

DANCING ON THE PENINSULA

[This is a continuation of the interview that appeared in the November 2009 issue of *Let's Dance!* magazine. As stated before, this is not a word-for-word transcript, but is based on the interview and written materials provided by Marcel.]

1956-1961 – Setting up the first dance class

In June of 1956, Marcel moved to the San Francisco Bay Area and became a resident of Palo Alto. After sampling the various local dance clubs, Marcel found a folk dance group to his liking: the Millbrae Highlanders, taught by Walter Grothe. [The Stanford dance group was closer and might have been a better fit, but it was restricted to people associated with Stanford.] The Millbrae Highlanders had, by then, become a small group, including Larry and Ruth Miller and Sam and Lillian Cohen. Marcel also joined a madrigal group and found some people with whom to play the recorder. He also joined the local Democratic Club and, in addition to his full-time job at Lockheed, had a full life.

In early 1957, Lockheed announced the formation of a recreation program. Several colleagues, notably Dan Bershader, a professor in Marcel's field whom Marcel knew from dancing in Princeton and in Washington, suggested that Marcel start a folk dance class. Lockheed did not have the new recreation building completed, and it was suggested that Marcel contact the City of Palo Alto regarding a dance venue. They offered him the multi-purpose room at Fairmeadow Elementary School in South Palo Alto.

Marcel's class started there in June 1957 with 31 students, and grew to over 60 dancers at one point. Most of the students initially were Lockheed colleagues and members of Marcel's madrigal group. Marcel began teaching the dances he knew from his years of dancing on the East Coast. Dances Marcel taught that first quarter that are still done today were *Hambo*, *Road to the Isles*, *Mayim*, *Miserlou*, *Cumberland Square*, *Troika*, and *Doudlebska Polka*.

The Federation and the Peninsula Folk Dance Council sponsored institutes every couple of months where dances from Stockton were taught. Marcel also attended every Kolo Festival starting in 1956. Marcel's repertoire continued to grow and he taught some of the newer dances from the local institutes and workshops.

1961 – Dancing Takes a Back Seat to Local Politics

In the summer of 1961, many people became concerned about plans to tear down all the houses on one side of Oregon Avenue in Palo Alto to build an expressway. Marcel was no stranger to political battles, having gotten involved in getting a park in his neighborhood instead of an apartment building, and setting up a precinct organization for the successful election campaign of the first residentialist city councilman in Palo Alto. When Marcel started writing letters to the local newspaper opposing the Oregon Expressway, the head of the Palo Alto Recreation Department told him he could not both work for the City as a folk dance teacher and publicly oppose a City project. Marcel chose to fight the expressway, and gave up his dance class at the end of the summer of 1961. He wound up being one of the leaders in the fight to stop the Oregon Expressway, but lost the advisory election in the spring of 1962.

1962 – Back to Dancing

Marcel might have given up folk dance teaching at this

point if it had not been for Shirley Eastman. She was a Menlo Park resident who had started taking his folk dance class in 1959. She convinced the Menlo Park Recreation Department to hire Marcel to help build their fledgling recreation program. Marcel resumed teaching in a multipurpose room of an elementary school in Menlo Park in the summer of 1962. Most of his former students were no longer dancing, so he started over with primarily new dancers.

The new Menlo Park Recreation Center was completed in the September of 1963, and he moved his class to the dance studio. New dances that Marcel introduced that quarter (and that he still teaches) were *Milondita Tango*, *Roeh V'Roah*, *Debka Halel*, *Shibolet Basade*, *Sestorka*, *Sitno Zensko Horo*, and *Sopsko Horo*. With its wood floor and a central location his class grew rapidly.

In the fall of 1963, Shirley Eastman asked Marcel to come to the Peninsula School, a private school her daughter attended, to teach some dances at lunch time to the students. Because of his flexible work schedule, Marcel was able to fit in these classes once a week for a few months. This seemingly insignificant project had far-reaching consequences – a wave of enthusiastic, young dancers.

1964 – The Youth Movement

When Shirley's daughter graduated from the school in 1964, the dancers wanted to continue so Shirley started teaching a teen class on Friday nights at the Menlo Park Recreation Center. The initial group of teens included children of dancers at Marcel's adult class. Shirley and Marcel also started to jointly run occasional Saturday parties at the Old Burgess Gym.

When the older teens outgrew Shirley's class, they moved on to the available adult classes – Stan Isaac's class on Thursday night, and Stanford on Friday. Only a few of the advanced teens came to Marcel's class, which was too advanced for most of them.

In 1966, Neal Sandler, a former member of Westwind International Folk Ensemble in Los Angeles, came to Marcel's class and recruited some of the dancers as a nucleus to form Westwind North. Among them was Alix Cordray, the best of Shirley's teens. Alix went on to become a co-director of Westwind, until she left for Norway in 1975 for a computer job. While living there she studied Norwegian dances and became enough an authority to teach them at camps in the U.S.

Steven Kotansky was another teen dancer from that time period who was recruited to join Westwind by Neal Sandler. Steve is now a much-respected folk dance teacher specializing in Balkan and Hungarian dances.

Many teens, who were learning folk dancing outside of school, started dance clubs and classes in their high schools, which generated even more enthusiasm and demand for dance classes.

1965 – Dancers Go Camping

Peter Scott, a post-doctorate student at Stanford had been an active folk dancer at UC Berkeley. He and his wife joined Marcel's class around 1964, and Peter was responsible for getting dancers to go camping in Yosemite on a weekend in May, beginning in 1965. Starting with a handful of people, it quickly grew to a large group, and they found venues to dance on Saturday night, preceded by a potluck. At its peak, the camping/dancing crowd had close to 100 people, including children. For most people, it was the only opportunity to camp

and hike at Yosemite.

1965 – The Balkan Explosion

The next few years saw an explosion of Balkan dances and all the special workshops Marcel attended besides the Kolo Festival. An organization called Kolo of San Francisco had 4th of July weekends at the Tourist club starting in 1966. Atanas Kolarovski taught there in 1966 and 1968. Dancers from Aman Folk Ensemble taught in 1971.

Neal Sandler had taken over a class started by John Skow, moved it to Taraval Street, and called it Mandala. There were many workshops held at Mandala. Marcel attended workshops there with such dance luminaries as Marty Koenig, Dennis Boxell, and Yves Moreau. Miriam Lidster had seminars at Stanford, where Marcel learned Hungarian dances from Andor Czompo in 1966, 1967, and 1968. The first Scottish dance that Marcel taught – *Rest and Be Thankful* – he learned from Stewart Smith at Stanford in 1965. Marcel attended Mendocino Camp twice. Marcel himself sponsored many workshops at Burgess Gym, including ones taught by Atanas Kolarovski, Yves Moreau, and Zoran Vasiljevic. A number of our favorite Balkan dances were first introduced at those workshops.

1967 – Santa Cruz Added to the Schedule

In addition to camping, the other activity Peter Scott started came about when he joined the faculty of the new UC-Santa Cruz campus in 1965. He wanted to have folk dancing there and saw to it that Marcel was hired to come down Friday evenings to teach folk dance for beginners in January 1967. It was only the second year of the campus and there wasn't much else going on, so the classes were large. Marcel soon started to drive over to Santa Cruz in the afternoon to teach an advanced class (thanks to that flexible work schedule!). He also arranged for Kathy Kerr to be hired to teach an additional section. (Kathy was an accomplished dancer from Marcel's Menlo Park class who also taught classes on the Peninsula and went on to teach folk dance at Oregon State University and later at the University of Iowa.) This continued until the spring of 1975 when a full time person was hired.

Another teenaged dancer from that era was Marcus Holt (later Moskoff). Marcel took him to Santa Cruz when he was still in middle school. One summer in Seattle Marcus learned how to make Bulgarian instruments. Following that, he organized his first band, Koza, with Santa Cruz students, and made some of the instruments. Their first public appearance was at Kathy Kerr's wedding in the Vinokurs' back yard.

Marcus spent a year in Bulgaria studying how to play Bulgarian folk instruments while still in high school, and he produced several LPs of Bulgarian dance music. He also did some research on dances in Bulgaria, and taught them at dance camps and at Kolo Festival.

1971 - A Pivotal Year

Marcel continued to teach on Fridays in Santa Cruz and on Wednesdays in Menlo Park, plus occasional parties at Burgess Gym on Saturdays. The only problem Marcel faced was having a single large class with a wide range of dancing experience and abilities.

Then, in 1971, two events occurred that changed the status quo dramatically: in February Marcel was laid off from Lockheed and in July Burgess Gymnasium burned down.

TO BE CONTINUED