



Published Monthly by the Folk Dance Federation of California--Sub. Yearly \$1.75

Vol. 2

June 1945

No. 6

LET'S GO TO MEXICO

By
Ruby Biel

All folk dancers are related to the fiesta spirit that is so much a part of colorful Mexico. In order to understand a people one must understand, and to some degree be in sympathy with their way of life. The frequent fiestas, both spontaneous and according to custom, make one want to know the people and their background better in order to more fully appreciate a land where the ancient as well as the modern contribute to daily life. To visit Mexico at any time of the year is to know and feel a thousand differences from village to village or state to state, yet one feels the basic unity of the whole. Today the descendants of the ancient tribes, chiefly those of the Mayas, Toltecs and Aztecs, are found side by side with American tourists, engineers, and archeologists.

The pageant that is Mexico may be best viewed by standing quietly on a street corner absorbing the sights, sounds, and odors of every grade of Mexican life. In the cities the dashing motor vehicles of all kinds dispute the right of way at the corners with a sharp "toot-toot." The pedestrian scurries at the crossings, and the traffic dashes by, yet seldom is an accident encountered. The noisy flow of traffic disturbs the visitor all over Mexico, in the towns and cities, but the peon sleeps undisturbed in the plaza, wrapped in indifference and a sarape. Like many other things in Mexico this noisy rush is in sharp contrast to the soft air and the brilliant sunshine. In the shopping district of downtown Mexico City the hum of softly spoken Spanish fills the air so completely that the visitor feels the spirit of "mañana" stealing over the senses, and begins to understand the attitude that puts off until tomorrow everything that need not be done now. Even the insistent cries of the lottery ticket vendors do not disturb you. The soft padding of bare-footed Indian women carrying their babies tied on their backs with the customary rebozo; the white pyjama trousers and coarse shirts of the men topped by wide straw sombreros; the patient soft-eyed children pausing to gaze with rapt attention at some treasure in a nearby window all contrast sharply with the modern American dress, seen in the shops and on the streets. One need not speak Spanish in Mexico City to get around as many shops have signs in their windows, "English spoken here."

In Oaxaca, two hours by air and centuries in time from Mexico City of today, a big fiesta is held at Easter. In front of the main church, as close as possible a merry-go-round and a ferris wheel are stationed, and such tunes as "Tea for Two," are heard until 1:00 o'clock in the morning. Hundreds of little booths spring up all over the place, foods of all kinds, brightly colored drinks, sarapes, filigree, jewelry, pottery, beads and belts being sold over the counters. American camera film may be had at the corner drugstore by rapping on the door at certain times, for the usual business place does not open officially on Holy days. The Oaxaca market at fiesta time has many of the same items sold on a much larger scale, and many more besides. Here one may see the green, smoky black, rainbow hued famed Oaxaca pottery in all shapes and sizes. One longs to buy plates, bowls, cups and saucers by the dozen. Saddles, bridles, belts, sandals, plain and colored hemp rope, cotton napkins and tablecloths from a local workshop in brightly colored plaids, sturdy baskets in all shapes and sizes, woven straw animals and toys, painted clay whistles in the shape of animals, masks in skulls, devils, etc. of paper mache, wax images and candles to burn in church, machetes and knives (one of Oaxaca's specialties) and many other articles too numerous to mention, are sold. Here also may be found booths serving a hearty native meal-soup, frijoles, tamales, tortillas, enchiladas, all for a few centavos. One also sees hacked meats and dried fish, displayed next to mountains of vegetables, fruits, and nuts. A word must be said about the native dress, men in the usual white pyjama trousers, coarse shirt, felt or straw sombreros, bare feet, with sarapes of black and white or gaily striped worn on one shoulder; women in pink skirts, ankle length, bare feet, white blouses with blue rebosos, or pink embroidery on a white skirt with orange embroidery on a white blouse. Children are miniature copies of their elders.

Less than thirty minutes from Oaxaca by automobile the ruins of Monte Alban draw the visitor as well as the archeologist. Here excavations are still in progress. In Mitla forty-five miles away from Oaxaca the ancient Zapotec dialect is still spoken and the people have the simple curiosity of children. The natives have little contact with visitors except at the ruins where the Indian women sell beautiful hand-made lace doilies, scarfs and center pieces. They surround the visitor with clay whistles and brightly colored hand woven baskets, each one attempting to outsell her neighbor by offering her wares first or at a slightly lower figure. Here bargaining is expected to follow a definite pattern.

Travel in Mexico varies greatly, but all conveyances are filled to capacity. The greater part of the natives use second class buses which travel their routes packed with good natured mobs. Not an available inch is ever wasted. The Indian women carry pigs and produce to market on these buses. Extra baskets, clothing in rolled bundles, and even poultry are stuffed in between the milling humans. The aisles are always full of standees and at each stop the pushing starts all over again. Sometimes pigs are carried close to the bodies of the women with the four feet sticking out in front. At other times they are carried by a cord being tied around the body, with a convenient handle on the back. On the larger second-class buses, the luggage is carried on the roof, and a boy sits majestically on the swaying surface to prevent the loss of any baggage on the sharp and numerous curves. The first-class buses take only seated passengers. Even on all day trips the stops are very brief and food is either taken along by the traveler or bought through the windows from sidewalk vendors at convenient stops for the driver. No one gets off the bus for fear of being left. Many visitors travel by private car with a driver who acts as a guide as well and usually speaks fluent English. The guide arranges all details, mostly in advance. The airplanes are always filled in advance, but occasionally people go "shipside" (taking a chance on a cancellation at the last moment.) The trains are also very popular.

Any article on Mexico that does not touch on the twenty-eight-month-old volcano, Paricutin, 23 miles out of Uruapan in the state of Michoacan, would not be complete. The sight of Paricutin belching vast columns of smoke and lava at more or less regular half minute intervals is impressive enough to last one a lifetime. The walls of this volcano are now about 400 feet high, having risen from a cornfield. Its crater is over 112 feet across and it has buried three villages. The hot lava still flows hungrily toward the surrounding country and only an isolated church spire tells where one of the villages lies buried. As far as eight miles from the volcano the lava dust lies six to seven inches deep. Buildings, trees, even animals are covered with the grey, slate colored powder. Water for miles around must be carried in on burro or Indian pony and the nearer the volcano the more desolate the countryside. The last five miles of the journey is made by riding little Indian ponies to within 1100 feet of the volcano, the roar and thunder of which grows in volume as one approaches.

There is not enough space to tell of other places visited, Tasco for its silver, Fortin for its orchids and gardenias, the Pyramids, Xochimilco and the Floating Gardens, or even the bullfight in Mexico City. One must go in person to get the full flavor of a land that embodies service in helping a neighbor harvest his corn, or turns to recreation as easily as eating. Mañana (tomorrow) you will see it for yourselves.

MESSAGE FROM THE RETIRING PRESIDENT

Having served as a guide in the Folk Dance Federation of California as it sailed through an active third year, I feel I should share with the Federation members the reason for any growth and success we may have had. Much goes on behind the scenes of the monthly festivals and the public performances in which we all participate. Often, however, we are so engrossed with the joy we derive from the participation that we are unaware of those who work unobtrusively to keep our machinery ticking. At this time, it is my aim to make known these people and their contributions to the year's efforts. When you see them, shake their hands, congratulate them, let them know you realize the importance of their service to the Federation!

Ruby Biel, retiring secretary, did an efficient job in this capacity, assuming many responsibilities while also serving as editor of Let's Dance, our publication.

Lucile Czarnowski, director of the research committee, under whose guidance the dance patterns which circulate each month were painstakingly worked out, authenticated, and published.

Beatrice Jenkins, retiring treasurer, who has kept accurate accounts through the trials of organizing finances for Federation and publications.

Beatrice Cook Culver who served as business manager of the paper for the first half-year.

Ken Wade, retiring vice-president of the Federation.

Bret Van Kriedt, editor of "Let's Dance" for the first half-year. He nurtured the paper through its infant days.

Clyde Evans, present Business Manager of "Let's Dance".

Jon Bittman who assumed chairmanship of the successful War Bond show and Woodminister performances in Oakland.

Walter Grothe who effectively coordinated the Museum of Art performances.

Without the cooperation of the faithful members of the Council who attend every business meeting at the sacrifice of participating in the opening dances and ceremonies at the festivals and of the many members they represent, these officers and directors would have been unable to have effected the growth and development for which they held responsibility. With continued cooperation, the newly elected officers should enjoy an even more successful year than the last.

We wish them the best, and hope they will find their service in promotion of the Federation, folk dancing, and folk arts activities as pleasurable and satisfying as have the retiring officers.

Clarice Dechent, Retiring President

OFFICERS 1945-1946

Listed below are the officers for the Folk Dance Federation of California for the ensuing year. These officers officially take office at the June 3 Council Meeting and all items of business should be referred to them at their addresses.

President..... Miss Lucile K. Czarnowski, Hearst Gym, Room 234, Univ. of California, Berkeley
Vice President..... Mr. Walter Grothe, 390 Liberty St., San Francisco 14, Calif.
Treasurer..... Mr. Harold Pearson, 4218 Detroit Avenue, Oakland 2, Calif.
Recording Sec..... Miss Dorothy Frost, Box 1028, Stanford University, California.
Corresponding Sec.. Mrs. Mildred Buhler, 180 Elwood, Redwood City, Calif.
Historians..... Miss Ginni DeLong, 536 Lincoln Ave., Palo Alto, Calif.
..... Mr. Henry Koopmann, 1249-A 9th Avenue, San Francisco 22, Calif.
Directors of..... Mr. Dan McDonald, 3070 17th Street, San Francisco 10, Calif.
Publicity & Ext.... Mr. Roy Zellick, 176 Valdeflores, Burlingame, California.

Editor, "Let's Dance"..... Mrs. Ruby Biel, 8007 Hillmont Drive, Oakland 3, Calif.
Business Manager "Let's Dance"..... Mr. Clyde Evans, 8141 Idlewood Street, Oakland 3, Calif.

The Federation extends congratulations to these new officers and pledges to support them in an ever expanding program of folk dancing and related arts.

***** MAY FESTIVAL

A Latin American theme was used by the Stanford Folk Dancers in presenting their festival on May 27 at the beautiful Frost Amphitheater on the Stanford Campus. The natural scenic beauty of this California outdoor setting with its surrounding green foliage and red roses merged delightfully with the costumes of the energetic participants. The festival was the "swan song" of the Stanford Folk Dancers for the duration-- or at least until they can get some more men and a new teacher. The festival began with a carillon concert played by Jim Lawson, University Carillonneur, showing the development of the minuet form. Dancing began at 2:00 p.m. and continued until 6:00 p.m. Credit should be given to Dorothy Frost as general chairman, Mary Cogswell for teaching the two Mexican dances which the Stanford club gave as exhibitions, and to Clarice Dechent for teaching the Kanafaska. Frances Case did a wonderful job in designing the programs, Ed Marion in announcing, and Jan Settle and Ann Robinson most of the afternoon not dancing, but selling cokes. The retiring officers and the newly elected officers were introduced to the dancers and audience. We were happy to welcome some of the delegates from the United Nations Conference now being held in San Francisco. Among those present were representatives from Australia, South Africa and Latin America. The South African delegates were later entertained at a buffet supper at the home of Mrs. Eugene Bulf (Nancy Deering) assisted by Miss Dechent. The almost traditional folk dance dinner was well attended. It was lots of fun, with community singing accompanying the eating.

***** JUNE FESTIVAL

The June festival will be held on June 3 in Golden Gate Park in honor of the United Nations Delegates with Chang's Int. Folk Dancers as hosts. (Due to only one week between festivals the write-up of this festival will appear in the July issue as is customary).

JULY FESTIVAL

At the time of going to press there has not been any official announcement of the July festival. Details will be mailed you from the host group.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Lists giving the new officers and active member groups as of June 1, 1945 (printed on yellow paper) have been received by all member clubs. Use this up-to-date list in sending out letters, bulletins, notices, etc. Clubs have also received copies of the amended By-Laws (printed on blue paper).

YOUR CLUB AND MINE

SAN CARLOS-BELMONT COUNTRY FOLK DANCERS by Helen Marie Harris

On Saturday, May 12, Mrs. Jeanne Taylor was elected president of the San Carlos-Belmont Country Folk Dancers. Mrs. Taylor is also the instructor for the club. The once a month folk dances now begin at 8:15 with the first forty-five minutes being used for basic instruction. Jeanne is assisted by the more advanced members during this period. The balance of the evening--9:00 to 12:00 p.m. is used for dances already learned with occasionally one or two new ones.

FUN CLUB FOLK DANCERS

The club elected new officers at their meeting April 28, 1945 with the following results: President, Dan McDonald; Vice-president, Mrs. Florence McMurray; Secretary, Mrs. Rosette Eriksen; Treasurer, Miss Norah G. Porter; Federation Representative, Arnold McMurray. (The other representative to be elected later)

SQUARE STEPPERS by Rachel C. Kennedy

On Tuesday, April 24 the Square Steppers held a formal party. The softly lighted hall was beautifully decorated with greens and sprays of flowers. Original drawings by a club member were also used in the decorations. Refreshments were served. On Saturday night, April 28, twelve couples from the Square Steppers went to Stockton to entertain at the College of the Pacific. We participated with a group conducted by Lawton Harris. The dancers enjoyed a very lively evening which closed with a buffet supper served by the local group.

CHANG'S INTERNATIONAL FOLK DANCERS by Jack Kaufman

Chang's announce an interesting series of dance events for their members on Tuesday evenings. Irish Dances will be taught by Anne Healy and Palestinian and Jewish Dances will be introduced by Celia Strauss. Shades of the "Cohens and Kellys" Another outstanding event for folk dancers will be the hobby and craft show in the near future. All are invited to display their "pet" activities with all types of interests welcome (from weaving to cookie baking!) The setting for the occasion will be an international market place with a variety of folk objects as foods, dances, and costumes on display. For further details dancers may contact Madelyne Greene. This unique affair will probably be held in October.

CASTLE PROMENADERS

This group announces its new officers as follows: President, Frank Durant. Vice-president, Peter Pilotti; Treasurer, Millie Von Kinsky; Secretary, Shirley Case; Publicity, Teckia Barry; Federation Representatives, Frank Durant and Elsie Durant; Program Chairman, Clyde Evans. The group recently had the pleasure of dancing squares to the calls of Lt. Jack Hickish and Pfc Sandy Tepper. With a constantly expanding membership the Promenaders are planning a full summer program including the gala Saturday night barn dances, held the first Sat. of the month at Durant Park. Recently this group gave an evening of instruction to the East Bay Section of the American Assn. of Health and Physical Education under the direction of "Buzz" Glass, dance director.

OAKLAND FOLK DANCERS by Betty Pearson

The Oakland Folk Dancers were very fortunate in having Senor Benito Martinez de las Torres from Peru who has danced in popular night spots in Hollywood as well as touring the Southwest. He was assisted by his wife who travels with him. He gave instruction in the authentic Argentine tango and samba. On May 23 the Oakland Folk Dancers were hosts at the hospitality house presenting an exhibition followed by dance instruction by Genevieve Healy.

BERKELEY FOLK DANCERS by Walter Grothe

The Berkeley dancers have been finding a new vein of folk expression in a number of new activities. Informal get-togethers have been held at different homes to listen to the recordings of folk music from many countries parallel with a study of native instruments. One evening was spent in learning songs that accompany folk dances. In the future, this enthusiastic group is planning evenings of folk singing. Other groups will find that greater attention to the musical aspects of folk dancing will bring rich dividends of cultural delights.

GATE SWINGERS by Patricia French

The Gateswingers climaxed their Thursday night beginner's class with an old-fashioned country dance, replete with squares, pie-eating contests, and nail driven games. Gingham and jeans keyed the evening's dress. The Gate Swingers welcomed the month of May with a real Maypole and dance complete with party viands. The Gateswingers still enjoy a wide correspondence from all over the globe. Eileen and Ken Wade are busy now-a-days with the Gate Swingers. Newest future caller, Little Ken Wade. Dad is "president re-elect." After internment in a neutral country, Bob Christensen dances every Mon. night with the group.

STAFF

Editor..... Mrs. Ruby Biel, 8007 Hillmont Drive, Oakland 3 (deadline 15th)
Business Manager..... Mr. Clyde Evans, 8141 Idlewood Street, Oakland 3
Assistants..... Henry and Frances Glass
Art Editor..... Miss Annemarie Steinbiss