

REMEMBERING ATANAS KOLAROVSKI

(1926 – 2022)

Atanas will long be remembered for his vast contribution to Macedonian repertoire of international folk dancers. When dance groups throughout the world heard of Atanas' death, many were prompted to look back through their dance collections and syllabi to make a list of the dances he taught over four decades. A partial list would include: Belasičko, Bufčansko, Čapkan Dimčo, Četvorka, Dedo Mili Dedo, Imate Li Vino, Ivanice, Kačerac, Kasapsko Horo, Legnala Dana, Maloj Mome, Mogilče, Nevestinsko, Pembe Oro, Tino Mori, and Žensko Čamče. In addition to being a master teacher who taught all over the world, he was also a musician, Atanas also played the accordion, the tûpan, the kaval, the zurla, and drums.

When I asked *Let's Dance!* readers to share their memories of Atanas, I did not expect to receive the dozens of responses that came pouring in. Below is a selection of the contributions I received.

He was a Legend No One Can Replace

by Fusae Carroll

We have lost Atanas Kolarovski, a legend of Macedonian folklore and a wonderful friend. I first met him in 1979 at IFC in upstate New York, and immediately invited him to teach in Japan. He accepted, arriving in Japan in 1980. That first year about 150 energetic young dancers (mostly male college students) attended his weekend camps and mid-week workshops. Word spread and his popularity grew. The Japanese loved him and he loved Japan, returning every year until 1985. Thereafter, until 2009, he returned almost every other year teaching workshops and camps up and down the country. Altogether, he toured Japan 18 separate times.



He began taking Japanese folk dancers on regular summer tours to Macedonia, and on three occasions in the 1980s and 1990s he led groups of Japanese folk dancers to festivals in Macedonia where they performed on stage in Macedonian costume, doing dances Atanas had taught in Japan and then specially choreographed for the stage. On each occasion Macedonian television was delighted and televised the performances.

Finally, in 2011 and 2014, after he was no longer teaching, Japan's Balkan dancers nonetheless brought him to Japan as a guest to celebrate his 85th and 88th birthdays at special parties.

He not only loved but was deeply impressed by the Japanese dancers. He used to say, "If you forget my dances, go to Japan and learn them."

He was truly a friend and mentor not only to me, but to every Japanese he taught. I had the privilege of dancing next to him so many times, feeling his subtle bounces, small details as if he was challenging me to match him. I loved those moments, and I miss dancing with him. As a dancer and personality, he was a legend no one can replace.

A Lesson Learned

by Dan Unger

The one memory I have of Atanas that stands out is from the time I was in college and a number of us went up to see him in either Ithaca or Cortland (New York). After teaching, he brought out his accordion and played Bucimis. All of the leaders stopped after the second time through. He looked at us and said, "I'm still playing. Why have you stopped?" It was a perfect lesson in live vs. recorded music 50+ years ago.

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How Atanas Saved My Life

by Lenny Talmy

In 1963, before hitchhiking to Skopje in Macedonia, Sandie, another folk dancer, and I met with Atanas in Dubrovnik, Croatia. Atanas gave us his sister's address in Skopje and said she could put us up when we got there.

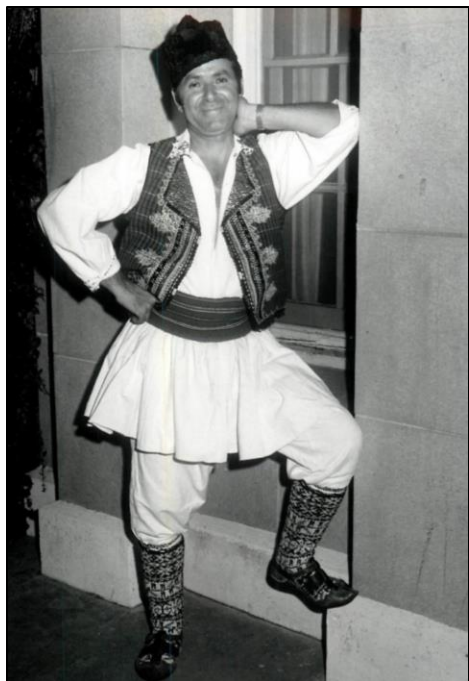
When we finally arrived, we couldn't find the address and decided to stay at the Hotel Macedonia. To give it one more try, we went to a tourist center where a woman looked up the address and told us how to get to Atanas's sister. She was very gracious and welcomed us to stay over in her one-story home. That was the night of the horrible earthquake that killed thousands. A chunk of ceiling fell on us, but it was the large buildings that collapsed, including the Hotel Macedonia. If it hadn't been for Atanas's kindness in inviting us to stay with his sister, and our one last attempt to locate her, there would be no one writing this remembrance of Atanas.



A memorable morning with Atanas

by Howard Young

I first met Atanas in San Francisco at the Kolo Festival in the late 1960s. Years later, in 1975, I housed Atanas and Bora Gajicki together at my home in San Jose. This was a couple of days prior to all three of us going to Stockton Folk Dance Camp.



After a light dinner, it was agreed that we would review/practice their Stockton presentations the following morning. I was concerned about the small dance space in my tiny living room, but Atanas said, "It is enough." I was to be Bora's teaching assistant at Camp, so I definitely needed to learn and practice the dances he planned to teach. Atanas agreed and said he wanted to review his material as well. I'm not sure he remembered what dances he had submitted for the syllabus, but we welcomed his participation and expertise.

As Atanas was beginning to dance, he turned to me and said, "You have medicine?"

As I pondered his question, I turned to Bora and said, "Medicine?" Bora whispered in my ear and said, "Slivovitz. He wants Slivovitz."

It was 9 in the morning, so this took me by surprise and became a cultural education for me. I was thinking, "Slivo at 9 am? You've got to be kidding!" Well, Howard, time to go shopping! I had no idea where to get the stuff, and I'd never been to a liquor store in my life. Upon return from my successful outing, there were shots all around, and a resumption of rehearsal, all in a much better mood.

If he can, so can I!

by Ralph Gagnon

Atanas was a towering figure in folk dance, especially for the types of dances that I like to do. I remember a conversation with Barry Glass when he said there was only one folk dance teacher that he knew whose abilities had not diminished with age. "Who was that?" we wanted to know. "Atanas Kolarovski," he said.

My first encounter with Atanas was around 1976 in Boulder, Colorado. He was giving a workshop there, and Bonnie and I went to it. He was dressed in full costume and, unlike in later years, was teaching a dance with lots of squats. "Well," I brazenly thought, "If he can do squats, so can I." What a miscalculation! Was I ever sore the next day!

I still do and very much appreciate the dance Anuse. Like so many other Atanas dances, it is one of those dances one never gets tired of.

Fond Memories of Atanas Kolarovski

by Barbara Bevan

Atanas! What a dear man! His dances are certainly among my favorites, being a mostly-Balkan dancer.

When I first began attending Stockton Folk Dance Camp, I was awed by Atanas. He would teach us slowly to do the steps of Macedonian dances. Then, when the music began, he would transform into the amazing performer he was. All those turns, squats, and rapid footwork! Wide-eyed, I would wonder what dances these were?! I was enthralled.

In 1985, I had the opportunity to travel on a folk dance tour of Macedonia with Atanas and Turkey with Bora Ozkok. At that time, Macedonia was still under Communist control. We had an unscheduled layover in Dubrovnik for three hours. We were not allowed to leave the airport, so what did we do? We danced! Photographers from a local newspaper photographed us, and we appeared in the next day's newspaper.

We finally made it to Skopje, the capital. We spent a lot of our free time shopping, but had time for several workshops with local dance teachers. On the weekends, weddings were held in local hotels. Atanas said we could attend the receptions and dance, but warned us not to eat or drink there. I think we went to four weddings. At one wedding where the women in our group went to the bride's home, we pinned money to her veil. We walked in a procession to the wedding site accompanied by the horse-drawn wagon displaying the wedding gifts. We danced in the street to the music of the outdoor band. Such great experiences.

Atanas was a celebrity in Macedonia because of his performances with Tanec, the premier Macedonian performing group. He was able to get us into wonderful performances and to hire local dance teachers to lead our workshops.

When my husband, Hadi Babazadeh, was still attending Stockton Folk Dance Camp, one year when Atanas was teaching there, he and Hadi hit it off! They referred to each other as "brother!" Both were immigrants, Atanas from Macedonia, Hadi from Iran. They had a great time hanging out with each other.

I am fortunate to live in Sacramento where, for many years, I danced with Fusae who often assisted Atanas in his workshops, especially in Japan.

Atanas was always charming and fun and I miss him.



Touring With Atanas in 1987

by Denise Heenan

It was a surprise and honor for me to be invited to join Fusae on the 1987 Atanas dance tour in Japan. It was an exciting and busy time traveling with Fusae, her 18-month-old daughter, Taeko, and Atanas from Kyoto to Osaka to Atami and so many other places to join folk dancers eager to learn from Atanas.



And what a beautiful and amazing sight they were! We American folk dancers had loved Atanas and his Macedonian dances for many years, but few of us had mastered the intricacies of his styling. The Japanese, however, had succeeded. I saw Atanas lead long lines of men who danced exactly as he did, with strength, vigor, and enthusiasm. The women, too, moved with the grace and lightness we long admired and hungered to attain. The Japanese knew and appreciated Atanas and what a remarkable, gracious, kind, talented, and modest man he was. They showed it in their dancing.

It was unforgettable and wonderful to have experienced Japan, and its amazing dancers. Fusae has posted many videos of Atanas in Japan where you can see how much he was loved, emulated, and honored.