

An interview with

SUNNI BLOLAND

By Esther Mosse Mann

I was introduced to Sunni Bloland at a dance festival. However, since I had not begun to dance until late 2001, I really didn't know much about her. It was quite obvious to me that this pleasant, smiling lady is someone who is respected and revered by dancers. All the teachers and other people around made sure to stop and speak with her. Then, I was asked to interview and write about her. So, my quest began to find out "who is Sunni Bloland?"

The first thing I did was ask some of my friends about her and was told that she was a very fine teacher of Romanian dance and a vivacious lady, full of personality, and no shrinking violet. When I got home, I went to my computer and googled "Sunni Bloland." Wow, was I impressed.

I found out that Sunni Bloland had been teaching at U. C. Berkeley for over thirty years. She received the U.C. Berkeley Distinguished Teaching Award in 1990. In 1998 Sunni received the California Dance Educators Assn. Heritage Award for life service and dedication to dance. She has taught at major camps including Mendocino Folklore and Stockton Folk Dance Camp. Sunni was a past president of the California Dance Educators Association.

We were told by a couple who attended her workshop in Hawaii that they bought a book she wrote with Anca Giurchescu "Romanian Traditional Dance: A Contextual and Structural Approach. She also wrote "Evaluation Device in Dance" and an article on International Council of Traditional Music. Then I interviewed her. We spent a very pleasant afternoon and I found her delightful.

Sunni is not of Romanian descent as I had thought. She was born Frances Alexandria Lober in New York City. Her farther was English and her mother was born in Kiev.

The nickname "Sunni" was given to her at Girl Scout Camp Laughing Water in Bear Mountain, New York. She was a swimming counselor named for the sunfish that swam in the lake. Her family was very active. For example her brother, Jud was awarded a scholarship to Tulane University for his tennis which was also her father's passion. Her father was her first dance partner. He used to put her on his feet and dance around the room with her. Sunni loved sports and was an avid figure skater. One of her precious memories was receiving a pair of white buckskin skates so she could skate ala Sonja Heine.

Sunni studied dance at Sargent College of Boston University where she received a B.S. in 1948. When Sunni recently attended her class reunion over 40% of her class was there and they are still close. Among other places, Sunni taught at Teachers College of Connecticut and also at a private girls school, Bennett Jr. College. Then she attended the University of Wisconsin where she studied modern dance under Margaret H'Doubler and met her future husband Harley Bloland. Harley and Sunni were married in 1951. In 1955 they moved to Berkeley where Harley attended graduate school. Sunni taught physical education at Mission High School in San Francisco, Piedmont High School and San Francisco State



College.

In 1960 Sunni joined the staff of the Physical Education Dept., at University of California, Berkeley where she taught modern dance and folk dance. She taught dance theory, history of dance and rhythmic analysis. She also taught the Iyengar method of Yoga. She used to dance at the home of Anna Halprin in Marin who developed the Tamalpa Institute in Mill Valley. She was instrumental in bringing the Kolo Festival to Hearst Gym at U.C. In 1967 Sunni was awarded a Fulbright grant to study Romanian Folk Dance and went there where she met Anca Giurchescu. She visited villages and filmed their dances. She is known as a specialist of Romanian

dance. Sunni brought to her students her enthusiasm for dance and music, her humor, and a belief in the power of dance to transform students into happier, more confident, more cultivated, more alive, and sensitive people.

Sunni said "My classes are not required, therefore, students enroll in them as electives. In the sixties and seventies, they came to study international folk dance. As an interpreter of various folk dance styles from the Balkans, Central and Western Europe, and American Ballroom, I talked about the historical and cultural context in which dance developed to help students connect to each other and to their own cultural roots." I truly am sorry that I was not around to dance with her. Although I have missed dancing with this spirited lady, I am grateful for the opportunity to have met with her and enjoy her company.

The following is a partial list of the dances Sunni taught. See how many you know and are dancing today?

Alunelul Batut, Alunelul de la Bailesti, Alunelul de la Urzica, Alunelul Schiop, Alunelul Sucit, Alunelul Vaideeni, Arcanul, Ardeleana din Banat, Avrameanca, Balta, Balta de la Durareni, Barbatesc din leud, Batua, Barbatesc din leud, Batuta de la Mironu, Batuta de la Tudora, Boereasca, Briul Banatean, Briul de la Fagaras, Briul din Fenes, Briul lui Iova, Briul Zarvenilor, Bugeacul, Carligul, Coasa, Dansa Fetelor de la Crihalma, Damul, De-a Lungul, Dragaicuta, Floricica, Floricica Munteneasca, Frunza, Galaonul de la Birca, Galaonul de la Sapata, Ghimpele Dobrogean, Giumpul, Gonita, Hodoroga, Hora de la Buciu, Hora de la Buciumi, Hora de la Rispiti, Hora din Avrig, Hora la Dreapta, Hora Mare Bucovineasca, Hora Mare Moldoveneasca, Hora Munteneasca (Hora de la Virtoape), Hora Nutii, Hora pe Gheata 1, Hora pe Gheata 2, Invaritata din Luna Turda, Jiana de la Jina, Jiana din Avrig, Marginea, Mandrele, Momirul, Murgulitul, Nagra, P'A Lungul, Paidusca, Papuselele, Poloxia 2, Pomoletul, Prunza, Romaneste de Purtat, Rustemul ca la Gori, Rustemul Sucit, Salcioara, Tarina Sir de la Abrud, Sarba de la Cinci, Sarba de la Sticlaria, Sarba de la Sticlaria, Sarba de la Tismana, Sarba in Sir de la Tismana, Sarba la Doi de la Goicea Mare, Sobolanul, Trei Pazeste de la Bistret, Trei Pazeste de la Goicea Mare, Tropca, Tiganeasca din Giubega, Tintaroiul, Trei Pazeste Butrinesc, Trei Pazeste de la Ciuperceni, Trei Pazeste de la Geicea Mare, Trilisesti, Tropca, Ungurica (Ca la Breaza), Vascencuta, Vulpita, and two non-Romanian dances-Champs Elyses and What's Buzzin.