

NFO NEWS

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ORGANIZATION
OF THE
UNITED STATES
OF AMERICA

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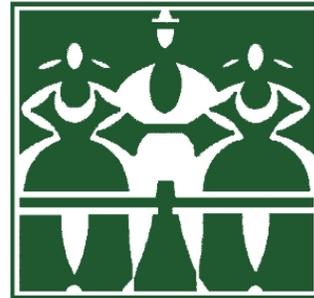
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May
2021

A CONFERENCE THANK YOU!

Cricket Raybern, Portland, Oregon

An annual conference takes months to plan and execute, but all of that is for naught if no one attends. Holding the 2021 NFO Conference online made it possible for people to attend who would not have been able to attend in person, and they did!

Thank you to all who were able to attend any of our conference. We had 1700 people register, and many of them joined us for at least a session or two. It was incredible to see everyone.

Once we realized that the 2021 event needed to be online, it opened up programming opportunities. We were not bound by location, time, or number of attendees, so off we went.

The result was five days of programming, with 30-plus presenters and discussion leaders; more than a dozen Master Teachers doing presentations or leading dances; almost a dozen bands playing live or via a recorded session; more than 30 different dance groups from across the country, and even a few other countries, leading dances for our dance parties; and two sessions done in conjunction with the Folk Arts Center of New England. The programming itself consisted of craft, instrumental, dance, and singing workshops, as well as talks and discussions.

One of the things about an online event is that you have the opportunity to market the event to a much broader range of people. We had the great fortune to have Ahmet Lüleci create 19 teaser videos that we then posted to our YouTube channel, as well as sharing them on Facebook. The result is that many people who had never heard of the NFO became aware of us (even if they didn't know that NFO stands for National Folk Organization), and many of those registered for and attended our conference. It was awesome to have the opportunity to share our event and organization with these people, as well as our many members who have never been able to attend a conference.

The bottom line is that more than 125 people were directly involved with making this event happen, plus 1700 people who registered to attend the event. To all of you...thank you!

NFO CONFERENCE AFTERTHOUGHTS

Diane Baker, Corona del Mar, California

Zoom has delivered so many virtual international dance festivals to my living room this year. How much would the NFO annual conference excite my curiosity and maintain my attention? Lots and lots, it turns out! Each festival/conference/event has a distinctive personality. A mélange of folk arts—fine arts, song, instrumental music-making, dance, film, storytelling, poetry, all individually introduced and narrated—characterized the NFO conference in 2021. Lectures and panel presentations aroused critical discussion that continued into break-out rooms.

I remain mesmerized by the gentle scarf dance of the Qashqai people, and am eager to see it danced at a traditional event in southern Iran. The Resources page on the conference website allowed me to re-visit Phil Jamison and view his exuberant, yet precise, flat-

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Conference Afterthoughts (Continued from page 1)

footing. Still making use of the Resources page, I again admired Catherine Foley, Irish step dancer extraordinaire, and compared the two art forms, finding them similar indeed. Irish step dancing features more petite steps. Both have a complex history, and leave me breathless. Steve Kotansky, like a chameleon, has a unique presentation for every conference. For the NFO, he described traditional celebrations that take place in the Vlach communities of eastern Serbia, and he taught steps typically danced at their parties.

What a joyful experience to trek along with Mickela Mallozzi and hear the backstories that enable her cultural dance vignettes! During her narration, my own recollections of dancing informally with locals in Ecuador, Nicaragua, Portugal, Cuba, Cape Verde, etc., briefly came to mind.

I found all of the sessions of the conference enriching and aesthetically presented! The opportunity to learn from leaders about recreational dance groups across the country made evening dance parties especially enjoyable. Congratulations, NFO conference committee and volunteers; you created an informative, thought-provoking, and gratifying experience!

NFO CONFERENCE DANCE PARTIES—A SMORGASBORD OF TALENT AND FUN

Mady Newfield, St. Charles, Illinois

What happens when you put out a call for dance leaders, pair those who want it with exciting live music options, find performance groups with sparkling videos, bring it together with a knowledgeable and hard-working committee that organizes it all with Google forms and sheets and lots of emails, and execute it with a well-prepared, on-the-ball tech crew to make it all run smoothly? You get the three nights of dance parties that were enjoyed by some 300 people each evening during the recent online NFO conference.

It was an ultimately utterly exhilarating and satisfying experience to be a part of these. Our committee of five worked for six months to pull these parties together, and we are so grateful to all the participants.

Over the three evenings, there were 40 different segments, including 75 individuals dancing, five musicians who played live, another dozen or more who played in pre-recorded videos, and seven performance troupes. Dance leaders joined us from as far away as the Netherlands (Jaap Leegwater, his accordionist Jan Wollring, and tech helper Tijn Boissevain stayed up very late to join in live on Saturday evening) and Indonesia (Etty Soemardjo's group sent us videos of their native dancing), as well as from all parts of

the United States. Dance performances ranged from flashy American clogging to colorful Mexican to crisp Scottish highland to swirling Scandinavian to precision Transylvanian and Hungarian. One could dance along, not only with all sorts of more- and less-familiar international folk dances, but also Yiddish, contra, and English country dances. Or, just sit back and enjoy music from excellent bands and versatile musicians like Bill Cope, Tom Pixton, Don Weeda, Blato Zlato, Zlatne Uste, Free Range Organic, or Rare Privilege. Most impressive, from my perspective on the "inside," was how everyone involved worked together to make it all happen so seamlessly. (Photos by Alicia LaFetra.)



Stacy Rose and Gail Elber (North Bend, Oregon) dance *Jerusalem*



Jacob and Nancy Bloom (Arlington, Massachusetts) dance *Pata Pata*



Bill Cope (San Jose, California) plays for the Saturday dance party

KUDOS TO CRICKET!

Kathy Bruni, Auburn, Washington

At the President’s Reception on Wednesday night (the first night of the 2021 NFO annual conference), a surprise video played, honoring Cricket Raybern for the amazing job she did in planning and coordinating the first-ever virtual NFO annual conference. While she would be the first to say that she didn’t do it alone (and she did say that, in response to the video), all of us who were involved with the conference in any way know that Cricket is the one who had the vision and the executive skills to make it the fantastic conference it was.

The touching video was a project instigated by the Awards Committee, comprised of Roo Lester, Jo Crawford, and Taunya Lund, but it could not have been completed without the photos donated by many of Cricket’s friends in the NFO, and the technical and artistic wizardry of Ahmet Lüleci. Co-conspirators in pulling off the award presentation surprise: Adony Benaires, Dale Adamson, Ahmet Lüleci, Bruce Spainhower, and Wendy Raybern.

In addition to the video, the Awards Committee pulled off another tricky feat: surprising Cricket at her home with flowers and an award plaque. Cricket’s daughter Wendy and Cricket’s granddaughter were complicit in that venture, and Cricket was caught off guard and touched at the sweet gesture.



Cricket Raybern
in appreciation for
dedicated service
2021

National Folk Organization
of the U.S.A.



Those who missed the Wednesday night festivities had another chance to see the video at the end of the conference on Sunday.

In addition to being a competent and organized event planner, Cricket is a wonderful human being, and an amazing friend. Kudos to Cricket on a fantastic conference this year (and also to the many NFO conferences she has planned over the last several years, as NFO Vice President). We appreciate you!

IT’S A WRAP!

Kathy Bruni, Auburn, Washington

The 2021 NFO conference was one for the record books! With 1700 people registered, and more than 300 attending some of the sessions, it was by far the largest conference since I began attending in 2007.

It was—by far—also more work. While my part in the conference presentations was limited to the annual meeting and the President’s reception, even that required about eight hours of meetings and several more hours of Zoom research and preparation. Contrast that with my general prep time of about one hour for the same involvement at a live conference, and you can see that this conference was a lot more complicated, due to the technology required.

Those people who were involved in every aspect of the conference—Cricket and Adony, in particular, as well as the entire planning committee, and also the many people who were both techs and MCs repeatedly throughout the conference—spent many hundreds of hours preparing and presenting what you saw for whatever part of the conference you attended. The planning committee consisted of Cricket Raybern, Roo Lester, Jo Crawford, Jacob Madsen, Adony Benaires, Ahmet Lüleci, Pat Henderson, Alicia LaFetra, Bruce Spainhower, Dale Adamson, Evan Chu, Murray and Randy Spiegel, and Wendy Brown. Hats off to all of them! In addition, there were other committees and individual volunteers as MCs and techs, so around 125 people were directly responsible for making this event possible.

Having the conference on Zoom was definitely an advantage for the many, many people who have never attended a live NFO conference, and there were some programming advantages, as well. For example, presenters like Mickela Mallozzi, who have been unable to attend a live event in the past due to scheduling conflicts, could finally participate in the conference. Presenters from around the world gave lectures or taught dance classes; at a live conference, it isn’t in the budget to bring presenters from other countries to participate. Having the Wycinanki Polish paper cutting workshop was feasible because of participants being at home and on Zoom. Playing Kahoot and doing puzzles added levity in a way that is normally not possible at a live event. There was also extended programming at this conference; since participants didn’t have to travel, the conference extended into all day Sunday. Our in-person conferences generally end by noon

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Conference glimpses...

Photos on these pages courtesy of Alicia LaFetra and Kathy Bruni.



Mabry Mill dancers 1984



SEALASKA HERITAGE



DONALD HÉENDEI GREGORY
Tlingit artist





Irish Dance Training



Sisters Catherine and Pat Foley. Circa 1963. The Peggy McTeggart School of Irish Dancing, Cork. Photo © Catherine Foley. Personal Archive.



From left to right: Ann Russell, Catherine Foley and Theresa Butler. Circa 1966. Photo © Catherine Foley. Personal Archive.



ROSITA KAAHĀNI WORL, PH.D. President Sealaska Heritage Institute



It's a Wrap! (Continued from page 7)

on Sunday, so that those who have to catch flights home don't miss the activities. So, there were many positives.

Those of you new to the conference, or to the NFO, might not realize that our in-person NFO conferences are just as wonderful, with the added incentive of dancing together, meeting new friends, investigating the local area, and a lovely awards banquet. Keynote speakers at the live conferences are generally drawn from the area where the conference is being held, and we have had many stellar speakers in the past—academics, folklorists, ethnologists, dance teachers, lawyers specializing in performer visas, and professionals of all types related to the mission of the NFO. I am always astounded at the quality of the presenters at the conference. Of course, there are also dance workshops, dancing every day, and other activities unique to each conference.

The 2021 conference, though, was special due to the circumstances of the pandemic and also due to how many wonderful people participated. It would be impossible to mention all the things I learned over the course of the conference. Other articles have mentioned some of the dance workshops, dance parties, and performances. I don't find dancing at home alone particularly scintillating; what I enjoyed most were the lectures, and the music and singing classes.

Phil Jameson's lecture about the History of South Appalachian Square Dance was fascinating. He has written a book about the subject and his talk was full of photos, drawings, and video clips illustrating his points, including the definite influence of Black Americans on southern square dances and music. Southern square dances used a circular visiting-couple format for any number of couples, with chorus figures. The choreography is flexible, with freeform timing. The dance form includes a large repertoire of distinctive dance figures, and the dances are very fast. In his workshop on Thursday, he taught us a few flatfooting moves—easy to do alone in a small space.

On Thursday, Dr. Catherine Foley talked about her dance journey, and the field research she did on traditional Irish dances. Her presentation included video clips and photos as well, including one of her playing the Celtic tin whistle while three older gentlemen showed off their Irish step dancing expertise. Their feet were nimble! On Sunday, she gave a workshop on the Irish tin whistle, which I enjoyed very much. (My husband wasn't too enamored of the squeaks emanating from my tin whistle, though...)

Another fascinating presentation on Thursday was a video about the Culture and History of the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian of Southeast Alaska, including Tlingit artist Donald Gregory talking



about halibut hooks that were designed to catch only medium-sized halibut. They were not only practical, but also (often) works of art. Donald was also on the Zoom session to answer questions, and one point he made in answer to a question was that songs and stories are owned by the clans. Individuals must have permission before telling clan stories or singing clan songs.

Ahmet Lüleci talked about the wishing tree custom in Turkey, and showed lovely slides of various wishing trees around the country and their connection with history and the Ederlezi festival. The wishing trees often have pieces of paper tied to them with wishes—for example, for a husband, or a good job. There are also trees with blue glass amulets tied on them to protect people from the evil eye.

The lively Peruvian dance (Changanakuy) with Ruben Pachas was entertaining and accessible. It was also fun to not only see the woman's costume, but also how it was assembled.

The Wycinanki Polish paper cutting workshop with Sue Van Wassenhove challenged my artistic skills. She provided clear instructions and covered a lot of ground in the interesting workshop.

Friday's lecture by Stephanie Hall brought to light a lot I didn't know about the history of egg decorating. It was amazing to see the decorated ostrich eggs from thousands of years ago. The oldest one she showed was Phoenician and dated from about 600 BC. (It is in a British museum). Ostrich eggs were used as drinking vessels, and decorated ostrich egg shell fragments from 65,000 years ago have been found in a pit in Africa—10,000 year's worth of decorated ostrich egg vessels!



During our time with Mickela Mallozzi, she talked about how she started her television show, *Bare Feet*, with a couple of friends doing the video and editing work for the first two seasons, which she put on YouTube. Then, a commercial station wanted to buy her show, but she would have had to relinquish artistic control and wouldn't even have been in it! She was against making it commercially, because she makes the show to honor the cultures that she visits, not to make money. She was eventually given a time slot by PBS, but that doesn't come with funding. She said she has had an amazing time making the show, and she showed us several clips and talked about her experiences. She is one of us!

I am running out of space to continue my rundown of sessions that impressed or amazed me. Suffice it to say that each session I watched enriched my understanding of dance and culture. I am honored to be a part of the NFO, and to be friends with many wonderful people who are part of the folk dance and folk arts world. See you live (hopefully) in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 2022!