

# AMAN Alumni Reunion

50<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY  
NEWSLETTER  
SUMMER 2012

## IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO MAKE A REUNION

Columbus Day Weekend • Thursday, October 10-Sunday, October 13, 2013

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### *A Message from Paula Davis*

IN JANUARY, MY HUSBAND AND I flew out to California from dreary wintery Pennsylvania to visit family and friends. One task was to visit Palm Springs to check out the fabulous **Marriott Renaissance Hotel** in Palm Springs for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary AMAN Reunion. We were not disappointed—from the fabulous views of the mountains and the incredible weather and food (they even have vegan choices) I was convinced that we have the perfect place to create AMAN magic in 2013. The guest and event rooms are fantastic and will create just the right atmosphere. But a place is just a place without the people who were AMAN. And so while I was there I could envision the lecture hall filled to the >>>



## It Takes a Village

(continued)

>>> rafters as we listen to stories of AMAN through the decades from those who were there from the very beginning. And I could see how the kafana will be glittering with twinkle lights and strewn with elegant fabrics and pillows, conversation and dancing, and the best music in the world. And then there is the outdoor patio café with brick

and wrought iron and trees that remind me of the AMAN Fandango days that will be perfect for catching up with folks we performed with for years. And then there are the various halls where we will get to relive our favorite AMAN numbers that rocked stages around the country and world (I do not exaggerate!) such as *Ladarke*, *Appalachian*, *Lindó*, *Mezőség*, *Samarkand*, and

more. Once we get registration going we will be polling everyone for your favorite numbers and we will put it all together. And if you were a rehearsal director for any of these numbers let me know—we will put you to work! I look forward to working with all of you in the coming year to create a special (yes, special!) and magical event and more great AMAN memories. *Aman, Aman!*



Palm Springs Marriott Renaissance Hotel— outdoor patio area and one of the indoor halls.

# AMAN Alumni List Blockbuster Reboot

*You can't believe how many more Amanites have been found!*

THANKS TO THE AMAZING DETECTIVE WORK OF LOUISE WEILER a new, huge and improved Alumni List has been posted at the AMAN Reunion Website <http://www.aman50.com>. But the work is still ongoing to find as many of our colleagues as possible. We need as many super-sleuths as we can get. Click through to the actual list and take a look. We bet you are in contact with someone that we are looking for.

Also, don't assume everyone you know is getting the news. Forward the newsletter and website links to the AMAN buds in your address book!



***Opa! Thought Bubbles from the Greek Chorus  
aka Letters to the Editor***  
.....

# That Reminds Me *by Susie North*

**R**EADING CHRIS YESETA'S hilariously irreverent Small Group memoir took me back to one of the most fun (and, I must add, surreal) episodes of my life. Like a series of scratchy photos—or rather, a set of substandard home movies—the memories came flooding back. Out they poured, from the back attic of my brain. I owe a debt of thanks to Chris for dislodging them. I'm passing a few of them along to you in hopes of reclaiming some much-needed brainspace for the storage of passwords and current phone numbers.

Michael Alexander was the Small Group's first show announcer. He did a great job because, unlike most of us, he could be lively and presentable at 9 AM. He was fast on his feet too, a lot faster than his successor proved to be. When Michael's administrative duties back at the office became too pressing, he asked me if I'd take over announcing. (I guess he figured, *she's worked with kids and, well...she's loud.*) One of my very first shows as announcer was at a parochial school. Our announcing gambit was very Q&A—y'know, engage the kids. So I asked some question or other and hundreds of hands shot up. "You," I pointed, "You in the white shirt and blue sweater." This led to some con-

fusion because *every single child in the entire auditorium was wearing a white shirt and blue sweater.* (Duh, Sooz, "parochial school.")

One of the truly gratifying things about performing for kids, especially kids who had probably never seen a live performance, was their enthusiastic embrace of the music and dances we brought to them. I can remember one time



when this had a nearly catastrophic effect. We were driving out of a school's parking lot right after our show when a scene on the schoolyard caught our eye. Four little boys about age ten were trying to duplicate the flying circles we had (shrewdly if not authentically) grafted onto our mini-version of the Appalachian suite. The boys had the general idea: grab

hands tight around each other's shoulders and whirl around as fast as possible. Then, at some unheard signal, *all four boys* lifted their feet in an attempt to "fly!" Unclear on the concept. Being children, they fell like drunks. No one was hurt, thank goodness. We shot off in search of the 605.

The stages we performed on were, for the most part, boxes set in to one end of a school's "multipurpose room" (doesn't that term just brim with hope and enthusiasm?) or auditorium. The back of the stage was a brick wall. This was always covered, in an attempt at theatrical gentility, by a terrible little curtain of indeterminate age and color. The curtain hugged the brick wall, so there was no way to pass behind the stage without creating a ludicrous moving wave between wall and curtain. I mention this because if you exited the stage on the wrong side, you were doomed to wander the school grounds, in full ethnic regalia, looking for the entrance on the other side. I would like to add that people likely to exit a stage on the wrong side are the very same people who cannot find that other entrance. Not that I'm bitter...I'm just saying.

Anyway, back to our tatty little curtain. The Russian Quadrilles were a staple of the Small Group repertoire. Doing the quadrilles on >>>



**That Reminds Me***(continued)*

>>> these tiny stages was a challenge, but we had fun hamming it up and the kids responded to our antics with a rewarding degree of laughter and applause. Plus the dance was demanding and crisp; it certainly did keep us honest. I had the incredible good fortune of partnering with Don Bersticker. He was a fabulous dancer, nice as the day is long, with a very steady manner and a cute sense of humor. It was pure heaven to dance with him. At one point in the choreography, Don and I were positioned upstage. He was going to execute his flawless chene turns as I flounced about and flirted with someone or other across the stage.

Loved the article in the Alumni Newsletter about the maps! What great memories (mammaries as we used to say). We had so many ways of keeping ourselves otherwise entertained. To this very day, I use the "my brother plays the accordion" line to demonstrate a disconnected thought. We were pretty darn responsible for a group of stray artists! Keep those updates coming....thanks... xxooxx.

—Adrienne Lipow Malka

Behind me I heard "thwup-thwup-thwup" – and when I turned to look, Don had completely disappeared from sight! Yet, there were his shoes peering from below the back curtain, which was oddly rolled

up atop those shoes, looking like a gigantic erect burrito. Again the "thwup-thwup-thwup" and here was Don, back from his second set of chene turns and free of the curtain's evil clutches. He never missed a beat. Don was coolness itself.

So many memories. Preschoolers Leslie ("Dinka") and Aaron Yeseta planted in the first row, always ready to be called on if the school kids were reluctant to engage with us: "It's from Dubrovnik and it's called a *lijerica*!" Chris' maps, both meticulous and funny, which always pointed east to Bosnia. And being able to dance and sing all day long...I don't think any of us could have sustained the pace forever, but for the time that it lasted Small Group was a dream come true.

## FREE SONG DOWNLOAD FROM THE **AMAN** ARCHIVES

# *Pinar Başı*

This Turkish melody by **Ergun Tamer** could always be counted on for an impromptu and seductive dance in the wings—kick off your shoes, lounge on your ottoman pillows and swoon! On this recording are: **Ergun Tamer and Philip Harland.**

Click here to download "Pinar Başı"

<http://www.aman50.com>





*Fakelore—True (and Tall) Tales from the **AMAN** Storybook*

# Leona Wood:

## *Accurate and Beautiful* —by Ronda Berkeley

I TRIED TO EXPLAIN TO SOMEONE once who Leona Wood was and to my surprise, trying to blend, combine, quantify many things—autodidact, historian, linguist, painter, writer, dancer, choreographer, teacher, mentor—I was tongue-tied. Why? Because, in Leona's world accuracy was paramount; and I was falling short of an accurate description of an extraordinary woman.

I first met Leona at Eddie and Alida Gerard's annual Christmas Eve party—a dazzling yearly event for a twelve year old like me that culminated in "The Christmas Show"; a combination of prepared songs, dances and improvised skits on a variety of topics performed by their children Edwin and Michele and their friends, Susan Shapiro, Laila Luria, Karen Fisher and others. It was always energetic, exciting and on that particular night, thanks to Leona, a bizarre and wonderful slide down the rabbit hole. She wore an amazing costume of layered skirts, a gypsy blouse, gigantic dangling earrings from sensuous long earlobes, white porcelain skin, exotic black eyeliner and her long hair twisted in a knot on top of her head >>>



**Leona Wood** *(continued)*

>>> held there by a gigantic black Spanish comb. Breaking the fourth wall and deftly using her audience as unwitting collaborators she portrayed “The Sole Reader” examining the bottoms of the bare feet of the party guests telling outrageous and silly fortunes. She was beautiful.

A few years later I was sucked into her vortex and became a part of her world. The first revelation being that Leona’s costume that night was not a costume at all—many other revelations followed exponentially. Leona inspired those around her allowing them to explore anything they wanted, in as much depth as they wanted, for as much time as it takes—literature, history, drawing, painting, ethnic dance, music and costumes. Leona would greet you sometimes at her front gate, sometimes her front door, often from the roof of her house wearing an African mask dancing some crazy shaman dance, a long black wig and pointed witch hat and cauldron, a space age silver jumpsuit made from what looked like a paper picnic table cloth and Reynolds Wrap. Her greatest gift was the ability to suspend time. She had no clocks in her house and once you entered it, all sense of time and place were erased. While Phil, the love of her life, would quietly read or practice music in his study; Leona and her guests would play and play

and play—exploring dance technique in front of her wall of mirrors, spatial relationships laying out her choreographic ideas with black and white chess pawns, or giggle and screech up to our elbows in analyn dyes and silk desperately trying to duplicate an amazing color from one of her oil paintings. Hours would pass until the telephone would ring and my mother would kindly remind Leona that it was 3am, emphasize that I had school in the morning and ask Leona to allow me to come home.

It wasn’t until years later that I truly realized the genius of Leona’s ability to suspend time. Those who knew Leona often perceived her as someone who did not manage her time well. She always was way past due on some deadline whether it was designing



and sewing costumes for an AMAN concert or delivering an article to Arabesque Magazine. The truth is that Leona was a master of time having juggled numerous careers, all with a reputation for excellence. She had successfully reinvented herself a number of times, a New York book and magazine illustrator, a dancer and choreographer, an historian, didactic and fiction writer simultaneously maintaining a vibrant career as a master fine arts painter. A jack of many trades.

Years after I first met Leona and had become her student, my grandfather, who had known Leona and Phil socially in the 1950s, opined and grumbled that Leona had attended a salon at his home in Laurel Canyon with “that physicist husband of hers who likes African drums.” How she crashed the party with an oud and when they disagreed on politics or art or some matter she cried “Mowbray when will you stop being such a bore!” My grandfather replied “When you stop wearing an eggplant on your head!” “Dilettante,” he >>>





**Leona Wood** *(continued)*

>>> whispered “with her Becky Sharp costume and bare feet.” (This from my grandfather who, born in Canada, spoke his entire life with the phony British accent that belonged to his vaudevillian father.) His opinion of Leona changed one night in my living room as he looked at one of her paintings, his eyes suddenly moist in appreciation. Dilettante indeed.

Leona had many sons and daughters whom she inspired, cajoled and terrorized, imparting to them an aesthetic and approach to study and life. Be excellent. Be right. Don’t compromise your vision. An autodidact, Leona taught the value of a primary source, scoffed at secondary sources and despaired over tertiary sources. Agoraphobic, Leona traveled the world through books and publications, through the National Geographic and the OED. She launched her students out into the world to gather for her first-hand accounts of people and places and helped them to explore ways to share their new knowledge through performance and art. When Leona could not acquire the information she needed about a long ago extinct art or practice, the artist would push the historian aside to apply imagination and vision to recreate a lost piece of folklore. The product, admittedly often “fakelore,” always remained true to the spirit of the people she sought to expose to her audience and often became classics in their own right. An accurate exponent of Leona’s mind, they were always beautiful.

Leona’s tea parties consisted of tuna fish from the can, iceberg lettuce, lapsang souchong tea, Sweet and Low and tomato soup with a dash of sherry in her bamboo garden with the Culver City parrots and squirrels in attendance. She loved pizza deliveries—the greasier the better. She would sip her tea and read to her audience the droll and witty short stories and

mysteries she would pen for her own amusement packed full of puns and bon mots, with titles like “The Accident Corpse” and “Debt in Venice”.

A proud Luddite, Leona stubbornly insisted on using two manual typewriters to create a document for publication; one courier, one italic, cutting and pasting revisions so often that a final version of an article would be a papier mache collage—3 D suitable for framing. She found personal computers loathsome, and the idea of the internet—“It is so inaccurate!!!” she would shout in frustration. “Anybody can claim to be an expert on anything and you believe them!” She only succumbed to television when she discovered that on any night of the week she could watch bull riding on ESPN2. She

eventually came around to the VHS machine to watch Monty Python but plugged in the DVD player only on demand. Though she claimed to be a Libertarian, she was Jon Stewart’s biggest fan.

In her later years, Leona relied heavily on her caretakers Aisha Ali, Samira Tamer, Mardi Rollow and Susan Marshall. Her window on the world became very narrow. She would let in less and less. But she continued to examine what she did let in with vigor and ferocious analysis. Sometimes she was hard to take, less measured; somehow more urgent. On one of my last visits to

Leona she greeted me sharp and aware, asked me about my mother’s health and my boyfriend’s writing, what movies I had seen. Then as she tired, her mind turned inward somewhere else. She couldn’t remember my name. “Who would bring me such an ugly flower?” she cried, distressed, offended; angry. “I did. It’s an orchid; a phalaenopsis.” “I know what it is.” She replied. “Ugly flower.” She then proceeded to tell me in great detail how she would paint that ugly flower, using light, color, chiaroscuro; hard and soft lines. How she would transform it through her painting and people would see it as something both accurate and beautiful.



Postcards from the Diaspora—The Latest from **AMAN** Alumni

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## Collage Dance Ensemble



A native of Turkey, performer and choreographer **Ahmet Luleci** joined AMAN as a dancer and resident choreographer in 1991 and dramatically expanded AMAN's Turkish repertoire most notably with his dynamic suite of dances from the Black Sea. His Boston-based *Collage Dance Ensemble* is a vibrant presenter of world and multi-cultural dance with passionate and lively contemporary interpretations of traditional performing arts.

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For more information on Collage Dance Ensemble go to: <http://www.collageusa.org>.

To see a video of Collage Dance Ensemble go to:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDYq40LVGxc&feature=relmfu>.

## The Date is Set for AMAN's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration October 2013

**AMAN'S 50<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION**  
**Thursday, October 10–Sunday, October 13, 2013**  
**Columbus Day Weekend**  
**Renaissance Marriott**  
**Palm Springs, California USA**



Three nights of wall to wall music and dance; food and drink, kafana!, panels and discussions on all things AMAN.

As we prepare for our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration in 2013, please, make sure that we have your correct contact information and share the newsletter with all of your AMAN alumni friends, family and supporters. We want to reconnect our vast AMAN family for a once in a lifetime gathering and beyond.

**Register now at:** <http://www.aman50.com/registration.php>



## Keep in Touch, Watch Videos and Photos on the AMAN Facebook Groups

Don't forget to join the AMAN Facebook Groups.

There are two: One, the public AMAN Folk Ensemble Group at <http://www.facebook.com/groups/92420925316/>

There is already an archive of 2000 photos and 50 videos on-stage and behind the scenes—some of you are so old you are in black and white—you know who you are. Peruse the blog wall and see what your AMAN pals are up to. Upload your pictures to share.

Two, the private AMAN Folk Ensemble Reunion Group at <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100002876950355&ref=ts>

This private group page will be your go to for updates on the actual event in 2013.

\* \* \*

## More Videos & Photos

Not on FB? Check out the photos and videos on Myspace and YouTube.

\* \* \*

## More Links to the AMAN Related

<http://www.zlatneuste.org>

One of the east coast's most popular brass bands, alum



**Tamburlaine Harris** and friends tear it up every year at the Golden Festival in January.

<http://www.robbyfriend.com>

**Robyn Friend's World of Iranian Dance.** Check out her upcoming Silk Road Dance Weekend August 23-26, 2012.

<http://www.braveoldworld.com>

**Brave Old World** and our very own **Stuart Brotman** have been electrifying the international klezmer scene since 1989.

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## Are You an At Home Worker Bee?

**Scanners (Not the kind whose heads explode)**—We need LA area volunteers willing to help scan in batches of photos and/or memorabilia over the next 4-5 months as they come in. We will

bring you the photos and then pick them up! You do not have to commit to a huge amount—let us know what you can take on.

Other “at home” worker-bee volunteer jobs:

**Researchers (Aimlessly wandering the web?)**—Give the farm a rest and be a part of **Louise Weiler's** team searching the internet for missing Alumni contact information.

\* \* \*

## Time to Clean Out the Garage

Want your face to be immortalized in the AMAN image CD and slide shows at the reunion event? Deadline for submitting AMAN photos and/or memorabilia is November 1st, 2012.

Got stuff? Write to us at [amanreunion.2013@gmail.com](mailto:amanreunion.2013@gmail.com)

