



AMAN 50th Anniversary

Alumni Reunion

NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2013

—IN THIS ISSUE—

Concert Raises Dollars for In Need Alumni—2

Your Handy Dandy Reunion Schedule—3

REGISTER NOW FOR THE AMAN50 REUNION!—4

Opa! Thought Bubbles from the Greek Chorus,
aka Letters to the Editor—4

No Clowning Around: Michael Alexander's History
with the AMAN Folk Ensemble—5

Žensko Čamče and Kopačka:
Free Song Downloads from the AMAN Archives—9

Veretski Pass: Postcards from the Diaspora—9

So You Think You Can Clap? Auditioning for Leona:
Tales from the AMAN Storybook—10

AMAN SPAWN II: When More Artists Breed—13

Be a lifelong part of the AMAN 50th Reunion
Souvenir Book: Buy an Ad—14

FAQ: Freakin' Awesome Questions About AMAN50—15

• Last call for photos and videos: Be a part of the
AMAN archive! • Kafana • Silent Auction—16

Thanks to all the fantastic alumni and AMAN family and friends who came out for the Alumni Benefit Concert.

We raised \$1600 to help subsidize “in need” alumni so that they can attend our AMAN50 Celebration.

Clementine (alums Katy Huey, Mindy Leventhal and Terri Prizant) opened the show with a rousing set of original and traditional American tunes with sexy tight vocal harmonies on guitar, banjo and mandolin. *Nevenka* followed with two sets of AMAN favorites and selected songs from their upcoming new CD “When Marigolds Sing.” (“Like” Nevenka on Facebook to make sure you get on their mailing list for the new CD!) The highlight of the evening came from the *Tanza* kids, directed by our own Billy Burke, who wowed us with some

Concert Raises Dollars For In Need Alumni



amazing blasts from the past performing AMAN’s iconic Bulgarian, Tunisian and Canopy dances. The fun continued into the night with Billy spinning dance tunes for the crowd. Kudos to these wonderful performers for donating their time!

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Announcing **Mendocino Folk Dance Camp Raffle Winners 2013**

ONE 2014 MFC CAMBERSHIP —winners are Craig Kurumada & Linnea Mandell

ONE AMAN50 EVENT TICKET —winner is Joe Gordon

\$100 TRADER JOE’S GIFT CARD —winners are Jay & Jill Michtom



Your Handy Dandy Reunion Schedule

(All Subject to Change)

Thursday October 10th

- 3:30pm** Registration and Schmoozing (*Santa Rosa Room*)
8:00pm Welcome Kafana Social Mixer (*San Jacinto Room*)

Friday October 11th

- 8:00am** Master Class Stretch, Strength and Alignment with Linda DeNike (*Sierra Room*)
9:00am African Tribute to Phil Harland—Dance and Drumming Sohu Jam (*Sierra & Ballroom*)
11:00am Ladarke Tribute Session—Singing (*Ballroom*) and Band (*Sierra Room*)
12:30pm No-Host Outdoor Grill and Salad Bar with Musical Serenade and Singalong
2:00pm AMAN Through the Decades #1 Panel Discussion (*Mojave Learning Center*)
2:00pm Swing Tribute Session (*Ballroom*)
3:30pm AMAN Through the Decades #2 Panel Discussion (*Mojave Learning Center*)
3:30pm Podravina Wedding Suite Review (*Ballroom*)
6:00pm Happy Hour—No Host Bar (*Ballroom Foyer & Terrace*)
7:00pm Buffet Dinner on the Patio
8:00pm AMAN Songbook Singalong (*Sierra Room*)
9:00pm Evening Dance Party with Live Music and Surprises (*Ballroom*)
11:00pm Late Night Kafana (*San Jacinto Room*)

Saturday October 12th

- 9:00am** Master Class Pilates with Robyn Friend (*Sierra Room*)
9:00am Zumba Gold Workshop with Nina Edelstein (*Ballroom*)
10:00am Appalachian Tribute Big Circle Dance (*Ballroom*) and Music Jam (*Sierra Room*)
11:00am Zangbozi and Egyptian Tribute Sessions (*Ballroom*)
11:00am AMAN and the Early Balkan Music Scene Panel Discussion (*Mojave Learning Center*)
12:30pm Lunch (Free-Time)
2:00pm Special Workshop—Hungarian with Kovacs & Deanne (*Tentative*)
5:30pm Happy Hour and 50th Anniversary Portraits (*Ballroom Foyer and Terrace*)
6:30pm AMAN Gala 50th Anniversary Banquet and Awards Dinner (*Ballroom*)
8:45pm Ladarke Sing/Play Along (*Foyer*)
9:00pm Evening Dance Party with Live Music (*Ballroom*)
11:00pm Late Night Kafana (*San Jacinto Room*)

Sunday October 13th

TBA Survivors Lunch

REGISTER *NOW* FOR THE REUNION ACTIVITIES!

Event Cost for 3 Nights/2 Days

\$295*

REGISTER NOW for the
Activities, Dinners & Dances on the
AMAN REUNION WEBSITE
<http://AMAN50.com/registration.php>

**WE ARE ACCEPTING
DEPOSITS NOW!
FINAL PAYMENTS DUE BY
SEPTEMBER 6, 2013**

**AND DON'T FORGET TO
BOOK YOUR ROOMS**

The Reservation Line is Open

UPDATE: The hotel is telling us that
some room types are already selling
out...so please don't wait, book your
rooms **NOW!** You'll definitely want
to be staying in the heart of all
the action with the rest of us!

Call the Renaissance Marriott
888-682-1238

Click [HERE](#) for the NEW Hotel
Online Reservation link

AMAN's 50th Anniversary Celebration
Thursday October 10th to
Sunday October 13th, 2013
Columbus Day Weekend
Renaissance Marriott
Palm Springs, California USA

*After Sept. 6, Event Price is \$320

***Opa! —Thought Bubbles from the Greek Chorus,
aka Letters to the Editor***
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Lite Egyptian by Barbara Gordon

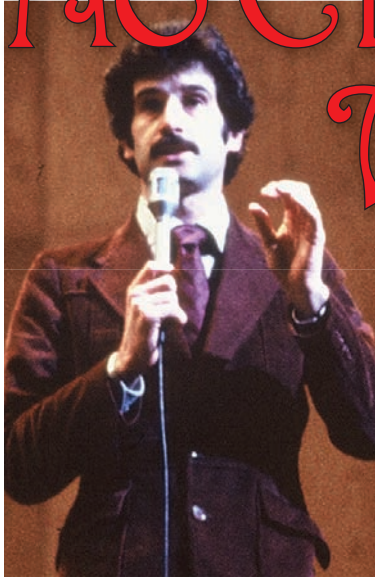
I DON'T KNOW if anyone else had to do this. But I had to wear dark pancake makeup for Sohu, and maybe some other numbers—on my arms, hands, face, neck, legs, feet. The darker the better. I'd run to Max Factor in Hollywood with friends to find it, along with the mandatory stop at Fredericks for belly dance costume foundations. This started with Aisha; she too made me do this. I have a picture of Aisha's group coming down the stairs at the King Tut exhibit at LACMA, and the darkest chick was me. I think I looked weird! I can't remember when I no longer had to do this. But it certainly was a mess to clean up.

As we all do, I remember many times at Leona's house. One night she was working on the draping, etc. of the Asyut dress and there I was, barefoot, wearing only a leotard underneath, modeling, moving; Leona sketching. I don't remember if anyone else was there 'til the bitter end. It was wonderful seeing her develop an idea. But there was no heat in the house. I was absolutely frozen. When I got home I sat in a hot bath for a very long time before I stopped shaking. Work the next day was oh so much fun!

The summer that the Epcot group was gone I remember working on the Japanese suite. Once again we were at Leona's house, working on the Samurai dance. I don't remember the Japanese teacher's name, but she was fun. And she was a mean Samurai. We kept trying, but I don't think I ever got it down. So she again demonstrated, for about five minutes. It was great. When she stopped we were silent, she looked at us and said "What, no crap?" More stunned silence. Aha, she meant "What, no *clap*?" Then we laughed and clapped like crazy.



No Clowning Around



Michael Alexander's History with the AMAN Folk Ensemble

an excerpt from the
Dance History Project

MY CAREER IN THE ARTS owes a lot to my personal history with the AMAN Folk Ensemble. I danced with the company for seven-plus years, managed it for a dozen (some of which overlapped with my dancing career) and was involved on the board at its beginning and at its end. But let me start with my involvement as a performer before sharing stories about what was done to change a UCLA “club” into a nationally respected ethnic dance company that toured the country and then the world and became one of the leading dance companies in Los Angeles.

In 1965 I started UCLA and included a Balkan dance class being taught by Elsie Dunin. Among my classmates was Mika Seeger (Pete’s daughter). Concurrent to our evening dance class, AMAN was rehearsing on the lower floor of the UCLA Women’s Gym (now Kaufman Hall). When Mika told me that AMAN had been engaged by Universal Studios to be the Berber dancers in the film *Gambit* starring Shirley MacLaine, Michael Caine and

Herbert Lom, I dropped by a rehearsal and almost instantly accepted an invitation to join the company. I was 18. (The story, as I recall hearing it, was that Mustafa Akkad—not yet renowned for producing a film on the life of Muhammed—was hired by Universal as a consultant for *Gambit* and he recommended engaging the AMAN dancers and musicians for a scene taking place on a Moroccan street. I also heard that some of the footage

shot was later used to promote tourism to Morocco.)

Victor Sirelson and I started working out a dance that involved two men mock fighting each other with five-foot long pieces of doweling. We incorporated all kinds of jumps, squats and lunges as we swung our sticks towards each other and engaged in “combat.” At one point, I got to show off my prowess by holding the stick with both hands and jumping back and forth over it. I had quite an exciting part for the film—all which ended up on the cutting room floor. Other sequences from AMAN’s Berber Suite were featured but if you hunted for your popcorn while watching the film, there was a good chance you would have missed the company.

I had not fully committed myself to really joining the company but Universal kept putting off our day at the back lot and each passing week found me more and more engaged in the company’s repertoire. I was learning other dances, being asked to participate in small performances, having a good time and making friends (not an easy thing for a commuter-student at UCLA at that time). We finally were filmed, I got my measly dancing/extra check (not even \$100 if I recall correctly) and I was hooked on staying with AMAN.

What was this company? I quickly learned that AMAN was the product of the merger of two dance groups with links to UCLA. Anthony Shay and Leona Wood were two charis- >>>

>>> matic leaders who enticed dozens of people over the years to join in their dream. Leona had been the director of “Friends of Arabic Dance.” Her husband, Philip Harland, was a brilliant musician (and over the years, dozens of musicians joined AMAN just for the opportunity to work with Phil). Phil was an astrophysicist working for McDonnell Douglas by day and making music by night. Whenever the UCLA’s Institute of Ethnomusicology was lacking a resident Ghanaian master drummer, Phil was in charge of passing the drumming traditions of the Ashanti and Ewe to UCLA students of African music. Anthony (called Tony by everyone who knew him) was the director of the Village Dancers, which had a heavy Balkan and Central Asian focused repertoire. Tony had spent time living in Iran in the early 1960s where he had absorbed much of the culture, learned the language and, even, performed as a singer on the national radio station.

Leona’s and Tony’s companies had shared performances and they realized that they shared common interests, standards and performance goals. They decided to merge and call their new company the AMAN Folk Ensemble. Among the goals that they had was to have live music played on appropriate instruments (we ultimately toured with 15 or more musicians and upwards of 60 different instruments), authentic costumes or well-researched copies, a large corps of dancers and a varied and substantial enough repertoire that the company could present full evening concerts without having to share the bill with anyone else.

By the time I joined AMAN, it was at least 18 months old (start dates vary according to my sources). It still needed to involve some guest artists. A local tamburica orchestra (the Hajduks) was engaged to accompany the Croatian repertoire until AMAN had enough string musicians to create our own (and we had to purchase a number of the instruments from Yugoslavia so we could have our own tamburica). The soloist skills of various

individuals were also essential to filling out a full program including belly dancing by Leona (accompanied on dumbek by Phil) and Tony singing a number of Persian songs that he had learned while abroad.

AMAN was a “community” by that time. Though we clearly had two artistic directors, there was a collaborative leadership spirit that impacted on the company’s growth in many ways. Many of the most experienced dancers taught new dances to the company. Various members coming with specific expertise helped expand the repertoire into new and exciting areas. Dancers with backgrounds in other styles of performance dance helped us raise our standards in many areas including how we warmed up before rehearsals, worked to have a Bolshoi level of tight performance, learned to sing in a variety of languages and add elements of theatrical dance



(lighting and other stagecraft) that helped distinguish the company from other “folk dance” groups performing exhibition work. We were modeling ourselves after the finest international companies—the ones that Sol Hurok was touring (and we once auditioned for him but more on that later).

So I decided to stay with the company after the filming at Universal was complete. In short order I was learning dances from Croatia, Serbia, Macedonia, Morocco and Gujarat, India. We were getting performance opportunities throughout the L.A. area. In addition to performances with UCLA’s Institute of Ethnomusicology under the direction of the legendary Mantle Hood, we performed for Croatian and Serbian churches, various Jewish Community Centers, UCLA’s Spring Sing at the Hollywood Bowl, various civic events and as special entertainment for society banquets at major hotels. All sorts of dignitaries were in our audiences including Princess Alexandra of Great Britain, Ambassador Ardeshtir Zahedi of Iran (during the Shah’s reign) and numerous elected officials.

Not all our venues were meant for concert dance. One of the most memorable was the time we danced >>>

>>> at the Olympic Auditorium—the primary location for boxing, wrestling and roller derby at the time. Fortunately the corner posts and ropes had been removed but it was weird for us all to use dressing rooms that had also been used by Gorgeous George and Haystack Calhoun.

By the late 60s, we all felt ready to produce our own concert at the Wilshire Ebell Theater. It was one of the primary rental houses in town with a seating capacity just under 1,300 seats. Remarkably, we sold it out. AMAN was still an amateur company—no one was paid to perform. After covering all the performance related costs all funds were invested in building the costume collection. At first replicas were made here but in time, AMAN started to purchase authentic costumes directly from villagers in Yugoslavia, Rumania and Bulgaria and fabric from Egypt essential to the costuming for our Ghawazi suite (from the city of Asyut, we bought netted fabric with hammered pieces of silver bent over various threads to create beautiful intricate patterns that reacted beautifully under stage lights). Instruments usually belonged to the individual musicians but AMAN did buy some over the years, including a cymbalom, the tamburica instruments and a number from Greece.

Management of the company, if you could call it that, was provided by various individuals at different times. Most of the managers were the spouses of members of the company. I wanted to be involved in the management in some way and in 1967—just before my twentieth birthday, I became “bursar”—the keeper of the checkbook. Meager as the funds were, I would collect our fees and distribute the funds as needed to buy cloth, beads, dye and who-knows-what so we could make authentic-looking costumes ourselves. Leona became quite expert at knowing which types of tea would color a fabric just right for different regions’ costumes.

By 1969, after a series of spouses had taken on one aspect of managing or another, I got a call that Tony and Leona wanted me to give a try at a more comprehensive management job for the company.

I was young with limited personal responsibilities and could devote 15 or more hours a week to company management at that time. I was offered five percent of the income as compensation. In a good month, I might make a few hundred dollars. Within a year, I was working full time for the company with a guaranteed \$500 per month. (Thank goodness I still had my clown shoes—purchased when I started to work for the L.A. City Circus in 1964. If it weren’t for the clown work that I continued to do every weekend, I would have starved!!)

Among the first things that I did was take advantage of our affiliation with the UCLA Student Activities office. As a UCLA club (we got a tiny allowance from UCLA for a number of years), I could use a spare office and phone at UCLA a few times a month to place phone calls throughout the state trying to line up performances. I got directories of all the colleges and universities in the West and called to find out who was responsible for booking each one’s concert series.

Leona (you need to look her up on Google) had an illustrious history as a fine artist and as a graphic designer. We worked together on copy for booking brochures and press kits that we mailed out to prospective presenters. Fortune came our way when a



few community concert associations asked us to perform for them and we came to the attention of Columbia Artists, which owned Community Concerts at that time. Columbia Artists asked us to fill in for a Philippine Dance Company that was scheduled to perform in both Oakland and Sacramento. They were not on consecutive days and we were going to have to come home between shows.

The Sacramento date was in the middle of the week. I bought seats for 60 plus performers on PSA airlines to get to Sacramento but the only flight after the performance was one chartered by the US Post Office. No one was allowed to buy advance tickets, but we could get in line and get really cheap tickets (\$13 per person if I recall correctly) just prior to the flight. I sent one of the musicians who had >>>

>>> nothing to do in the second half of the performance to the airport with instructions to buy seats for all the performers and some of the larger instruments that we would not store below the plane (e.g. the bass, some large drums, etc.). At the end of the performance we had less than 45 minutes to get out of costume, pack everything and head to the airport on two charter buses that I had engaged (one driver asked me on the way, how to get to the airport!!!). Sixty chicken dinners were delivered just before we took off and we made it to Sacramento's airport with about 15 minutes to stow everything and get on board. The flight staff kept insisting that we would have to buy more seats for various instruments so we kept running back to the counter to buy more seats for various Central Asian santours and the like. At one point Leona was about to be kicked off the plane when she would not give up holding onto one of the more precious instruments in her and Phil's personal collection. Ultimately we took off all intact. The flight made a stop in San Francisco where a bunch of young travelers who had never had trouble getting seats on this cheap flight were turned away because we monopolized the plane.

Other tour dates in California included performances for the University of San Francisco, Mills College, a Serbian Church in San Diego, the folk dance club at UC Santa Barbara, the Sacramento and Fresno Bees, various out-of-county Community Concert Associations and a few summer series including the Redlands Bowl. Though mainstream media ignored AMAN for the most part, folk dancers, ethno-musicologists and others with specific interests in folkloric and non-Western traditional arts knew about AMAN and were organizing for our visits. Many hosted welcome parties and helped fill halls as we toured to their home towns.

After a number of successful Ebell concerts, I was encouraged by Tony to see if we could get booked at the Music Center. The Dorothy Chandler Pavilion was just about five years old when I approached the Music Center about an engagement. We were told that we would have to be approved. Two associates of Dorothy Chandler including Marjorie Winfield, who ran Chandler's Performing Arts Council, came to see us at one of our local performances. They gave us a "thumbs up" and we started the process that led to

our premier performance there on March 19, 1971.

We had to present ourselves. I borrowed \$7,000 from my father's Electrical Workers Credit Union (on his signature alone) to cover the theater rental and stage crew costs. Barry Glass, who by this time was one of the Assistant Directors of the Company, set up a meeting with his father who was a Hollywood producer with a substantial press/promotion background. At his suggestion we engaged a publicist who helped us get some special coverage in the papers and on radio. To our relief and astonishment, we sold out. I had promised two people seats and could not get them any. I ended up having to put seats in the wings so they could watch the performance. I was able to pay the Credit Union everything they loaned us before the month was out.

Within days of our success, I got a call from Jack Present, who was in charge of booking for Music Center Presentations. They wanted to bring us back in September for four performances at the Ahmanson Theater. Now we would not have to front money for the performance. Now we could work with the Music Center's very sophisticated marketing team. We met Dave Bongard and Betty Barr who helped us get even more local coverage and a review from Martin Bernheimer who called himself a "Martin-come-lately" who discovered that "AMAN was every bit as good as its reputation." We had turned a corner as a member of the local dance community.





Žensko Čamče • Kopačka

FREE Song Downloads from the AMAN Archives

Two from Macedonia:

For the gals a 7/8 *Žensko Čamče*
and for the guys a 2/4 *Kopačka*.

Click to download [Žensko Čamče](#)

with **Stewart Mennin** on clarinet,

Phil Harland on darabuka and **Dave Owens**.

(The committee brain trust can't remember who was playing the tambourine. Do you know?)

Click to download [Kopačka](#)

with **Mark Levy** on gajda
and **Phil Harland** on tupan.



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



Veretski Pass

Our own prolific multi-instrumental genius **Stuart Brotman**'s most recent project, *Veretski Pass*, offers a unique and exciting combination of virtuosic musicianship and raw energy that has excited concertgoers across the world. Taking its name from the mountain pass through which Magyar tribes

coursed into the Carpathian basin to settle what later became the Austro-Hungarian Empire, *Veretski Pass* plays a collage of Carpathian, Jewish, Rumanian and Ottoman styles. Check out Stuart and his colleagues Cookie Segelstein and Joshua Horowitz and buy their CDs at <http://www.veretskipass.com>

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

It's 1966 and I'm an 18 year old freshman at UCLA, an anonymous electron amidst 26,000 other students, crisscrossing the campus daily from building to building, discipline to discipline, major to major: English, Western Civ, chemistry, modern dance, bacteriology, geography, Middle Eastern studies, psychology, etc. Who am I? What should I major in? Will I ever find a kindred spirit in this galaxy of disciplines, in this cauldron of competing minds?

I come from a rich cultural heritage, but apparently so does everyone else. Some have cultures with "clout," identities that resonate and that people talk about. These groups form student associations: Latino, Jewish, Chinese, African American...but I came from an invisible culture, curiously absent from any public high school history books: Armenians from Anatolia? Armenians, period. Who are they?

Don't forget this is 1966, before the influx of Armenians to Los Angeles from Tehran, Yerevan and Beirut. That won't begin 'til the 1970s. So the vast majority of people I meet has never heard of Armenians, even here at UCLA.

Another smoggy April afternoon on campus. I'm feeling particularly anonymous today as I walk from Schoenberg Hall towards Hilgard. It says "AMAN FOLK ENSEMBLE—Now auditioning new members." I've

So You Think You Can Clap?

Auditioning for Leona

by Edwin Gerard



noticed the past few months that there has been a number of these posters for some kind of folk dance group called AMAN. Each time I've appreciated the esthetic design. Eye-catching yet discreet. Intelligent posters with a folksy look, yet graphically

state-of-the-art. I'm attracted to something legitimate and authentic about their message.

I'm a pretty good dancer, so I'll try out for them next Sunday.

The first thing I notice when I show up for my audition is the informal atmosphere at the International Student Center on Hilgard Avenue, where somebody named Leona Wood holds her Sunday afternoon "AMAN Oriental Group" rehearsals.

At the reception desk, I am greeted by a young lady with big Ukrainian eyes and flowing blond hair. Her name is Stephanie Komarowsky and she is also a dancer in Leona's group. She says she's on duty at the front desk this Sunday and can't rehearse with the others. She tells me to proceed down the hallway and I enter, unannounced, into what looks like a harem. I don't want to interrupt Leona's rehearsal of a Berber line dance, where 10 fair damsels in flowing gowns stand shoulder to shoulder, hands interlocked, swaying...rhythmically...from side to side. Their feet aren't moving, just upper bodies swaying as if windblown across a wheatfield. I stand in a corner unobtrusively. A feeling of calm comes over me, and I feel transported. Like walking into an Orientalist painting.

A tall, trim, stately lady with long black hair pulled into a taut ponytail is beating a hand drum, her dark piercing eyes minutely

>>>

>>> surveying every detail of the dancers' moves. She is wearing a floor-length skirt and a black long-sleeved blouse covering as much of her upper body as a blouse can cover. I ask myself, is she Muslim? She puts down the drum to demonstrate the correct way to sway. DAH DOOM DAH, DAH DOOM DAH, her voice replacing the drumbeat. Something about the way she says the "DAH" tells me she is U.S. born and bred. But why the puritanical modesty, almost like a nun's? Not Muslim, just Victorian maybe?

She spots me standing in the corner.

"Good afternoon" she calls out, smiling.

"I'm here for the audition."

"Ahhhh yes...wonderful!"

(I feel like Patrick Dennis meeting Auntie Mame for the first time.)

"We need another young man to do G'nawa in our North African suite! Have a seat. We'll do your audition during the break. DAH DOOM DAH, DAH DOOM DAH..."

Very soon it is break time. Leona leads me to an upstairs conference room with a large table and a dozen chairs. I wonder how this can possibly be a dance audition space.

She says, "Let's see if you can learn this Berber clap pattern from Morocco."

I have rarely heard the word Berber. I assume it is another group, like Armenians, that nobody ever talks about at L.A. Unified.

She breaks down the "Berber

clap pattern" into three easy sections. The second section is a long responsorial riff in triplets that's a bit tricky. I enjoy the challenge. We march around the conference table in time to the rhythm of our hands. She shows me how to clap like a Berber, instead of striking the fingers of one hand against the other palm, the hands come together in perfect symmetry with fingers outstretched.

I have a Proustian moment: "Hey, this is how my grandfather



used to clap his hands!"

"Where was he from?"

"Egypt."

"Of course, you'll find this clap pattern in most of the Arab world. And then of course you do realize it's the same in Spain, except that they use fingertips to palm as well. And what does the responsorial second section remind you of? Of course... FLAMENCO..."

Ah yes, of course, Auntie...

Here, Leona bursts into a *cante hondo* and turns into a flamenco dancer to illustrate her point.

I wonder when my dance audition is going to start.

After the flamenco demonstration, her attention comes back to me. "So... you're Egyptian! Ahhhh, Omm Kalthoum, what an amazing voice. The nightingale of Egypt..."

"Well, my parents lived in Egypt, but they were Armenian."

"Ahh, yes, the Armenians of Egypt...such a noteworthy community. And many of those Beys from the Ottoman Empire were Armenian... remember Noubar Pasha?"

"You've heard of Noubar Pasha?!"

Nobody in the world outside of Egypt had ever heard of Noubar Pasha, the Armenian from Izmir who went from being secretary to Muhammed Ali (the General, not Cassius Clay) to becoming the first Prime Minister of Egypt in 1894.

I'm amazed by the scope of her knowledge.

"How do you know so much about the Armenians of Egypt?"

"I've read all about them in Edward Lane's *The Modern Egyptians*. Young Armenian, Greek and Jewish boys danced at Egyptian weddings throughout the 1800s because it was immoral for women to do so."

Wow, Armenian boys entertaining at Egyptian weddings? This isn't the kind of thing they told me about at Church! I want to know more. I want to find this Edward Lane book immediately and learn more about my ancestry.

Over the next 20 minutes, I've >>>

>>> learnt more from Leona Wood about my own history, music and dance, than from anyone I've ever met. She goes on to demonstrate the differences between North African 6/8 time signatures and Persian ones. She explains how Armenian dance is based on the same 6/8 beat as the Persian, but the feet move contrapuntally instead stepping on the downbeat. I'm riveted. Facts, drumbeats, movements gush continuously from this fountain of erudition. She picks up speed, the subjects shift from one ethnic group to another and expand over continents. I'm spellbound. She explains the way Arabic rhythms change from Egypt, to Iraq, to Syria. How the head movements differ when you move up from Jordan into Iraq. Her mind sails across the steppes of Central Asia to Mongolia and China, sweeping my imagination along with it. For a curious



young mind, impassioned by history and art, she is a gold mine. I want her to keep talking so I can keep dreaming.

By the end of my "audition," I feel like I've just completed a semester course in Mid Eastern studies. I ask if I've passed the audition. She says "Of course. You're definitely musical." Later, during the rehearsal, she introduces me to some of the men who perform with the Oriental section: Joe Witt, Victor Sirelson, and Michael Alexander, the other G'nawa dancers. They tell me they are also members of another section of AMAN, called the "Balkan Section," which has a lot more members. I wonder what their auditions must be like.

* * *

About a year after I join AMAN, I'm accepted into the UCLA Junior Year Abroad Program in Bordeaux, France. Sadly I must leave Leona and her group, but before leaving, I bring my sister Michele to an Oriental Group rehearsal. Leona takes one look at her and already sees her doing the Gujarati skirt dance, imagining the photo she will take (and perhaps later, the painting she will paint) of Michele spinning around in one of those bright, billowing skirts. Like me, my sister is spellbound at her first meeting, and passes her audition with flying "Gujarati" colors. Michele turned out to be a tremendous dancer and stayed with AMAN well into the 1980s. She, too, brought many of her friends into AMAN, like Lisa Sparks, Susan

Shapiro, Patty Rosa, and Ronda Berkeley.

Over the next forty years, Leona and I remained close friends. Every time I would visit LA from Paris, I made it a point to visit her in the tranquility of her Shinto-inspired home on Kelton Avenue. Usually our visits would start around 10 p.m. and would last 'til 2 or 3 in the morning. Until his demise, her husband Phil Harland would join our "salon," along with Leona's close friends: Aisha Ali, Mardi Rollow, Jeannie and Gary Margolis, Susan Marshall, Samira and Ergun Tamer, and other members of the Oriental Group. These late-night gab fests covered every kind of topic from Northwest native American cultures, to Milton's *Paradise Lost*; from Thucydides' *Peloponnesian Wars*, to Ingres' way of painting hands, to the temple prostitutes of India, to the joys of the Victorian novel.

Few others have ever shown as much interest as Leona in the world's artistic heritage, in people's backgrounds, in going beyond the cultural clichés.

She not only endowed me as a dancer with a place in the artistic and academic community, but also served my own cultural heritage by bringing it out of darkness onto a brightly lit stage. By opening my eyes and ears, through music and dance, to the vast, interconnected patterns of ancient and modern civilizations, Leona Wood continuously expanded my horizons and gave me the priceless gift of world knowledge.

AMAN SPAWN —When More Artists Breed: 2nd in a series of interviews with children of AMAN Artists

by Intrepid Reporter Susie North



Leslie Yeseta, daughter of Chris Yeseta and Connie Yeseta, is an amazing singer and musician with L.A. blues/rock band **Les and Shel, the Swing Riots**

and a valued member of **Nevenka**. Leslie debuted in 1975 at the Dorothy Chandler Pavillion in Podravina.

Susie: What's your earliest memory of AMAN?

Leslie: Tamburica rehearsals in my living room...

Susie: Do you remember performing in Podravina when you were four?

Leslie: Oh yeah, absolutely. I remember being really excited to be part of the group and feeling like "this is my scene." It was really one of the high points of my childhood. It was so cool. The costume was beautiful, I got to sing—and I thought I was dancing!

Susie: What about being brought by Chris (her dad, Chris Yeseta) to all those small group shows?

Leslie: That was awesome too. It didn't occur to me that other kids didn't spend every morning with their parents going to different schools and seeing the same show over and over again.

Susie: Any dislikes about your stint with the small group?

Leslie: No, not at all! My brother Aaron might have been bored from time to time. But it was what it was. I always loved going to rehearsals and shows.

Susie: You know, on a number of occasions you saved my bacon. I emceed those shows for a long time... sometimes I'd ask the audience a question and not one child would volunteer an answer. I knew I could count on you, sitting there in the front row, to raise your hand if there was a lull—and answer the most esoteric question!

Leslie: (laughs) I was very serious about that. I don't think I ever thought about it as a concrete "job," but



I knew how it was supposed to flow and when it didn't go that way, I was very concerned.

Susie: Well, I owe you a debt of thanks! What's your own musical history?

Leslie: Well, there was chorus in elementary and middle school. Then I got interested in guitar. I played with various rock bands. I took classical voice lessons in college. Then I found **Nevenka**. Now I'm playing with three groups, well, really four—**Nevenka** <http://youtu.belGVsXoTwqKyQ>, **Les and**

Shel <https://www.facebook.com/les.shel> (with her husband, **Shel Riddles**, playing rock originals with some covers), a larger group that's spun off from **Les and Shel**, and **Swing Riots** <http://youtu.belkqYVsr8VJOQ> with AMAN alum Miamon Miller.

Susie: What do you want to hand down to your daughter Zoë?

Leslie: Love of music. She's growing up immersed in it, but she'll go any direction she wants.



Be a Lifelong Part of the AMAN 50th Reunion Souvenir Book— Buy an Ad

We hope you will join us in supporting the AMAN 50th Anniversary with a Personal Tribute or as an Event Sponsor. Your generosity will help ensure that the AMAN tradition continues through scholarships to the Mendocino Folk Dance Camp.

— Sponsorship and Personal Tribute Response Form —

Print, fill out and return the form below with payment to: **Barbara Gordon, 13555 Calderon Road, San Diego, CA 92129—858-442-3082**. Payment may be made by check to **Mendocino Folklore Camp** or with your credit card below.

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FAQ

FREAKIN' AWESOME QUESTIONS ABOUT AMAN50

There are no stupid questions about AMAN50, only Freakin' Awesome Questions. Here are a few...



Q: *If I register on the website have I reserved a room?*

A: No. If you plan to stay at the Renaissance Marriott where the event will take place, you will need to reserve your rooms through the hotel. Call 888-682-1238, or click [HERE](#) for the NEW Hotel Online Reservation link.

Q: *Do I have to stay at the Renaissance Marriot in order to attend the AMAN50 Reunion?*

A: No. But at 3 a.m. do you really want to drive back to another hotel when you can crawl to the elevator? Anyway, don't you want stay where all the fun kids are staying?

Q: *May non-AMAN members attend the AMAN50 Reunion?*

A: Of course—all AMAN friends and family are welcome to attend.

Q: *Can someone come just on Saturday?*

A: At this time, guaranteed attendance is only available through a full package enrollment. "Saturday Only" participation *MIGHT* become available if and when we have met our financial goals and obligations to the hotel.

Q: *If I cannot afford the registration fee, is there any financial help for me?*

A: Yes. We have a limited number of work/exchange scholarships available for those in need. Please contact Paul Sheldon at hospitality@aman50.com

Q: *Can I get a ride to the AMAN50 Reunion?*

A: Yes. We are organizing ride sharing. Please contact Paul Sheldon at hospitality@aman50.com

Q: *Can I share a room at the AMAN50 Reunion?*

A: Yes. We are organizing room sharing. Please contact Paul Sheldon at hospitality@aman50.com



LAST CALL for Photos and Videos— Be a part of the AMAN archive

LOVE THE PICTURES you are seeing on Facebook and in the Newsletter? Want to make sure everyone else sees your mug in that charming Corn Beaver Maiden frock? That Pag hat? Slovak midriff? Come on guys you know who you are! Get your pictures in STAT so that we can add them to the AMAN photo and video archive. Performance and backstage photos welcome. Email them to *Mitzi* at photos@aman50.com

Images or videos not scanned? Our LA area worker bees are prepared to pick up your photos, scan them and bring them back to you.

Want the digital images at high quality for your very own? You got it. Well the scans are high quality—can't vouch for the water stained originals from the attic. The Photo Compilation CD will be on sale at the AMAN50 Reunion. (Proceeds to the Mendocino Folk Dance Camp Scholarship Fund.)

WANTED: Items for the Silent Auction

WE ARE WELCOMING items for the Silent Auction to be held during the AMAN50 Reunion! The proceeds will benefit the Mendocino Folklore Camp scholarship program, which has opened the door to many opportunities for cultural education and lifetime enjoyment for many AMAN alums, families and friends. This pioneer international dance/music camp just celebrated its own 50th Anniversary, and is dedicated to reaching out to youth to help ensure the future for all folkloric events. So look through your dazzling belongings to see what might become someone else's treasure, or create an intriguing gift basket, or donate a gift certificate, a service, or a special



DO NOT Forget to Sign Up for the Kafana!

CALLING all Singers, Musicians, Storytellers, Dancers—Whatever (you know who you are!) If you have a talent (solo or group) that you'd like to share with us at the reunion, then SIGN UP for a Kafana time-slot to perform them!! Contact *Trudy Israel* via email at: kafana@aman50.com



bottle of wine, homemade culinary delight, etc., and be part of continuing this wonderful legacy!

We would like to know what you might be donating by September 30, at the contact site auctiondonations@aman50.com, and please include a brief description and estimated value. You can send small items to *Patti Ledner* if you wish to submit early (request address at the site), or deliver them by Friday morning of the event. Thank you so much!

