

AMAN Alumni Reunion

50th ANNIVERSARY

NEWSLETTER
WINTER 2013

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PRAISE BE THE MESSENGERS



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THE RESERVATION LINE IS OPEN

Get your rooms for AMAN's 50th Anniversary Celebration

Call the Renaissance Marriott **877 622 3056**
or click [HERE](#) to book online

AMAN's 50th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Thursday October 10th – Sunday October 13th, 2013

COLUMBUS DAY WEEKEND

RENAISSANCE MARRIOTT

PALM SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA USA



AND DON'T FORGET TO REGISTER FOR THE ACTIVITIES, DINNERS AND DANCES ON THE AMAN REUNION WEBSITE: <http://AMAN50.com/registration.php>
>>>WE ARE ACCEPTING DEPOSITS NOW!<<<

“SUITE GENEROSITY” UPDATE – From the Fundraising Brochure we sent out in early November, we are happy to report that we have received two large sized donations (\$3,000 and \$1,500) and numerous smaller donations (in varying amounts) for a total of \$5,960 so far! The AMAN alumni committee wishes to send out a heartfelt thanks to all the 2012 contributors, your “suite generosity” is definitely appreciated by all the alumni.

And for those of you still planning to, or thinking about, donating in the New Year... a reminder that there are just 10 short weeks left to make a pledge or send in your contribution. The deadline for our “Suite Generosity” fundraising efforts is March 30, 2013.

We on the committee have been trying to do our part as well to keep costs lower. Financial chair Barbara (Shaffer) Gordon and I recently went over the budget with a fine-tooth-comb and were able to pare down a few of the larger hotel expenses. In return, hopefully we'll be able to borrow sound equipment, decorating items and get volunteer help at the event.

10 months and counting... can't wait to see you all in Palm Springs! Don't forget to make your hotel reservations and send in your deposits for the event... let us know you're coming!

Susie Burke
MFC Board of Directors
AMAN Alumni Committee – Event Chair

The Joys and Sorrows of An AMAN Alumni Hunter

—A Message from Louise Weiler—

“THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR FINDING ME!”

These sweet words mean that one more AMAN alumnus has the opportunity to attend the AMAN 50th Reunion, and I have the opportunity to see or meet them there. This is why I volunteered to hunt for and find as many AMAN alumni as possible.

The Internet makes it possible to find just about anyone, but Internet searching requires patience and determination. Think about the challenges of finding someone with the name Mary Adams or Teresa Davis. The Internet will find thousands of them, and on top of that, Mary and Teresa might have changed their names since they were in AMAN.

As you might imagine, Facebook is a highly effective path to finding alumni, even when there are multiple Facebook members with the same name. If I did not know them personally, I can get clues from their pictures, their interests, where they live, and their Facebook Friends. If I'm really lucky, I'll recognize a Friend who is an AMAN alumnus! Similarly, if they “Like” a Croatian band, that's a clue that I'm on the right track. Other social media like LinkedIn and MySpace also provide important clues. If someone was once an AMAN sound techie, he is very likely to be found on LinkedIn, still working as a sound techie.

If social media fail, then I go to Google and type in the name. AMAN alumni frequently have careers or interests that merit a web presence. Some of these careers and interests are unusual, at least to me. So, as a side benefit to people-searching, I've enlightened myself about topics of interest to our alumni—for example “mudding.” If you haven't heard of mudding and mud running, check it out!

If I can't get an actual email address or phone number from following Google threads, then there are specialized Internet people-search tools. AMAN has a paid subscription to Searchbug.com. But free



tools sometimes do as well. Many of these tools display the names of other people who have lived at the same address. For example, there is more than one Serena Barton, but there is only one associated with Joachin Barton. I remembered Serena's son Joachin, and many of you may remember him, too! Another site, Veromi.com, tracks aliases. Veromi showed me that Bette Bar-Glover changed her name to Faith Freewoman.

Of course, many AMAN women have changed their last name due to marriage or divorce. I tackle this problem by using Ancestry.com, which displays marriage and divorce records. Classmates.com also shows married name information if the woman has ever attended a high school or college reunion.

Finally, when someone seems utterly unfindable, I look them up on Legacy.com to see if they are deceased. Sadly, I found Mary Bailey's obituary there.

So to everyone reading this, if we really want to re-experience the magic that was AMAN, we must do our best to make sure that as many alumni as possible will actually be at the reunion. Please take a look at the Alumni List on the web by clicking [HERE](#).

If you know *anything at all* about the missing alumni, please let me know at louise.weiler@yahoo.com. From the tiniest clues, huge discoveries are possible!

P.S. I have not found Mary Adams or Teresa Davis. I really want to find them.

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

PRAISE BE THE MESSENGERS *by John Zeretzke*

SO THERE WE WERE, side-by-side, hands facing upwards, marching like penguins and circling like birds; and in the hazy darkness, past the glaring lights, the ominous sound of hundreds of Arabs chanting. We could not really tell their numbers but I could see the flashing glimmer of their shiny daggers in the blackness catching bits of abeyant light. The Arabs were rising up united. We could feel their energy swell. The beautiful yet haunting sounds of their voices, those high-pitched vocals, were frightening. They were passionately unified in their ‘oneness’ and we were their focus of attention. I had never been to Syria before. I realized this might be my last trip...anywhere. Talk about bucket-list finality, we were all doomed.

Our pace quickened. And as we increased our tempo, so did the fever and volume of the men in the darkness beyond, their chanting intensifying as our footsteps plodded heavily in unison. Dan Ratkovich, my roommate and a tower of a Yugoslavian man, turned to me as we marched faster; his meat cleaver-like hands lifted towards

heaven as he leaned in closer and said quietly just so I could hear, “We are all going to die”. A pang hit my stomach. His words hit home. How did it all come to this?

I glanced over now and noticed that Charlie Eisen had just hit the floor, writhing in what seemed to be some ecstatically painful catatonic state, his eyes rolled back in his head. His body shook violently in pangs and tortured twists that seemed almost humanly impossible—a Gumby crossed with a slinky toy. Charlie was ‘gone’ far off into another world already. Poor soul, I thought. Maybe that was not such a bad way to go anyhow. Perhaps they would spare him, as one would be warily respectful of crazy-eyed wandering folk or babbling fortunetellers. But the rest of us might not be so lucky. Everything was spinning out of control.

The remainder of our group banded together in a more tightly knitted circle, moving step for step racing even faster to a fevered pitch—getting louder and louder. You could feel the intensity in the air like rays of electricity forcing us towards some climatic conclusion that was inevitable. We were all bewildered and scared. You could see it in the wide-eyed stares of everyone in our group as beyond, in the darkness, the Arabs continued their mystical chanting and knife waving, swaying in unison. Escape? A quick dash for the door was a possibility even though I knew there were guards at every exit.

Suddenly, it was over. Our work was done. We walked off. The chanting decreased to a murmur in the blackness. Our performance ended. We were all backstage wondering—what the hell was that? What were those Syrians chanting about? Something about ‘Allah’?

PRAISE BE THE MESSENGERS

(continued)

>>> AMAN's tour to the Middle East came about when USIA, United States Information Agency, ended up with a surplus budget in 1985 and wanted to use the money rather than lose it in the following year's budget. They decided it would be nice to send AMAN out as cultural ambassadors to over ten countries in the Middle East as a gesture of goodwill to perform traditional music and dance of the United States of America. Our show did just that—though we did end the second half with an Arabic debke, which usually brought the house down and ended the show with standing ovations.

It was in Syria that we met with an intense, extraordinary and frightening reception from our audience, e.g. daggers—and it was not about our earnest attempt at performing their national dance, a debke. It was about something intrinsically American. It was about the Shakers.

Robin Evanchuck introduced the Shaker choreography and music to AMAN back in the 1970s. The Shakers were a religious sect formed in England in the mid 18th Century and reformed again within decades in the eastern United States. The Shakers were known for their unique and powerful worship ceremonies of song and dance in which they would literally drift into trance and revelation. American presidents and foreign dignitaries came and witnessed their services watching in awe from the galleries in their halls of worship. Shaker songs like Simple Gifts are known around the globe today and many of their inventions are still in use; from the circular saw, to the flat broom to the clothes pin—all Shaker innovations. A unique slice of Americana, AMAN's Shaker Suite surprised most American audiences with its combination of familiar and commonplace sights and sounds and the extreme and foreign outcome of its bizarre climax. Little did we know we'd be unleashing the daggers by exposing the service to Syrians.

The American Ambassador and his entourage met us backstage after the performance. He was like you would imagine an ambassador—a man of great dignity, grace, intelligence; powerful in his presence with a keen awareness of the world around him. As performers, we gathered around him, anxious to ask him about what we had just witnessed from the stage. The Syrians had stood up and started swaying in unison, chanting and responding to our dances and songs. They had been triggered by our performance and our 'speaking in tongues' and of Charlie's ability to enter a transcendental state of being.

"In all the years I have been posted in Middle Eastern countries, I have never seen or heard anything like it" he told us, as we listened intently. "I have seen many things in the years I have been an American ambassador, but this was the highest honor they could

bestow upon any foreigners. They were chanting, 'Praise be the messengers of Allah.'"

It was Shakers that brought out the daggers; and not with malice or outrage but with a fervent recognition of another individual or a group's seeking an ecstatic experience, even a religious desire for rapture. After years of scratching my head at the Shakers, here was a bunch of guys

who really got it! "Praise be the messengers of Allah!"

To this day those words have stuck with me. The memory of the moment is sharp like the edges of the knives they were waving. It has lingered inside me ever since that evening many years ago. I have often shared versions of this story to groups and audiences. It is truly impossible to fully convince anyone of what I walked away with in my heart that night. It cannot be understood by language or even the written word. It is something so profound and beautiful that it transcends all other forms of contact or communication. It is the universal idea of understanding our commonality and acceptance of our differences that was simply shared though watching and hearing dance and music. We are all here on earth as wonderful creations of the human spirit united by our differences and similarities at the same time.

Praise be the messengers.



AMAN *A History of the* Folk Ensemble

*An excerpt from "A History of the AMAN Folk Ensemble
and the Avaz International Dance Theatre"*

Written for World Arts, the Dance History Project of Southern California

by Tony Shay

Born and raised in Los Angeles, I was very early exposed to a wide variety of ethnic music and dance. This was especially true of my years at Los Angeles City College, which had over a thousand students from a wide variety of countries, and at UCLA during the period in which the beginnings of the ethnomusicology program instilled a deep interest in the music and dances of many cultures, where I began to learn the dances of a spectrum of cultures and perform in student productions. I even remember performing in Irwin Parnes' International Folk Dance Festival on the same programs in which Ruth St. Denis appeared. I learned Danish dances from inhabitants of Solvang, Persian dance from the Iranian students, >>>



History of the AMAN Folk Ensemble

(continued)

>>> Croatian and Serbian dances, both at their respective churches and as a participant in the burgeoning international recreational folk dance movement, Greek dances at St. Sophia festivals and the Greek Village Tavern on Hollywood Blvd., and mambo and samba from my classmates at LACC.

In 1960, upon my return from Iran, where I had attended the University of Tehran studying Persian language and literature and Persian classical music, I returned to UCLA to begin graduate school in Middle Eastern languages. From the 1940s, UCLA had sponsored a student body recreational folk dance club that utilized the women's gymnasium for weekly

the United States and the former Soviet Union. I envisioned creating a company with one hundred dancers, singers and musicians, so the models from Eastern Europe did not serve as a choreographic model so much as a model of scope, empowering me to create a large dance ensemble. I began my first attempts at choreography with dances from Iran and Turkey, which meant that the choreographic models from the professional companies like the Moiseyev Dance Company would not work for dances from the Middle East. I had to develop unique works, but I wanted to have the professional level of performance and the authoritative look of those professional companies.

In 1963, several of us in the group grew unhappy with the name of the company, the UCLA Village Dancers, because it had an amateur, recreational

The Village Dancers, c1963



meetings. At that period the company had been dormant so I started it up again, but changed the focus from a recreational to a performance company. The UCLA student body provided us with a handsome budget of \$25 a semester to purchase dance records. I used the old name, the UCLA Village Dancers. It was with this small group, and a \$25 budget that I began to create my first choreographies and the company gave many appearances, culminating in an evening-length performance at UCLA in 1962 using live music.

The models for these choreographies were the appearances of Kolo, the Serbian State Folk Dance Ensemble, and Tanec, the Macedonian State Folk Ensemble, both of which had toured the United States in 1956, as well as the more spectacularized Moiseyev Dance Company, which appeared to great acclaim in 1958, the first performance in the newly-minted cultural exchange program established between

sound, and since the companies that we had seen tended to have short, pronounceable names, we tried out a number of them. I remember one evening as I was humming some music from Serbia, Iran and other places, that several of the songs had the recurring refrain "aman, aman." (Aman, like amen, is a Semetic word to secure a wish or prayer.)

I decided that would be the name; it was short and everyone could pronounce it. So, in December 1963, we did our first performance using the name AMAN in Santa Monica for Parviz Gharib-Afshar, the emcee who presented an international show, for which he invited us to appear. We performed a number called "Banatske Igre" (Dances from the Banat, a region in Northern Serbia), using the costumes, music, and choreography that I had created for the Village Dancers. The Dance suite utilized fifteen dancers. At the time we also had dances from Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, Iran, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan in the repertoire.

It was during this period that I met Leona Wood and Philip Harland, husband and wife who were an oriental dancer and musician respectively. We had appeared in several of the same international festivals, and found a common interest in dances and music of the Middle East. We then gave a joint appearance at the El Cid, >>>

History of the AMAN Folk Ensemble

(continued)

>>> the well-known flamenco club on Sunset Blvd. in Silver Lake, using five performers (Marianne Allen, Phil Harland, Pam Heider, Leona Wood, and I), in which we performed with the flamenco dancers showing the connections between flamenco and our Middle Eastern dances. After that performance Wood and Harland decided to team up with the already functioning Balkan and Middle Eastern dance ensemble that I had resurrected from the Village Dancers.

Shortly after this I performed in a film called “What Did You Do During the War, Daddy?” and I invited several of the very fine dancers who appeared in the film to join the new company. These new dancers contributed greatly to the professional level we were striving to achieve. Within weeks, the company was engaged to perform in the film “Gambit.” In that performance, we did Leona Wood’s choreography of a suite of Moroccan dances, further attracting more dancers.

In 1967, LADO, the Ensemble of Folk Dances and Song of Croatia, appeared for one week at the Greek Theatre. I arranged to have AMAN perform for them. If the AMAN dancers had known what to expect from a LADO performance, it would never have happened, but we performed for them upon their arrival before their performances, and the members of the two companies became fast friends; the members of LADO were enchanted to meet Americans who were so devoted to learning their music and dances and who performed them as authentically as possible. Members of the two companies spent every free hour together, during which they taught us several new dances for the AMAN repertoire. The following year two company members and I journeyed to Croatia where we were allowed to run tame in the company’s rehearsal halls and wardrobe, and attend concerts riding on the LADO bus. Several of the company members reached out to us and taught us everything they could about style and dance technique. I have kept those friendships to this day. The experience with LADO, and seeing the operation of a professional

dance company, the ways in which they rehearsed and performed, the attention to detail, was eye-opening for a green choreographer, and through those experiences, I fully understood what professionalism meant and I strove to achieve that level in our performances.

AMAN began to tour widely and in 1970, we were the first local dance company that the Dorothy Chandler theatre invited to perform at the Music Center. It was a sold-out house. Sol Hurok, the famous impresario, came to see the company in a Royce Hall performance, and engaged us to fill in several appearances that the Philippine national company, Bayanihan, was unable to do. In 1977, KCET (Channel 28), created a very expensive, beautifully directed and produced special about the company. During this entire period major US newspapers gave the company rave reviews.



Thanks to Tony for letting us reprint this excerpt. You can read the entire article at www.dancehistoryproject.org

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

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DANIEL SLOSBERG

A MUSICAL JOURNEY ALONG THE LEWIS & CLARK TRAIL

PLAYING FIDDLE, jaw harp, bones, spoons, and other instruments of the Lewis & Clark Expedition, AMAN Alum Daniel Slosberg's one man show takes audiences on an unforgettable musical voyage with stops along the way for humorous and moving stories about the journey and about boatman and fiddler Pierre Cruzatte's critical contributions to it. A recipient of the [Lewis & Clark Trail Heritage Foundation's](#)

Meritorious Achievement Award for "outstanding contributions in bringing to this nation a greater awareness and appreciation of the Lewis and Clark Expedition."

Daniel's recording "Pierre Cruzatte: A Musical Journey Along the Lewis & Clark Trail," is available on CD from [Native Ground Music](#), (800) 752-2656.

A Pair of *Invirtitas*

—Free Song Downloads from the **AMAN** Archives—

THERE'S A *TANCHAZ* GOING ON SOMEWHERE.

So get ready to whirl 'til you hurl (or was that Laura Dean's "Light?") with a pair of invirtitas from the AMAN Orchestra—*Invirtita* from AMAN Volume #5 (1974) and *Învîrtita Din Apșa* from AMAN's Concert Album (1975).

These cuts feature Loretta Kelley, Andrew King, Mark Levy, Miamon Miller, David Owens and Chris Yeseta.

Click here to download *Invirtita*
<http://www.aman50.com>

Click here to download *Învîrtita Din Apșa*
<http://www.aman50.com>





STILL MAKING ART?

*Singing? Playing? Dancing?
Tell us about it! We want to know
what you are doing. Share it with
us on the AMAN Facebook page.*

Join the AMAN Facebook Groups. And if you have already liked the pages, click share and make sure your AMAN friends know about it too. Go to the AMAN Folk Ensemble Group at: <http://www.facebook.com/groups/92420925316/>
Post your stories and photos on the blog wall. And if you haven't, go to 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 AMAN Videos and Photos...

Not on FB? Check out the photos and videos on MySpace at: <http://www.myspace.com/AMANworldmusicanddance>

MOURNING THE DEMISE OF KODAK?

*Embrace the change! Pledge to digitize
your photos and videos in 2013.*

We need your photos and videos SOON if they are to be a part of the compilation for the reunion. We also 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. Contact aman50threunion@aol.com

AMAN SPAWN

*Are your kids carrying
on the AMAN tradition?*

Write to us and tell us about your singing, playing and dancing kids. We'd like to feature them in the Newsletter. Send us their story at: editor@aman50.com

