

# *The Saskatoon International Folkdance Club*

by Members of the Club

The Saskatoon International Folkdance Club (SIFC) had its beginnings in 1981. The idea and plans to form a club began with Carol and Bernard Desoer, who had just moved to Saskatoon from Ontario, where they had been actively folk dancing. The club was initially associated with the University of Saskatchewan where folk dancing was offered as a part of the Physical Education Program. Seven years later, in 1988, the club registered as a non-profit organization.



Photo: Dorothy McQueen.

*Dancing outdoors in Kinsmen Park in Saskatoon.*

The club meets weekly, and has to date, cancelled their Thursday night dancing only during the Christmas/New Year's season and during the annually occurring Saskatoon Folkfest, a city event that involves many of our members as performers and volunteers. From September to the end of May, the club dances indoors, and once the weather allows, dancing

takes place outdoors in some of the local city greenspaces and parks.

In addition to the regular weekly get-togethers, members have enthusiastically provided entertainment at various venues such as birthday and anniversary parties, weddings, disaster relief fundraising events, immigration celebrations, cabarets, conventions and at many schools and long-term care homes.

Club members also have performed at many annual special events including the Festival of Trees, Broadway Street Fair, Harvest Fest National Day of Dance, The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Hadassah Bazaars,



Photo: from the collection of Lalita Marfeld.

*Participants in the Klezmer opera Love and Latkes.*

the 1986 Kinsmen TeleMiracle, Annual Day of Dance and many more.

Of special note were two invitations to provide dancers for local productions. The first was in 1996 for the world premiere Klezmer opera, *Love and Latkes*, produced and directed by Henry Woolf with music by David Kaplan and the Saskatoon Klezmer Band. In 1998, the club was invited by the Saskatoon Opera Association to provide dancers for the play, *The Merry Widow*.

Our club has been grateful to be repeatedly asked to dance for the fundraiser, Save the Children Canada, Saskatoon Branch, which usually occurs on Valentine's Day. In 1982, our dancers performed at Saskatoon's Centennial celebrations during a visit from HRH Princess Anne.



*Dancing in a seniors' residence.*

Of all these wonderful opportunities to bring folk dancing to our community, the most rewarding and humbling have been the times we danced at long-term care and seniors' homes and with people of all ages who have intellectual disabilities. Our dance club is so fortunate to connect with this

often overlooked segment of our population. Through music, we see our audience transported to times when they were the singers and dancers. Many ways that our audiences can still participate is through smiles, toe tapping, clapping hands and swaying to the music. There are many requests to do a dance from a senior's home country, and we are thrilled to oblige.

In addition to our activities in Saskatoon, we have travelled to surrounding communities in the province. These include Estevan, Nipawin, Prince Albert, Regina, Swift Current, Warman, North Battleford, Waskesiu, Kindersley and Weyburn. To each of these locations we have brought energetic and varied ethnic performances.

As a club, we have taken two holiday trips, far from home, with many members participating. In 2015, many of us travelled to Kauai. In addition to soaking up the sun and hiking the many beautiful trails on the island, we had a traditionally-themed Hula workshop taught by a local Kumu Hula. These activities were followed by an internationally-themed mini workshop with dances taught by our own members. In 2017,

Photo: Michael Courtin.





*Members of the SIFC and a local Kumuhula while on holiday in Kauai.*

our travels took us to Las Vegas where we toured the numerous compulsory tourist sites, tried our luck at the casinos and hiked the many surrounding desert canyons. One night we joined a local folk dance club and discovered many dances we

had in common. We also drove to Laguna Beach to attend the annual Spring Dance Festival workshop.

Workshops are an integral part of folk dancing. Our club has been very active since its inception, in organizing and holding workshops. Within two years of the club's creation, the SIFC held its first workshop, inviting Slobodan Hadjikan from Vancouver to teach from his extensive knowledge of Croatian dances and culture. When the club registered as a non-profit organization, it was decided that it would hold two workshops a year, the first in the fall inviting instructors from the registry of the many talented folk dance teachers available in Canada and North America. Members of our own dance club would teach the second workshop. This tradition has continued except for those years when prevented by fiscal restraints or lack of participants.

Workshops have given the club exposure to many excellent, well-known instructors from around the world. We have been able to invite fellow Canadian teachers to Saskatoon including Yves Moreau, Ann Smerciu, Marcel Pronovost, Edwidge Munn and Andre Montsion. As well, we have been thrilled to host instructors from other parts of the world. We have welcomed Alberto Zirlinger from Mexico, who gave a lively workshop in Israeli dance; masters in Romanian dance, Lea and Theodor Vasilescu who came from Romania for a challenging weekend of dance; Tineke van Geel from the Netherlands who treated us to a workshop of Armenian dances; and Roberto Bagnoli from Italy, who gave us a smorgasbord of international dances. Workshops with teachers from the U.S.A., Michael Gelman and Lee Otterholt, taught a variety of international dances. Our last workshop, before the pandemic closed our borders, had a predominately Turkish theme, taught by an up-and-coming instructor from Japan, Yoshinari Murikami, accompanied by two members of his dance troupe.

Many of our membership have also travelled near and far to attend dance seminars offered by other clubs, primarily to Calgary and Edmonton. In 1997, the SIFC was invited to Camrose for a combined gathering of dancers from Calgary, Edmonton, Camrose and Saskatoon. Each club took a turn teaching dances from their respective club repertoires. It was the beginning of a wonderful and important relationship.

Recently, membership numbers in our clubs have dwindled. It was decided among the Edmonton, Calgary, Winnipeg and Saskatoon Clubs, that sharing the responsibility of hosting large workshops would be most beneficial. Each club took its turn to host, in rotation, while the other clubs were supportive by providing membership attendance. This has been very successful, enabling us to bring in instructors that are more established.

As well as hosting our own workshops, some of our dancers have travelled to other cities and countries to take part in seminars and tours abroad. Winnipeg and Montreal are two popular folk dance destinations. Some of our dancers have traveled as far as Greece, Turkey, Armenia and Poland to experience the culture as well as the dance.

Outside of dance evenings, workshop weekends and performing opportunities, our club has enjoyed each other's companionship by sharing home dinner parties with an ethnic theme, picnics, camping, dinners out, holiday costume parties, costume construction and sewing sessions and cooking classes.

In March 2020, with the arrival of COVID-19, restrictions came into effect in our province, which prevented us from gathering indoors for our weekly dance sessions. It also curtailed our being able to perform in long-term care and seniors' residences. In June 2020 and 2021, with the return of summer weather, our dancers took to the parks and by wearing masks and practising social distancing, we danced, sometimes late into the evening under the streetlights. The outdoor dancing continued until the beginning of



*Members of SIFC enjoying dance and the outdoors during the Covid pandemic.*

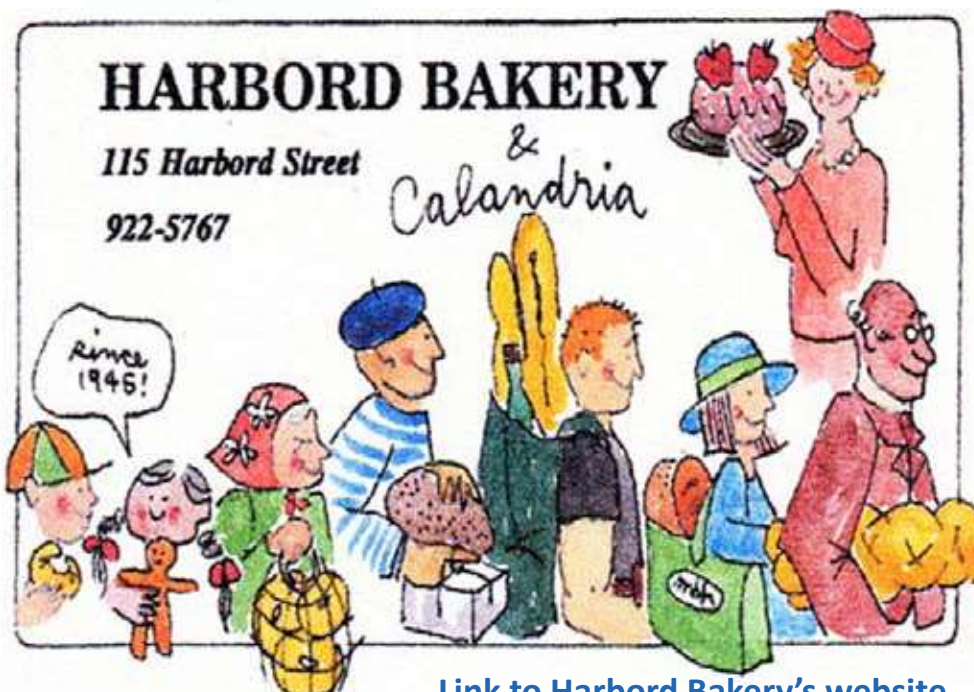


November, when the shorter days and dropping temperatures forced us to stop. There was a brief period of time when attempts were made to dance again indoors, but ultimately, with another surge in COVID-19 cases, the club moved to the online video platform, Zoom, like many other clubs were doing. These weekly video meetings became our “Culture Corner” and over the winters of 2020-21 and 2021-22, we embraced culture and dance through another medium. In the Culture Corner, we explored dance from different cultures by showing videos of dance, costuming and styling as well as exploring the countries from which the dances were derived. We danced in our own homes while being instructed over Zoom or by watching DVDs recorded from our workshops. We celebrated the holiday season by exchanging recipes, customs, and made crafts as well as dancing. We also had a celebration of Ukrainian heritage on Ukrainian Christmas. Despite our successful Zoom sessions during the winters, we are looking forward to dancing outdoors and returning to indoor sessions in the fall, if possible.

The International Folkdance Club has been active in Saskatoon for more than 40 years. During this time we have collected and enjoyed a repertoire of more than 900 dances. The club has provided its members with considerable satisfaction, companionship, and joy that has been shared in our city and the surrounding communities.



<http://saskatoonfolkdance.ca/>



[Link to Harbord Bakery's website.](#)