

BYU FOLK DANCE ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

Spring 2018



In loving memory of
Mary Bee Jensen
May 21, 1917–April 13, 2018

“The Lord put me here on earth to influence and be a force for good for young people... I wanted ‘my kids’ to experience the best of life, and dance was the vehicle.”

—Mary Bee Jensen
BYU Magazine Spring 2017



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BYU ALUMNI



BYU and Minzu University Collaborative Dance Project

BYU and Minzu University Collaborative Dance Project was a choreographic work entitled Encounter. The work brought together student dancers and musicians from Minzu University in China with the BYU International Folk Dance Ensemble and Mountain Strings to provide opportunity for cross-cultural understanding through artistic collaboration. The project was meant to foster the discovery of new ways to identify the cultural differences between—and similarities of—Chinese and American dance and music expressions. The work bridged the aesthetic of east and west by combining the two, while increasing an understanding and appreciation of different cultures and human values. This was particularly meaningful as each cultural expression was embodied, shared, and performed by natives.

LANDMARKS

This project took place partly in Beijing, China and partly in Provo, Utah.

Early Spring 2016

- Initial invitation to Minzu University College of Dance

May 2017

- Collaborating and setting of choreography on the Minzu dancers in Beijing, China

Fall 2017

- Costume design and construction
- Setting the choreography on the BYU dancers
- Musicians working separately to learn and rehearse the music

Oct. 2017

- Minzu guests were denied their B-visas
- Hiring of DC Immigration firm
- Expedition of petition to re-apply for P3-visa status
- Individual interviews for approval

Nov. 2017

- Last students were approved for P-3 visa status (All but one male dancer were approved—a miracle)

Nov. 26–Dec. 3

- Minzu guests arrive in Provo
- Rehearsals and performances



Results of the BYU and Minzu University Collaborative Dance Project were many and included public performances (with audiences of 14,000), a creative collaborative work, student exposure, new friendships, bringing the aesthetic of east and west together, research of traditional dance expression, and discovery of new perspectives. The newfound aesthetic was strongly evidenced in these outcomes.

Benefits to the student performers were profound and powerful. Students learned that “strangers” can come together and touch hearts and make something

powerful thought creativity, art, and friendship. The students learned that differences don’t prevent kinship. They learned that love and humor transcend language and culture. The students understood the importance of the feelings and experiences they felt and gained a desire for everyone to have the same experience. They understood that love and friendship developed in a cross-cultural experience can change the world. It increased the students’ appreciation of traditional dance beyond Utah in a real physical sense.



Other benefits include:

- Faculty opportunity for professional growth
- Audience members witnessing an entire Chinese dance and music ensemble as special guests of a main stage BYU production
- Increasing the scope of discipline of traditional dance and music expression
- Students being mentored as they observed and experienced





Cross-disciplinary creative collaboration

Dennis Wright

Costume design, America, Assistant professor, BYU TMA

Su Ri Ga Ga

Costume design, China, Student, Minzu University

Mark Geslison

Musical arrangement, America, Faculty, BYU School of Music

Wang Xi

Musical arrangement, China, Lecturer, Minzu University

Travis Moore

Videographer, independent filmmaker

Project originators, creators, and choreographers

Jiamin Huang

Professor, BYU Department of Dance (just retired and now back at Beijing Dance Academy as a visiting professor)

Jeanette Geslison
Assistant Professor, BYU Department of Dance

Choreographic collaborators

Cong Shuai Shuai

Lecturer, Minzu University

Greg Tucker

Faculty, BYU Department of Dance

Maria Tucker

Faculty, BYU Department of Dance

Xiao Ji Yuan

Lecturer, Minzu University

Performers

- BYU International Folk Dance Ensemble, 28 students, BYU
- Minzu School of Dance, 29 students, Minzu University
- Mountain Strings (BYU Folk Music Ensemble). 7 students, BYU
- Minzu School of Music, 5 students, Minzu University

Traditionz 2018

Traditionz 2018 (aka SPAC—Spring Performing Arts Company), is almost ready to hit the road! We have been working hard all semester on a really fun show that includes dances from Ukraine (but not Hopak!), Bulgaria, Puerto Rico, Mexico, India, China, South Africa, Poland, and more! Thanks to alumna Tiffany Smith Stefl for restaging her Argentine suite for us, and world dance faculty Emilee Wright and Greg and Maria Tucker for choreographing new dances. This year’s theme, “Colors of the World,” explores the meaning that colors have in culture, from our speech to symbolic ideas that are represented on costumes and flags. We begin performing May 1. For questions about scheduling a performance for next year, write us at traditionz.byu.edu.

MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR MARY BEE JENSEN

On Saturday, April 21, folk dance alumni and dear friends gathered to pay tribute to our beloved friend and folk dance founder, Mary Bee Jensen. She would have been 101 years old next month and she lived life to the very fullest. The service was one of reflection, remembering, yet rejoicing in a life that was so well lived. The chapel was filled to the brim with family and loved ones. Several who were in attendance told me that there were more people who attended her 100th Birthday Party than her funeral service, but that is just how Mary would have wanted it. They came to visit her when she was alive and celebrated with her at her farewell party!

One folk dance alum shared his thoughts about the service: “As we entered the church, there were many displays set up (see photos) in the foyers as well as in the Relief Society room and cultural hall. Many folk dancers, in full costume, served as ushers. Mary asked her nephew Robert, an Episcopal minister, not only to speak at her funeral but to do it wearing his vestments. He was reluctant, feeling like it wasn’t part of his official duties and that he may be out of place, but Mary insisted, and Jim even followed up on it for her before the funeral, so Robert spoke wearing his vestments. He was really sweet and said some wonderful things, including a discussion of the ‘beatitudes.’ He told us that if we were thinking of the Savior’s beatitudes in Matthew 5, we were mistaken. He was referring to the “Bee-attitudes,” which involve the will and the drive to get things accomplished, always being careful not to hurt anyone along the way. He also said that the angels in heaven are now learning to square dance!”

Mary’s son Jim was tender as he spoke. He mentioned that they listed so many of Mary Bee’s professional accomplishments in the program because his kids only knew Mary as their loving grandmother. Once she retired, she threw all her passion, energy, and commitment into her family. She said “goodbye” to her twin-missionary grandsons and fully expected to welcome them back home with big warm hugs upon their return. While in the hospital in February, she tried hard to recover from her stroke so that she could still be here for them. Jim concluded his remarks by reading touching letters from both of those grandsons.”



Mary’s bishop didn’t have the chance to get to know her very well, and when he visited her not long before she died, she kept steering the conversation towards him and his family, not wanting to talk about herself. The music was lovely, the spirit was strong, and we were taught the gospel as we celebrated the life of a grand lady, all in the space of an hour, just like they do for apostles.”

I first met Mary Bee when I was an endowment scholarship recipient many years ago. What a classy lady she was and I felt nothing but love from her as she met me and the other recipients. Years later, as the folk dance alumni chair, it was my privilege to talk with her more often and share our experiences of being “authors” together. We both published a book in the same year and it was so fun to talk about the struggles and rewards of writing and publishing a book. We talked a few times a month and as always, she was so concerned about my family and what my kids were doing! She rarely talked about herself. In my last conversation with her, just a short time before she passed, she offered me some cherished advice . . . still loving and teaching one of her “folk dance kids” up until the very end.

I would like to add my personal thanks to Jared Fugal, Brent Lewis, Ryan Purcell and Becki Love for adding to this newsletter with their thoughts, photographs, and video/website information. They are dedicated alumni and I am so grateful to them for their assistance.

So, BYU Folk Dance Alumni, let us carry on the spirit of love and connection by keeping Mary Bee Jensen's legacy alive in our hearts. Come to BYU and visit often, bring your family members to folk dance performances, attend alumni events, and support local dance groups in your hometown. We can share the light that was first sparked as students and we can keep that flame burning bright and strong!

Love to you all,

Tamara Marshall Chamberlain
Folk Dance Alumni Chair

To view the video tribute shown at the funeral, please visit www.byufolkdancealumni.com.



A - Mary Bee at the Family Cabin in Vivian Park, Provo Canyon