

BYU Folk Dance Alumni

The Folk Dancer - Summer Newsletter

August 2019

Ed and Vickie Austin - Called to Serve



Ed and Vickie Austin have been called to serve in the North Adriatic Mission and they report early this September. They are ready to go after having a few language classes and packing plenty of taco seasoning and ranch dressing packets to feed the missionaries. We know they will dive into the culture and serve wholeheartedly. We love you Ed and Vickie and we wish you both a happy and fulfilling mission!

Folk Dance Alumni - GIVE NOW contest with Students

By Tamara M. Chamberlain, Alumni Chair

In December, Alumni Chair, Tamara Chamberlain, visited all of the folk dance teams. She instigated a GIVE NOW contest, explaining to the students that it is so important to start giving now, even while they are in school to create a habit of life-long giving back to BYU. Every student and alumni that has gone through the program has saved many dollars in fees due to the generosity of alumni donors. We want to continue that tradition by giving back, no matter the amount. A contest was arranged to see how many students, per team, would donate. The dollar amount was not important, but the number of donors was the main factor. We are happy to announce that 3 teams had 100% of their members donate back to the alumni replenishment grant! Each winning team received a Bagel breakfast, compliments of the alumni. When Tamara asked some of the students how it felt to give back many were surprised how EASY it was to give! We invite ALL alumni to join the “GIVE NOW” movement to give back to the program that created life-long memories for each of us.

If students can give . . . even \$1, then so can YOU. Thanks everyone!

To donate, click on the following link and it only takes a few seconds: <http://give.byu.edu/fd>

IFDE travels to China



BYU China Spectacular 2019

By Jeanette Geslison, Artistic Director, IFDE

From the beginning of the invitation to participate in the *BYU China Spectacular* almost two years ago I knew this was going to be a very unique opportunity. With 8 BYU performing groups we headed off to China in May of 2019 with 204 students and leaders; the largest group BYU has ever sent out. The groups included: *Chamber Orchestra*, *Young Ambassadors*, *Vocal Point*, *Cougarettes*, *Folk Dance Ensemble/Mountain Strings*, a Native American group, a Ballroom couple, and the *Dunk Team*. The tour went to Beijing, Xi'an, and Shanghai with two performances in each city.

Our two feature pieces for this production included, 1. *Go Big* (American clogging), and 2. *Riverdance* (Ireland's monumental contribution in bringing traditional dance to the stage). Choreographers included folk dance alumni Greg and Maria Tucker and Tina Shelley. We began learning and training for these two pieces in August of 2018. Both of these pieces were accompanied by live music provided by *Mountain Strings* and *Chamber Orchestra*, which was a feat in itself, synchronizing musicians on the stage and in the orchestra-pit, separated by dancers. Aside from these two pieces our students participated in various other parts of the show, sharing the stage with the other performing groups.

The *BYU China Spectacular* connected with Chinese audiences through Janielle Christensen's inspired and brilliant concept creation and script. It follows a young man who is beaten down by the social pressures and confusion of the world around him. He is "met" by his ancestors, who tells him that he is not alone. He is the result of those who came before him and that he is the result of the love of thousands. He is then introduced to 5 important values that gives him hope to contribute and fill the world with love. These include: The circles of family, harmony, friendship, learning, and love.

We experienced several setbacks in the process of preparing for the *BYU China Spectacular*.

1. One of our lead and expert Irish dancers, Sage Black, broke her foot during one of the rehearsal-runs of the *Riverdance* piece. The Marley floor for the set was quite a bit stickier than the dancers are used to, and Sage had felt her shoes sticking to the floor leading up to the accident. Needless to say, we were all very disappointed as we worked quickly to find solutions for her replacement in *Riverdance* and *Go Big*, and the Native American Pow Wow (Sage is ¼ Navajo). Luckily, I always have alternate dancers in place for our pieces.

*Sage still accompanied us to China with her husband Joe playing bass in *Mountain Strings*.

2. We experienced a very unfortunate set back in the delivery of all the containers with the show equipment (all but costumes and instruments), that had been shipped following the DeJong concert hall premiere. The containers included very expensive, lighting, sound and audio equipment, set pieces, large props etc. We ended up having to scramble for two days prior to the first show in Beijing purchasing and/or renting alternate equipment. The largest set-back as part of this challenge was that the rented lighting equipment did not connect with our programmed system. So, Marianne Ohran (our lighting designer) had to spend an entire day starting from scratch with a design that had taken her a week or more to create. She had a Chinese programmer available with a translator as she worked her way through the most crucial lighting cues.
3. Several minor challenges included many other performer injuries (which were treated), a fire alarm in the HFAC on the opening night, the unfortunate timing of the political situation between China and the US, timing of the visa returns, and sickness.

The shows in China happened, despite everything that seemed to prevent them. They were received with great enthusiasm and excitement. The word about the show spread like wildfire on Chinese social media as we brought in audiences, and with each show we filled with concert halls to the brim. When the cast sang the beloved Chinese folk song "Mo Li Hua" at curtain call the excitement and connection between audience and performers came to a peak. The Chinese audience members filled the lobby in a pandemonium after the performance, eager to take photos with all the student performers.

One of my favorite aspects of this collaborative performance opportunity was the merging of performers from our different groups. It created a sense of unification towards a common cause. It broke down barriers between groups and created positive interaction and friendship. It was wonderful to see the talented students be able to share the stage together as they crossed genres as well as shared each of their own expertise. Each group was so talented and I never tired of watching them share the stage to create such an impressive and unique performance.

Our *Folk Dance Ensemble* and *Mountain Strings* had the opportunity to do two outreach cultural exchanges while on tour:

1. With Minzu University in Beijing College of Dance and School of Music.

*This was especially meaningful because of our previous *BYU and Minzu Collaborative Dance Project* in 2017 at BYU. We had established a great friendship then, so the students were excited to meet up with some of their friends from 2017. We were lucky to have BYU Professor Emeritus Jiamin Huang with us for this exchange.

2. With Jiao Tong University in Shanghai dance program.

***Tune in for the broadcast of the *BYU China Spectacular* and a documentary film presented during Conference weekend in October of 2019 on BYU TV!**



TRADITIONZ dazzle Utah students by Amy Jex, Director



Traditionz (SPAC) '19--the reviews are in! See what people had to say about our show!

This year we featured the elements of storytelling through dance, with old favorites like the hat dance "Siracovy" from Slovakia, "Babushka," from Ukraine, and new choreographies such as our new Yiddish wedding suite by guest choreographer Steve Weintraub!

One child wrote, "Thank you for making us laugh. My favorite performance was the Los Viejitos. Thank you for coming for the assembly. I love all of the stories around the world." Another child said (sic), "thank you for your lesons. they where so so good. the performing and the funny stories made me lafe so hard."

An adult wrote, "The program went by quickly with high entertainment value and audience appeal. The children were highly engaged and well nourished by the artistic performance. . . The performers interacted with the children with kindness and authentic personal interest in the students. They were great ambassadors for BYU and for the arts and demonstrated the role of artists in the community with distinction. I saw the children leave the auditorium dancing and singing and I believe they were also dancing in their hearts."



National Folk Organization Comes to BYU

By **Tamara M. Chamberlain**

In April 2019, the National Folk Organization held their annual conference at BYU. Many of our students attended and learned a great deal during the week. Lectures on dance were given as well as participation classes. On Thursday evening, a dance party was held. It was patterned after our Recreation Dance Nights and was packed with dancers of ALL ages! It was such a thrill to see dancers from all over the country mingling with our students and dancing their hearts out.



Instructors, such as Roo Lester, an expert on Scandinavian Dance, offered a master class to our IFDE company.