

GARSAS • Lithuanian U.S. Alliance of America

English Section

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Mrs. Pat Nixon graced...

The Fourth International Lithuanian Dance Festival



Mrs. Pat Nixon is met at the door of the Stock Yard Inn by Mrs. Josephine Dauzvardis, Consul General of Lithuania at Chicago. Mrs. Ogilvie, wife of the Governor of Illinois stands between.

Almost every American of Lithuanian descent wanted to attend the folk dance festival at the International Amphitheater of Chicago on July 2nd of this year.

Preparations had been going on for two years. Lithuanian folk dance groups all over the world had been practicing the repertoire for two years. In 1970 the arrangements committee began collecting special donations for the production of the festival and a budget of \$100,000 was foreseen. Hundred dollar donors were honored at a special banquet; other enticements were offered to raise the fund to cover the huge expense of bringing dancers from Europe, South America, Australia and Canada. Tickets were going briskly, but some doubted that the huge amphitheater could be filled.

Then, three days before the festival, the news hit the Lithuanian and metropolitan newspapers: Mrs. Nixon, wife of the President of the United States, will be present for the opening of the folk dance festival. That evening lines formed outside of the three ticket selling stations. The few hundred tickets that remained unsold were gone in a matter of hours. "Standing-room-only" tickets were printed to be sold at the gate. It was then the committee moaned: "We should have rented Soldiers' Field and had an open air dance festival". Soldiers' Field is the home of the Chicago Bears football team. That was a wistful thought but it might have been the place because many non-Lithuanians had made enquiries about tickets for the dance festival.

If the arrangements committee could have gotten a firm commitment from the great lady of the United States, that would have been the place for the Fourth International Lithuanian Dance Festival.

It Was A Great Day For Lithuanians

Fifteen thousand awaited the entrance of Mrs. Pat Nixon, wife of the President of the United States. The ovation was tremendous and lasted for about ten minutes. As she waved to one side and then to the other, the ovation increased. When she

sat down the crowds began holding back on their cheers.

As the cheers subsided, the fifty two dance groups from the four continents began their march into the amphitheater, in all about eleven hundred dancers. After their entrance about one thousand grammar school children from the lithuanian schools intermingled with the regular dancers. Mrs. Nixon waved to each group as it presented itself to her on the reviewing stand.

After the usual festivities of anthems and welcoming speeches, Mrs. Nixon spoke her brief word: stating that her daughters had such a great reception during the song festival last year, she decided to see what a Lithuanian reception was like. That almost brought the house down. And when she left the reviewing stand to take her seat in the box, she passed through the entire group of dancers, stopping to talk to some and pose for pictures. Again, the ovation was thrilling. She was seated with the great Lithuanian lady of Chicago, Mrs. Josephine Dauzvardis, the Consul General of Lithuania at Chicago, and Mrs. Ogilvie, the wife of the Governor of the State of Illinois.

This too might be the place to mention that the daughter of the Ogilvies had learned a few Lithuanian folk dances and made a good showing during her brief encounter with the Lithuanian dance.

When one considers the number of groups and dancers that participated in the festival and the time allowed to practice the ensemble, one must say that the dance festival was a huge success. The usual dances were rendered, but the formations and figures presented were unusual and very interesting. The variety of figures far surpassed those of previous years. Mrs. Genevieve Breichmanienė must be complimented.

Orchestras, Dancers and Singers

The dancing was complemented by a thirty piece orchestra, under the direction of Alvydas Vasaitis, a specially trained folk instrument orchestra led by Zigmantas Lapinas (none of the participants in this group was over

fifteen), a hundred voice choir trained by Alfonsas Gecas and Alice Stephens.

The blending of all three made for a thrilling sight. The intricate figures, the full strong tones of the orchestras and the background of lovely voices made the amphitheater a bewitching scene of sound and graceful movement. Twenty dances were performed. The more intricate and vigorous dances were performed by the veterans and the simpler, but lovely dances by the thousand grade school children, who received a tremendous hand from the crowds. If the festival is to continue through the coming years, the enthusiastic children are the hope of those coming festivals.

The orchestras and the singers are the innovation of this dance festival and it was a good thing that the usual accordions were missing from the scene. They might have their place in school halls and at similar scenes when an orchestra cannot be afforded, but not in an international event. The various committees should be congratulated for the very welcome change in the accompaniment of the dancers.

The most pleasant surprise of the entire dance festival was the folk instrumental orchestra organized by Zigmantas Lapinas and his group. Twenty young people played a large variety of wooden instruments that would be hard to recognize and name in the English language. This is the make-up of instruments as known in the Lithuanian language: 15 kanklių, 5 įvairių Sekminių ragelių, vienos birbynės, 2 beržinių trimitų, tabulų, skudučių; 4 lumzdelių ir skrabalų. All of those instruments were not played at one time. The twenty young people played the various instruments. Their rhythm was outstanding. Everyone seemed to take great delight in the playing of the instruments. The youngsters seemed to be having so much fun playing the various instruments. Two of the instruments must have been seven feet long and they looked like trumpets and a second youth had to hold the trumpet while it was blown. They must have needed a good sized station wagon to transport those and the other playing instruments of the folk orchestra. It would be a wonderful experience to hear a concert played by the young people.

The Impact of the Festival

The presence of the First Lady at the opening of the folk dance festival had a tremendous impact on the production of the event. At least sixty photos were present from various parts of the country and all of the TV channels reported the event on their news programs that same evening. And Mrs. Nixon was truly a very gracious representative of the President, as we experienced at the reception before the festival.

Only three hundred tickets were available for the reception in the Stock Yard Inn, a very fancy restaurant and hotel on the grounds of the International Amphitheater, where the International Stock Shows are presented every year in November.

A reception line was formed by the ranking Republicans of Illinois with Mrs. Dauzvardis, Mrs. Ogilvie, Senator Percy, Cong. Derwinski and Mr. V. Adamkus at each side of the First Lady. She shook hands with each person in the line as they were introduced to her. All were recognized by one or another at her side. The entire ceremony went off with clock-like precision and was well guarded by the numerous secret service agents that observed every motion of Mrs. Nixon. All visitors seemed to be thrilled to be chosen for the reception and truly felt rewarded for the long wait at the reception.

The arranging committee was exhausted by the pressures of choosing the lucky ones and the demands made of them for extra favors. Dr. L. Kriaučiūnas was a haggard-old man after all of the festivities before, during and after the dance festival. He was the majordomo of the arranging committees. He must be congratulated for his heroic efforts. There were too many others to mention for the production of this grand festival of the Lithuanian dance.

Lithuanians have been getting long columns of publicity for the cause of enslaved Lithuania because of the suicides by burning and this great cultural triumph enhanced by the presence of the First Lady of the United States brought greater recognition for Lithuania. The distinction is noticed immediately in other spheres of Lithuanian activity. It seems that newspapers are quicker to respond to publicity in other matters. The success of such endeavours certainly help all around.

Not For Ourselves Alone

The Lithuanian folk dance is one of the basic activities of our culture and the festival like that arranged in Chicago this year certainly highlights its importance. The song festivals that are the alternate productions that take on an international flavor bring prestige for our nationality. The thousands of dollars spent for their productions are worth every cent spent if the best of the folk songs and dances are presented to the public.

The dance and song festival certainly attract our people from all over the world and the United States. But is that enough? Much more value could be added to these very expensive productions, if we could attract non-Lithuanians to our song and dance festivals. Hardly any money is spent for advertising our great festivals in the metropolitan press and radio. Sometimes it seems, that we do not

welcome other peoples or nationalities.

Couldn't such productions be scheduled in outdoor stadiums where larger crowds can be accommodated and cheaper admittances could be charged. The amphitheater seats 12-15,000 spectators, at prices from \$5.00 to 10.00. Song festivals can accommodate more because the center of the theater is not needed for dancers. \$2 or \$3 tickets would attract larger audiences.

Lithuanians Meet Lithuanians

The greatest part of the expense in presenting such productions is the traveling bill. Imagine the expense of traveling from Buenos Aires, Sidney, Berlin, Ottawa, Los Angeles, Florida, etc. This year larger parts of the travel bills were paid by the committee. Other years the greater part of that expense was carried by the dancers or the sponsoring organizations. Charter planes cut the expense tremendously, but what audience can cover \$75,000.00 worth of travel? The participants themselves had everyday expenses. The youth of South America and elsewhere made great sacrifices to attend, even though their travel expenses were practically covered. The United States dancers, from affluent organizations and circumstances, did not need too much help.

In talking to a number of the young people that visited with us after the dance festival, we learned that they felt their sacrifices were well worth the trouble. What pleased them most was the communications they were able to effect with Lithuanian youth of other parts of the world. There will be a number of international marriages after all of this.

The matter that made the trip even more important was the International Lithuanian Youth Congress that was scheduled at the same time. Some came to dance and others came to discuss their problems of Lithuanianism in the countries of their birth or adoption. This congress will be discussed on these pages at another time, in the following issues of this section. This was a historic occasion for the youth and adults of Lithuanian ancestry in all parts of the world. In another four years it may be repeated after all of the pros and cons are assessed. There is great enthusiasm for the dance festival, but many are wondering if the youth congress was worth all of the expense.

P.P. Gabris

"Eglutė", a Lithuanian monthly magazine for children up to the fifth grade, is commemorating its twentieth anniversary of publication. It is printed and for the most part edited by the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of Putnam, Conn.

Peking's Interest in Captive Balts

Red Chinese support for Baltic and Ukrainian freedom aspirations is the subject of a second article in the Caracas daily, *El Universal*, December 21, 1971. The first article by Vieri Lodovico Pericoli was published on December 14.

The author quotes from a Manifesto published by the Ukrainian National Front, an organization which receives moral and material assistance from Peking. The Manifesto states that "Russian imperialists" had occupied Finland and had transformed a number of European nations into their "colonies" by "destroying the independence of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania." The Manifesto goes on to urge all Ukrainians, those who have been deported to Siberia and those at home, to move away from Moscow and establish a socialist state entirely independent of Moscow. Finally, the Manifesto charges that Russia is quietly preparing new aggressions against Rumania, Albania and Yugoslavia.

Pericoli also quotes a Lithuanian who managed to escape from Siberia to Iran. His one-year trek through Soviet Territory had made him realize that the non-Russian nationalities in Siberia are regarding China as their savior, while the Russians are openly disturbed. Also, in Lithuania as well as in the other Baltic countries, even among members of the Communist Party, there are growing sympathies for Rumania. Earlier, sympathies were expressed for Czechoslovakia and respect is shown for Yugoslavia, the Lithuanian said.

Goods and Good Service are found in Outerspace

The paucity of consumer goods and poor consumer service persists in Lithuania. In a humorous sketch the author daydreams of full shelves and polite sales people — in outer space!

Some go here, some there, but as for me — it's other planets!

In one of my hands — the rudder of the cosmic ship, in the other — a basket and a long list, what to buy and for how much. Wait for my return, ladies — I'll bring a little gift for each of you as my office buddies had asked me.

And here is Mercury! Not in vain does the planet carry the name of the god of trade. Shops, nothing but shops everywhere — more than there are bureaus in our capital. That's why it's so spacious there, so free, no elbows jamming the ribs.

And what selections of gifts! Celophane — and in three colors no less!

"And if I'd ask you to make a little change in the contents of the selection", I appealed to the salesgirl.

"With pleasure", she says and smiles.

"I'll keep these gloves, but please give me some perfume from that arrangement there... and this shawl here..." "At your service, I'll rewrap it immediately", she smiles.

...In the solar system and in the galaxy in general I never heard: "You, citizen, talk it over with the old woman at home, but here in the store you either buy it pronto or give your place to the next in line!" (Literatūra ir Menas, Vilnius, March 1972)



The huge show space of the International Amphitheater is filled with dancing couples. All dancers wore authentic Lithuanian costumes. (Photo by Ed. Mankus)

