Documenting Latvian Folk Dances in Labanotation: The Story of Cukas Drikos (Pigs in a Buckwheat Field)

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ABSTRACT

- Professor Julie Brodie and Hannah Russ are researching and documenting the participatory versions of common Latvian folk dances in Labanotation. They chose to note the simpler, social forms of these dances to document core elements of the more ornate and presentational staged dances. To distinguish between participatory and presentational dance, they looked at different contexts for folk dance in Latvia, including celebrations, festivals, and prosenium stagings.

Tracing the evolution of folk dance in these contexts meant researching the history of Latvia and its relationship to the folk arts. Brodie and Russ then examined established methods for teaching and preserving folk dances in Latvia, which involves use of a verbal-graphic notation system. While highly effective for educating Latvian dancers, it is style and language specific, precluding access to foreigners. Their hope, through their preservation of these dances in Labanotation and their continuing research, is to make this body of work accessible to a broader audience. Their process to this point has included extensive viewing of Latvian folk dances and other primary sources, attending the Baltimore Folk Dance Festival, and interviewing professional folk dancers. To provide a concrete starting point, Brodie and Russ chose to trace the story of one specific folk dance: Cūkas Driņiš (Pigs in a Buckwheat Field).

RESULTS

Evolution of Latvian Folk Dance:

- **Pagan Influence**: Song, dance, rituals and symbols and their function in establishing community, celebrating the cycle of life and nature
- **Christian Influence**: Attempts to assign meaning to pagan celebrations mostly unsuccessful. Solidified significance of folk dance as a symbol of unity, community, Latvian identity
- **19th Century Influence**: Institution of festivals, cultural awakening linked to Romantic nationalism and ethnic-national concepts
- **Soviet Union Influence**: Presentational/stylized, paradox of dance as propaganda as well as source of Latvian national identity
- **Neo-folklore Influence**: Used as a tool for resistance of Soviet occupation. Return to less presentational functions. Desire to study, reclaim, and actualize “authentic” folk art

Today: Less about ritualistic meaning, more about community and expression of national identity. Stylization has been embraced as a way to reference national identity and pagan origins. Latvian folk dance is continuously changing with times in Latvia as well as in the Latvian diaspora, reflecting new values and cultural beliefs.

METHODS

Viewing of Latvian Folk Dances
- Baltimore Latvian Folk Dance Festival
- Video sources

Use of Primary Sources
- Interviewing Latvian Americans, Latvian folk dancers, Latvian scholars
- Researching historical influences on the evolution of Latvian folk dance
- Research on Latvian notation systems
- Research of Cūkas Driņiš specifically

REFERENCES/ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Kenyon College Summer Scholar Program and the Beulah Kahler College Trust
- Kenyon College Provost Office
- Special thanks to: Karen Greener, Juris Gogulis, Valda Vidzeme, Diāna Gavare

INTRODUCTION

In our research, we chose to trace the story of one dance: Cūkas Driņiš (Pigs in Buckwheat Field). Cūkas Driņiš is a Latvian Folk dance seen in both participatory and presentational contexts. It is not associated with a particular occasion, but is a celebratory dance performed at various events for the joy that it elicits.

For the purposes of our project, we chose to take a prescriptive point of view when notating and researching both participatory and presentational versions of dances. We found that, in terms of folk dance, the standardization of movement on microscopic level is designed to highlight and reinforce macroscopic elements. Thus, we are proposing that the presentational dances of Latvia are more complex and ornate in terms of step patterns, floor plans and virtuosity than their participatory counterparts.

Defining Participatory v. Presentational:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participatory</th>
<th>Prescriptive</th>
<th>Descriptive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complex in the microscopic</td>
<td>Simple in the microscopic</td>
<td>Complex in the microscopic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvisational</td>
<td>Facilitates interaction between dancers</td>
<td>Little improvisation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presentational</th>
<th>Prescriptive</th>
<th>Descriptive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complex in the microscopic</td>
<td>Simple in the microscopic</td>
<td>Complex in the microscopic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvisational</td>
<td>Places focus on formations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Contexts for Cūkas Driņiš:
1. Celebrations (Participatory)
2. Prosenium Stagings (presentational)
3. Festival Stagings (Presentational)

(Andriy Nahachewsky)