

A Personal Journey

by Linsey Pollak

I first fell in love with Macedonian music in 1975 by way of a recording of a group led by Pece Atanasovski. Actually, I fell in love with the gaida (Macedonian bagpipe), and decided then that one day I would learn to play it. In 1977 I travelled to Macedonia for the first time and met Lazo Nikolovski (see photo) with whom I lived and studied gaida for three months. At that time I was living in London and had started learning Macedonian music through my involvement with the band that played for the Zivko Firfov dance group, and in 1978 I travelled with that group to Macedonia to perform at the Bitola Festival. This was a fertile meeting ground, and I met dozens of great musicians from all over Macedonia and spent the next three months travelling and furthering my love and exploration of Macedonian music. On returning to Australia, I wondered how my new passion for Macedonian music could continue to develop. One night while busking with the gaida outside Hoyts cinema complex in Sydney, about 15 young Macedonian men started dancing to the music and I soon discovered a rich and thriving Macedonian culture alive and well in Sydney. This encouraged me to organise a two-month tour for Lazo, Mile Kolarov (a wonderful 73 year-old kaval player who had lived in the same village as Lazo and played in the Radio Skopje Orchestra for many years), Chris Gunstone (a tambura player with whom I had played in the Zivko Firfov group) and myself under the name of Orkestar Grupa Pecalbari (see photo).

We played concerts, dances and workshops in Sydney, Canberra, Wollongong and Melbourne in early 1979 and



Lazo Nikolovski

Lazo Nikolovski



Orkestar Grupa Pecalbari
L to R: Lazo Nikolovski, Linsey Pollak, Chris Gunstone & Mile Kolarov

recorded the album "Dojdovme" (soon to be re-released on CD). This tour enabled me to meet many musicians within the Macedonian community, particularly Risto Todoroski, a great clarinet player who also started playing and making gaidas (at that time I was also making gaidas in my workshop, which I had started doing in London). Actually Fuat had his first ever gig with Risto.

Interest in Macedonian music also started to develop in the broader Australian community, albeit very slowly (this was still well before the now more common acceptance of music from other cultures). I was invited to play with the Renaissance Players by Winsome Evans and Tansey's Fancy (with Mara and Llew Kiek and Doug Kelly) and Macedonian music was incorporated into their repertoires.

Around the same time I met Kim Sanders, who also fell in love with the sound of the gaida and together we formed a number of bands such as Rabadaki and Strantsi which played for monthly multicultural dances led by Gary Dawson (someone who had been responsible for helping develop my love for Balkan music and dance since 1975). In the summer of 1982 I started playing Macedonian music in Newtown Park (inner-city Sydney) with Christine Evans and a number of other musicians and this developed into one of the most joyful experiences that I have had in music and dance. For three months up to four hundred people came every Sunday afternoon to dance to a scratch Macedonian band that sometimes included up to 15 musicians playing gaidas, tamburas, tapans, flutes, clarinets, trumpets and euphoniums. It was a wonderful time and many older Macedonian men who had not played for years joined in the music-making on borrowed gaidas. The crowd that came consisted predominantly of Macedonians but many people came from outside the Macedonian community.

Because I was meeting so many great musicians from various ethnic communities that were not getting the recognition they deserved, I became interested in the idea of establishing a centre that would support and resource musicians from diverse cultures and provide avenue where multi-cultural music could be heard. So in 1983 I established the North Perth Ethnic Music Centre (now the Multicultural Arts Centre of Western Australia). It was at this time that I met Philip Griffin and together with Christine Evans we formed Makedonski Bop (playing Balkan music in and around Perth).

A few years later while living near Adelaide, I met and played



**Gaidas at the Australian
Bagpipe Convention
(Tallangatta, 1987)**

(l to r) Kim Sanders, Svetan Bonevski, Risto Todoroski, Anne Hildyard

with Petre & Branko man Gjorgjievski (Mile Kolarov's nephews). Petre is a superb kaval (long Macedonian end-blown flute) player and Branko is a string player and composer. It was exciting to rekindle a link back to Mile and Lazo (from whom Petre had learnt as a boy). Through Petre I first met Fuat Sazimanoski. He now plays with the group Xenos, together with Anne Hildyard and Rob Bester who have also travelled and studied extensively in the Balkans and share a love of the gaida.

Anne, Rob and I have developed a long-term musical relationship, sometimes as Balkan Bop and also as the zurna-based band Chermoula. In 1989 I travelled back to Europe with Jessica Ainsworth, busking with darabukha and a rubber-glove gaida, and met up with Lazo once again. It was during this time that Philip and I began collaborating on a book of Macedonian Folk Music. That book is the basis of this album. The tunes have been selected from within the pages of "The Red Book" and because of this, we have called the band Tsrvena Kniga (Red Book). As a token of appreciation I would like to dedicate this album to my gaida teacher Lazo Nikolovski, with whom I studied 20 years ago.

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