

March 1994

### Miami Valley Folk Dancers

The only international folk dance club in the Miami Valley Dance Council, the Miami Valley Folk Dancers was organized in 1952 by Michael Solomon, out of a folk dance class. As all city-sponsored groups were obliged to do, the club elected a five-member council which worked with the leader to manage club operations. Grace Wolff, who had helped Mike with the class and its program, became the leader and teacher in 1954; and was responsible for the group's dance activities with the support of members until 1967 when she resigned in order to give full time to her career.

MVFD has sponsored many workshops over the years. Vyts Beliajus did our first ethnic workshop to the aroma of roasting turkey in old, dilapidated Burkhardt Center. Jane Farwell, Dick Crum, and the Dunsings soon followed. Jane encouraged us to become a group and insisted that anyone could lead singing with 90 percent nerve and 10 percent ability! We began to sing as well as dance. Good leadership and dancing, excellent ethnic home-cooked food, and singing sessions became our workshop tradition. Early workshops cost only five dollars and attracted dancers from hundreds of miles away. Recent instructors have been Aman Folk Ensemble, Ada Dziewanowska, Petur Iliev, Vickie Goodloe, John Pappas, and Muntu African Dance Ensemble. The ethnicity of workshops has included: International, Balkan, Hungarian, Lithuanian, Polish, American, African, Israeli, Turkish, Armenian, Croatian, Slovenian, Bulgarian, Scottish, English, Macedonian, Greek, Scandinavian, German, Russian, Romanian . . . .

This group's love of dance has been shared with the general public through many demonstrations. From 1957 through 1961, MVFD opened the winter Sunday Music Series of concerts at the Dayton Art Institute. In 1989, MVFD performed at the 20th Waynesville Sauerkraut festival for the 20th

time. Nursing homes, schools and festivals are regular benefactors of demonstrations by MVFD members each year.

In the early 70's, MVFD started its year-round beginner's class from 7 - 8 pm. It continues today as a vehicle to introduce new people to international folk dancing. Old and new dances are taught to the membership via our "Ethnic Sundays," every 2nd Sunday, and advanced teaching sessions on Thursdays. Ethnic Sundays have also allowed us to explore individual ethnic cultures a little more in-depth.

The membership fee of \$1.00 per month and guest fee of 50c per session has not changed since 1952. Visitors' first night is always free, as are Ethnic Sundays. MVFD is truly a non-profit organization.

Today we are fortunate to be able to dance in the Michael Solomon Pavilion, a premier dance facility. Our membership is active with running Thursday night programs, teaching dances, and serving on various committees. Everyone pitches in.

Visitors are always welcome and no partner is needed. Please visit us on Thursday or 2nd Sunday, and share in the legacy of ethnic cultures around the world.

(This article was compiled by Leslie Hyll from a 1987 article in *Viltis* magazine by Grace Wolff, and from articles and notes by Ken Steed, John Pappas, and Lou Hyll.)