



Philippine Performing Arts Company of Tampa Bay, "Singkil," Philippines, Tampa, FL; won first place, Adult Team, Large Group Division



Matsuri-Ren, "Awa Dance," Japan, Valdosta, GA



Sanggar Lestari Indonesia, "Pembubung," Indonesia, Atlanta, GA



Indak Pambata (Children's Steps), "Dance of the Flowers," Philippines, Tampa, FL

The 4th Annual World Culture Folk Dance Competition

In 2008, both the Georgia House of Representatives and the Georgia State Senate passed resolutions designating the Azalea International Folk Fair as Georgia's official international festival. I was thus very excited to be invited by Ms. Serena Huang, the driving force behind this extremely successful event, to join its panel of esteemed judges for the 4th Annual World Culture Folk Dance Competition.

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This year, the panel of judges included Ms. Caroline Hoadley from Walhalla, South Carolina, Professor Eric Nielsen of Valdosta State University, Mr. Julius Horvath from Daytona Beach, Florida, Ms. Kristia Kaufman of Valdosta, and myself from Tallahassee, FL. All of the judges had significant performance and teaching credentials, across a range of dance traditions, from classical ballet to modern, tap, jazz dance, acrobatics, gymnastics, ballroom, folk and international dances.

My duties as a judge began on Friday night, March 6, where, under the guidance of Mrs. Judith Joseph, Dr. Derald Jones, and Dr. Isik Denizman, I met the other judges, and discussed the various procedures and criteria involved in judging the various entries. This was an important meeting, as not only the honor of being recognized for excellence in folk dance was involved, but also significant cash prizes, with a total of \$2,700 being awarded.

The 2009 competition has three divisions, grouped according to age ranges, and to the number of people involved per entry. There were nine entries in the "Youth Team" Division (aged 14 and under); there were 10 entries

under the "Adult Team-Small Group" Division (from 15 years old upwards, and with only one to three dancers per group); and there were 12 entries for the "Adult Team-Large Group" Division (from 15 years old and up, with four or more dancers).

The competition certainly lived up to its reputation in terms of global diversity. Countries and regions represented include Hawaii, India, Scotland, Ireland, Nigeria, the Philippines, Thailand, Brazil, Malaysia, Egypt, Cuba, Korea, Indonesia, U.S.A., Sicily, West Africa, the Middle East and Bavaria. The costumes could be very simple and yet capture a crucial element of the folk culture being depicted, as in the case of the Ibo Youth Group of Atlanta, who danced the "Atilogu," using black leotards and strips of genuine Nigerian fabric; or be quite ornate, with faux gold headdresses and finely embroidered fabric, such as those used by the Malaysian Association of Georgia, who performed the "Dance of Love," or the Sanggar Lestari Indonesia, who danced the "Pembubung." Participants came from all over Georgia and Florida to compete, and I could feel the energetic buzz in the air, as soon as I stepped into the mag-

nificent and spacious Valdosta-Lowndes County James Rainwater Conference Center the next day, Saturday, March 7.

I knew it would be tricky to judge, across so many variables, and so many traditions, but I thought that the guidelines prepared for the panel of judges were sound. First, all dance presentations had to be under 5-6 minutes (with prior approval required for those exceeding five minutes), or there would be a two point deduction from the total score. Second, each of the following categories carried 20% of the total mark: choreography (how difficult and diverse were the movements and lines produced); projection (whether the dancers created a powerful rapport with the audience through facial expressions, eye contact, and the general energy and enthusiasm they conveyed); execution of movement (whether the spacing was effectively managed, especially when the dancers transitioned across different parts of the choreography); technical skills (which, for the groups, entailed how synchronized they were with each other; for soloists, this was about how controlled and poised they were); and overall impression (whether they had



Dhun Sae Institute Atlanta, "Ribbon Hat Dance," Korea. Atlanta, GA—third place, Adult Team, Small Group

From Left to Right: Professor Michael Noll (Board Member), Mr. Julius Horvath (Dance Judge), Ms. Caroline Hoadley (Dance Judge), Dr. Caroline 'Kay' Picart (Dance Judge)



Youth Division Competitors, receiving certificates of participation: from the far left" Valdosta Middle School (Hawaii); Indak Pambata (Philippines—"The Flower Dance"); Indak Pambata (Philippines—"The Coconut Dance"); Glas Tara Jr. Dance Troupe (Ireland)



The Philippine Performing Arts Company of Tampa Bay, "Aray," Philippines, Tampa, FL—won third place, Adult Team, Large Group Division



Adult Team, Small Groups, on stage, for certificates; from the left: Malaysian Association of Georgia (Malaysia); Kahu Ahi (Hawaii); The Thai Doll—Joy Sheffield (Thailand); The Batista Sisters (Brazil); Sidona (Middle East); The Liedle Brothers: Stefan, Francis and Jacob (won first place—Adult Team, Small Group), "The Argyle Broad Sword Dance," Scotland, Marshallville, GA; and finally, Devon and Nicole Garis (Sicily)

Malaysian Association of Georgia, "The Dance of Love," Malaysia, Atlanta, GA



The project is supported in part by the Georgia Tourism Foundation, Georgia Humanities Council, National Endowment for the Humanities, Grassroots Arts Program of the Georgia Council for the Arts in partnership with Lowndes-Valdosta Arts Commission, Inc. and through appropriations from Georgia General Assembly.

audience appeal and whether their costumes and movements had an authentic folk quality to them). Costumes had been pre-screened through photographs, to make sure they were appropriate for the competition. The competition has developed a reputation as a family-friendly affair, and the organizers wanted to make sure that would be an enduring quality of the folk fair.

Much like ice skating, we were encouraged to score conservatively, at the beginning, to see whether entries that followed would be better than the first. We thus looked back, occasionally, on some sheets, to make sure that we were scoring consistently, as we compared entries. But for the most part, time constraints made us concentrate on writing down not only numerical scores, but also qualitative comments that would serve as constructive feedback for the various participants.

In terms of which teams won, Europe dominated the Youth Team Division, with the Glas Tara Dance Group (Ireland) winning third place; Christiana Liedle (Scotland) winning second place; and the sister-team, Christiana and Annaliese Liedle (Sicily) win-

ning first place. What I enjoyed most about the female Liedle duo was their synchrony of their partnering, and the precision of their footwork.

For the Adult Team-Small Group Division, the Dhun Sae Institute Atlanta worked the crowd, to win third place, with its powerful drums, and two traditional hats, from which a ribbon was hung, and with which intricate head movements, could be done, alongside some powerful leaps. Kahu Ahi (Polynesian) captured second place, with the women's colorful and authentic costumes, their sinuous and synchronized movements, and their relaxed and lovely smiles. But the Liedle Brothers: Stefan, Francis and Jacob (Scotland) won first place, with their striking "The Argyle Broad Sword Dance," combining masculine and military bearing with grace and precision.

For the Adult-Large Group Division, it was a clear fight between two groups: the Philippine Performing Arts Company of Tampa Bay and the Highlanders of Marshallville, GA. Hardly surprisingly, the Highlanders combined the Liedle brothers and sisters to form a formidable team; they won 2nd place for

the dance of The New Highland representing Scotland. They won fourth place with the Schwinger Tanz, representing Bavaria, which moved across marching military postures, softer and more graceful elements, and a some group lifts, in which two young women were lifted off their feet, as the group soared in a circle.

But it was ultimately the Philippine Performing Arts Company of Tampa that won two prizes: third place, for their charming rendition of "Aray" (a dance that depicts the Spanish influence on the northern parts of the Philippines and is a courtship dance), and first place, for their breathtakingly spectacular "Singkil" (a dance of the south in the Philippines, which depicts its proud Moslem heritage, combining the story of royalty with love and battle, and using long bamboo poles, beat in rhythm to traditional drums and gongs).

The AIFF is indeed a festival to track, as it continues to grow and evolve. I look forward, with anticipation, to 2010's version. Many thanks to Ms. Serena Huang, the panel of judges, and the AIFF Board, for their hospitality and kindness to me and to my husband Jerry, while we visited with them. ☺