

## 1997 Spain and Utah, U.S.A.

*Story by Rae MacCulloch*

*August, 1997*

August 4th, this was the day of departure, the opportunity to let the world know how Canada fits into the world of music and dance. Buses were loaded at the MacCulloch Studio on Chapel Road, one headed for Dorval airport for the flight to Utah, the second headed for Mirabel for the flight to Spain. At the same time, a convoy of vans from our Navan Studio was also headed to the two airports. Goodbyes and well wishes were exchanged and we were on our way. We boarded the planes with great anticipation, not sure what challenges were ahead of us.

### UTAH

The contingent traveling to Utah arrived with great anticipation, wondering what this new experience would bring. The group was billeted with local families, two or three to a family. This gave our young people a feeling of belonging. The host families took on the role of guidance and shopping expeditions and attended all performances. The festival took place in Bountiful, Utah which is Mormon country. This is an experience in itself. Learning about the cultures and religion of these very kind people is a valuable education.



My daughter Deborah who was in charge of the well being of our young people during their stay in Bountiful, states that the festival was a great success. The superb performances earned them an invitation to Hungary and Mexico. The Brigadoons were Deborah's support, helping with all details required to make the tour successful. Linda Wood was also there to give her assistance when needed.

## SPAIN

The group traveling to Spain, because of the time difference, actually arrived in Madrid on August 5th. Welcoming delegates from the festival met us at the airport in Madrid. From there we had a four hour drive to our destination in Almendraljo. Along the way, we stopped for a picnic lunch at a little snack bar. Parched from our journey, our first Spanish words were learned: "agua" (water). I believe we drank every bottle of water available. The shop clerks were quite amused. Our second word was "Gracias" (thank-you). Our journey continued.

On arrival in the city of Almendralejo, we were met again by a welcoming committee, which included Sr. Masa Romero, president of the festival and Begonia, our guide. I had been corresponding with Masa Romero for the past year, it was nice to finally meet him. Begonia, our interpreter and guide for our entire stay in Spain was a beautiful and gracious young Spanish dancer. Begonia led us through each day, answering all our questions and making sure that all was well with us. The bond between Begonia and our group strengthened each day. She was truly our friend.

We were then shown to our residence, which was on the 5th floor - 69 steps to be exact -, no elevators. Dorms included both one and two bed accommodations, containing a sink, night table, and clothes closet. We soon discovered that only cold-water showers were available. We learned to appreciate the cold water as the temperature outside rose to 40 degrees. Home is what you make it and we made it our home. With 31 young people aboard, laughter was always heard throughout the halls. We were a family sharing our joys, new experiences and occasional lonesome moments for our families back home.

An adjustment was required with the food, but that is expected when one travels to foreign countries. It is a major part of sharing the customs and traditions of people from other cultures. The fruits and vegetables were delicious as was the ice cream. Tea and coffee was only available at breakfast. Sangria, soft drinks and water was available at all other meals. Sangria is a drink made up of red wine mixed with vodka and fruit juices. Our young people frequented the local food market to stock up on snacks and treats, which seem to be essential to their diets.

After a few days we finally got the gist of things, sleeping or shopping during the day, performances and parties all night. This is the way of life in Spain during the heat of the summer, even the children were gadding about late into the night. All shops and businesses close for their siesta between the hours of 1:30pm and 5:30pm. Music was heard all night. There was always one country willing to serenade you throughout the night. I must add that we set a curfew for our young people. An adult always accompanied them. Jim Forbes and Rod MacLeod fit that role.

The public relations from one country to the other were tremendous. We were continuously asked if we would consider attending their festivals and they expressed their wish to come to Canada. Countries included Peru, Malaysia, Romania, Italy, France, Yugoslavia, Russia, Argentina, Mexico and Turkey. The world is open to us. I looked after the public relations with the other countries, exchanging brochures etc. for future tours. My daughter Heather looked after the concert arrangements.

The Opening Ceremonies was an extravaganza as each country was welcomed on stage and presented with gifts. The Cultural Consul Sr. Francisco, His Excellency Mayor Don Manuel Moran, Festival President Sr. Masa Romaro, my son-in-law Jim Forbes and I took part in the presentations.



Each night performances took place in a different village or city. The quaint villages had very narrow cobblestone roads. On some occasions our bus could barely drive through. The homes had beautiful wooden doors with highly polished brass decor. The people exited from their homes onto ceramic tiled sidewalks which measured about 18 inches in depth.

Concerts never started before 10:30 pm or 11:00 pm. The sound systems were excellent. Some stages were better than others. At one concert site, we arrived to find the stage carpeted. The stage crew realized this was not appropriate for our step dancers and immediately removed the carpet. Our exuberance dented a few stages.

On one occasion, the microphones were not properly tightened on the stands, so Shelly Downing had the opportunity of knowing what the statement "The show must go on" means.

As Shelly was playing her fiddle, the microphone became loose and began to slowly descend to the floor - so she simply followed it down. She was almost on her knees when an Argentine dancer noticed her dilemma and immediately came to her rescue. Neither she nor the dancers missed a beat. A slightly astonished Clara MacLeod, watching these manoeuvres loudly exclaimed "Oooh My !" but just kept on playing her piano. Little did she know that her exclamation was heard throughout the audience. Thanks for the chuckle, Clara.

Our most memorable performance was held in the Ancient Roman Theatre in Meridia. The theatre, which dates back to 15 BC was donated to the city by Agrippa, son in law of the Emperor Augustus. For many years the theatre was buried under the city and was only discovered after the Second World War when a new building was to be erected on the site. The theatre was restored and is now declared as a world heritage by UNESCO.

A feeling of belonging to another era overwhelmed us as we stood within the walls of this great structure, imagining the performances that took place before our time with the Roman emperors sitting in their special places of honour. The theatre holds 6,000 people and was filled to capacity for our performance. We shared the stage with Yugoslavia, Spain, Argentina and Malaysia. Our dancers put on a show that would make the Province of Ontario and Canada extremely proud.



Another interesting performance was held high up in the mountains in the town of Jerez Los Caballeros. As we approached the town, a most spectacular view of the richly decorated towers of two churches rose above the castle walls. It is a photographer's dream. The churches date back to the 16th century. Our performance was held on a stage within the walls of a castle which was built by the Knights Templar in the year 1312.

As we journeyed through the countryside in luxury Mercedes buses, we saw acres of olive trees and grapevines. There were fields of sunflowers and corn. The soil was red and very dry and the fields were barren of any weeds. On several occasions we came across castles set high on the mountain tops. All our concerts were held outdoors on beautiful summer nights, not a mosquito in sight. Perhaps, like the Canadians, they sleep at night.

During the last two nights, the countries were divided into two groups, alternating each night, one group performed and the other watched. This allowed us to enjoy the performances of our fellow performers. As each country took the stage they were cheered exuberantly, there were shouts of "Bravo" as they left the stage. The feeling of togetherness was never so evident. The concert sites were always filled to capacity.



On our final night of concerts we had to go directly to the airport from our concert site. Our goodbyes were as touching as the ones we had when we left Canada. Amidst cheers, tears and lots of hugs from the remaining countries we finally boarded the bus.

Our guide, Begonia stood on the bus steps to say goodbye and with tears in her eyes said, "You are the best group I ever had, please come back again." With fond memories and many new friends, our adventure was over. It was time to say "Adios Amigos".