This Magical Flute —
Thracian Kaval Players Outside of Bulgaria



Lyuben Dosev

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This Magical Flute — Thracian Kaval Players Outside of Bulgaria

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Foreword

I started reading "This Magical Flute" shortly before publication, intending only to help with proof-reading. I must admit, I volunteered for this task partly because it involved the personal journeys of a lot of people from the kaval community around the world that I had either met or had heard a lot about through my dad. Not to mention that Cathie Springer and David Bilides are close friends of mine and had been working on this project for a few years since my dad first came up with the main idea. Contributing my perspective seemed like a small way to participate in something I knew was important to all of them.

And so, I started reading. Before I reached page 50 I already realized that this collection of biographical information about kaval players around the world is a lot more than just that. It revealed a vast network of communication between people who, for one reason or another, fell in love with the kaval and started searching for ways to master it, including, in many cases, before even owning the instrument. Bio after bio, I saw the common language, the ancestry, so to speak. It almost felt like you could draw a family tree and trace back roots in the form of teachers, places, ensembles and folk gatherings. A truly astonishing map of the otherwise niche world of kaval playing.

I realized also that this book is not a collection of testimonials on how great a kaval teacher my father is. To my surprise, my father was not directly involved in the kaval studies of a lot of these people and that impressed me on another level. It made it even clearer that this art is quite alive and there are (still) plenty of great kaval players out there that will keep it going for at least a few more centuries. I bet my father came to this very realization many years back which is why he set forth to create this tiny collection and bugged Cathie and David incessantly until it came to fruition. Only after reading all of these stories together would one see how important the individual is in this impressively large network and how alive, creative, resourceful and passionate this community is. It makes me want to be a kaval player.

And then a third revelation dawned on me. In many ways, this book reflects qualities I have always associated with my father. Being one of the great Bulgarian kaval players, he never sought recognition or demonstrative advertisement of his own brand. He just worked tirelessly—constantly writing music, teaching his entire life (since he was 13-14 years old) and devoting himself to this beautiful art and spreading it, literally, from one corner of the planet to the other. So I love the fact that my dad is not the direct teacher for each and every person whose story you're about to read. This is precisely who he is—giving rightful place and credit to those who have earned it, no matter how small it may seem. I thought you, dear reader, should know this about Lyuben Dosev, if you don't already through your own encounters with him.

There is this other remarkable thing my dad brings everywhere he goes. He is the person who would cause hilarity in the most unlikely of situations. After about 2 minutes in his presence, everyone relaxes and bursts into laughter for one clever joke or another he just dropped spontaneously. He is at the same time the silliest person I know and the most hard-working, professional and serious about everything he does. Don't take it from me, take it from his extended kaval family—everyone who so graciously agreed to share their stories of love for the kaval, difficulties, triumphs and funny moments. Through these biographies, I realized that the friendships and connections reflected in these pages may be as important as the music itself and that this large community may be my dad's biggest accomplishment. The kaval family tree I imagined while reading continues to grow, and the stories in this book are living proof of it.

Throughout the book, you will hear repeatedly that it takes about 2 weeks to produce a solid, consistent sound on the kaval. So don't waste any more time. The next story added to this collection might be your own.

— Tzvety Dosseva, Washington, D.C., June 2026

Preface

My dear kaval-playing colleagues! Most of my life has been spent as a kaval teacher in various educational institutions in Bulgaria and abroad. During those years, I published many booklets of songs, and *horo* and *rŭchenitsa* tunes. My idea was for these collections to provide a wide variety of musical transcriptions through which younger *kavaldzhii* could enrich their repertoires.

But then, as my career as a teacher was winding down, I unexpectedly had a strange impulse to write a book about the lives and creative paths of the most beloved and respected kaval players in Bulgaria. Making that project a reality took me a lot of effort and a lot of time. It would not have come to fruition without the help of my colleagues from all over Bulgaria, for which I am infinitely grateful!

And now, my kaval colleagues, you have yet another book from me in front of you, and you may very well be wondering what inspired me to create this small collection of kaval player biographies, players who live in other countries and who are not Bulgarian, but who, with great effort, have learned to play and who love to demonstrate their art to friends and relatives wherever they may be!

Why do they do it? What gets people from practically everywhere in the world interested in this ancient Bulgarian instrument? Because the velvety sound of the kaval conquers even the most pretentious listeners—it caresses the ear, tells ancient stories, sometimes evokes feelings of nostalgia or sorrow, and other times makes people rejoice, get up and start dancing. I'm not making this up—I know it from the many kaval players I've met from different countries. Many of them were my students, who impressed me with their questions about finger movements, ornaments, breathing, phrases, and much more.

And why did I do it? Why go to the trouble of assembling all these biographies and photos? I'm assuming that every colleague who is in this book will want to acquire it. When they share the book with friends and loved ones, maybe they, too, will become interested in the kaval and ask them to teach them how to play the kaval. Or at least hold it in their hands and try it. And the incredibly powerful and beautiful music of the kaval will spread even further around the world.

Many thanks to you all, the kavaldzhii who contributed to this book!

— Lyuben Dosev, 2026

Introduction

I first heard about a "kaval encyclopedia" in August 2019, from friends and eventually from Lyuben. Lyuben was the generator of this idea, with the plan of finished copies going to graduating Bulgarian kaval students at the Music Academy in Plovdiv. Lyuben wanted bios of some non-Bulgarian players.

Lyuben and I had known each other since the early 1990's, with me as his student, and had visited each other in the United States and in Bulgaria. I had also helped produce and publish one of his books about kaval playing, with Cathie Springer, Bob Snider, and Jeff Fine.[1]

In December of 2019, Lyuben sent me a list of questions that I answered and sent back to him. I didn't hear anything about the project for several years, during which time Lyuben, Cathie, and I published another book, on kaval melodies.[2]

In late 2024, I received an update of sorts, when Lyuben sent me the same questions. The project hadn't progressed, but he was still enthusiastic about it. I updated my previous answers and asked him to keep me posted.

In early 2025, it was clear that this kaval bio project needed a boost of extra energy. Lyuben was having difficulties getting submissions, and there were technical hurdles to overcome. I spoke with Cathie, and we agreed to propose to Lyuben that the three of us produce a scaled-back version of the original idea. We thought an online-only version of just non-Bulgarian Thracian kaval players could get completed. If Lyuben wanted to print and distribute it in hard copy, he could easily do so. Lyuben agreed.

We created a list of kaval players we knew, solicited more names from colleagues, and added to it referrals from some of those players. Margaret Loomis sent us photos of decades of kaval classes taught at the EEFC East Coast workshops. Then it was a matter of tracking the players down and encouraging them to submit a bio. We obviously didn't reach everyone, and several we did reach chose not to participate. In the end, no one should think this book contains all current non-Bulgarian Thracian kaval players.

The bios arrived in different languages and formats, so we decided to keep the bios in the players' own words as much as possible. We created narratives only when a player simply submitted answers to Lyuben's questions. We tried to standardize spellings, names, places, etc., in order to give the project stylistic consistency. For English transliteration of Bulgarian, we used the Bulgarian "Streamlined" system of 2013, with the exception of ъ, which we transliterated as ŭ. We italicized the first instance of every non-English word in each bio (except for "kaval" and group names; albums were italicized separately). These italicized words can be found in the glossary at the end of the book.

There are three entities that frequently recur in the biographies:

- The Bulgarian Folk Music & Dance Seminar (in Plovdiv), often referred to as "the Plovdiv (summer/folk) seminar;"

[1] *Mastering Thracian Kaval Ornamentation: A Handbook*, available through Izvor Music

[2] *Автентични мелодии за български кавал / Authentic Tunes for Bulgarian Kaval,* available through Izvor Music

- The Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts “Prof. Asen Diamandiev” (in Plovdiv), often referred to as “the (Plovdiv) Academy,” “AMTII,” or “the Plovdiv conservatory;”
- The East European Folklife Center (EEFC) Music and Dance Workshop (USA), often referred to as “EEFC (summer) camp,” “Balkan (music) Camp,” “Mendocino camp,” “East/West Coast camp/workshop.”

We decided not to standardize these names across all the biographies, but instead to gather the variations and links here.

The most rewarding aspects of the project for me were communicating with and learning about players previously unknown to me, and hearing new details from old friends about their musical journeys. There are so many interesting stories, and I was left with a conviction that the kaval has an unusually strong and long-lasting hold on those committed to it.

— David Bilides, 2026

Dedication

To the memory of Aleksandr Illich Eppler

1955-2019



Aleksandr Eppler 1972

"Sasho" Eppler—an American of Russian, Armenian, and Georgian background—came from Seattle, Washington, USA to Bulgaria at the age of 17 in order to obtain a degree as a kaval teacher. His time in the city of Plovdiv was unique: he was the first kaval student at the Plovdiv Conservatory, the first foreigner to study at the Conservatory, and the first kaval player in the student ensemble of Prof. Asen Diamandiev (for whom the Conservatory was later named).

As it turned out, Sasho never completed his undergraduate studies—he stayed in Bulgaria for only two years (1972-74) before returning home when his mother fell seriously ill. Despite this, he became an exceptional musician, an excellent teacher and a sophisticated craftsman, making many kinds of musical instruments, including gilded flutes for clients in France.

I met Sasho for the first time in the Fall of 1972 at a concert presented by the students of the Music High School in Shiroka Lŭka (where I was a kaval teacher) and the students of the Conservatory in Plovdiv. Our paths never crossed again in Bulgaria after that.

In 2000, when I was traveling in the US as a musician for Iliana Bozhanova's Bulgarian folk dance teaching tour, we arranged to meet Sasho at his home in Seattle. We visited his workshop, and he showed us around his incredible *dryan* garden, where he was growing cornelian cherry (*cornus mas*) trees, training them to grow in such a way that he could make very good kavals from them.

Sasho Eppler was indeed a unique person. I am extremely happy that Bogdan Darev, inspired by my former student Vasko Denev, created a documentary film, Kaval Park, about Sasho in order to preserve the story of his life. I urge you to watch the film.

Eternal memory!

— Professor Lyuben Dosev
Plovdiv, Bulgaria, April 2026

Isabelle Courroy *(France)*



Isabelle Courroy

Concertist, Composer

I was born in France, in Longjumeau, a suburb of Paris, in May 1956 into families in eastern France, and I live in Provence, in the Luberon region.

In 1989, I was a professional flautist, and my career was divided between concerts, chamber music and teaching in Paris. I was also very interested in traditional flutes and borrowed a lot of LPs from the media library to learn about other music. That's how I came to discover the world of kaval flutes, then more specifically the Bulgarian kaval, then the specific repertoire of South Bulgaria and Thrace.

I started by working on my own and then as soon as I could, I went to Bulgaria to get to the source. I joined a traditional dance troupe that came to Gabrovo, in the center of the country, for a Bulgarian dance workshop. There, I was lucky enough to meet Orlin Vassilev, with whom I began my apprenticeship. Between 1990 and 2000, I visited him very often and regularly. He welcomed me in the apartment he occupied with his family. They all generously welcomed me and their hospitality was wonderful. My stays lasted about ten days. I worked hard and with passion.

I also studied with Lyuben Dosev, Teodosii Spassov, and Nedyalko Nedyalkov. I learned a great deal from the analysis and very detailed work I undertook based on Stoyan Chobanov's recordings. Later, with the advent of YouTube, I also learned a great deal from the historical recordings that could be listened to.

I have been teaching kaval at the *Conservatoire du Pays d'Apt/Luberon* since I was 19, in monthly workshops. I also give regular master classes at the *Institut International des Musiques du Mondes* in Aubagne. Occasionally, I also offer pedagogical courses throughout France.

I've taught kaval on a very regular basis for the past twenty years. Having pioneered kaval in France, I have many students here. My students come from a wide range of backgrounds, from complete amateurs to professional musicians and enlightened amateurs. They are French, Belgian, English, Spanish, mostly adults. During COVID, I also had a Bulgarian teenager as a pupil.

As a soloist, I play in formations ranging from solo, duo, trio, etc., to orchestral ensembles. I play around fifty concerts a year.

I attach great importance to the concept of the "oblique," which is the organological principle of oblique flutes, of which the kaval is a part, and for which the musical traditions of Bulgarian Thrace have developed one of the most subtle languages in existence.

This style, as well as the *kaba* register, is the basis of my work as a performer, whether on stage or in the studio, as I do a lot of recording. My latest recording is "*Un éloge de l'oblique.*" I've also composed for theater, dance and cinema, notably the soundtrack for Alain Ughetto's film *Jasmine* (*Les films du tambours de soie*), in which the kaval plays the leading role.

On the radio, there's been a lot: national broadcasts like *Ocora*, a one-hour program on *GmFrance Musique* devoted to my work. *France Culture*, too, with historian Patrick Boucheron, for the book/album *Contretemos*, and many regional radios (*France bleue Provence*) and free radios (e.g., *Radio Zinzine*), not forgetting international programs (for example, the *Zanzibar* program devoted to me on Swiss Radio), etc.

Whether as a soloist or with other musicians such as the ensemble "Canticum Novum"and "La Compagnie Rassegna", I have enjoyed an international career, with numerous tours to Japan, Russia, Canada, and Yemen, as well as North Africa and many European countries.

I have collaborated with many international soloists, including singers Mariyana Pavlova, Françoise Atlan, Katerina Papadopoulou, instrumentalists Hristina Beleva (with whom I set up a trio in the 2000's), Sokratis Sinopoulos, Shadi Fathi, Djamchid Chemirani, in duo, etc.

I've played kaval a lot with others, especially with the "Aksak" quintet since 1989, for example, as well as with many other music groups of various aesthetics. With "Panselinos", *musiques traditionnelles de Grèce* from 2007 to 2014, I played the traditional repertoires of Greek Thrace alongside Thracian singer Vanghelis Dimoudis. Currently, remaining faithful to the pastoral roots of kaval flutes, and seeking to respect its essence, I integrate the kaval into my creative projects.

A child once asked me after a concert: "Why is there sand in your flute?" I find this question so accurate and sensitive that I often share it during concerts to explain the very special sound of kaval flutes, and in particular the kaba register, as well as more generally the question of sound matter, which has been and remains my obsession.

The question of lutherie is of the utmost interest to me. In collaboration with a flute and kaval maker (Riccardo von Vittorelli), I have developed a whole range of ideas on the construction of kaval flutes in terms of materials: different woods, of course, but also other materials and their possible impact: PVC, plexiglass, copper, crystal. With glass scientist Ludovic Petit I designed and made a crystal kaval for the *Loxias* stage creation. I also recorded using this instrument.

I've also been working on different ways of stretching the length of the tube to obtain low-pitched instruments without them being too long, and therefore easier to handle. I've also been working on the question of the terminal stop, the inner bore of the tube body, the tube head, and more generally on the invention of new instruments, *not* to dethrone the old ones but to open up other avenues.

The discovery of the kaval, and in particular the powerful beauty of the Bulgarian Thracian kaval, has had a considerable impact on my life as a musician, and therefore on my life in general. I often say that I don't play this instrument, but rather it's what "makes" me.

Website: www.kaval.org
Awards:

- *Coup de cœur de l'Académie Charles Cros* 2014, 2017, 2022
- *ffff de Télérama* 1995, 1998

- *Diapason d'Or* 1998
- *Choc du Monde de la Musique* 1995, 1998
- *Victoires de la Musique* 1992

Discography:

- 2024 - Triple album: *Confluence 1,2,3 Un éloge de l'oblique* (with *L'oreille buissonnière*)
  #1 - *Le souffle onirique des flûtes kava*l
  #2 - *Le chant des sources*
  #3 - *Un éloge de l'oblique*
- 2018 - *Les artisans du temps* (with "Aksak")
- 2017 - *Il sole non si muove* (with "la Cie Rassegna")
- 2015 - *Aashenayi* (with "Canticum Novum")
- 2015- *Kumpania Massalias* (with "Panselinos")
- 2014 - *Contretemps* (with la Cie Rassegna)
- 2012 - *Éditions du Seuil*
- 2011 - *Zaman Fabriq* (with la Cie Rassegna)
- 2008 - *Portraits* (with Aksak)
- 2005 - *L'Oreille du voyageur* (with Aksak)
- 2001 - *Noëls des Balkans* (with Aksak)
- 1999 - *Florina* (with Aksak)
- 1998 - *Noches* (with Françoise Atlan)
- 1996 - *Les oiseaux migrateurs* (with Aksak)
- 1995 - *La rose et le jasmin* (with Françoise Atlan)
- 1993 - *De l'Europe Centrale à la Méditerranée Orientale* (with Aksak)
- 1991 - *Llanto por Ignacio Sanchez Meijias* (with "Musicatreize")

Antton Curutchet *(France)*



Antton Curutchet

I was born in 1992 in Bayonne, France, into a Basque family. I currently live near Paris and am a chemistry teacher.

Before hearing about the kaval, I started playing do-it-yourself instruments. I practiced how to get a sound out of a basic PVC pipe. I later discovered that this technique was used in folk instruments (kaval, *ney*).

Guillaume Klaval and Arwen Sentis are current kaval-playing friends. I've studied with Léa Maquart and Kiril Belezhkov.

I play kaval in the Elektruka project and perform only during workshops and ethno gatherings.

Here's how I first discovered the blowing technique: I was playing tin whistle in Ireland, and I met Xavi Lozano, who makes instruments out of any material. He removed the tip of my whistle saying, "You don't need that," and started playing "kaval style" on the body of my tin whistle.

A kaval story: I met a kaval player in a hut in Macedonia. His kaval had been stolen, and he never could afford another one. We stayed two days in the hut playing my two kavals, improvising, and eating lentil and rice soup in wooden bowls. It was a great time.

Chris Hayward *(France)*



Chris Hayward

I was born in Chicago in 1952, left the USA for Puerto Rico in the late 1950s (the McCarthy witch hunt era), then returned to the States in 1961. When I was 10, I emigrated to Paris, and now have French as well as US citizenship.

I'm of German, Scandinavian, Ukrainian, and Jamaican heritage (a genuine mix). I've lived in France since 1963.

I first heard Bulgarian singing as a child, and had my first contact with the kaval and *tŭpan* the second year of the Plovdiv seminar, about 13 years ago. Later I also got involved with the *gayda* and *gŭdulka*.

My first kaval lessons were with Isabelle Courroy. After I'd studied with her for two years, she suggested I go to the Plovdiv seminar. I've also studied with Stoyan Paurov, Temelko Ivanov, Kiril Belezhkov, and, for the past three years, with Vasil, the titular head at Plovdiv. All are wonderful players of Thracian technique.

My kaval-playing friends in France include Isabelle Courroy, Benedicte Jucquois, Ivan Zec, and, when visiting, Kiril Belezhkov.

The classes I've taken have been at the Plovdiv Academy, at the *Tapis Vert* seminars near Avençon, Normandy, a great center, and a few private classes at a regional conservatory.

My first years of playing during performances I'd lose my embouchure placement, and the sound would disappear...literally. This was distressing, to say the least!

I have too many recordings to list, but most are not on kaval. However, I've been integrating kaval in contemporary venues—jazz situations—and projects are emerging in this period. I've been all around Europe, Lebanon, the US, Canada, and South America in the 70's. Since then, I've played at concerts, festivals, and some television, in many styles of music, and I'm still playing.

In December 2025, I played kaval with pianist Elie Maalouf at the *Institute du Monde Arabe* in Paris. Other than that, I play kaval in studio recordings.

I'm a concert flutist (including studying with Jean Pierre Rampal) since the 60's, as well as a composer and producer ranging from early music to very modern forms. I've done extensive work in Arab, African, and Celtic music, as well as all areas of jazz. I also joined the circus ("Nouveau Nez") in 2005, became a clown, and toured as part of "Le Trio Petrouchok"-.

At a regional conservatory I teach flutes, recorders, Early and Baroque music, orchestra, and chamber music. I became the director of the conservatory for several years and was also at the university for three years. Additionally, I created a record label—CNF—and have produced children's

projects, jazz and modern classical recordings, digital audio books, and film music for the last 20 years.

It's taken my family some years to enjoy Bulgarian music. And my bringing home the gayda, well, there was some talk about a divorce...So, I've avoided playing at home. It's safer for all concerned, but it certainly got a reaction!

Léa Maquart *(France)*



Léa Maquart

Born on 11 September 1978 in Lyon, France, Léa Maquart now lives in Lonsle-Saunier, in the Jura region.

She began her musical journey studying classical flute at the conservatory, before turning towards traditional Eastern and Balkan music with the discovery of the *ney* and the kaval. In 2004, she began studying Ottoman classical music in Istanbul with Ahmet Sahin, singer and *neyzen*. Between 2004 and 2014, she returned frequently to Istanbul to continue learning with him, and later earned a diploma in Oriental music from the Villeurbanne Conservatory.

Alongside the ney, Léa plays the kaval—a transverse flute found in Turkey, Greece, and Bulgaria—which opened up a repertoire rooted in popular music and dance. She studied this instrument with Isabelle Courroy and Nedyalko Nedyalkov. In 2021, she received a fellowship grant from the FAMDT [Fédération des Acteurs et Actrices des Musiques & Danses Traditionnelles] and ADAMI to work in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, with kaval player and ethnomusicologist Kiril Belezhkov.

Léa is passionate about transverse flutes, whose free mouthpiece allows for extraordinary flexibility of sound. While deeply connected to the traditions of the ney and kaval, she also enjoys taking these instruments beyond their usual paths, venturing into contemporary and rock music projects.

She currently performs with a wide range of ensembles: "Golyamata" (Bulgarian instrumental and vocal septet), "Yeni Gayda" (experimental Turkish music), "Canticum Novum" (early and world music, with whom she recorded *Samaï*, *Alep la cosmopolite* and *Sur la route de la soie* for the Ambronay label), "Banitsa" (Bulgarian dance music), and the Rassegna Company as a substitute for Isabelle Courroy in *Contretemps*—a performance built around medieval poetry with Patrick Boucheron and Bruno Allary. She is also part of "Pili Coït et les Exocrines" (experimental oriental orchestral rock). Since 2023, she has been performing in Abdelwaheb Sefsaf's play *Kaldûn*, which tells the story of three uprisings: the Paris Commune, the Algerian Mokrani revolt, and the Kanak revolt of 1978.

In addition to her performance work, Léa regularly leads educational projects, workshops, and master classes.

Website: Pili Coït et les Exocrines
YouTube: Banitsa, Léa Maquart, Yeni Gayda

Alain Rolland *(France)*



Alain Rolland

Hello! My name is Alain Rolland. I was born in Paris, France, on March 13, 1950. I lived in Paris for 60 years, and now I live in Britany, in the west of France.

My grandfather was a violinist, and I became a violinist, too. But unlike my granddad, I discovered traditional music while living in Scotland in the early seventies. Back in France I started playing traditional French music in a band with musician friends, from 1973 to 1979.

I first heard Eastern European music through a Hungarian band during a recording session in a studio in Paris in 1977. One of the musicians, Ivan Lantos, played *gayda* and kaval. Later, in 1980, I started playing Romanian music for dancers with a band, "Taraf de caprioara." The association *Intergroupe folklore* organized all sorts of dance and music workshops, and my first real encounter with kaval was with the Macedonian kaval, not the Bulgarian one! Mile Kolarov and his only pupil came to Paris for concerts and workshops. They played in the traditional way: two kavals or two gajdas. I attended the workshop with Mile who was around 78 at the time.

Mile's first question was to find out whether we knew about rhythms, and he played a tune as a quiz: 9 plus 13 rhythm! Of course everybody was lost! I had been taught by Talip Oskan, Turkish collector, singer and *saz* player, about asymmetrical rhythms, but I could only master the basic 7/8 and 9/8 rhythms. I tried the Macedonian gajda and couldn't play any kaval, as you can imagine, during the workshop, but I liked Mile's kaval playing very much. When Mile finished his group tour in France, he agreed to sell his two kavals and a gajda. I still have those two kavals, made from the same piece of wood.

A few years later, I traveled to Bulgaria to the Koprivshtitsa festival in 1986. There I heard a lot of kaval! On my cassette recorder I recorded musicians sitting in the grass and playing. I met Theodosii Spassov, who was not well-known then—he was still a student at the time. He sold me the kaval he was playing. I still have this kaval, and by coincidence learned that it was made by Krŭstyo Dimov's father, so I asked Krŭstyo to repair it for me, which he did a few years ago.

I started trying to produce a sound back in Paris. I would be carrying the head of my kaval in the car and blowing even in traffic jams!

I eventually produced a sound and started learning Macedonian tunes from Mile on the Bulgarian kaval that I could also play on the Macedonian one. I understood that the decoration [ornamentation] system was very different, and I couldn't produce the Bulgarian style. But as I said, I was a violinist, and violin took the lead in my musician life. So kaval was just a fantasy; I like it very much. I had a few lessons with Krassen Lutskanov in Paris before he died.

I retired in 2010 and then had plenty of time for playing music with no economic pressure. I started playing the kaval more regularly and attended a Kiril Belezhkov workshop in Paris maybe 10 years ago with a friend of mine, José Ponzone. I met Chris [Hayward], who convinced me to attend the Plovdiv summer seminar in 2019, which I did and attended Vasil Vassilev's kaval class and Kiril's ensemble class. I came back home with a lifetime supply of music sheets and recordings!

I bought Lyuben Dosev's Thracian ornaments book and a few more publications from Izvor Music online. I use them regularly to improve my playing.

I have settled into a regular workshop here in Britany with a dozen musicians. We play Central European music and some Bulgarian tunes as well that I play on kaval.

I don't teach kaval, as such; I just teach music, including violin from time to time, but I try to show musicians how to play certain ornaments on their instruments. That's about it. I have played many different styles of music: classical, jazz, and traditional. I like playing any kind of music so long as I feel it's the right way to do it!

Soundcloud: Kaval Djanam

Arthur Tanguy *(France)*



Arthur Tanguy

I was born in Nantes, France in 1994. Both my parents are French. My father comes from Brittany and my mother is half Kalmykian. I still live in Nantes. I'm a musician and jazz music teacher.

When I was 15, I first heard the sound of the kaval without knowing what it was, on a jazz album, *The Rise*, by Julien Lourau with Krassen Lutzkanov. Many years later, in 2020 at the end of my jazz studies in Switzerland, I discovered more Bulgarian folklore—*Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares*—and that fit really well with the many hours I spent at night trying to write my master's thesis. This led me to discover some famous kaval players who took part in "ethno-jazz" projects, such as Nedyalko Nedyalkov, Theodosii Spassov and Zhivko Vasilev.

The more I discovered about kaval music, the more I wanted to play this instrument and repertoire. Since finding a kaval is not easy in French music stores, I first tried to transcribe kaval parts on my flute, since I was used to doing that in my jazz practice. Later, after finding a website describing the measurements and documentation about fingerings, I made my first kaval out of PVC so I could start trying to make a sound on this oblique flute. Well, obviously, the first attempts were so hard!

For a few years after, I just did what I could to learn how to play alone (from internet videos, tutorials, and recordings), until finally I got a good instrument from Krŭstyo Dimov in 2023 and had my first real lessons with Kiril Belezhkov in 2024, during a summer camp in France.

I met Léa Maquart during a concert she had in my city. The others I met were French students who attended Kiril's kaval seminar in France. I'm still studying with Kiril Belezhkov. I'm not teaching kaval, because it's a bit early yet.

Unfortunately, I haven't yet had the opportunity to perform Bulgarian music with a well-known musician. Nevertheless, I was a member of a few bands gathering French musicians to play Balkan and Romani music (*Pas d'nom, pas d'maison*, or ephemeral bands).

Just after I'd crafted my PVC kaval, by chance my mother met a Bulgarian woman living in France. My mother had a lot of fruit (*mushmuli*) from the garden to give away, and this woman was very interested to get that fruit that she loves from Bulgaria but couldn't find in France. When she heard I was interested in the Bulgarian kaval, she just said to me, "I can find you one next time, and send it to you."

Finally, one year after many attempts, she managed to send me a wooden kaval, which was my first "real" instrument. It was a Turkish one-piece kaval, but still better than my DIY PVC one to start learning on!

Siropli Garifalia *(Greece)*



Siropli Garifalia

I was born in Drama, Greece in 1985. I came into contact with the kaval for the first time in 2001 at the Music School of Drama. My Byzantine music teacher, Tsormpatzidis, seeing that I liked the tradition and knowing that I played flute and saxophone, suggested that I give the kaval a try. The following year, a kaval teacher came to the school, so I started lessons.

When I finished school, I took Byzantine lessons at the Byzantine Music School of the Maximilian Spiritual and Cultural Centre of the Holy Metropolis of Serron and Nigrite and played at all the events.

I have obtained a degree from the Department of Social Administration of the Demokrite University of Thrace in the area of social policy as well as a degree from the Postgraduate Department of Pedagogical Education of Western Macedonia in the subject of Intercultural Education of semiotics and communication. In addition, I have obtained the Byzantine Music Diploma in 2004.

At the end of my studies, I returned to Drama and was active in various orchestras in cultural clubs such as the Choristis Cultural Association, the Mikropolis Cultural Association, and the Pyrgon Drama Cultural Association. In 2004 I worked as a kaval teacher at the music school of Komotini. In 2011 I started a series of kaval lessons with teacher Peter Avramov in Goce Delchev, Bulgaria, for about a year. My involvement with the instrument stopped when I decided to have a family.

I am an active member of the philharmonic orchestra of the music-drama club *Choristis Anagnenithisa Makedonia* since 1995.

Maria Gkouskou *(Greece)*



Maria Gkouskou

I was born in Katerini, Greece, in 2008 and am the daughter of Nektarios and Sophia.

I started playing music at the age of 5, taking piano lessons, and I also have a degree in harmony. After my admission to the Music School of Katerini, I heard the kaval for the first time being played by my teacher, Stella Kampouridou, during a presentation of musical instruments. What impressed me the most was the seductive sound it produced. That constitutes the reason why I chose to embark on my music career with this instrument.

Today as a second-grade high school student, I am a member of the traditional and Pontic orchestra of my school and participate in all the events and concerts we organize both in Greece and abroad, in countries such as Serbia, Bulgaria, and Albania. These concerts are initiated by our school and the School of Traditional Instruments of the Holy Metropolis of Kitros Katerini and Platamon.

Stella Kampouridou *(Greece)*



Stella Kampouridou

Stella Kampouridou was born in Katerini, Greece in 1990. She began to study music and play kaval at the age of eleven. Her first teacher was her uncle, Lazaros Tsormpatzidis, who is also a kaval player and was the reason she met and loved this instrument. She is a graduate of the music high school of Katerini.

In 2012 she completed her studies in the Department of Music Science and Art at the University of Macedonia, with a major in Greek Traditional (Folk) Music and specialization in "Performance on kaval" under Professor Manos Ahalinotopoulos. She studied the different styles of Greek traditional music, especially of Macedonia, Epirus and Central Greece, as well as music from other eastern Mediterranean regions.

That same year she started postgraduate studies at the Academy of Music and Fine Arts in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, with kaval professor Lyuben Dosev, with whom she focused more on the technique of the instrument and the Bulgarian Thracian style. She also has a diploma in Byzantine music.

The past fifteen years she has been working as a music performer, playing kaval in concerts in Greece and abroad and taking part in recordings. In 2017 she performed as a musician in the music-theatrical performance, "I have never forgotten you" that went on tour all over Greece for a year and also gave two performances in Tel Aviv, Israel.

She is a member of the music bands "Iliodromio," a group that plays its own contemporary music with Greek characteristics and flavors (albums: *Poetics* 2016, *Indigo* 2021), and "Argatia," a group that plays music from Pontos and the Black Sea (album: *Entama* 2020).

Since 2016 she has been working as a kaval teacher in the Music School of Katerini (Pieria, Greece), which is a secondary and a high school. She is also teaching kaval in the conservatory of the Metropolis of Katerini.

She lives in Panteleimonas, a village in Pieria, with her husband and their two children.

YouTube: Iliodromio

Stratis Pasopoulos *(Greece)*



Stratis Pasopoulos

My name is Stratis Pasopoulos and I was born in 1985 in Kouvouklio, a small village in the Serres region of Greece. My parents' grandparents were Greek refugees from Asia Minor, Eastern Thrace, but also local Macedonians. I live with my family in Sidirokastro, a small town in Serres near the border with Bulgaria.

My first experience with the kaval was in 2001 when I was a student at the Serres music high school. I heard my teacher in Byzantine music, Lazaros Tsorbatzidis, play the kaval, which excited me, and I immediately asked him to teach me. He lent me his own instrument and Lazaros became my first kaval teacher.

Later, as a student, I first heard Bulgarian folk music and great Bulgarian kaval virtuosos such as Lyuben Dosev, Nikola Ganchev, Stoyan Velichkov, Theodosii Spassov, Nedyalko Nedyalkov, and others.

It is a great joy and honor to have several friends and collaborators here in Greece who are excellent kaval players such as Pantelis Stoikos, Hristos Barbas, Nikos Paraoulakis, Stavroula Trifiati, Stella Kabouridou, and Minas Dafkas, as well as Isabelle Courroy from France and Nedyalko Nedyalkov from Bulgaria.

During my studies at the Department of Music Science and Art with a Specialization in Greek Traditional (Folk) Music, I followed the Degree Program of kaval with teacher Manos Achalinotopoulos.

For several years I have been teaching kaval to both adults and students, mainly in private lessons. Also, the last two years, I have had the honor of teaching as a visiting professor at the Department of Music Science and Art of the University of Macedonia in Thessaloniki in the specialization of kaval.

The kaval, in addition to the traditions of Thrace and Macedonia where it is known, is now loved and played in other types of music, in orchestras as well as new productions by composers. The productions in which I have participated as a kaval player over the years are many, both in concert, on television and on disc. An important concert moment was the collaboration with Chronis Aidonidis, the great teacher and singer of the Thracian tradition, at the Thessaloniki Music Hall. Also during my studies, I had the luck to participate in important projects with Socrates Sinopoulos, Manos Achalinotopoulos, Ross Daily, Antonis Apergis, Nikos Saragudas and Petroloukas Chalkias. As part of my discography, I have participated in the works of important new composers such as Stamatis Pasopoulos and Lefteris Passias.

The most important part of my musical performances has been with the musical group "Evritiki Zygia" in which I participate as a kaval player and singer. The group consists of ancient Thracian in-

struments like the bagpipe (*gaida*), the lyre, the kaval and the *daouli* (*davul*). We have released five albums with songs and music from the Evros region, from Eastern Thrace in the area of Makra Gefyra (Uzunköprü), from the *Gagauz* villages of Northern Evros, and from Northern Thrace (*Eastern Rumelia*) in the Black Sea region. Also the album *ORMENION* was released in 2020 with new compositions, and the most important moment was the concert of the group at WOMEX 2018 in the Canary Islands.

The memories and stories over the years are endless, but I will single out one that happened in a village in Katerini where the residents were originally from northern Thrace. I had been invited by the local cultural association to participate in the traditional Christmas carols that the members of the association were singing throughout the village. Arriving at a house, we were greeted by an elderly lady who, as soon as she heard the kaval, was moved and started hugging me, telling me that her father, who came to this particular village as a refugee from eastern Rumelia, also played kaval, and that was a truly powerful moment.

In addition to musical performances, I work as a music teacher in primary schools and of course I have "introduced" the kaval to the children, which they like very much. I also use the kaval in music lessons.

YouTube: Evritiki Zygia

Stavroula Tryfiati *(Greece)*



Stavroula Trifiati

Stavroula Tryfiati was born in January 1993 in Athens, Greece. She grew up there in a very musical family environment. Her father was a traditional Greek dance teacher and played traditional percussion instruments, and her sister is a professional singer.

In 2003, she began taking classical guitar lessons and studying music theory at the Artemis Conservatory with instructors Eleni Dafnia and Maria Kariotou. She attended lessons of alternative and classical singing with instructors Katerina Papakonstantinou (2008) and Marialena Panagiotopoulou (2013-2014).

It was at the Experimental Music High School of Pallini that she first learned and listened to kaval. She did her initial studies in kaval in 2006-2011 with instructor Eirini Derebei. She was excited and loved the sound of the kaval and decided that this was her instrument. So, at the age of 13 she began learning kaval and researching kaval music, and that was when she found Bulgarian traditional music.

After high school, she studied at and graduated from the department of Music, Science and Art at Macedonia University (Thessaloniki, Greece), Traditional Greek (Folk) Music, and specialized in kaval with Professor Manos Achalinotopoulos (2012-2015). In 2016-2017, she finished her masters studies and specialization in kaval at the Academy of Music and Fine Arts in Plovdiv with professor Lyuben Dosev. In parallel with her studies, she began playing kaval with various musicians at concerts, events and festivals. In particular, she taught kaval at the Evros bagpipe seminar (2015-2017).

Stavroula has recorded kaval for the soundtrack of the film *Exodos 1826*, for the CD of the book *Lullabies and Wake-ups*, and for other new music and CDs. She has been a member of the "Rythmos Orchestra" since 2017. She has also collaborated with Dionisi Savvopoulo, Orfea Peridi, Melina Kana, Gianni Kotsira, Lizeta Kalimeri, Xroni Aidonidi, and many other artists. Currently, she is working as a musician and music/kaval teacher in Athens.

YouTube: Mila mou (from *Exodos 1826*), Kamiles - Tsestos, Troiro

Lazaros Tsormpatzidis *(Greece)*



Lazaros Tsormpatzidi

I was born in 1966 in Katerini, Greece, into a large family, and I was the fifth child.

From the visits to my brothers who became monks in Athos, I fell in love with the school that existed in Karies on Athos. For six years (age 12-18), I studied in Athoniada, the two Byzantine arts of church music and hagiography, along with the regular courses. After finishing school, I enrolled in the Municipal Conservatory of Katerini and after exams, I obtained a degree in Byzantine music. In addition to my diploma in Byzantine music, I also have degrees in mode, harmony, counterpoint, fugue and composition from the conservatory.

For the next ten years, I played football, the last seven professionally with the *PIERIKOS* team. After finishing with football, I was offered a job as a teacher of Byzantine music and hagiography in the schools of the Holy Metropolis of Serres and Nigrita from 1994 to 2005.

From 1995 to 2000, I worked at the Music School of Drama. From 2000 to 2005, I worked at the Music School of Serres, and since 2005 I have worked at the Music School of Katerini. During the decade of my stay in Serres from 1995 to 2005, I was the director of the School of Hagiography. Returning to Katerini in 2005, I opened a school of Byzantine music as its first director and remained there for a decade. At the same time, during all these years I have also painted icons in churches.

From a visit to the Academy of Philippopolis (Plovdiv) during Christmas in 1999, I heard the kaval for the first time and I liked it very much. In 2000, I began studying at the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts in the town of Plovdiv, Bulgaria at the Faculty of Music Folklore and Choreography, majoring in "Performing Art" with Bulgarian kaval, under Lyuben Dosev, Ph.D. There I received my bachelor's degree in 2004, and in 2005 graduated as a Master of Performing Art with kaval. In 2012, I also completed a master's degree in Byzantine music, again at AMTII-Plovdiv. During my student years, I also participated in several horseback riding events and in 2012 also worked as a first horse-back riding teacher to five students.

Currently I work as a teacher of Byzantine music in several schools and in kaval at the school of Katerini. I am very happy that now at the music school in the town of Katerini, the kaval teachers are my students. I am proud that the time I spent learning to play was not wasted and now there are people younger than me who continue my teaching activities.

Panayiota Vasilios Zafeiriou *(Greece)*



Panayiota Vasilios Zafeiriou

Panayiota Zafeiriou was born in 1981 in Larissa, Greece and still lives in her hometown. By the age of eight, she was already enrolled in the musical school of Larissa (at a branch of the Larisa Conservatory of Music) and studied Byzantine music, tambourine,[1] harmony and polyphony.

She was a soloist in the school choir, studied European music theory, learned to play folk instruments (tambourine, kaval, bagpipe, drum), and was a member of the Representative School Orchestra. After graduation (2000-2005) she worked playing kaval, bagpipe, and drum and was a member of the Representative School Orchestra.

After graduating in 2005, she continued her studies at AMTII-Plovdiv, specializing in "Instrumental art" with the tambourine. From 2014-2016 she studied for a master's degree, also at the Academy, specializing in "Orthodox Church Music."

She then enrolled once again at the Academy to obtain a doctorate in folk music, while at the same time specializing in Theology and graduating from the Plovdiv University "P. Hilendarski."

She currently works as a teacher of folk music, tambourine and kaval at a music school in Larissa. In addition, she is the president of the "Bulgarians and Friends" group in Larisa, where there is also a dance group and a Bulgarian school. She has collaborated and played with well-known musicians in Greece and Bulgaria and is the conductor of the largest student orchestra in Central Greece. She is the mother of four boys.

[1] We wonder if "tambura" was intended. —Eds.

Orlando Cialli *(Italy)*



Orlando Cialli

I was born in Florence, Italy, in 1993, in an Italian family without any connection with Eastern Europe or the Middle East. After studying classical saxophone in Italy, I moved to Rotterdam (NL) for 2 years and Istanbul (TR) for 2 years to study *makam* on clarinet and Turkish *ney*. Now I am living in Barcelona (SP).

I have always been interested in folk music from the Balkan region and fascinated about traditional wind instruments. I started playing makam and folk music from the Balkan region when I was around 25, and I discovered the kaval at that age. I didn't dare to start playing the kaval at that moment because the Bulgarian style seemed too difficult and virtuosic to me, due to the difficulties of its blowing technique, and also because I was more focused on reed instruments such as clarinet, sax, and *duduk*. But later, during my studies of Ottoman classical music, I started playing Turkish ney and this made me think that maybe it could be interesting to take a kaval and try to play on it a bit.

In the summer of 2024, I was going from Florence to Istanbul with my girlfriend in my van. The journey took one-and-a-half months, with a lot of stops. After a long period in Greece, we decided to cross the Greek-Bulgarian border near Xanthi (GR) and go to a folk dance festival in Nedelino (BG). After the festival we decided to go to visit Plovdiv. Right when we arrived in the center of the city, the temperature alarm of my van started blinking with a red light and making a very loud sound. We were really worried, and we had to stop in a random place in the city center. The situation was very stressful because no one was speaking English (and we don't speak Bulgarian), and we could not find a technician who wanted to help us! In that moment of frustration I told myself: how can I transform this difficult moment in a positive one? Maybe I can buy a Bulgarian kaval!

So, I searched in my contact list, because I remembered I had the number of Kiril Belezhkov. He was free that day, and he came to my broken van with a very nice kaval made from Mexican palisander. My journey with the Bulgarian kaval started like that! (And fortunately, the day after, a very nice Bulgarian car technician changed a water pipe with a huge hole on it, and we could reach Istanbul!)

Since that time, I have barely tried to play on that kaval, because I was busy with other music, and I kept it hung in my living room wall as a nice piece of design. But now I have more time, and I decided to start practicing it more consistently. I was searching for a collection of scores of traditional tunes, and I got in touch with the work of Prof. Lyuben Dosev and the community of Izvor Music.

Now it is time to practice!

Instagram (Makam Vibes): https://www.instagram.com/makam_vibes/
Instagram (personal): https://www.instagram.com/orlandocialli/
Website: https://orlandocialli93.wixsite.com/orlando-cialli

Mihail Paskalov *(Moldova)*



Mihail Paskalov

My name is Mihail Paskalov. I was born in 1984, in the village of Tvarditsa, now a town, in Moldova. I became acquainted with the kaval for the first time in Tvarditsa, when I applied to college, and I liked it as an instrument because of its sound and timbre.

I studied at the college from 2000 to 2004. My first teacher was Georgi Penev (2000–2002), then Dancho Radulov (2002–2004). At that time, we were fortunate to be taught by strong teachers who were good musicians and good people. I graduated from the college as an instrumentalist and teacher, then I applied for higher education (music pedagogy) in Taraclia, and later for a Master's degree in the city of Comrat, Moldova.

At present, I work as a teacher of Bulgarian folk instruments at the Music College "Center for Excellence in Education" in Tvarditsa. My student there is Alexander Paskalov (3rd year), and at the School of Arts in Tvarditsa my pupil is Sergey Pitragov (5th grade).

I work as a performer in the Bulgarian folk song and dance ensemble "Rodolyubie" in Taraclia, Moldova, in the *Gagauz* ensemble "Kadynzha" in the town of Ceadîr-Lunga, Moldova, and in the city of Comrat, Moldova, where I play the kaval in the wind orchestra. The Rodolyubie ensemble is the only Bulgarian professional folklore ensemble outside the borders of Bulgaria, and in general, I'm the only practicing and performing kaval player in Moldova.

Aleksander Todorov *(Moldova)*



Alexander Teodorov

I am a Bessarabian Bulgarian. I was born in 1985 in the village of Valya-Perzhey in the Taraclia region of southern Moldova. I have been interested in music since I was a child. When I was little, my brother Andrey played the kaval, and it was because of him that I became curious about this instrument.

My first kaval teacher was Mrs. Manka Bilcheva, who gave me Theodosii Spassov's album, *Long Path*, and this finally got to me, charmed me and "turned me on" to this instrument. In 1999, I was accepted into the Music High School in Pleven, Bulgaria in the class of Valentin Nedyalkov, who motivated me to play the kaval around the clock.

In 2000, I moved to the Republican Music College "Stefan Nyaga", the branch in the city of Tvarditsa, Republic of Moldova. Georgi Penev came there from Bulgaria at that time, and after him came Dancho Radulov.

Outside of school concerts and competition appearances all over Moldova, I started playing at weddings in Bulgarian and *Gagauz* villages in Moldova and Ukraine. In 2003, I was already a student at the Academy of Music, Dance, and Fine Arts "Prof. Asen Diamandiev" in Plovdiv, in the class of Prof. Dr. Lyuben Dosev.

Over time, I made all kinds of other appearances: interviews on various television and radio stations, festivals all over Europe with different configurations of musicians, as well as participation in the film, "*The Foreigner,*" by Niki Iliev, together with the tambourine[1] player Boris Mitin.

I am currently a performing artist in Ensemble Pazardzhik in Bulgaria. There I am a small part of the great orchestra of the ensemble, which presents concerts in Bulgaria and abroad.--

[1] We wonder if "tambura" was intended. —Eds.

Eddy Tijssen *(Netherlands)*



Eddy Tijssen

I was born in the Netherlands in 1950. Nowadays I still live in the Netherlands, in the province of Drenthe.

When I was 15 years old I started international folk dance and joined folklore dance weekends, where international teachers were invited. In 1969 Georgi Kinski from Veliko Tŭrnovo was invited. Up till then I just knew some Bulgarian dances like *pravo horo*, *Kulsko horo* and *paydushko horo*. Georgi taught us the basic Bulgarian folk dances like *rŭchenitsa*, *kopanitsa*, *daychovo*, etc. All that time we were only used to dancing with our legs and feet, it was a real challenge to now include arms and body as well as irregular rhythms.

Georgi also brought music with him from groups such as "Trakiyskata Troyka" and "Strandzhanskata Grupa," so the real authentic *bitov* ensembles! As soon as I heard this music, I fell in love with it, particularly the kaval with its foreign, eastern, magical sound. I was already playing instruments like the guitar, *frula* and the clarinet. But this is what I wanted to play!

On my second trip to Bulgaria, in 1970, we were guests at the apartment of Tsvyatko Vasilev. He had been our teacher in Holland the year before and had invited us to come to Bulgaria. I told him I wanted to buy a real good kaval instead of the one I had bought the year before in a shop in Plovdiv. He gave me the address of Stoyan Dimov in Nedevtsi.

That was the beginning of a long and intense relationship with Stoyan's family. They became my *Bŭlgarski tatko* and *Bŭlgarska mayka* and his sons are my *Bŭlgarski bratia*. Krŭstyo, the eldest (also my teacher), is retired now, but was for 35 years one of the best kaval players in the National Radio Sofia orchestra. Besides that, he is one of the best kaval makers in Bulgaria, with national and international clients.



Eddy Tijssen and Stoyan Dimov, Nedevtsi, 1970

In the seventies and eighties, I returned every year to Bulgaria, and Stoyan was my teacher. During the time at home in Holland I was rehearsing intensely, but when I returned to Nedevtsi I had to start all over again. The first song Stoyan taught me was *Lyavata* of Stoyan Velichkov. I loved and still love the *trakiyski stil* the most, the fluent, smooth way of playing.

During the years of my visits to Bulgaria, I was blessed by meeting all the members of Trakiyskata Troyka and Strandzhanskata Grupa. I was really very lucky!!

I never attended kaval classes, because I had a very good teacher in Stoyan, and also I developed my career as a specialist in Bulgarian folk dance. I had my dance education in Gabrovo and Dobrich and returned to Bulgaria every 2 to 3 years to learn more. Of course I attended the famous festivals at Koprivshtitsa every 5 years and always met a lot of friends there. Bulgaria became my second "native" country.

When Jaap Leegwater started the dance ensemble "Praznik" in 1980 in the Netherlands, I joined it as a dancer and *repetitor*. At the same time I got connected with people who also played the *bitov* instruments. We formed the orchestra "Prijatno", and over the next 10 years, we played everywhere.



Prijatno, 1985 l-r: Eddy Tijssen, Mees Muller Rob Kerkhoven, Wim Zuiderwijk

Prijatno was a real bitov orchestra: *gayda*, *gŭdulka*, kaval, two *tamburi*, and a *tŭpan*. We played Bulgarian as well as Macedonian folk music, which resulted in producing a CD in 1990.

We also accompanied Praznik in performances, and I was lucky to have Prijatno as live musicians in my Bulgarian dance workshops.

In 1995 the Bulgarian singer Desislava Georgieva came to Holland and we formed the "Desislavaband" for 1 year.

Many years later, in 2024, I started and still play with a small bitov orkestra, "Drentska Troyka." Two good friends of mine play the gayda and gŭdulka, and I'm on the kaval.

Nienke van Keulen *(Netherlands)*



Nienke van Keulen

I was born in 1970 in Culemborg, the Netherlands. My interest in Bulgarian folklore actually started when I danced in an ensemble for international folk dance. It soon became clear that the dances from the Balkans appealed to me the most. Especially dances from the former Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. In addition to my studies at the Rotterdam dance academy, I also danced in the ensemble "Praznik." That's where my love for Bulgarian music grew. I immediately get energy when I hear a good Bulgarian band. I can rewind certain parts of songs 10 times to hear them again. The music is varied because of the different time signatures. My favorite time signature is 7/8: 2-2-3, and I think the most beautiful music is the music from Trakia. So I can't get enough of a *trakiyska rŭchenitsa*. If the orchestra plays well, I can dance rŭchenitsa all evening long.

I love all the Bulgarian instruments, but my preference goes to the *gŭdulka* and the kaval. I am a wind player, so I wanted to try the kaval. If you are lucky enough to have a good instrument at your mouth, the first notes come quite quickly. Playing a melody is not difficult, but getting it in the right style is another story. You just need a person like Lyuben for that.

After studying at the dance academy, I got a scholarship via the NUFFIC (a Dutch organization for internationalization in education) to study kaval at the Academy in Plovdiv. And there, I met my teacher, Lyuben Dosev. Lyuben is a very good teacher. I learned the most from him. I play by ear, because I can't read notes, but he had a lot of patience. He did insist that the style was played correctly. That is good, no mercy with a beginner from abroad.

I can still remember my very first lesson. The melody was simple, but there they came, my very first ornaments. I was so happy to finally learn the secrets!

The most difficult thing for me was to blow powerfully, and with a long breath. If you can't do that, you can't play the high notes either. Years and years later, when I found a studio in Amsterdam where I could play as much as I wanted, I finally got a nice strong tone and could also reach the high notes. It is a nice feeling to feel the vibrations of the air through the kaval.

I had a fantastic time in Bulgaria, everyone was very kind and helpful. Most people didn't speak English back then, so I had to speak Bulgarian. That's the best way for me to learn a language. Without books, just start talking.

I lived in the apartment above my best friend, Iliana Bozhanova. I ate at her place almost every night with her big, nice family. The nice thing about Bulgaria is that you can make music at home all day long, except between 2 and 4 pm. I could also often study in the Academy itself, in a study room up-

stairs. It was so nice to be in the building of the Academy. To be surrounded by the sounds of Bulgarian voices and instruments. Waiting in the hallway for an appointment was not a punishment at all.

After half a year I went back to the Netherlands. I had learned so much, it all had to become a bit organic and that was stimulated by playing in the orchestra of ensemble "Zarowe." Zarowe has toured Bulgaria several times.

At that time I also started studying nursing. After my studies, I worked as a nurse in various hospitals and institutions.

During holidays, I often went back to Bulgaria for kaval lessons. Over the years, I have had lessons from several teachers, namely:

- Lyuben Dosev
- Temelko Ivanov
- Stoyan Paurov
- Nedyalko Nedyalkov

One day I met Theodossi Spassov, when he made a documentary about his world tour. He played in the Bimhuis in Amsterdam. After the concert, I spoke to him, and he wanted to hear what I had learned in Bulgaria. I played *Lale li si*. After I'd played a few notes, he told his crew to come back, with the camera, and film me. When I was done, he asked, "Did you have lessons from Lyuben Dosev?" "How do you know?" "I can hear that." Together with Jan Wollring, who brought his accordion, we played some more melodies. I don't know if it was ever broadcast in Bulgaria, but it was a nice moment.



On Rodina TV, 2014

In 2014, we went with the ensemble "Mladost" on tour to Bulgaria, where we gave performances in various places in the country. The entire concert was broadcast on Rodina TV several times.

Due to various circumstances, I haven't played for a while. Maybe that will happen again in the future.

Study:

- Dance academy Rotterdam
- The Academy Plovdiv 1992/1993 (6 months)
- Medical nursing

Work:

- Medical nurse in various hospitals
- Volunteer work Ronald McDonald House Emma Amsterdam

- Dog sitter

Ensembles:

- Dance ensemble “Praznik,” Bulgarian dance, artistic director Eddy Tijssen
- Dance ensemble “Rŭchenitsa,” Plovdiv, artistic director Dimitŭr Doychinov
- Kaval player in the orchestra of dance ensemble “Zarowe”
- Leader of the orchestra “Jan Wollring,” artistic director dance Esther Willems
- Kaval player in the orchestra of dance ensemble “Mladost”
- Leader of the orchestra “Kathy van Prooijen,” artistic director dance Esther Willems

YouTube: Ensemble Zarowe: Trakiya (choreographer: Iliana Bozhanova, music: Lyuben Dosev)
Ensemble Zarowe: Dobrudzha (choreographer: Esther Willems)
Dance ensemble Mladost: Trakiya (choreographer: Iliana Bozhanova)
Dance ensemble Mladost: Severnyashko (choreographer: Esther Willems)
Dance ensemble Mladost: Shoplŭk (choreographer: Esther Willems)

Bajsa Arifovska Dimitrova *(North Macedonia)*



Bajsa Arifovska

I was born in Kočani in the Republic of Macedonia in 1978. I am Macedonian and live mostly in Skopje, but also travel very often to Sofia, due to my marriage there. I am currently a first chair instrumentalist (tambura) in the National Ensemble for Dances and Songs, "Tanec-Skopje" in Macedonia. I am also a former teacher of Macedonian traditional instruments in the music high school "Ilija Nikolovski-Luj" in Skopje.

I was about 13-14 years old when I started to travel with our local amateur folk ensemble to different Balkan folk festivals, and started to recognize Bulgarian folk music and instruments first by ear only.

I must mention that I started studying Macedonian kaval first, when I was 18, in a music academy in Skopje, as a student of Prof.-Dr. Dragan Dautovski.

That academy education was very successful and complete, including tone production, the technique of performing, style, different ornamentations and sound, repertoire, etc. I started playing professionally in concert and recording activities, solo and group performances, even in a dedicated teacher's role in a public music high school in Skopje. During that period I also listened to Bulgarian folk music (which was important to me in the process of self-education), but still didn't play a Bulgarian kaval seriously. That happened much later.

As for the Bulgarian kaval in my country, to be honest I hardly know anyone who has played or performed publicly. I know only my friend Ilija Janevski, who studied with Prof. Dr. Dosev and graduated with a master's degree in Plovdiv, but I haven't had the opportunity to see and hear him.

My friends in Bulgaria start with Nedyalko Nedyalkov first, as a very important person who really inspired me and motivated me to play the Thracian kaval. There are also the other highly respected musicians from the folk orchestra at Bulgarian National Radio: Krŭstyo Dimov, Kostadin Genchev, and Georgi Dobrev. Then Dragni Dragnev from Varna, Zhivko Vasilev from Sofia, and Minas Dafkas from Greece.

I've studied Thracian kaval with Nedyalko Nedyalkov. We met each other personally on a world music stage in Italy in 2014. Almost 10 years later, when I actually started to travel more often to Sofia, I decided, "It's time for a new challenge on another instrument." I was deeply inspired and called Nedyalko to ask him to order me a good instrument. Then he told me a good story about Krŭstyo Dimov, and so I met another excellent master and person at the same time.

My curiosity and interest about that instrument was a good sign for Nedyalko and a reason for him to invite me to one of his seminars. I was happy. It was a good experience and an opportunity for me as a professional musician to observe directly the similarity and the differences between the two in-

struments: Thracian and Macedonian kaval. Nedyalko is very helpful: he gives his knowledge openly, selflessly, deeply and studiously, and I was right...all those ''micro'' problems are actually the big key to open a door to another world!

My participation in the EEFC has been mostly as an online teacher or performer of Macedonian traditional music, including songs and tunes/dances for *Izvoren orkestar* (kaval, *gajda*, *tambura*, *tapan*). The most recent class was about Macedonian clarinet, where I showed and taught the students about different styles of treating that instrument in Macedonia. It included the old *čalgija* style—the music, dances and songs influenced by the Ottoman Empire—with instruments like *kanun*, *oud*, violin, clarinet of course, *tarabuka*, and *def*). I also taught city style, Romany oriental style, and more contemporary style as well.

Over the years, I've performed a lot. These include concerts around the world with the Dragan Dautovski quartet, with "Tanec" in Skopje (where I work), and my other private projects and seminars through the Balkans, Europe, Canada, America, and Australia.

There are also many CD recordings:

- with the Dragan Dautovski Quartet: *Roots and blossoms*, *The Path of the Sun*, *Flame*, and *Razboj*
- Recordings and concerts with my mandolin orchestra
- Traditional recordings: *Bajsa Arifovska and Macedonian Chalgia*, and *Kon Istok*
- Music for the choreodrama *Broken dream* and others
- Other CDs as a guest musician: *Essauera* project, *Ahimsa* trio, and the *Harmelogic* trio
- Concerts and recordings with *Amala* and the Slovenian Symphonic & Big Band orchestras

One important live performance for me was "The Rhythm of the Balkans" with the folk orchestra of Bulgarian National Radio in March 2024. And, as a continued friendly and professional communication with Nedyalko Nedyalkov, we did a project "Balkan rainbow" seven months later in Skopje.

I perform Thracian kaval depending on the events and kind of music I like to prepare. For example, there was a cultural event initiated by a Romany non-governmental organization and our Ministry of Culture from Skopje. I invited my colleagues, musicians from Skopje and a singer from Sofia, Ivaylo Dimitrov (my husband). The music was a mixture of Balkan motifs (Romany, Bulgarian, Macedonian, Turkish), mostly arranged and composed by me. Another instance was performing with the "Arco" chamber orchestra conducted by Erhan Shukri. It was originally a composition for *kemenche*, but I transcribed it for a Thracian D kaval.

I can remember my first big concert with the Dragan Dautovski Quartet in Universal Hall in Skopje, with guests Alexandra Popovska on vocals and Ratko Dautovski (Dragan's son) on percussion. It was a really great concert for everyone, with wonderful music and energy. Ratko and I were young, still students. After the concert, a lot of people came backstage to congratulate us, with cameras, lights, interviews. And some men hugged me, excited, under the wrong impression: "Oh, congratulations! You are amazing, same as your father!" I blinked my eyes twice, thinking that for sure he doesn't know my father, and decided to correct him: "You mean, like my professor!? He replied, "Oh, I thought you were his daughter! And I said, "You know, you are not so far off"! I had already accepted my professor as my second father!

Ilija Janevski *(North Macedonia)*



Ilija Janevski (right), with Lyuben Dosev

I was born in 1976, in Skopje, Macedonia. I developed an interest in music from a young age. At seven years old, I began learning to play the accordion and progressed very quickly. At the age of ten, I became a member of the orchestra at the Children's Cultural Center—"Karpoš." While a member of this orchestra, I developed a desire to play the kaval, and thus I began teaching myself to play it.

After finishing primary school, I enrolled in a music high school at what was then the Music and Ballet School Center "Ilija Nikolovski–Luj" in Skopje. My education in music did not stop at school; at the same time, I was also a member of the orchestra of the Academic Cultural and Artistic Society "Mirče Acev" in Skopje, where I later became conductor and kaval soloist.

In 1995, I enrolled at the Faculty of Music Arts in Skopje in the Department of Music Theory and Pedagogy, while at the same time joining the Department of Folk Instruments in the class of Prof. Dr. Dragan Dautovski. I graduated on time, receiving many commendations from most of my professors and recommendations to continue with postgraduate studies. Unfortunately, the academy did not offer a specialization in kaval, which I wanted to pursue, so I continued to research and study independently.

Meanwhile, I was also a member of the musical group "Akademci," with whom I performed numerous concerts both across the country and internationally. Between 2001–2004, I formed a multi-ethnic ensemble consisting of instrumentalists from various Balkan countries, with whom I gave many concerts across Europe and participated in festivals. Around the same time, I found work as a music education teacher at the primary school "Živko Brajkovski" in Skopje, where I formed a student orchestra that went on to win numerous awards, recognition, and gratitude.

In 2011, I was appointed teacher of folk instruments at the State Music and Ballet School Center "Ilija Nikolovski–Luj" in Skopje, where in a short period of time I won many awards and distinctions. In 2013, I formed the folk instrument orchestra "Kladenec," with which we have had numerous performances in the country and abroad. Alongside my teaching, I have collaborated with a large number of performers, for whom I have recorded many works and taken part in many of their concerts and performances.

I am the author of 4 concert pieces for kaval and symphony orchestra, 20 dances for folk and instrumental orchestra, and many works for Orff ensembles. In addition, I am the author and arranger of 74 newly composed songs in the folk spirit.

I am also a multi-instrumentalist, as I play several instruments, including: kaval, *šupelka*, *duduk*, *dvojniče*, *gajda*, *zurla*, *tambura*, *kemane*, *šarkija*, *tapan*, guitar, accordion, and piano.

I have won many awards, among which I would highlight:

- 1989 – Grand Prix Pioneers in Soko Banja
- 1992 – First Prize "Folklore Pearls" in Belgrade
- 1995 – At the "Pece Atanasovski" Festival in the village of Dolneni—Prilep region, Macedonia, a special plaque for best improvisation (non-mensural [unmetered] improvisation)
- 2001 – The most important to me: the Golden Ladybug for Peace from the then-President of the Republic of Macedonia, Kiro Gligorov

—and many others.

In 2014, I discovered by chance that the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts (AMTII) in Plovdiv had opened a department for master's studies in folk instruments. After a long search, I enrolled in AMTII in the Department of Musical Folklore in the class of Prof. Dr. Lyuben Dosev. Within one year I completed my postgraduate studies with the highest grades and many recommendations from the professors, such as, "We expect you next year in the doctoral program."

Currently, I am a doctoral student at AMTII-Plovdiv in the Department of Musical Folklore, with scientific advisor Prof. Dr. Lyuben Dosev.

Melina Margareta Saxena *(Norway)*



Melina Margareta Saxena

I was born at midsummer in the middle of Norway, Trondheim, in 1981. My mother is from Sweden and my father is from India. They moved to Norway when my father got a job there, and me and my sisters were born. Now I live in Oslo and have lived here 18 years.

I have always had a thing for Balkan music, the rhythms and the beautiful deeply felt melodies just call to me. I have felt that way since I was a kid, and I remember being amazed by some Greek *tambura* players I saw when I was 4 years old on a family trip.

During my twenties I went to some Balkan concerts at festivals here in Norway, and then saw that magical flute and wanted to learn more about it. In Norway, we had the amazing band "Farmers Market," that played a lot of Bulgarian music, with Stian Carstensen who also plays the kaval so beautifully. So I was also introduced to this nice music with crazy odd rhythms through them. They have really spread Bulgarian folk music around for people to know about it!

In 2013 I formed and played in a Balkan band here in Oslo, the "Oslo Balkan Band," and through that I decided that I wanted to find out more about that magical nice flute sound that was in all the Bulgarian tunes that I was listening to and learning by ear. I googled and found a description on how to make a kaval by yourself out of PVC. I went and made one. It was really hard to play and to figure out how to play on my own, but I was eager to continue, even though I could only get out one or two notes at first. I contacted Stian Carstensen from "Farmers Market." He loaned me a kaval and some nice video recordings with kaval players from when he had been traveling around Bulgaria. So inspiring.

I bought a one-way ticket to attend the Plovdiv Folk Seminar and travel around the Balkans to learn more about the folklore music and culture. My very first kaval teacher at the seminar was Stoyan Paurov. A really nice teacher and a very good composer. After him I have had lessons with several teachers such as: Temelko Ivanov, Kiril Belezhkov, and Vasil Vasilev. I have been to the Plovdiv Folk Seminar since 2013. There I learned to play the kaval and also met other kaval players from around the globe, who are now good friends of mine. It was so nice to connect around something so specific as Bulgarian music and kaval.

In 2013 my Oslo Balkan Band collaborated with the wind band, "Vestre Aker Musikkorps," in Oslo. We played a concert with Bulgarian music together with them. I played kaval in the band.

In 2016 I was asked to join a nice project that wanted to take a Norwegian folk tune and make it sound Bulgarian, add Bulgarian ornaments and change the time signature. It was a part of a bigger concert, with mixed music from everywhere, that was held at the Opera House in Oslo.

In 2016 friends from abroad and I formed a project band named "Mish Mash group." We did a small tour in France together with a female choir, a children's choir, and a dance group. The instruments in our band were: accordion, *tambura*, violin, vocal/drum and me on soprano saxophone and kaval.

In 2017 I was asked to play solo kaval with a brass band named "Oslo Brass Band," in a competition in Stavanger, here in Norway. This brass band competition is a very popular one in the brass band world here, so they stream it on television every year. The brass bands were doing a Bulgarian music program. Some arrangements with Bulgarian folk tunes were presented.

In 2019 a project band was formed in Oslo to make a show together with a Bulgarian folk dance group "I-HA" that I danced with here in Norway. They made the choreography, and we played the music. The instruments were kaval, accordion, tambura, *tŭpan* and singing.

I have played kaval for the celebration of St. Kiril and Metodij Day for the Bulgarian Orthodox Church here in Oslo several times. Such a nice thing to do. There I have played solo kaval and duo with accordion.

I still play in the Oslo Balkan Band, which is now more of a project band that takes bookings to play at parties, celebrations, weddings or whatever people want. The instruments are clarinet/vocal, accordion, and me on soprano saxophone and kaval.

I also currently play in a folk band named "Åretak" (which means something like a single pull of an oar in rowing). We mostly play Norwegian and Swedish folk music, but also include folk music from around the globe, such as Bulgarian folk music. I play saxophone and kaval with that band. I like to teach the audience some easy Bulgarian folk dance steps, so that they can dance to some of our music when we play.

I'm now and then doing some projects with kaval and other instruments. Melting traditions together and making new sounds and music and also playing traditional Bulgarian folk music. Instruments used depend on the concept and concert we are playing at.

Here's a funny and scary story: When I was playing in the brass band competition with the Oslo Brass Band, I was supposed to walk up some stairs at the back of the stage to play on a balcony together with a cornet player, after playing a slow melody in the front of the stage. After that I was supposed to put down my D kaval and pick up my C kaval and walk up to another part of the balcony to play a solo there. Just me on the C kaval. I had put my C kaval on the floor of the first balcony before the concert started. Everything started and when I was finished playing and was supposed to change kavals, my C kaval was gone. I couldn't see it. The brass band was still playing and I knew that when that tune was finished I was supposed to start my solo and be on that other balcony!! I was in shock about what to do. The tune had to be played on the C kaval due to a nice transition in key signatures and the next tune they were going to play. Then I had a tap on my shoulder. The cornet player saw that I was in a bit of panic, searching. He pointed behind me. He had put my C kaval on some seats behind us so it wouldn't be stepped on lying on the floor. Aaahhhh, all good. And it went fine. But gosh, we laughed about that after the concert.

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Toune de Montmollin *(Switzerland)*



Toune de Montmollin

I was born in 1961, and I'm a recently retired music therapist.

Twenty-five years ago, I discovered the kaval at a concert by the group "La Folia" in Bern. I tried to get a sound out of it, without success! This motivated me to learn to play the kaval. From then on, every year at Easter, I went to the VTI Easter folk dance and dance music seminar in Flüehli-Ranft, Switzerland, where for several years I had the chance, along with Rita Peloso, to benefit from Nikolay Doktorov's teaching. Currently, we are taking lessons together in Zurich with Murrough O'Brien, who also is studying the kaval with Nikolay.

In 2019 and 2025, we participated in the Bulgarian Folk Music and Dance Seminar, Plovdiv, and took kaval lessons with Vasil Vasilev. Also a very good teacher! I play Balkan music on the kaval and flute in the group "Punto" (violin, clarinet, accordion, double bass).

Murrough O'Brien *(Switzerland)*



Murrough O'Brien

I was born in Dublin, Ireland in 1983 to an Irish father and a Muslim South-African Indian (Pretoria SA, Gujarat, India) mother. I now reside in Switzerland.

I had probably heard the *Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares* albums when I was a child, but when I was 23 or 24, I heard an interview on the radio with Dessislava Stefanova about the "London Bulgarian Choir," but I didn't pay much attention to it. Later, I met a flat-mate of a friend who sang in that choir, and I eventually joined in 2008. I started to hear about the kaval, that it was difficult to play, and found a Teodosii Spassov CD in a friend's collection in 2010. We toured in Bulgaria that year, but I still wasn't very aware of the instrument. The first live exposure happened when I was 28, in 2011, at a Bulgarian music camp when I had just moved to Switzerland, and Nikolay Doktorov from Varna was teaching. I had the experience of singing solo, with him and other instrument teachers accompanying me.

At the third Bulgarian music camp in 2013, I was mostly there to work the bar—singing less—and Nikolay was also there again. I said to him that "I might try to get a sound out of one of your flutes." He later approached me with a kaval, removed the head of it, quickly showed the mouth position, the angle, a couple of tips, and told me to come back to him when I could sustain a note. Choir had a free block in the morning, so I went and sat outside the kaval classroom and tried, this way and that, what angle, where does the line go from the kaval across my face, etc., etc. It took me about an hour to get a reproducible sound. I returned to Nikolay and he gave me the rest of the instrument and instructed me to start with A and play long notes.

I bought the kaval at the end of the seminar, and he said, "If you need anything, materials or help, get in touch,. which I later did, but he was busy at the time, and I wasn't the type to ask twice. I went to Japan for 2 weeks after that seminar, and I remember sitting in parks, playing long notes. I continued with the instrument, armed with sheet music from 3 seminars, some tune recordings, and interest, but no instruction on technique. I continued for 2 years, but eventually gave the instrument to a very enthusiastic neighbor in India, where I was immersed in yoga for a few months, who would come by daily and ask to borrow the kaval.

A friend eventually got me another kaval in Plovdiv three years later, at my request, and I finally started having regular lessons with Nikolay in 2020, when I travelled to Varna with a friend, Sigi Nagel, who has a big house there, dedicated to folk music.

Kaval players I'm friends with: well, Nikolay as my teacher, Dragni Dragnev, Temelko Ivanov, Veliko Velikov, Kostadin Genchev, and Gergana Dimitrova. Alexandre Choux—who I will write about again. Toune de Montmollin, Rita Peloso. I made some new friends in Bulgaria this year, including Damyan Iordanov. I've studied with Nikolay Doktorov, and had a lesson or two from Veliko Velikov, and Dragni Dragnev, and Temelko Ivanov.

I have two students: Toune de Montmollin and Rita Peloso, two Swiss women, both now retired, both with much more musical experience than I. I have no idea how many instruments Toune plays/owns, while Rita is also a transverse flute player. They were both playing kaval with Nikolay for years before me, but when I met them again before traveling to Bulgaria to study with Nikolay, 1.5 years after I began studying seriously myself, they approached me and told me they wanted to have lessons with me after my return, as they found the language barrier with Nikolay too difficult, and the online option wasn't suitable for them. Now we are at three years working together, and they received praise for their progress at the Plovdiv seminar this year. I am inspired, and am planning to begin to promote myself to teach.

My most memorable performance has been to play in duet with Dessi Stefanova, leader of the London and Swiss Bulgarian Choirs, formerly of the "Filip Kutev Ensemble," and an old friend. This is my favorite playing style: kaval and singer. We reproduced Yanka Rupkina & Stoyan Velchikov's *Mŭri Maro* (*Altŭn Mara*), at a concert in the Greek Orthodox Church in Zürich, in the summer of 2024. It was a real honor, and I felt I did the piece, and Mr. Velichkov and Dessi, justice, which is not always the case.

I'm a singer with the "Swiss Bulgarian Choir," and we have some songs with band accompaniment. We also have some musicians in the choir, so we have the "Swiss Bulgarian Band!" We have performed with the choir, and on some concert occasions we also play some instrumental pieces for dancing, usually afterwards. We have, so far, had one big concert independently, at a Swiss city's cultural event, and have played at a party/wedding or two, etc.

These concerts happen mostly in and around Zürich, Switzerland, but also farther away in the country. This summer (2025) was the first time our band went abroad, on tour in Bulgaria. We played in Zelenika (Varna) and Tryavna (Gabrovo). In Stara Zagora our choir collaborated with "Zagorche," and so the band played with their orchestra for a couple of pieces, too, and the same setup at the Koprivshtitsa festival.

In the Spring of 2021, I had travelled to Bulgaria and taken my first series of lessons with Nikolay six months prior. I was living in a strange apartment, only for a few weeks between places, which was difficult to find due to old-town architecture. One day, there was a knock at the door: a young man doing charity work. I declined his cause, but invited him to drink tea because he seemed stressed. We sat at my doorstep talking, and he told me why he was doing this kind of work: to save up to travel by bicycle from his native France to Nepal. I asked him more details. He talked about his past, his interests, including having started studying at the conservatory, many things. I asked about his route, and the first country he mentioned was Bulgaria. My interest piqued, I asked further questions, also referring to his talking about music.

He told me he had had a dream where he was playing a flute, but couldn't see what kind of flute it was, but that it led him to do a lot of research, which ended up with him choosing to start playing the kaval. Silently, I got up and went to fetch my kavals, which was a big surprise for both of us! There are so few Bulgarian kaval players outside of Bulgaria, and he finds me by knocking at my door, and having a very unlikely conversation!. He had just started taking lessons online with Zhivko Vasilev, and I showed him videos on my phone from a concert of "Outhentic"—Zhivko's band—from six months before, that Nikolay had taken me to, as he was Zhivko's first teacher. It was a wonderful, impossible chance meeting, with Alexandre Choux.

Eventually, after setting off on his cycling journey, our timing lined up so that he could be in Varna when I was there in 2022, and so he came and stayed in the house where I was a guest, and there he met Nikolay and also became his student, while also having more immersive experiences of Bulgarian folklore. Our next meeting was 2 years later, also in Bulgaria, when he was returning from Asia, still with his bicycle, so we organized to stay together in Zlatograd, where we attended Nikolay's kaval academy.

Our most recent meeting was in Koprivshtitsa (2025), where we could play together on stage with the kaval players from Dobrudhza. It is a wonderful friendship, from such an unlikely beginning. I often say to him how much I enjoy having a kaval geek friend, where we send each other music, questions, opinions and frustrations about all things kaval. It very much enriches the experience of learning the instrument, and doing so outside Bulgaria. How lucky we are now, to have this technology where we can access and share so much music and material so easily.

Another story that comes to mind was in Spring of 2022. Alexandre Cellier, son of Marcel Cellier, of "Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares" fame, but also a known local musician in my region and someone who had been an acquaintance/friend for some years, invited me to perform a kaval and piano duet with him at a concert featuring the "Eva Quartet" that he was organizing in my local, beautiful, small, very old church. He was also presenting two other musicians in collaboration. We prepared a *chetvorno horo* (T. Prashanov) from the syllabus, which was still not perfect for me, but I liked it.

For a bit of background, when I was singing in the London Bulgarian Choir 12 years beforehand, I had a huge musical crush on the Eva Quartet. It was specifically their rendition of *Ibish Aga* that seduced me, which I listened to hundreds of times over a month to learn to sing it. I had since met them several times, done workshops with them, had conversations. But here I was now, performing on the same stage as them. I was told the running order; I would be sixth. And I thought it was fine. But then I slowly, progressively, went through all the stages of nerves, anxiety, stage-fright, as I sat through the first performances, and then it was me. I got up, was presented, and we began. The four women of the quartet were sitting directly in front of me, like queens in their beautiful costumes.

The beginning was shaky, and then it settled down and I could play alright, but as time went on, my fingers got stiffer and stiffer, my breath got shallower and shallower, my throat getting tighter as I felt like I was drowning. Even before this, I didn't fear performance anymore. I rather think of a performance as inevitable, unpredictable, and it will be over at some point anyway. But that didn't make that experience any easier! And as I was slipping out of control and just holding on until the end, those women just looked me in the eyes and gave me such support, reminding me that all musicians go through these stages, and that we're all part of a big family, supporting each other to get better.

Support or not, I still died on stage in front of 'my idols'—if I could say I ever had idols—albeit from another discipline. The performance ended, cheers and applause, and the concert went on and was lovely. I came away from that experience feeling, "If I can die on stage in front of them and still be alive at the end of it, I can survive any performance." What a wonderful way to overcome stage nerves! I was also happy to have video evidence of the performance, because OK, while it was shaky in places, it was actually quite alright.

I'm an acupuncturist by qualification, though I closed my practice in 2023, and have since been focussing mostly on my young daughter, and leaning more into music and associated projects. My father was an instrument maker as his main profession for the first part of my childhood, before

moving on to other things. He was particularly interested in viols and early music, so having an unusual musical interest is not unusual for us! I am also interested to learn how to make kavals. My brother is also a professional musician and associate professor in his institution (double bass—jazz).

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Mŭri Maro: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c1m7aVGL-Nk

Rita Peloso *(Switzerland)*



Rita Peloso

I was born in 1959 in Winterthur, Switzerland. At the age of 35 I was fortunate enough to discover folk music and was able to play the transverse flute and *frula* in the "Polifonia" group (6 people), which I still do today. We play traditional music, mainly from Serbia and Macedonia, with the occasional piece from Bulgaria and Romania.

I increasingly heard people talking about how beautiful the kaval was. I was interested, and a folk dance teacher brought me a Bulgarian kaval. A musician from Macedonia spent an hour trying to show me how to produce a sound from this instrument. Nothing came out! Back home, I knew how to do it and kept trying until I finally got a sound.

In 2011 and 2012, I took part in the VTI Easter folk dance and dance music seminar (vti.world) in Flüeli-Ranft, Switzerland, where Nikolay Doktorov was teaching. Since I usually learned on my own, I played the instrument with tongue slaps. But when listening to Bulgarian kaval music, I never understood what else was being done. It just sounds different. A different technique? The tongue is not needed! I was motivated to learn the correct technique at the Bulgarian Folk Music and Dance Seminar in Plovdiv in 2019.

In 2025, Toune de Montmollin and I had the opportunity to continue our studies with Vasil Vasilev. Thanks to Murrough O'Brien, who takes lessons from Nikolay Doktorov, we now have the opportunity to take regular kaval lessons and continue learning. The instrument is wonderful, but sometimes it can be frustrating when learning is difficult. Still, I am delighted to slowly understand Bulgarian music, with its versatile timbre created by vibratos, trills, glissandos, *hlopki*, etc., and also that the sound always comes out during performances!

Aras Poyraz Açıkgöz *(Turkey)*



Aras Poyraz Açıkgöz

I was born on January 31, 1989, in the Aegean Region of Turkey, in the Salihli district of Manisa province. The region where I was born carries the legacy of Sardis, the historical capital of the ancient Lydian civilization. Sardis shaped world economic history with the invention of money and was also a multi-layered center where religious, social, and cultural life took shape. I currently live in the city of Izmir, Turkey.

My father's *Yörük* heritage and my mother's background as a Balkan immigrant introduced me to two distinct cultural frameworks from an early age. The presence of the kaval tradition in Yörük and immigrant communities has been decisive in shaping my musical inclinations. This cultural predisposition has enabled the Balkan musical tradition to be kept alive in my family, while kaval playing has gained continuity in my individual identity. Today, I am the only person in my family who continues this tradition.

I began my musical journey at the age of 15 with the kaval. During my high school years, I participated in various competitions with a folk music orchestra and won first place in Turkey three times in the solo instrument category. Inspired by my esteemed teacher Sinan Çelik, renowned in Turkey for his authentic kaval performances, I turned to understanding and learning the kaval; I later became his student. During this process, my encounter with the Thracian kaval broadened my musical horizons. Listening to Bulgarian kaval virtuosos such as Dragan Karapchanski, Nikola Ganchev, Dosyo Milkov, Stoyan Velichkov, Gospodin Stanev, and Ivan Bogoev was a significant turning point in my musical understanding. During my academic years, I began researching the position of the kaval in Bulgarian folk music and observed that the instrument was performed in a wide social context, from weddings to funeral ceremonies. The term "*meden kaval*," frequently mentioned in interviews with performers in Bulgaria, concretized the importance of the Thracian kaval in folklore.

It all began one weekend when I first picked up the kaval my father had given me, as I was sitting by the fire in the mountains. Since that day, the kaval has become an integral part of my life. I had known about the kaval before, but I had never actually held one in my hands. Since there were no kaval players in the city where I lived, there was no one who could teach me. Starting this difficult journey alone, I listened to records, cassettes, CDs, and watched digital platforms to follow instrumentalists, especially kaval players, trying to distinguish and understand their playing styles while learning the holding position, tone production, finger placement, and blowing techniques. I gradually began to imitate authentic kaval players. Achieving the right tone was difficult, and capturing the tones of the performers I listened to was even more difficult. I worked tirelessly, never giving up.

During this time, meeting Sinan Çelik, Turkey's renowned kaval virtuoso, changed my life. During school breaks, I would travel 450 km from my city to visit my teacher and play the kaval. He didn't just teach me how to play; he explained where a kaval player could find inspiration, what kind of music I should listen to, and what I needed to do to become a good musician. He emphasized in our lessons that the kaval was not only played in Anatolia, but that kaval performance was also highly advanced in the Balkans, especially in Bulgaria, and he directed me towards the Bulgarian kaval. Kaval virtuoso Sinan Çelik was my first teacher in this instrument.

Kaval players I am friends with:

- Turkey: Sinan Çelik, Mahmut Karagenç, Haydar Tanrıverdi, Aytunç Aydın.
- Greece: Stella Kampouridou
- Bulgaria: Prof. Dr. Lyuben Dosev, Dimo Jelev, Dancho Radulov, Dinko Farchanov, Nikolay Doktorov, Matyo Dobrev, Nikolay Georgiev, Temelko Ivanov, Nedyalko Nedyalkov, Krŭstyo Dimov, Konstantin Genchev, Theodosii Spassov, Vasko Vasilev, Vladimir Velichkov, Kiril Belezhkov, Nenko Tsachev, Damyan Dimov, Ivan Petrov, Hristiyan Hristov, Georgi Dobrev, Damyan Yordanov, Ilian Dinev, and Dimitŭr Kiryakov.

The person who played the biggest role in my understanding of the Thracian kaval was my teacher, Prof. Dr. Lyuben Dosev. He taught me not only the performance techniques, but also the historical journey of the kaval, its important performers, and its place in Bulgarian literature. By reminding us in every lesson of the great poet Ivan Vazov's words, "The kaval is the harp of the Bulgarian mountains," he emphasized that this instrument carries a sacred meaning.

I began my education in 2007 at the Plovdiv Academy of Music, Dance, and Fine Arts (now the "Prof. Asen Diamandiev" Academy of Music, Dance, and Fine Arts). After a one-year preparatory period, I continued my studies, completing my bachelor's degree between 2008 and 2012 and my master's degree in 2013. I hold the distinction of being the first Turkish kaval student in the history of this institution. Throughout my education, I was a student of Prof. Dr. Lyuben Dosev.

The *Trakya* kaval is taught by me to students outside the degree program. This student profile consists of individuals who are passionate about the instrument and interested in Bulgarian culture. Key elements that increase students' interest include: rich ornamentation techniques, speed and fluidity of performance, use of all registers of the kaval, the existence of pieces composed exclusively for the kaval, and rhythmic diversity in the pieces. Lessons are held periodically in Izmir.

I have not performed in a concert with famous instrumentalists. I have performed the Thracian kaval as a soloist many times with the Symphony Orchestra at music festivals held in many provinces and districts of Turkey's Thrace region and in Hamburg, Germany. I have performed works composed by the famous kaval virtuoso Theodosii Spassov, such as *Belchenski Rŭchenik* and *Staro Horo*. I would like to share some of my concerts where I accompanied on the Thracian kaval:

- Hamburg / Ahrensburg Chamber Orchestra Festival, April 14-16, 2016
- Edirne Thrace University, March 21, 2017
- Kırklareli University, May 18, 2017
- Tekirdağ Namık Kemal University, February 28, 2017

I currently use the Trakya kaval in *Sirto* and *Longa*, which are instrumental genres within traditional Turkish art music. I perform with different instruments outside of the traditional performance tradition, such as the *oud* and *kanun*.

In my first years at the Academy, I was in the preparatory class and took my Bulgarian lessons in the top floor of the Academy, known as "the attic." In those beautiful little rooms, which carried the tones and spirit of many famous kaval players and instrumentalists, when I finished my Bulgarian class with Gospozha Filipova, whom I loved like my teacher and mother, I would immediately grab my kaval and eagerly repeat what I had learned from my teacher, Lyuben Dosev. Repeating it over and over again until it was time for my kaval lesson and just starting to learn Bulgarian was very difficult for me. One day, I left my Bulgarian lesson again, did my repetition, and then waited in the room for Lyuben Dosev's kaval lesson. Lyuben was both a very disciplined and very witty teacher, and of course, I only came to understand his witty side once I started learning Bulgarian. The lesson began, and he said to me, "*Kalpazanin hayde* (Калпазанин хайде)" and started by saying, "We'll see if you sat around doing nothing at home or if you worked." By the way, I was very confused by the word "Kalpazanin (Калпазанин ["good-for-nothing," "rascal"])" at first, but then I grew to love it, because that was his way of showing affection, which was only natural for such a witty personality.

As always, I was working, not sleeping. I had to change my entire performance routine and work hard for it. I had practiced all the assignments he gave me and was showing them to him. After playing each measure, I waited for his approval. In the measures, he had marked embellishments on the notes. When I looked at him after playing each measure, Lyuben would nod his head up and down. I came from a different culture. In my culture, nodding your head up and down means, "Yes, I approve, it's correct." I learned after that lesson that nodding your head up and down means "no" in Bulgarian culture. I thought I was a student who had done all his homework correctly, worked hard at home, and made his teacher proud, and I was secretly happy, but I was devastated when he told me, "You haven't done anything at home, none of it is correct." I realized I needed to work even harder.

Performing on the Thracian kaval wasn't easy; in order to play the Thracian kaval, I first needed to study Bulgarian folklore, Bulgarian music history, Bulgarian folk creations, and geographical diversity. In this process, learning a culture wasn't sufficient with just music, which is one of its most basic building blocks; I must also live and experience the geography where the music developed to understand how all the products created by the people are interconnected. In short, I realized that day that I needed to "think and live like a Bulgarian." And for that, I thank you very much, my teacher, Lyuben Dosev, who helped me find myself.

From 2015 to 2018, I served as a lecturer at the Balkan Music Cultures Department of the Balkan Research Institute at Trakya University. During this period, I also performed as a kaval artist with the university's Balkan Symphony Orchestra, playing Bulgarian *rŭchenitsa* and *horo* dances. Since 2018, I have been working as a kaval instructor in the Music Department of the Faculty of Fine Arts, Design, and Architecture at Celal Bayar University in Manisa. I am also continuing my Ph.D./Master of Fine Arts education in Bulgarian Folklore at Ankara University of Music and Fine Arts.

I am married and we have a daughter. My wife's name is Betül, and my daughter's name is Leyla. My mother's name is Hayriye, my father's name is Adil, and my brother's name is Fırat.

Batuhan Aydın *(Turkey)*



Batuhan Aydın

Batuhan Aydın was born in Istanbul on July 14, 1991. His mother's family originates from the Ludogorie (Deliorman) region of northeastern Bulgaria, west of Dobrudzha, while his father's roots lie in Gümüşhane, a city in Türkiye's eastern Black Sea region. Aydın grew up in an environment deeply influenced by his parents' work as folk dance choreographers and folklorists. Unsurprisingly, young Batuhan took his first steps in music by imitating the traditional Turkish folk drum rhythms played by his father during dance performances.

At the age of 15, he was accepted to the high school division of Istanbul Technical University's Turkish Music State Conservatory. There, he encountered the instrument that would become his life's calling—the kaval. Aydın studied the kaval under Cihan Yurtçu, later continuing his training with Serdar Deli and Haydar Tanrıverdi.

From 2010 to 2013, he performed as a kaval player in the "Youth Orchestra of the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT)."

In 2014, he was the youngest instrumentalist to perform at the "1st International Kaval Conference" in Istanbul.

Academically, Aydın studied the kaval and traditional Bulgarian folk music with Prof. Lyuben Dosev at the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts "Prof. Asen Diamandiev" in Plovdiv, Bulgaria. He later engaged in academic research at the Department of Musicology at Istanbul Technical University's Turkish Music State Conservatory and earned a master's degree in Music and Performing Arts from Yıldız Technical University.

In the 2020 academic article, *The Kaval and the Symphonic Orchestra*, (authored by legendary Bulgarian kaval virtuoso Theodosii Spassov, a musician often hailed to be the founding figure of modern kaval playing), Batuhan Aydın is recognized as one of the most promising artists entrusted with carrying the instrument's legacy forward. Aydın is presented as a next-generation voice reshaping the identity of the kaval in both classical and contemporary contexts.

In addition to his artistic career, Aydın is active as an academic and scholar, regularly conducting workshops and master classes around the world, focusing on advanced kaval performance techniques, traditional Bulgarian folk music and related performance practices. Through these international teaching activities, he has established himself as a global ambassador of the kaval, reaching a wide range of students and professionals across Europe and beyond.

In addition to his solo career, Aydın is the founding member of "KAPIKO," an Istanbul-based ethno/world jazz and fusion ensemble centered around the kaval as lead instrument. As of 2025, KAPIKO has released two albums—*On Bierli* (2013) and *Nova* (2022)—along with two singles: *Viensko Horo* (2022), featuring legendary Bulgarian drummer Stoyan Yankoulov, and *Ethiopian Waltz* (2023). The

band's most recent album, *Nova*, is widely regarded as a milestone of Turkish fusion and ethno/world jazz. It was listed among the best Turkish jazz albums of 2022 by Türkiye's foremost jazz magazine, *Cazkolik*.

> *"KAPIKO's new album Nova has taken its place among the vanguard of contemporary ethno/world jazz and fusion albums. Over the course of Nova's 8 tracks, Batuhan Aydın's unique approach to improvisation—blending traditional Turkish and Bulgarian kaval techniques with concepts of modern jazz—creates a fresh new approach to fusion and ethno/world jazz."*
>
> —**Zekeriya Şen**, Music Critic

In 2022, Aydın released his composition, *Yana*, an intriguing example of oriental electronic fusion, in collaboration with world-famous Bulgarian electronic music producer Ivan Shopov. In *Yana*, oriental influences merge with a modern electronic idiom, creating a distinctive and immersive listening experience.



Performing "*Chifte Kaval*" with Teodosii Spassov, 2024

In 2024, Aydın broke new ground with *Chifte Kaval*, a collaboration with Teodosii Spassov, with whom he shares deep artistic kinship. This important project marks the first time that two kaval players from different cultural backgrounds have performed together with a classical orchestra. In *Chifte Kaval*, Aydın and Spassov narrate the story of the kaval—the instrument that bears witness to centuries of cultural history in Anatolia and the Balkans. It is a story of friendship and shared heritage, brought to life through the masterful performance of two of the world's leading kaval players. The project premiered to great acclaim on June 5, 2024, at Istanbul's Cemal Reşit Rey Concert Hall—Türkiye's most prestigious concert venue.

That same year, Aydın founded the "Batuhan Aydın Folk Quartet" together with Türkiye-based Austrian pianist and composer Dr. Nikolaus Grill, his longtime collaborator from KAPIKO. In this project, Aydın's contemporary and experimental improvisational concepts converge with Grill's microtonal harmonic language. Developed over two years of intensive theoretical, stylistic, and ethnomusicological research, the quartet represents one of the most innovative approaches to contemporary Turkish folk-jazz music.

Some renowned musicians who have collaborated with Aydın describe him as follows:

> *"Batuhan Aydın is not a musician—he is music itself!"*
>
> —**Prof. Bernhard Vanecek**, Mannheim University of Music & Performing Arts (Germany)

> *"He's living sunshine on earth."*
>
> —**Leonhard Paul**, Mnozil Brass (Austria)

"When Batuhan Aydın enters a room, you just know—he's the star of the evening."
—**Prof. Hristijan Nikolovski**, University of Goce Delčev Music Academy (North Macedonia)

"He is, by all means, a fantastic musician."
— **Prof. Bruno Cândido**, Conservatório Regional de Castelo Branco (Portugal)

Batuhan Aydın is widely recognized as one of the leading kaval players of his generation and a pioneer of modern kaval playing. Throughout his unique musical journey, he has redefined the role of the kaval in both traditional and contemporary music. Deeply rooted in the folk traditions of Anatolia and the Balkans, yet open and experimental in vision, Aydın has elevated the instrument to new heights on the global stage. Through his innovative techniques, profound improvisational voice, and unwavering dedication, he continues to shape the future of this ancient instrument—building bridges across cultures and time with every note he plays.

His work not only honors the kaval's rich cultural heritage but also transforms it into a vital, expressive voice for modern music, leaving an indelible mark on the art of kaval playing worldwide.

Cristina Catania-Flores *(United Kingdom)*



Cristina Catania-Flores

I was born in the UK, in London, in 2001, and I reside there today. My ethnic background is Spanish and white. I am a master's student in International Development Management and a graduate student in Music. I'm also a composer, piano teacher, and music facilitator for a community choir.

My first encounter with Bulgarian folk music and the kaval was at a music improvisation workshop in my university when I was 18 years old. I saw my professor playing the kaval, and I fell in love with the sound of the instrument. I later spoke to him to learn more and he offered to sell his kaval to me and connect me to his teacher (Kiril Belezhkov).

At this time the Covid-19 lockdown had just begun, so it was an opportunity to dedicate time to learning the new instrument with my online lessons with Kiril. Being a pianist, it was definitely a challenge learning a wind instrument! The diaphragm techniques were difficult, but I enjoyed the process and being challenged. I also loved learning and listening to the folk song repertoire which was so different from the Western music I was used to playing. I have not met any other players in the UK other than my old professor Alexander Gagatsis. I had the honor of meeting some of Kiril's other students across Europe when we met in Bulgaria.

When I first began learning the kaval, Covid-19 had just begun, so I had moved back home to live with my brother and father. Of course, we were spending all day in the same house, so they had to hear my practicing all day long which was...interesting! I think they found it funny, because it took me such a long time before I was making a sound that felt "pleasant" to the ear. Until that point, there were a lot of family jokes running in the household about my "questionable" kaval playing!

Another special memory I have is when Kiril invited me to Bulgaria to visit the Koprivshtitsa 2022 festival. I convinced some friends of mine who had never listened to Bulgarian folk music to join me. We had never been to Bulgaria before, there wasn't much information about the festival online, and I had never met Kiril in person before, so to be honest, my friends and I were feeling a little nervous about what was going to happen!

In the end, it was an absolutely amazing experience. The festival was vibrant and lively with beautiful music, traditional performances, and wonderful natural surroundings. It was a pleasure to finally meet Kiril in person, watch him perform, as well as meet his other lovely students. We even had a group class in the mountains, which was so fun. My friends were so enchanted by the festival and culture that they returned to the festival in August 2025 with more UK friends. Although I am currently not playing the kaval, this experience cemented my love for traditional Bulgarian music, the kaval, and also my connection to my teacher and the online kaval community that he has created and keeps alive! I am so grateful to be connected to such a special community. Thank you Kiril!

Sian Phillips *(United Kingdom)*



Sian Phillips *(Veneta Nikolova)*

I am a musician based in Lancaster, UK, of English and Welsh heritage. As well as the kaval I also play piano accordion.

I first encountered the kaval in 2005 on a trip to Bulgaria. I was at a music and dance seminar near Sofia and remember sitting outside on the grass trying to get a note out of the kaval for hours.

From 2012 to 2018 I participated in the Balkan music and dance seminars run by the French ensemble "Aksak Quintet," held at Tapis Vert in Normandy. It was always the haunting sound that Isabelle Courroy contributed to the music that drew me to the instrument. At the 2014 edition of the seminar, we had the opportunity to make our own kavals out of PVC plumbing pipe, with the help of my partner Paul, and I began to experiment and make a sound. It turned out that the instrument was quite playable despite its humble origins, but when my fiftieth birthday came round in 2015 I asked my family to buy a provessionally made instrument. They all chipped in to enable me to buy an instrument from Ricardo Von Vittorelli from Belgium.

In 2019 I took the opportunity to attend a workshop with Kiril Belezhkov in London and at this point I began learning Bulgarian kaval with him online. We invited Kiril to teach and perform in Lancaster in November 2019.



Sian Phillips with friends *(Veneta Nikolova)*

In March 2020 COVID-19 arrived, and I stopped my teaching work in schools, so I had time to play kaval in our garden, and to apply for grants. I received a British Arts Council grant to study the kaval in Bulgarian and Macedonian music. My first mentor was clarinet player Susi Evans. Then in November 2021 I travelled to Provence to work with Isabelle Courroy. The following year I travelled to Bulgaria and Macedonia to work further with Kiril and to visit Filip Arilon and Stoyan Stoyanov in Veles. I also attended the *Chiprovtsi* music seminar organised by Nicolas Hauzeur, and together with some members of "Brussels Balkan Orchestra," we performed at the Koprivshtitsa festival. I was interviewed for BNR Radio Bulgaria.

This was also a difficult time for me emotionally as my brother Dominic had been murdered on June 22 working in the Amazon. I had travelled to Brazil for his funeral and there were many press inter-

views and a lot of emotional grief. Somehow in this time playing the intricate Bulgarian music and becoming lost in the Thracian melodies proved therapeutic for me. The breath and the sound are so connected, so moving and so absorbing. The music gave me a focus and soothed my anxiety. It motivated me too.

I have been lucky to continue studying online with Kiril, which works surprisingly well, and I have joined a number of EEFC online workshops, including Macedonian kaval ornamentation with David Bilides. I have recently been fortunate to attend a workshop with Georgi Dobrev. I now play this music on the kaval, as well as accordion for Bulgarian and Macedonian dance workshops, and playing for dances in the UK. I also run a folk ensemble in Lancaster and play with them for dances and performances locally.

So much wonderful music. I count myself lucky for the musical adventures I have had. I look forward to more!

Website: https://www.sianphillipsmusic.co.uk/

John Bartholomew *(USA)*



John Bartholomew

I was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I studied biology at the University of Oklahoma and veterinary medicine at Oklahoma State University. Much of my career as a veterinarian was at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland. I currently am mostly retired, but serve as a member of the Vermont House of Representatives.

I first heard the kaval on records used for international folk dancing, which included music from across the Balkans. I later encountered the actual instrument through friends who had chosen to study kaval. I was intrigued by the haunting and beautiful sound of the kaval, particularly the *kaba* register.

When I still lived in Maryland, my regular teachers were Nikolay Doktorov and Valeri Georgiev. I also have taken kaval classes at the EEFC Balkan Camp.

I do not have much opportunity to play Bulgarian music in Vermont.

E-mail: johnbartholomewvt@gmail.com

David Bilides *(USA)*



David Bilides

I was born in 1952 in New Haven, Connecticut, USA, into an Asia Minor Greek and a Neapolitan Italian family. I spent a lot of time in the Greek community, at church and cultural events, including dances. The music was all modern, though, and I didn't hear traditional Greek music till my senior high school year, when I went to international folk dancing at Yale University in 1970. It was there that I had my first encounter with Bulgarian music and folk instruments. I heard the kaval and some *bitov* groups on records, including the "Strandzhanskata Grupa."

In my freshman year at Oberlin College, I got together with a philosophy professor who had danced at Yale and had played kaval. He didn't have a kaval, but he showed me how to make a sound out of a rolled-up tube of paper. That was a little bizarre for me, as I was playing classical piano and oboe at the time. But two years later, as a member of a performing folk dance group in Boston, I was friends with another dancer who had a kaval, and he could play notes. I asked him if I could borrow it, and after two weeks, I made a sound, and there was no turning back. I even soon recorded a very basic melody track for one of my group's dance suites.

I was self-taught, using records and reel-to-reel and cassette tapes, for 6 years. In 1974 I went to Bulgaria and purchased two Slavi Ivanov kavals from a player at the Grand Hotel Balkan *mehana*. Then I went to Burgas and Kameno and met the master himself in his workshop. I remember sitting in hotel rooms trying for weeks to get the *kaba* sound.

When I returned to the States, other Americans who had picked up the instrument gave me tips (for example, I had been holding the instrument incorrectly, like a recorder, and had to relearn everything). In 1978, I returned to Bulgaria and took my first ever lesson in Burgas with Stoyan Iliev. But the first extended lessons I had were in 1979, when I studied for a week with Alex Eppler at an EEFC camp in Mendocino California. At that 1979 camp, I met other players whom I continue to know today, 45 years later: Steve Finney, Mark Forry, Mike Gage, Dave Golber. Later on, I met Eran Fraenkel, Rich Schultz, Dov Buk, Larry Morandi, Chris Rietz, Jeff Fine, Bob Snider, Victor Robin, Mike Slama, Melissa Miller, Patrick Yacono, Kate Gerson, Fred Graves, David Shochat, and many others.

Subsequently, I met Stoyan Velichkov, Gospodin Stanev, and Valeri Georgiev, had lessons with Nedyalko Nedyalkov and Temelko Ivanov, and week-long camp lessons with Ivaylo Kuchev, Mitko Konstantinov, Georgi Zhelyazkov, and Nikolay Doktorov. The teacher I spent the most time with was Lyuben Dosev. I've also been corresponding with Kiril Belezhkov, and recently bought my second "re" kaval from Vesselin Hasabaliev.

When I returned from the Balkans in 1974 with a lot of instruments, I helped start an ensemble in Boston, "Evo Nas." We played together for 14 years, at concerts, dances, and on national public radio. We even got to play with Kostadin Varimezov when he toured the States. After moving to the West Coast in the late 80's, I played several years with the "Bay Area Balkan Ensemble" and "Edessa" in San Francisco at local clubs, EEFC workshops, and national festivals.

Latif Bolat invited me to play with him several times, once with Necati Çelik. I would switch from saz to kaval for a *ney*-like sound. (Getting the correct Turkish intervals on a kaval was I challenge I didn't always overcome.) I also played kaval with a rock/indie group in Santa Fe, "Ruby Ate the Fig."

I've recorded a CD and DVD of Macedonian folk music with the Radio Skopje singer Dragi Spasovski. I've also recorded for two local women's choirs, "Dunava" and "Bulgarian Voices of Seattle," a choir of women who immigrated from Bulgaria.



Playing at a Bulgarian wedding, with Toni Kirilov, Michael Lawson, and Alex Eppler, 2014

I've taught many players in the United States, including at the EEFC camps. Now that there are several fine Bulgarian kaval players in the US, when I do teach, it's usually to musicians just starting out on the instrument.

I currently play *tŭpan* and kaval for a small ensemble in the Seattle area, "Osem i Devet," tŭpan for the Eugene-based group "Slavej," and kaval for the Macedonian *izvoren* ensemble "Staro Selo." I have two YouTube channels. I also produce a long-running podcast with Dragi Spasovski, Macedonian Postcards, and we collaborate on recorded arrangements of his repertoire. I produce, publish, and sell downloadable Bulgarian and Macedonian books and audio on my website, including kaval books by Lyuben Dosev and Kiril Belezhkov. I've met many kaval players from around the world online, through my website.

For 40 years I worked with children and adults as a social worker and public school counselor.

One of many memorable kaval moments: In 1996, Lyuben Dosev and Iliana Bozhanova visited and performed in Santa Fe, where I was living at the time. One night, I took them to a small cafe, where it was Open Mic Night. I begged the owner to let them play, and he agreed. The three of us performed a couple of songs, and the audience loved the unexpected, unfamiliar, but wonderful music.

Here's the story I want to end on: In the late 1980's, I was camping in a wilderness area in northern California. I had my kaval with me. When I woke up, I saw that it had snowed the night before, and it was snow-silent outside. I climbed out of my tent, took my kaval, walked to the edge of a drop-off, and started playing a Teodosii Spassov slow song, which begins low and climbs high, and sounds a little like the first few measures of Rhapsody in Blue. Immediately I heard a howling from across the drop-off: it was a group of coyotes who I decided were singing back to me. So we exchanged melodies for a few minutes, and I never forgot that.

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YouTube: Izvor Music & Osem i Devet

Harry Bochner *(USA)*

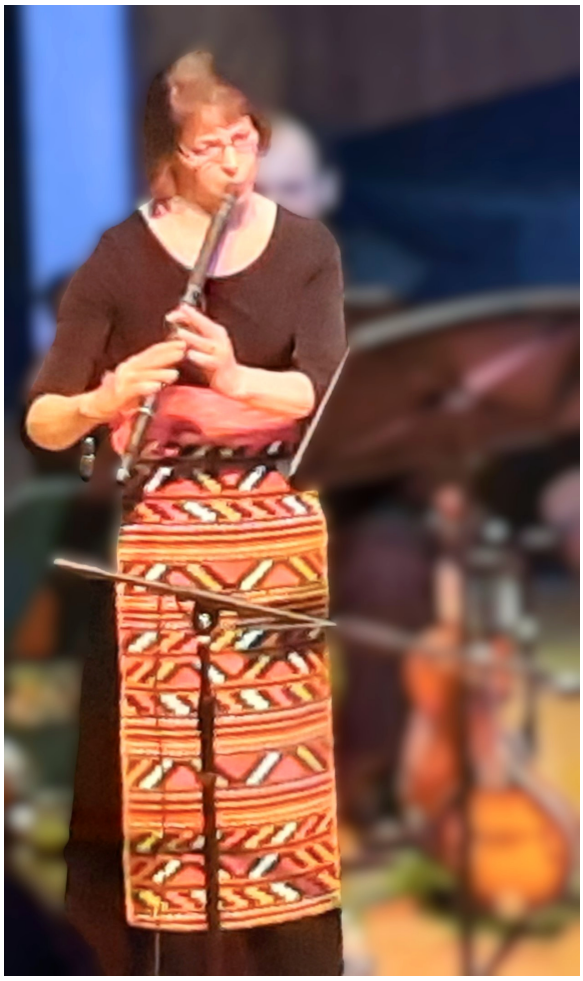


Harry Bochner

I was born in Buffalo, NY in 1954, to a Polish-Jewish family. I was first exposed to Bulgarian music at MIT international folk-dancing in 1974 in Boston, and first heard kaval live in the playing of David Bilides, with the local band "Evo Nas." For reasons I can't explain, kaval is the only instrument I've encountered where my response was "I would like to be able to do that!"

Some friends bought me a bamboo kaval; it wasn't very good, but it was good enough for me to learn to get notes. So, I bought a better kaval and started taking lessons with David. In 1980 I went to Bulgaria and Yugoslavia to go to summer folk festivals and study Bulgarian, and I brought back both Thracian and Macedonian kavals. I continued studying with David through about 1984, doing mostly Thracian but also Macedonian style. But after that, I found that I didn't have the time anymore. For about 35 years I played just a few times a year, just enough to make sure that I hadn't completely lost the embouchure. Now, in retirement, I have started playing again and have been enjoying studying Macedonian style with Eran Fraenkel. I hope to start playing Thracian style again as well.

Donna A. Buchanan *(USA)*



Donna Buchanan

Professor Emerita of Music (Ethnomusicology), Anthropology, and Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (UIUC)

I was born in the small Adirondack town of Malone, New York in 1960 to Elizabeth and John Buchanan, of Irish (my father) and Danish and German (my mother) descent. I am a US citizen and reside in Champaign, Illinois, where I taught at the University of Illinois's School of Music from August 1997 until my retirement in December 2024.

My initial musical training was as a classical flutist. Like many US children, I began learning flute in public school band at the age of ten. I studied the instrument seriously throughout high school and college, with aspirations to eventually perform professionally with a symphony orchestra. I first encountered Bulgarian traditional music and the kaval in my early twenties, while in graduate school studying ethnomusicology at the University of Texas at Austin. The campus library possessed three or four LPs of Bulgarian music; these included Ethel Raim and Martin Koenig's *A Harvest, a Shepherd, a Bride: Village Music of Bulgaria* (Nonesuch 1970), A. L. (Albert Lancaster) Lloyd's *Folk Music of Bulgaria* (Topic, 1964), and *Music of Bulgaria* (original 1955 recording; Nonesuch 1966), performed by the "Ensemble of the Bulgarian Republic" (i.e., the "National Ensemble for Folk Songs and Dances"), directed by Filip Kutev. Through these and other recordings I fell in love with the richly resonant timbres of Bulgarian instrumental and vocal music in all of its stylistic manifestations. In particular, as a flutist with abiding interests in the world's many aerophones, I became entranced by the kaval through Shtiliyan Tihov's performance of *Trite pŭti* and, unaware that the instrument has historically been played primarily by men, determined at first hearing that I must somehow learn how to play this unique instrument.

Although I have never had opportunity to participate in the EEFC music and dance camps or workshops, my dream of learning kaval was realized in Bulgaria itself, when I began conducting research for my doctoral dissertation concerning socialist-era Bulgarian folk orchestras in Sofia in 1988. As part of my fieldwork with the folk orchestras of the National Ensemble for Folk Songs and Dances - Filip Kutev and the Bulgarian National Radio, I was able to take kaval lessons, studying principally with Stoyan Velichkov and Georgi Zhelyazkov until Velichkov's death in June 2008. Over the years, my friends and acquaintances in the kaval world have included David Bilides, Ivan Bogoev, Nikolay Doktorov, Lyuben Dosev, Gospodin Gospodinov, Dr. Pavlos Kavouras (Professor Emeritus of Cultural Anthropology, Department of Music Studies, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens), Simon Leunbach, Nedyalko Nedyalkov, Spas Rizov, Wiebe Stodel, Stoyan Velichkov, Georgi Vŭrbanov, Dr. Dave Wilson (Senior Lecturer in Music at the New Zealand School of Music—*Te Kōkī* at *Te Herenga Waka*—Victoria University of Wellington), and Georgi Zhelyazkov, among several others.

Although not a professional *kavaldzhia*, I have performed regularly with "Balkanalia," the UIUC Balkan Music Ensemble, since establishing it in 1998. I have shared my knowledge of the kaval with my students in the ensemble context at New York University, where I founded a similar group (1992–97), and at UIUC, as well as in classroom lectures and informal private lessons. Among my kaval students are Dr. David A. McDonald, Associate Professor, Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology, Indiana University; Dr. Ioannis Tsekouras, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and Deree American College of Athens; Dr. Jonathon Smith, Assistant Teaching Professor, School of Music, University of Illinois; and DMA candidate Danielle (Dani) Nutting, a gifted flutist and ethnomusicologist who will complete her doctoral dissertation on Bulgarian flute and kaval at UIUC in autumn 2025. Nutting has additionally studied kaval with Nedyalko Nedyalkov, with whom she worked while pursuing her doctoral research in Sofia in 2019–20 and 2022.

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Will Cope *(USA)*



Will Cope

I learned to play flute in high school, among lots of other instruments, but I never really liked how it sounded when I played. It was like I could hear the metal in the tone, very metallic even played by the best.

When I first heard Alex Eppler play Bulgarian kaval at Balkan Camp in the early eighties, I loved it immediately, especially when he played in *kaba*. Subsequently, I commissioned Alex to make both D and C instruments for me and began to work on playing them, but after a few months, I decided to focus on *gayda* and *tambura*—why? Seems silly now, but it was because of the challenge of playing multiple registers with the same fingering.

I re-considered when Dr. Dosev visited California a few years ago. I had been gifted a remarkably easy-to-play kaval from John Gibson, and took a lesson from Lyuben and found the multiple registers no longer seemed a bit crazy, lol.

I don't have occasion to play much because there are lots of better players I have the honor and privilege of playing with on tambura and gayda, but I pick up the kaval several times a month and always wish I had more time and opportunity to play it and improve.

In closing, a very special thank you to Lyuben for re-opening this door for me.

Matt Darriau *(USA)*



Matt Darriau

I was born on Feb. 21, 1960, in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and grew up in Bloomington, Indiana, in a house of old-school folk enthusiasts—there was lots of East European, Balkan and klezmer music playing on the phonograph. My parents were "card carrying" members of the international folk dance scene that was happening at many universities in the 1950's and 60's. I especially remember the Kolo records from Yugoslavia, the Kutev Bulgarian Choir recordings, the Nonesuch record with Stoyan Velichkov playing that amazing *Trite pŭti*, the Pennywhistlers and the Folkways Bulgarian and Yugoslav brass band recordings, and even some Dave Tarras klezmer records. When I went off to study jazz music in Boston, I found myself going to local folk dances and started playing for them. I was asked to learn music from the old recordings, and as a woodwind, sax, and flute player, I gravitated to the sound of the kaval. When I understood that it was a wooden "folk" flute yet had the ability to play chromatically I was immediately hooked and intrigued to get to know this instrument.

I was somehow able to find a "student" kaval through the Boston Balkan scene, and as a dedicated musician I just started experimenting with it. I think someone gave me a hint about how to approach the sound and luckily it started to make sense—I think it took a good week to make the first little peeps. Before long I met David Bilides, who was the known kaval guy in the area and started taking lessons with him. I think he was the one who showed me how to put my fingers further over the holes rather than just my fingertips. I thought "Why, what's the difference?" but then learned it is THE way to get the authentic sound and the unique vibrato production on the instrument—by bending the fingers like a sine wave in slow motion. David was the first person I met who approached the instrument with a detailed knowledge and system with unique notations and symbols for the various kinds of ornaments that indicated whether to lift an upper finger or tap a lower one to get the correct kind of blip. After playing a fair amount of traditional repertoire and hours of transcribing, just like I was doing with old classic jazz sax solos, I started using the kaval in my original music, especially the material that had more eastern or oriental and modal music influences.

I acquired my first professional kaval after a concert given by the "Borovets Ensemble," a Bulgarian *bitov* group that was on tour in the US in about 1988. This was an exciting time when "the Wall" was starting to come down and musical groups from Eastern Europe were starting to perform in the West, and it was the first time that many of us got to experience the music live that we had been discovering on records. I was lucky enough to meet the great kaval player Ivaylo Kuchev from that group who sold me a beautiful kaval from his personal collection.

Around 1990 I moved to New York City and started a Balkan-influenced original band, a quartet called "Paradox Trio," along with a great American/Rom *dumbek* player, Seido Salifoski, whom I had met at the EEFC Balkan camp from a few years earlier, and two eclectic modern jazz players—guitar-

ist Brad Shepik and Rufus Cappadocia on 5-string cello. Together we evolved a unique sound that was heavily influenced by Bulgarian music and often featured the kaval. We have released 5 or so CDs over the last 30 years.

A few years later I was fortunate to meet master modern kaval player Theodosii Spassov, who was playing the kaval chair on the Broadway show, "Riverdance." I was somehow just good enough to sub for him, or I should say sub for his Bulgarian sub when he was not available. That was an evolution for my kaval playing as the music was quite technical and I had to work really hard. But more importantly, I developed a friendship with Theodosii that led to a cd featuring him with Paradox Trio. In about 2007 we managed to arrange a small tour in Bulgaria and recorded our music in Sofia, which resulted in our third CD, *Gambit*. It's not so available now, but at least you can hear it on my Bandcamp page. On that Bulgaria trip we also played the eclectic Apollonia festival on the Black Sea Coast, and on the way there we stopped in the small village of master builder Zhechko Marinov, Theodosii's kaval maker, and I was able to acquire two fantastic kavals, in D and C, made by him.

I am a freelance musician in the New York City area and mostly busy with "The Klezmatics," where the kaval has evolved into one of the main unique sounds that I contribute to the band. Because of its ability to play in most all the Eastern European and Middle Eastern modes, the kaval contributes to the evocative sounds that the band conjures up, as well as to some of the more fiery pieces. I also use it on the "straight ahead" Jewish gigs that I play and it seems to be a real treat for the listeners. Folks often come up to me and ask, "What is that wooden flute you are playing?" It's been a joy to add kaval to the mix when I am a sideman in the odd group touring or playing concerts—and it feels great when it creates a sound that is new for the other musicians and their audiences.

I have also been asked to play kaval for recording sessions and theater gigs where they want a more exotic kind of sound—over the years it seems composers want its sound for their sound scores.

Interestingly, I have been in several situations where I helped develop the sound score for a live theater production, and the kaval became such an integral part of the sound that it led to the odd situation where, whenever I needed a substitute, there was always someone who could play the sax or clarinet parts, but the kaval parts were always a problem. So they may try with a western flute or recorder or whistle, but it's just never the same thing!

Once when I had only been playing kaval for a few years, I was to start a piece at a concert on the big stage at New England Conservatory of Music. When it came time to begin, I just couldn't stop smiling and therefore was unable to start the song for what seemed like an eternity—I don't really remember how the situation got resolved, but it was funny and embarrassing!

I am married to a wonderful musician, Katie Down, and have one son who lives in Montreal and plays guitar.

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Jeff Fine *(USA)*



Jeff Fine

My name is Jeff Fine. As of this writing I am 70 years old. I was born and grew up in Poughkeepsie, New York in the US. I currently live in the US in New Jersey and work as a Pediatric Emergency Doctor in New York City. My grandparents were Jewish immigrants to the US from Belarus, Bessarabia (Moldova) and Ukraine. In elementary school I played the baritone horn (euphonium).

When I was a child, I listened to an AM radio station broadcasting from New York City, either WEVD or WBAI. I believe that was my first exposure to "world music," and I was captivated by the many unusual instrumental sounds and uneven rhythms. As a teenager during the 1970s I would do Israeli folk dancing in my synagogue. In college I started to do recreational international folk dancing and there were many dances from all over the Balkans. After college and during medical school I started to play the recorder as well as the Irish tin whistle, my first wind instruments.

I attended my first East European Folklife Center (EEFC) Balkan Music and Dance Workshop ("Balkan Camp") at Buffalo Gap, West Virginia, in 1986 with the intention of learning how to dance better. I was surprised to find people teaching traditional folk instruments. That first camp was the first time I ever saw a kaval and I tried to learn to play kaval and *gayda*. I have attended the camp almost every year since. My question has always been—if you play an instrument for one week each year at the camp workshop for 10 years, do you say you have been playing for 10 years or 10 WEEKS?

My first kaval teacher at my first Balkan Camp was David Bilides. In the early years of my attending the EEFC camps, before Bulgarian kaval players were coming regularly to the US, two Americans, David Bilides and Chris Reitz, were the Bulgarian kaval teachers. Over the years I had the opportunity to meet and learn from many excellent and talented Bulgarian kaval players—Lyuben Dosev, Ivaylo Kuchev, Georgi Zhelyazkov, Nikolay Doktorov, and Valeri Georgiev; I hope I am not forgetting anyone.

I have listened to many recordings of Bulgarian folk music. I think the one that really got me hooked on kaval was the recording of *Trite pŭti* performed by Shtiliyan Tihov on the album *A Harvest, A Shepherd, A Bride: Village Music of Bulgaria.* I am lucky to have heard the great Stoyan Velichkov perform at a concert in New York.

After one of the EEFC camps, I was invited to play with a group of Americans who also attended Balkan Camp, playing Macedonian folk music. We called ourselves "Izgori." Since then, I have mostly been playing Macedonian style kaval.

Over the years, I have had the opportunity to spend time travelling in Bulgaria, and in the US with Lyuben Dosev and his colleague, Iliana Bozhanova, who have both become close friends. I have now travelled to Bulgaria five times so far. During those trips, I have had the great pleasure to attend re-

hearsals and performances of the "Kutev Ensemble" (Sofia), the "Trakia Ensemble" (Plovdiv), and the "Severnyashki Ensemble" (Pleven).

There are too many funny stories to tell, but here's one...

I don't know how the subject came up, but Lyuben told me that a popular American musician had died and when I told him that wasn't true, he challenged me to a bet. In fact, he was so sure that he would win the bet that he wagered his kaval, the kaval his father had bought for him as a young man. Well, not surprisingly, it turned out Lyuben was wrong and I won the bet. I told Lyuben that I didn't want to take his beloved kaval but of course he insisted—a bet's a bet. Lyuben felt very sad and I felt very guilty; I couldn't figure out what to do. After a few days I came up with a solution. I asked Lyuben how much the kaval had originally cost and how much it was worth. After much negotiation, I agreed to sell back to Lyuben his prized kaval for the original price, seven *leva*! I think that was in 1995.

Steve Finney *(USA)*



Steve Finney *(left)*

I grew up in the state of Maryland (USA), but moved to San Francisco, California, in 1973. My interest in Bulgarian music had begun when I started doing Balkan folk dancing when I started college in 1971, and I had also started working at non-commercial public radio stations, where I played a lot of ethnic music, often Balkan. Although I wasn't a serious musician, I had played trombone and alto recorder before I played kaval.

I started playing kaval around the age of 18 (about 1972); I was visiting San Francisco and had been given a hand-made rough metal tube kaval by David Wilkinson, a member of Nada Lewis' "The People's International Silver String Macedonian Band." I had access to a lot of Bulgarian music, both from working at radio stations, and because there was a Balkan folk music store in San Francisco in the 70's (Festival Records), where I could buy Balkanton LP's (Balkanton 340, Nikola Ganchev, Stoyan Velichkov,...). I also was the international buyer at Tower Records in San Francisco, so I made sure we were stocked with American and European Bulgarian LPs, e.g., on the Nonesuch, Folkways, Monitor, and other labels.

I don't remember precisely how I learned to play kaval. I learned some stuff in the early 70's from Mark Levy (an ethnomusicology professor who largely played *gayda* and clarinet, and who founded EEFC), and I also visited and learned from Alex Eppler multiple times in Seattle. In the 70's and 80's, I visited Bulgaria about 4 or 5 times (usually for a month or so).

I played solo for a few years, but around 1974-1975 I started playing kaval with the band "Vitosha," which was a *bitov* group in San Francisco. The initial quartet included Marcus Holt (Moskoff) on gayda, Rachel Johnson on *gŭdulka*, Jennie Hartman on *tambura,* and Allen Nixon on *tŭpan*; I joined them on kaval and it became a quintet. We often played for the Balkan dance group "Westwind" (There's a 1976 video on YouTube, though the sound quality is poor.) We often played at the Mandala Folk Dance Center in San Francisco, founded by Neal Sandler, who was also involved in Westwind. We also played multiple times at the Kolo Dance Festival in San Francisco. Vitosha put out a dance LP in 1976.



Vitosha, 1975 (l to r): Steve Finney, Rachel Johnson, Marcus Holt (Moskoff), Alan Nixon, Jennie Hartman

I taught kaval at the summer Mendocino EEFC camp for 2 years around 1980, but after that Alex Eppler and various Bulgarian kaval players (Lyuben Dosev, Nikolay Doktorov, Valeri Georgiev) were usually the EEFC teachers. I got to study with all of them! But I still occasionally gave kaval lessons to people in the SF Bay Area who were interested.

When I visited Bulgaria in the 70's and 80's, I was fully focused on kaval and folk music. On my first visit, I often went to the rehearsals of the Bulgarian National Radio Folk Orchestra; I met Stoyan Velichkov, although I wasn't able to take a lesson with him. I also went to a "Filip Kutev Ensemble" performance and got to see Nikola Ganchev playing. I went out to Kameno (near Burgas) to get a D kaval from Slavi Ivanov; I also bought an Ivanov C kaval from a member of the Radio Orchestra. I visited a few festivals, though I've never made it to Koprivshtitsa. I did a lot of other stuff in Bulgaria also, but I can't remember details.

As a musician who mostly played kaval, I was largely focused on Bulgarian music, and played with a number of different folks, though I can't remember all of them (one frequent duet was with accordionist Erik Butterworth). In the 70's, I sometimes played solo kaval as a street musician in San Francisco. I also experimented with other types of music on kaval: I would sometimes go to Irish sessions and would play a tune or two; and in the early 1980's I sometimes played with a Santa Cruz group called "The Ethnophonic Orchestra," which played a wide range of music, including Polish, Mexican, Italian, polkas, Balkan, and others.

In 1982 or so, stimulated by Ivo Papazov and Yuri Yunakov, I started to play saxophone, playing Bulgarian wedding band music. I soon started playing sax with a band called "The Balkan Noyz Boyz" (available on YouTube). I didn't quit playing kaval, but I did it less; dealing with the both the sax mouthpiece and kaval was somewhat challenging. I played kaval, saxophone, and clarinet from around 1990-2015 (occasional performances, but not as a professional musician). When I lived in Hawaii from 2002-2005 I played twice in a group with visiting Turkish musician Latif Bolat (kaval and clarinet).

After 2015, I mostly played kaval, although not frequently. I did a few gigs with "Medna Usta" around 2015 (here's a link to a Medna Usta studio album from 1991; Mark Forry, who was also living in California at the time, was the kaval player. I also have played multiple performances with Hector Bezanis (gayda) and Dena Bjornlie (gŭdulka) around 2015-2020. In 2017, I went to the Labyrinth Music Workshop in Crete and took a class for 5 days with Bulgarian kaval player Nedyalko Nedyalkov (6 hours a day, and only 2 students!). And in 2019, with the assistance of Dan Auvil and Jerry Summers, I put together a solo kaval CD of Nikolay Doktorov, an excellent kaval player from Varna. The CD audio files and all the images and text of the original CD can be downloaded for free on the Izvor Music website.

My website has a few music recordings of mine, although only the last 3 tunes in the section "Stuff of Mine" are on kaval. I'm not playing much currently, but I'm hoping to get back into it. And I still live in California.

Website: http://sfinney.com/pages/music.html

Mark Forry *(USA)*



Mark Forry

I was born in Berkeley, California on March 6, 1952. My ethnic background is Northern European (English, Irish, Scottish, Scandinavian). I currently live in Ližnjan, a small town near Pula, region of Istria, Croatia.

I was 22 at the time of my first encounter with Bulgarian folk music and Thracian kaval. Some friends of mine went to the Center for World Music in Berkeley for a summer music workshop in 1974. Mark Levy and Lauren Brody were substituting for Turkish instructors who couldn't get visas. When my friends returned to Santa Cruz, they brought recordings: the first two or three Nonesuch LPs. One of my other roommates at the time said, "Oh, we used to folk dance to that music at summer camp!" At the time, I was studying classical music and dance, and I was thrilled by the idea that ordinary people danced to phenomenal music.

The records included recordings of the Kutev Ensemble, and also the solo recording of Shtiliyan Tihov playing *Trite pŭti*. As soon as possible, I started looking for LPs and tape copies of Thracian kaval players on Balkanton and other records.

I attended a Balkan music workshop in Sweets Mill, California in the summer of 1975. That was the first time I saw a Thracian kaval being played, by Dave Shochat (of "Pitu Guli") and Dave Golber. They (and Carol Akawie Schneider) were the first to show me how to make sounds and play. Dave Golber also sold me my first Thracian kaval, which he had made. Later that year, I met Marcus Holt (Moskoff), who was leading a Bulgarian music group in the San Francisco Bay Area; I got sheet music and encouragement from him.

My friends among kaval players are mostly in connection with the EEFC workshops: Peggy Datz, Steve Finney, Victor Robin, David Bilides, Mike Gage, Rich Schultz, Eran Fraenkel.

In 1978, I met Stoyan Iliev, a kaval player with an ensemble in Burgas, when they played at the "Smotra folklora" fesitval in Zagreb. Later that summer, I traveled to Bulgaria and met Stoyan in Burgas. I went with him and the ensemble to "Strandzha Pee" and met several great musicians. He also introduced me to



1978 Mendocino Balkan Camp kaval class, taught by Alex Eppler (center)

Slavi Ivanov and helped me purchase a C kaval. Stoyan later gave me a very nice D kaval from *Bai Slavi*, which I am still playing.

Apart from Stoyan, all my experiences with (great!) Bulgarian kaval teachers have been through EEFC workshops: Aleksandr Eppler, Nikolay Doktorov, Lyuben Dosev, and Valeri Georgiev. I have also taught beginning Thracian kaval—i.e., that unavoidably difficult initial period when trying to make tones—at the EEFC Mendocino camp for several years.

I played with the Aman International Folk Ensemble, based in Los Angeles, from 1978-1982. We played numerous concerts throughout the United States that included Bulgarian dance suites. Significant performances included the Brooklyn Academy of Music and the Los Angeles Music Center. We made several promotional videos that were broadcast to advertise our programs. The Bulgarian ensemble also played for recreational folk dancing.



Mark Forry

Over the years, I've performed Thracian kaval with many other instrumentalists and/or singers:

- 1978-1981: "Meden Glas," Los Angeles. Cindy Burton, *gŭdulka*; Michelle Breger, voice and *tambura*; Bill Cope, tambura; Ed Leddel, *tŭpan*; MF, kaval. Played for folk festivals and folkdance parties, occasional radio broadcasts.
- 1979: *Fugea Imaginea 104*; recording produced by Miamon Miller that included *Strandzhansko Horo*. Eran Fraenkel and MF, kaval; Miamon and Stuart Brotman, gŭdulka; Mark Levy, gayda; Ed Leddel, tŭpan.
- 1991: "Medna Usta," *All Dressed Up*; recording. Ruth Hunter, vocal, tambura, and accordion; Anne Cleveland, vocal and tambura; Dena Bjornlie, vocal and gŭdulka; Jana Niernberger, *davul* and *dumbek*; MF, kaval. Several live performances in California.
- 1991: *Inanna Descending*, theatrical performance written by Frances Hatfield and directed by Mary Kay Gamel. Incidental music by Mark Forry and Lorna Kohler, MF kaval.
- 1998: *Seven Veils*, recording by Robert Rich. "Dissolve" featured Thracian kaval (MF) and synthesized sounds.
- 1977-2000: Numerous folk-dance parties and festivals with other American-born Bulgarian music enthusiasts.

I am not currently performing Thracian kaval publicly, although I've recently begun playing again after a hiatus of 10 years or so.

Two stories:

Around 1981, the Aman Folklore Ensemble once played an outdoor concert at Mammoth Lakes, in the Sierra Nevada mountains of California. A strong wind was blowing (makes me think of the song "*Silen vyatŭr duva*") directly in our faces, making it very difficult for dancers and musicians. At one

point, it was blowing so hard that if I faced into the wind, the wind prevented me from blowing into the kaval and I was effectively silenced!

In 1994 or so, an ensemble of traditional musicians from Madagascar played in Santa Cruz California, featuring Rakoto Frah, one of the most renowned Malgasy musicians and the leading player of the *sodina*, a traditional end-blown flute. At the Santa Cruz concert, the musicians challenged anyone in the audience to make a sound on the sodina. However, many of my musician colleagues in the audience recognized what kind of instrument it was and called me to go up on stage. I did, and played something that sounded vaguely Malagasy but also something vaguely Bulgarian. Rakoto Frah and the other musicians were surprised and delighted, and they gave me several of their CDs.

I am retired from a career in information management, mostly as a technical writer and content architect. In retirement, I'm returning to ethnomusicological studies, mostly concerning tambura ensemble music. I have a Ph.D. in music (emphasis in ethnomusicology), University of California at Los Angeles, 1990.

I have played music since beginning piano lessons at age 5. I played wind instruments in elementary and high school bands and orchestras, and began concentrating on bassoon when I was 16. I played bassoon throughout college and grad school, and received a BA in music with bassoon as my principal instrument. I always thought my background as a classical bassoonist was exceptionally helpful for fingering, breath control, and general musical discipline.

More about me here: https://keftimes.org/kef-times-article/mark-forry/
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Eran Fraenkel *(USA)*



Eran Fraenkel

I've been involved with Balkan music and dance since the age of 11—which is a few moons ago. I grew up in Pittsburgh, and my family always went to the Pittsburgh Folk Festival, which had a Bulgarian, but not a Macedonian contingent. From the age of 11, I started folk dancing and got hooked on the Balkans. But although I was fascinated by Bulgarian music, I got totally obsessed with Macedonian music due to Dennis Boxell's 3-record set of Macedonian folk dance LPs. Those records included pieces on kaval and *gajda*, instruments that I didn't know about, and whose player wasn't identified. I played these items over and over and over, driving my parents a bit nuts and hogging our family turntable.

I was about 14-15 when Atanas Kolarovski held a workshop in Pittsburgh, and I found out that the gajda and kaval player on the records was his uncle Mile. And I was 19 when I first went to Macedonia in 1970 and met Mile in person. My goal initially was to learn to play gajda, but that's such a fussy instrument that by the time we got one to work well, I had already managed to get the kaval embouchure. And that was it. Macedonian kaval ever since. I spent that summer, plus 1972-73, plus 1979-82 learning and playing with Mile; not to mention the year he spent with me in Philly when we formed *Novo Selo*, and his subsequent visits to Mendocino.

I only really encountered Thracian kaval when *Novo Selo* went to Mendocino camp for the first time, where members of "Pitu Guli" were teaching Bulgarian music. I never had a Thracian kaval teacher, and my attempts to learn it well on my own have been limited. Ironically, when I moved to LA and eventually formed "Merak" with Tim Rice and other musicians (Lauren Brody as keyboardist and singer), I played Thracian and not Macedonian kaval; my main instrument was alto sax. Our bass player was Vic Koler, a Macedonian, wonderful, and tragically young-to-die arranger. Our guitar player was Brad Rabuchin who went on to play for Ray Charles. Merak was a great band, and I really regretted it when I moved from California to Massachusetts and the band disbanded. We'd recorded a demo tape and were hunting for a recording contract.



Eran Fraenkel (l), Jim Finn, Alan Zemel, & Dan Kolar as "Novo Selo," mid-1970's

Mike Gage *(USA)*



Mike Gage

I first started to play kaval in 1974 while I was a graduate student in mathematics at Stanford University. I had been folk dancing in Palo Alto, CA for several years and a group of folk dancers, inspired by a live music performance by "Pitu Guli," a *bitov* band from L. A. led by Mark Levy, decided to form our own band, "Sviraci," to play for folk dancers in the Bay Area. At first we played mostly on western instruments. (I had played clarinet in high school.) That was good for many folk dances, but we also wanted to perform bitov dances. Melissa Miller loaned me a kaval, showed me how to hold the kaval, (NOT covering the holes with the tips of my fingers) and gave me some idea about the proper embouchure. After much huffing and puffing I succeeded in getting a sound. Within a few months I was able to purchase my own kaval from Dave Golber (number 19—I still have it).

Within a year the band Sviraci was playing for folk dancers in two configurations: western: accordion, clarinet, *tambura*, *dumbek*, bass and bitov/*izvorno*: *gayda/gajda*, kaval (Bulgarian/Macedonian), *tambura*, *tŭpan/tapan, gŭdulka* and/or *dumbek*. Later I also joined a Bulgarian/Macedonian/Turkish dance group, "Danica," and played with the associated band "Vadni Raca," which included George Chittenden, Dan Auvil, Bill Cope and Sandy Cherin.

We learned the music from records and private recordings obtained by the few Americans who had traveled or studied in Bulgaria. In 1973 and 1974 there were two small summer Balkan dance camps at Sweets Mill where members of Pitu Guli taught music. In 1977 there began a series of larger camps that eventually became the EEFC (East European Folklife Center). EEFC has continued to hold camps nearly every summer in Mendocino, CA and, after 1983, a second summer camp on the east coast of the US. I attended the Mendocino camps in 1978 and 1979 and took my first real kaval classes with Alex Eppler, who had studied music in high school in Bulgaria.

I finished my graduate studies in 1978 and moved east with my wife, Sandy Cherin, where I started a series of visiting professorships first at Michigan State University, then at University of Delaware, University of Pennsylvania, and Case Western Reserve University until finally obtaining a tenure track position at the University of Rochester. Sandy and I started several bands and choruses along the way. (Sandy sings Balkan songs and also plays gŭdulka.) We started a bitov band "Balkanski Krai" in East Lansing, Michigan. (Chris Reitz was our tambura player.) While I was teaching at U. of Delaware and living in Philadelphia (1981-1983), we started the band "Yavka." In 1982 I bought my first Bulgarian-made kaval from a kaval player in the "Pirin Ensemble" which was performing at the University of Pennsylvania. In 1984 we arrived in Rochester, New York, where we started the band "Karamfil" and Sandy started the women's Balkan chorus "Sladki Doumi."

By this time the East Coast EEFC camps had started—both music and dance—and we have attended nearly every year since then. In 1986 we joined Martha Forsyth's tour of western Bulgaria, including attending the Koprivshtitsa festival.

At the EEFC workshops, the teachers were mostly Americans until after 1989 when Bulgarians could travel freely and Americans could visit Bulgaria more freely. After that year we had the good fortune to have many accomplished Bulgarian kaval players come teach at the EEFC camps. I had some lessons from Ivaylo Kuchev in the early 1990's and met Lyuben Dosev in the summer of 1994. I have had the opportunity to take lessons from him during several summers since then. I have also taken classes from Nedyalko Nedyalkov, Nikolay Doktorov, Valeri Georgiev and Temelko Ivanov. In addition to the EEFC workshops, I have also attended Lyuben and Larry Weiner's Bulgarian Folk Music & Dance Seminar in Plovdiv in 2010, 2015, and 2016, where I took kaval lessons from Temelko.

Karamfil and Sladki Doumi, in addition to other gigs, presented joint concerts at Harmony House, an old Grange hall near Rochester, New York, every year from 1996 through 2009.

In 2021 I retired from teaching at the University of Rochester, and Sandy and I moved to Baltimore, Maryland, to be near our son, daughter-in-law and grandson. I don't currently have a band to perform with but, now that I have more time to practice, I have been taking weekly kaval lessons over Zoom with Valeri, who lives in Washington, DC. We have been concentrating on solo kaval pieces, from Stoyan Velichkov, Nikola Ganchev, Shtiliyan Tihov, and others.

A kaval story: 30 years ago our kitten Artie (short for Artimus) was very interested when I played kaval. She would race into the living room where I was playing, climb up my back while I was standing (ouch!!), climb over my shoulder and nestle in my forearm to listen. Fortunately, she grew out of it as she got older and heavier.

John Gibson *(USA)*



John Gibson

I was born in Ventura, California, USA in 1954. I am an Information Technology professional working in Pasadena, CA. I am of Irish, German, and English descent.

I came to learn of Bulgarian folk music through dancing. My older sister took me to an international folk dance club in Ojai, California in 1972. I learned to love dancing *pravo*, *trite pŭti*, and *rŭchenitsa*. The music was played on records. Later I would go to Los Angeles to dance clubs that included The Intersection, Zorba's, and Café Danssa.

I auditioned to become a dancer for the "Aman Folk Ensemble" in the summer of 1976. Moving to Los Angeles, I performed and toured with them for the next four years[1]. I was looking for something to do in the down time between shows and while traveling, and I thought that playing Bulgarian music would be a good hobby. But what instrument should I study? I chose the kaval.

I bought my first kaval in 1977 from David Golber, an American kaval maker. I certainly didn't realize what I was getting into.

Ethnomusicology was an established area of study at many American universities and both musicians and dancers dedicated themselves to studying folklore. "Balkan" dancing was especially popular, and I began to seek out live dance music. An important figure in this scene was Mark Levy. He studied ethnomusicology at UCLA in Westwood, CA. I was first introduced to village Bulgarian folk music played on traditional instruments through his band "Pitu Guli." Mark played *gayda* and David Shochat was the kaval player.

My first real introduction to the kaval being played as a solo instrument was in 1977 at Balkan Camp in Mendocino, California. Alex Eppler was the teacher. It was incredible for me to hear what the kaval really sounded like solo, outside of the structure of a *bitov* band. Alex's solo kaval playing was incredible. That was the first time I heard the kaval being played in *kaba*. When Alex dropped into kaba on his "do" kaval I was hooked. Dragan Karapchanski and Nikola Ganchev were both very influential to Alex Eppler's playing, and their melodies were often used in his teaching. They continue to be an inspiration.

I have studied kaval with many accomplished musicians who have been very generous with their time. In my early years of playing I learned from American kaval players including: David Golber, Mark Forry, Steven Finney, Rich Schultz, and Neil Siegel. My Bulgarian teachers and mentors have included: Nikolay Doktorov, Georgi Ivanov, Temelko Ivanov, Lyuben Dosev, and Valeri Georgiev. My goal hasn't been to perform or become a concert-level musician. The reality is that the Bulgarian

[1] "Aman Folk Ensemble" – Bulgarian dance suite, 1977

people are very appreciative that somebody has taken an interest in their music, and I feel honored to have gotten so much help and encouragement from so many great musicians.

I have done some performances and played for dancers on occasion with various groups and ensembles, mostly informal. One memorable experience for me was being invited by Doktorov to perform at the "Nikola Ganchev" National Competition for Kaval Playing[2] in 2011 and 2013. Ivan and Tzvetanka Varimezov invited me to play with them for a few gigs in southern California. The "Bulgarika" band, led by Nikolay and Donka Kolev, tours here regularly, and they have invited me to play with them. I have also played with my good friends who tour in California, dance teacher Iliana Bozhanova with accordionist Todor Yankov, and, of course, with Lyuben Dosev when he toured in America. In 2017 I assembled an amateur band called "Hlopka"[3] with Aaron Strelnikoff on *tambura*, Nathan Bernacki on *gŭdulka*, and Julie Gibson on *tŭpan*. We played at several Bulgarian community dance events and Balkan folk dance groups.

My aim in recent years has not been to perform, but to be a friend of the Bulgarian music and dance community. In that capacity I have helped some kaval-interested people get started with the instrument by doing some beginning instruction, playing together with them, finding or loaning them an instrument, and connecting them with a teacher.

[2] This festival in Rudnik, Bulgaria, in the Burgas region, provides a stage for practicing musicians and encourages the preservation of traditional kaval playing.

[3] Hlopka ensemble playing at the Nadigravane Festival in Orange County, CA, 2017.

Jill Halloran *(USA)*



Jill Halloran

My name is Jill Halloran. I'm American, from Massachusetts & California, 68 years old. I've lived about half my life in California, where I am now.

I'm of mostly Irish descent, with some German, Danish, and other DNA swimming around in there.

Although my father and I didn't get along very well, I have to credit him with my exposure to and love of traditional music from different countries. He had a record called *This is Greece* that I really loved, starting from when I first heard it—I was probably 4-5 years old. It's one of my favorite records of all time, and I still have it.

Dad had no Balkan music other than that (he did have records of traditional music from Lebanon, Italy, and other countries).

I had a little exposure to Balkan music in high school when we had our first (and alas, only) International Day. A Greek man, father of a girl at school, came and showed us Greek dances and I was thrilled.

Probably the first significant exposure I had to other Balkan music was freshman year at college, when I took a class in international folk dancing. For some reason Balkan is pretty much my favorite, although I also love Turkish and some Middle Eastern and African music.

I think my first Balkan camp was in 1992, in Mendocino, California. I'm not sure how familiar I was with the kaval before that—I loved the sound of it in the Balkan music I had heard at folk dancing, on recordings.

I took a kaval class (using a kaval borrowed from the camp), which I think was taught by Mark Forry. I bought a kaval right then and there. Other teachers early on included David Bilides and Mike Slama. In later years, mainly Valeri Georgiev. Almost all this teaching has been at Balkan Camp.

Unfortunately, I'm really bad about practicing, and do so very rarely, so have never gotten very good at kaval—in fact, mine is temporarily (I hope) missing! (Moved about a year ago...gotta be in one of these boxes...). I don't have kaval buddies to practice with. I did play kaval in a very informal band when I lived in Silicon Valley. We just got together for fun, no pressure, no performances, although now they have developed into a "real" band ("Da! Mozhem") and they play a lot of gigs. I dropped out years before they started the real band.

Somewhere around 1997, I went to Bulgaria for what was supposed to be a music & dance workshop. Turns out no music instruction was actually planned, which upset me because that was the primary reason I went. I pressed for this opportunity, and the trip leader (Petur Iliev) got me in touch with none other than Lyuben Dosev in Plovdiv. At the time I had no idea who he was or how lucky I was.

Even then, I was deeply grateful that he took the time to work with this rank beginner. Now I'm blown away thinking about it!

I came down with a really nasty cold as soon as I arrived in Bulgaria, probably due to a sleepless 24 hours of flying. When I had my first lesson with Lyuben, he reached for my kaval and raised it to his lips, and I said "No, no, I have a terrible cold," and he said something like, "Just drink some *rakia*!" I really enjoyed his wit and patience. I feel so, so lucky to have studied with him. Many years later, (2024), back at Balkan Camp in Mendocino, by sheer coincidence I shared a cabin with Lyuben's daughter, Tzvety, who was teaching singing. She was as kind and smart as her dad.

My occupation: technical writer, which evolved into writing health-related web pages. Last job I had (retired now) was writing about Medicare for a health insurance broker. Nothing to do with music, alas.

Evaonne Hendricks *(USA)*



Evaonne Hendricks

I was born in Tulare, California, in 1953. My ethnic background is pretty much American. I have mostly German ancestry, but also some English, Welsh, Scottish and French. There's a rumor that there is some native American, but nobody knows whether or not that's true, and if so, what tribe. By the way, "Evaonne" is pronounced the same way as "Ivan."

My first encounter with Bulgarian folk music was when I was living in Castroville, California (the artichoke capital of the world!). I was attending Hartnel Jr. College, and my psychology teacher, of all people, took his boom box on the lawn in what they called Hyde Park. He taught several of us folk dances from Bulgaria, Israel, and several other countries. That was sometime between 1974 and 1975. I was around 20 years old. After I graduated and came up to Humboldt State University in Arcata, I took folk dance classes from Kay Chaffee, who interested me in the culture and music. I joined a small folk dance band and played flute. In 1979, I went to Mendocino Balkan Music and dance camp, where I took a class in *gayda* and bought a PVC pipe kaval off a friend. I still have it. I was 26 when I went to Balkan camp the first time.

Kaval was an experience in hyperventilation, but I had the same learning curve playing flute when I tried it. I started making sounds on kaval pretty soon. I don't remember when I bought my real kaval. I do know the Kolevi were here (Nikolay Kolev, Donka Koleva, and the rest of the members of "Bulgarika").

My friends who play kaval? I think Irene Treesong plays a bit, but also Craig Kurumada, Anna Fritschi, Tina Garson, and Olea. There may be others.

I had kaval lessons from Nikolay. I don't remember who else I took lessons from.

As I mentioned above, I went to Balkan camp in 1979. I'm not sure of the date, but I also went in 1989 on a half scholarship. We had several Arcata Folk Dance Festivals here, and I went every year. I'm not sure whether or not those were EEFC events.

I have never felt qualified to teach kaval. I'm still trying to remember the things I have been taught.

I used to belong to a little orchestra called "Club Band," which folded some years ago. We played for Friday night live music nights, craft fairs, and HSU [Humboldt State University] events. Now I am part of a loosely arranged group [in Arcata, California] of singers and musicians called "Balkan Meetup." This is led and organized by Linnea Mandell and Craig Kurumada. We play about once every other month or so for the First Friday party. I love jamming.

Once, back when Club Band was playing for a First Friday party, I was also playing clarinet and trombone on some of the pieces. I found out the hard way that it is a bad idea to play clarinet, then trombone, then kaval. My poor mouth wobbled. My lips became numb. I completely disappeared.

As of today, I am 72 years old. I am retired. I have been married to the same fellow for 44 years. We met while folk dancing, and we still dance.

Kate Jellinghaus *(USA)*



Kate Jellinghaus with Stoyan Chobanov

I was born in Waterbury, Connecticut in 1971. I have no Slavic heritage, but my mom was always interested in Russian and Eastern European poetry and literature, so as a kid we had pictures of people like Joseph Brodsky, Anna Akhmatova, Czesław Miłosz, and Vaclav Havel framed around the house like distant relatives.

When I first traveled across the east-west European divide, in 1991, I was enchanted by the hospitality I encountered there and vowed to go back. Three years later, in 1994, through the Soros Foundation, I landed a teaching job in Pleven, Bulgaria, and then moved to teach for two years in Sliven. There, I met the former director of the Musical High School in Kotel, Stoyan Chobanov, endearingly called *Dyado* Stoyan, and his wife, *Baba* Sŭbka. They became like grandparents to me.

When I met Dyado Stoyan, he was retired, and fully blind, but still playing the kaval and giving lessons. Despite his disabilities, he had a tremendously generous and loving spirit. He taught me to sing folks songs and play the kaval, using his hands to determine my fingering and to make corrections. Together with a group of my high school students, in 1996 and 1997 Dyado Stoyan and I started a folk music group at the "Zahari Stoyanov" Language High School. We performed folk songs and had a small folk group, with kaval, *gŭdulka*, and guitars. Sometimes we meshed jazz and folk— it was very free and the students loved it! Dyado Stoyan also participated in concerts with his local choir of folk singers.

After Sliven, I moved to Sofia to study painting at the National Academy of Art. During this time, I connected with Nikola Ganchev, known as *Bai* Kolyo, and took lessons from him. Once a week, I would take the bus from the city center to his high-rise in "Mladost" to sip *rakia* with him and learn melodies. We would only sip a tiny bit, to warm us up, and we would use a small straw, to not affect our lips. He greeted me with the same humble sweater on each day and a warm and sparkly look in his eye. Even in old age, he never lost his tremendous zest for life and his passion for Bulgarian folk music! I was so lucky to meet and play with him!



Kate Jellinghaus with Nikola Ganchev

Once, he took me with him on the road to a series of small concerts in the villages around Stara Zagora. We played together on various village stages, ate *slanina* over a fire and *crème caramel* out of jars with large spoons. People thronged around him and the communal energy was incredible! What a magical time!

During my stay in Sofia, I also met with the kaval player Ivan Bogoev. I have lovely memories of playing with him, as well.

When I returned to the States, for some time, however, I found it difficult to play. For me the kaval was deeply connected to the land and people in Bulgaria and it made me overwhelmingly nostalgic to play: I simply missed my friends too much. Instead, I joined Tatiana Sarbinska's Bulgarian singing group in Boston and sang with this lively group for many, many years. In this way, I kept my close connection to Bulgarian folk music.

However, I still do play my kaval from time to time and increasingly understand that it is an important part of me. I've come to understand that when I play the kaval, I not only carry Bulgaria inside of me, but also share this magic with the world.

I currently live in Boston with my husband Emanuel, son Ezra and mom Sandra. I am an art teacher at a public high school.

Artist website: katejellinghaus.com

Kostya LaPasha *(USA)*



Kostya LaPasha

I was born in 1954 in Baltimore, Maryland. My grandparents were all from Belarus. I grew up playing *balalaika* and singing in church.

I did my bachelor's degree in biology at Towson State College in Maryland and my Ph.D. in botany at the University of Montana in Missoula. I worked at North Carolina State University in Raleigh from 1984 to 2014 in the wood products program. I am currently retired and living in Durham, North Carolina.

As a graduate student in Missoula, I started Balkan folk dancing with the university international folk dance group around 1979 and went to singing and dance workshops in Seattle. I moved to North Carolina and danced with the Chapel Hill group. There I became friends with some of the local musicians who suggested the EEFC Balkan Camp. In 1992 I went to the EEFC Balkan Camp and started Bulgarian kaval. Judy Stafford (Durham, NC kaval player) got me started before camp enough to get a tone. Ivaylo Kuchev was teaching kaval and I think Mike Gage (or Chris Rietz) worked with the beginners. Plenty to work on till camp the next year. I have been going to Balkan camp since 1992 (missed one year). Most of my kaval instruction has been at Balkan camp. Teachers I've had the chance to work with are Ivaylo Kuchev, Mike Gage, Chris Rietz, Lyuben Dosev, Valeri Georgiev, Nikolay Doktorov, and Valeri Marinov while he was living in Chapel Hill.

I played Bulgarian kaval in the group "Medovina" in Durham, NC for about 18 years with Judy Stafford (*tŭpan*, *gŭdulka* and vocals) and Robin LaPasha (*tambura* and vocals). We mostly played for the local folk dancers, and at the Raleigh International festivals. I also played in some of the reunion bands for the Chapel Hill-Durham folk dance group. I continue to play kaval (Bulgarian and Macedonian) mostly for my own enjoyment.

In addition to Bulgarian kaval that I started in 1992, I started playing balalaika around 1964 and Macedonian kaval around 1993. I also play Greek *laouto* with the group "Parea," and *oud* with the local Turkish *koro*. I have been playing *kaba gayda* since around 2000, and occasionally Thracian *gayda*. I sang in the North Carolina Opera chorus from 2016 through 2018. I've been doing Balkan singing since 1979.

I grew up listening to records of Russian folk music. In graduate school I listened to recordings of Bulgarian, Macedonian and Greek folk music—mostly records and tapes. On rare occasions as a graduate student, I had the opportunity to dance to live music in Seattle at folk dance festival weekends. In North Carolina, we danced mostly to recorded music, records then tapes, with occasional live music from some of the local musicians. At Balkan camp, there were more live performances and the chance to learn from more experienced American musicians and musicians from the Balkans. In addition to instrument classes at Balkan camp, I have taken singing classes. I have found studying in-

strumental as well as vocal technique helpful in understanding ornamentation, and the relationship and similarity of vocal and instrumental ornaments.

My first kaval, purchased in 1992, was a plastic kaval (cPVC) made by Bob Snider. Bob's kavals were affordable and exceptionally well made and easy to play. Soon I started making plastic kavals, mostly because I wanted additional kavals and even Bob's were difficult to obtain. My plastic Thracian kavals were functional but never as good as Bob's. In 1993 there was a Macedonian kaval class offered at Balkan camp with Eran Fraenkel. Macedonian kavals at the time were even harder to find than Thracian kavals, so I visited a local musician that had a pair of Macedonian kavals so I could get some measurements. I started building Macedonian kavals from a paper-plastic composite. These played well and I made them so other students could get an instrument to learn on. I still make these.

I visited Bulgaria in 1995 with Martha Forsyth for the Koprivshtitsa festival. I bought my first good kaval at the festival. I was walking across a field at the festival, carrying a gŭdulka case I had bought for Judy Stafford, when three young Bulgarian men intercepted me and asked if I wanted to buy a kaval. This was a nice kaval made by Zechko Marinov. After paying for the kaval and thanking them, I opened the empty gŭdulka case and put the kaval inside. I was amused by the looks of surprise on their faces. At the time it was difficult to get a good kaval in the US, and we often played on kavals made from plumbing pipe since many of the wood kavals that we could find were not well made and almost unplayable (tourist-grade). I was very happy to get a good instrument.

I have always been drawn to live music and I have always been drawn to play or sing music. My goal has been to get good enough to not annoy people so I could continue playing music. Making music is an important part of my being, and I feel empty when it is missing. There is something very special about playing kaval that fills a piece of my soul. I continue to play because it pleases me.

E-mail: lauto.nc@gmail.com

Ronald Long *(USA)*



Ronald Long (center), with Rachel Johnson and Jim McGill

I was born in the USA in 1952. I am of European descent. My mother grew up in Austria, and my father in the US Midwest. I live in the Pacific Northwest corner of the USA. I come to Balkan music through my wife, who was a singer and dancer in ensembles in San Francisco and Seattle.

My first experience playing Balkan music was on *tamburitza*. I started playing Balkan music in 1980, when the ensemble my wife performed in needed an accordionist for a Macedonian suite. I purchased a kaval made by Alex Eppler at the 1981 Northwest Folklife Festival music auction. My first teacher was Jo Ellison, who helped with the basics of the instrument. In the early 80s the "Radost Folk Ensemble" wished to perform a suite of dances from Varna. I organized what we called the "Bitov Study Group," with Alex Eppler teaching each of the individual *bitov* instruments. I also took private lessons from Alex. The orchestra that performed "Varna" had 3 kavals, with Steve Holt and Eric Schmidt being the other two. The only other kaval player I know is David Bilides.

I've never been to the EEFC Balkan Camp and have never considered myself qualified to teach kaval. Nor have I ever performed with prominent musicians, unless you count Alex Eppler. But he was playing *cimbalom* and I was playing accordion the one time we performed together.

These days I am 99.9% an accordionist, though I occasionally fantasize about the group I play with doing a *bitov* piece or two.

I'm a retired software engineer.

E-mail: ronald.long@gmail.com

Larry Morandi *(USA)*



Larry Morandi *(r)*, with Dennis Godfrey, Ralph Iverson, and Mike Slama

My name is Larry Morandi. I was born in 1954 in Utah, USA. My family background is Italian on my father's side, and English and Irish on my mother's. I currently live in Oregon, USA.

My first encounters with Bulgarian music were when I started international folk dancing in about 7th grade. My music background included piano lessons, then trumpet in junior high school, and French horn in high school and college, where I studied music and electrical engineering.

My first encounter with a kaval was when friends Dennis and Priscilla returned from a trip to Bulgaria with instruments and handed one to me, saying "you should learn to play this." After some weeks of hyperventilating with little progress, I eventually figured out how to get a sound, and in 1981 made it to my first of many EEFC Balkan Camps at Mendocino.

Over the years at camp I studied with Steve Finney, Alex Eppler, and Lyuben Dosev. Eventually I was asked to teach beginning kaval at camp one summer. I played kaval and double bass for many years with the Portland Oregon band "Živo," performing at folk dance events from San Francisco, California to Seattle, Washington in the 1980s and 1990s. After the band broke up, my playing didn't have much impetus, so I haven't played kaval actively for about twenty years. The picture is from a balkanalia! event in 2008.

Maria Noel *(USA)*



Maria Noel

I was born in the USA, in the state of New Hampshire. However, at the age of 5 I moved west with my family, and I spent my childhood mostly in Montana, Washington, and Oregon. As a young adult, I settled in the area of Portland, Oregon, where I have remained ever since.

My ethnic background is Swedish, French, and English with perhaps a few others in the mix. My ancestors have existed in the US area of New England for several hundreds of years.

I was around 35 years of age when I first discovered Bulgarian folk music. It was around then that I started going regularly to the Balkan music camps on the West Coast of the US, specifically balkanalia! near Portland, Oregon and the EEFC camp in the Mendocino Woodlands of California.

Since middle school, I have played the modern silver transverse flute and had always been interested in owning and learning to play various types of flutes from around the world, though without much opportunity. However, after initially having become enthralled with the folk music of Bulgaria and learning vocal techniques and playing the *tŭpan*, I borrowed a kaval from a friend. Unfortunately, I found that particular instrument to be difficult to play and gave it back to my friend. Then in 2010, during a visit to the Koprivshtitsa festival in Bulgaria, I bought my very first kaval. After that, I started joining the kaval class at the Mendocino camp led by our beloved teacher, Valeri Georgiev.

Olea Stevens, also in the Portland area, has become my closest friend as a kaval enthusiast. Also from the Mendocino kaval classes I have become acquainted with Ivan Velev, Evan Stuart, and Victor Robin.

At the EEFC camp in the Mendocino Woodlands, I have learned from Valeri Georgiev starting around 2011, through the last year I attended camp, which was 2023. In recent years I have also joined the Bulgarian ensembles on several occasions, both at the Mendocino camp and at balkanalia!. I can't say that I have achieved as high a competency as I have with my Bulgarian singing or *tŭpan* playing but I enjoy playing the kaval on a casual basis, by myself or with my friend Olea.

I am currently a Software Developer.

Facebook: Maria Noel

Asaf Ophir *(USA)*



Asaf Ophir

I was born in 1980, in Israel. Both of my parents are Jewish Israeli: my mother's parents are *Ashkenazi*, from Poland, and my father's parents are *Sephardic*, their families having lived in Israel for many years. I currently live in the San Francisco Bay Area in California, and work as a full-time musician.

I grew up playing the clarinet, mostly in western classical and Jewish *klezmer* music. I also began to take interest in other woodwinds over the years, including the saxophone, Western silver flute, and many folk instruments. I have performed with many known artists throughout my career, including Miri Mesika, Avi Kushnir, Galit Giat, David De'or, Rana Farhan, Ustad Mahwash, Emel Mathlouthi, and Barbra Streisand.

I heard a bit of Balkan music while I lived in Israel, but I was introduced to it more directly by my fellow musicians in the Bay Area. Some of them were Bulgarian, and they introduced me specifically to Bulgarian music—which I fell in love with immediately—and to the kaval. At that time, I was already familiar with the Arabic *ney*, which essentially has the same embouchure and tone production. For this reason, kaval came very naturally to me.

I learned to play the kaval mostly by myself, with advice from friends like Will Cope—a local multi-instrumentalist who is very knowledgeable in folk music—and Ivan Velev, a local Bulgarian musician. After developing some basic skills, I began to attend the Eastern European Folklife Center music camp, where I could study with Valeri Georgiev. He was my main introduction to Thracian kaval.

One of my interesting stories about the kaval is how I originally found my instrument: I was looking for a good one, and several of my friends were trying to help. I tried many different flutes, but it was difficult to find one that I really liked. In the end, John Gibson sent me two flutes from Oxnard, California (near Los Angeles) which I fell in love with. There was only one problem: They were very old, and moldy. One of them also had a broken mouthpiece.

For many months, I tried every possible method to clean the flutes without damaging them. In the end, a local woodwind repairman recommended I use undecylenic acid, which is a common ingredient in treating fingernail fungus. It worked! But it made the flutes smell even worse. It took many weeks until I could finally play them.

I had a new mouthpiece made by Hector Bezanis, another local musician, instrument maker, and wood carver. Now I have two kavals, and a story to tell.

Website: AsafOphir.com

Chris Rietz *(USA)*



Chris Rietz, with Bruce Sagan and Nan Nelson

My name is Chris Rietz. I was born in Chicago, grew up mostly in Akron, OH, but I've been in Michigan for over 45 years (currently in East Lansing). I graduated college with a degree in English, but I worked the main part of my adult life at a folk/acoustic music store (Elderly Instruments), mostly managing their recordings department. I play a handful of fretted stringed instruments, chiefly guitar, in addition to the kaval. I'm 74 years old as of this writing.

I was introduced to Balkan music back in 1980 by a housemate, who had some records, and I was immediately captivated. Soon I discovered that a co-worker, Sandy Cherin, sang Bulgarian songs and played the *gŭdulka*, and that her (now) husband, Mike Gage, played the kaval. I was struck by how Bulgarian music—so highly developed, virtuosic and thrilling—could be played on an instrument so primally simple in design. Mike became my first kaval teacher, and I learned a great deal from him and Sandy both.

Shortly thereafter I attended a Balkan Music & Dance Camp in Mendocino CA, hosted by the East European Folklife Center, and in the following year they initiated a camp for the East Coast, then at a SUNY campus facility in Ashokan, NY. In subsequent years I had the privilege of teaching at these East Coast camps (and twice at Mendocino as well) for 10-12 years, teaching all levels of kaval, *bitov* (i.e., Bulgarian folk instruments) ensemble and occasionally Bulgarian tambura.

I've spent most of the last 25 years or so playing with a Bulgarian-style troika, "Veselba," with *tambura* player Nan Nelson and Bruce Sagan on gŭdulka. Our public appearances have almost exclusively been at dances, often for the dance groups in nearby Ann Arbor or in Detroit for various Bulgarian cultural and celebratory events. We've also played for the occasional MPO [Macedonian Patriotic Organization] convention, various dance camps (including Buffalo on the Danube in 2009 with Stoyan Kostov, and Tzvety Dosseva), Boston Balkan Night in 2019, and many more.

Despite the fact that I have no other connection to Bulgarian culture, I've been fortunate in that I've always had people to play this music with, and a succession of great teachers: Mike Gage and other Americans like Mark Forry, David Bilides, and Tim Rice, and genuine Bulgarian *maystori* like Georgi Doychev, Lyuben Dosev, Nikolay Doktorov and Valeri Georgiev. The nurturing and stimulating environment provided by the EEFC in their annual camps has been invaluable to me in maintaining my love for—and involvement in—Bulgarian music.



Chris Rietz with Georgi Doychev

Victor Robin *(USA)*



Victor Robin

I was born in East Palo Alto, California, on October 18, 1952. I am Swedish, Scottish, Irish, Welsh, English, French and German, and that's all that I know of. I live in Northern California.

My first encounters with Bulgarian folk music: in Summer School, Watsonville High School, 1969, I took a drama class from teacher Sue Cloe, at seventeen years of age. My assignment was to become Shakespeare's Macbeth. My Lady Macbeth was Linda Jurikovich, second born to a Montenegrin family. In 1969 she invited me to go "folk dancing" with her. Well, I said yes.

In grammar school I had learned circle dances such as The Cumberland Reel and Oh, Johnny, Oh, Johnny, oh (my favorite). But, no, Linda took me to Friday Night Folk Dancing at Cabrillo College, Aptos, California, with dance instructor Al Doud, who was also the instructor of Arabic Languages at the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California.

It was all music and dance from Serbia to Armenia and many stops in between. I had started playing piano when I was three years of age and had never heard music such as this! My favorite was the music of Bulgaria. The first two tunes that really impressed me wer *Shopska horovodna* and *Gjura beli belo platno*, played by the Pirin ensemble "Nasha Pesen." They remain two of my favorites till this day. I had never heard odd meters before this! I was immediately obsessed! I would sit in the corner while people danced, drumming on my knees to find the meter. When I did, it was like a gate opening onto a new hidden path taking me places I'd never been. This has literally been proven to be true.

My first kaval was made by Marcus Holt (Moskoff). He took it upon himself to produce by hand in his garage workshop all of the *bitov* instruments before any of these were available here in California. That kaval was made of aluminum electrical conduit, covered with wood-grained contact paper. This was my start.

My friends among kaval players: Oh, so many! Ivan Velev, Even Stewart, Peggy Datz, Temelko Ivanov, Nedyalko Nedyalkov, Theodosii Spassov, John Gibson, Steve Finney, Chris Rietz, Mike Stamp, Mitko Konstantinov, Ivaylo Kuchev, Mark Forry, Bogdan Darev, David Bilides, Aleksandr Eppler.

I have studied Thracian kaval with Aleksandr Eppler, Nikolay Doktorov, Mitko Konstantinov, Ivaylo Kuchev, Nedyalko Nedyalkov, Valeri Georgiev, Theodosii Spassov, and Temelko Ivanov.

In 1974 at Sweet's Mill, Auberry, California, Mark Levy, *gayda* player, slowly worked me through a transcription of *buenek* he had run off on the mimeograph at UCLA before the first Balkan Camp weekend at Sweet's Mill. The camp was offered as an extension class at UCLA. Mark was a student of Boris Kremenliev. At the camp in 1975, Mark quipped, "Are you still working on that?" Yes, I was still working on that...

I have not taught the kaval. I am a California boy. Students should go to the source.

My greatest achievement was a performance with the great *tŭpan* player, Ivan Velev, at the International Stage at the Koprivshtitsa festival in Bulgaria, 2015. Previous to that was my vocal of *Zaspala malka moma* at Kolo Festival in San Francisco, with "Verni Drugina," late 1990s. After the introduction, as I started the song, the dancers rushed the stage in their excitement. What a feeling! Also a greatest achievement, but a vocal one.

I currently attend Nikolay Kolev's Saturday Zoom *gŭdulka* workshop. Nikolay is a gŭdulka player of great renown (for example, in the band "Kabile"). I have performed with Kabile when it included the great Temelko Ivanov. Nikolay is also a lyricist, and I have performed some of his songs.

At Kolo Festival, San Francisco, 2024, I was privileged to play with Angel Dobrev and Petar "Usmivkata" Aleksiev. They lifted me up to do my greatest kaval performances yet.

In 2015, I joined the *Antika* Bulgaria tour of Bulgaria led by Tanya Kostova. One of the major events was the 40th Anniversary of the Trakia Ensemble, which I was there to enjoy in the ancient amphitheater of Plovdiv. Tanya had been the soloist in a well-loved dance production about the Shepherd and the *Samodiva*. She was honored with recognition of the importance of her role in the history of the Trakia Ensemble.

Later in the performance, Tanya and many others who were part of the great legacy of the Trakia Ensemble were kinetically impelled to join the performance. Living members who had been part of the ensemble in the past, including Ivan Varimezov, were present on stage for the celebration.

During this magical excursion, the participants enjoyed a viewing of the home of Orpheus, and a *gayda* festival in Gela, then two nights in Tri Grad. We did visit the Devil's Throat, where Orpheus chose to enter the underworld. Anton Shekerjiev Shekerdzhiev played gayda for Orpheus. I found the font of Orpheus' Tears. They are part of me now.

The last event on the tour was the Koprivshtitsa festival. Koprivshtitsa is the historical location of the engagement of Russian support to drive out the Ottoman occupation of Bulgaria. It is now the location of Bulgarian cultural preservation and respect.

I'm a retired cook. My Scottish blood, the McMurtry family relatives in Guerneville, California, were known to have employed "Bohemian" families in the 1920s and 1930s. Might there have been, rather, a "Bulgarian" connection there?

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Rich Schultz *(USA)*



Rich Schultz

I was born in 1954 in Iowa City, Iowa, in the USA, and grew up in various college towns around the Midwest. I studied classical piano from age 7 through college and took up folk guitar around age 15. In 1975, after college, I moved to Princeton, New Jersey for work and started going to international folk dancing. I fell for it, dancing multiple nights a week. The music for Bulgarian dances caught my attention, especially the sound of the kaval. I was already playing guitar in an international folk dance band, which was great fun, but it wasn't the sound I wanted for Bulgarian dances. I wanted to try the kaval. I was able to get one in 1980 and set about trying to play it on my own, knowing of no one who could teach me. Imagine all the bad habits I picked up! I remember many hours trying to get tones, followed by many hours trying to get decent tones and passable tunes, assuming a generous interpretation of "decent" and "passable."

Relief came in the form of a Balkan Camp flyer at a folk dance party. In the summer of 1981, I headed to Mendocino, where Alex Eppler was teaching kaval. Recordings had comprised my previous kaval exposure, most of them with orchestral accompaniment. Hearing a master play live while watching his hands was a fantastic experience. I learned to sit where I could see Alex's thumb in action.

Back home, I got in touch with Mike Gage, a kaval player in Philadelphia I had heard about at camp, and began working with him on my kaval playing. He was such a great help. I returned to Mendocino in 1982 (Mark Forry teaching) and 1983 (Steve Finney teaching), and also went to East Coast Balkan Camp in 1983, the year it started (David Bilides teaching). I returned to East Coast camp most years through 1990 and also went to Mendocino camp in 1990, then I moved to California and did camp in Mendocino most years through 1999, and in 2007. Camp gave me most of my kaval training. When "Trakiyskata Troyka" came to the US in 1987 as part of the "Balkana" tour, I was able to get a lesson with Stoyan Velichkov, whose playing style I much admired.

Kaval teachers I studied with at Balkan Camp and elsewhere in the US:

- David Bilides
- Nikolay Doktorov
- Lyuben Dosev
- Alex Eppler
- Steve Finney
- Mark Forry
- Mike Gage

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- Valeri Georgiev
- Dimitŭr Konstantinov
- Ivaylo Kuchev
- Chris Rietz
- Gospodin Stanev
- Stoyan Velichkov
- Georgi Zhelyazkov

I taught beginning kaval at Mendocino camp in 1991 and 1999. I also taught a couple of years at the Arcata Festival in California, mostly beginning students.

Playing kaval with others is great fun, whether performing, playing for dancers, rehearsing for a gig or just for the pleasure. I have been doing so since I could play well enough not to frighten the sheep, with instrumentalists and singers, all friends, from the mid-80's through today. Some *bitov* bands I have played in:

- "Yavka," based in Philadelphia
- "Pushka Pukna Bulgarian Orchestra", Queens Ethnic Music and Dance Festival, 1986
- "Zyko Byko," based in the San Francisco Bay Area
- "Sokalska Grupa," based in San Diego
- "Balkanton 340," based in the San Francisco Bay Area (It's a record catalog number and a band name!)

I currently live in Saratoga, California, about 50 miles southeast of San Francisco.

Leslie Scott *(USA)*



Leslie Scott

I was born June 27, 1950, in Urbana, Illinois, U.S.A. I have no ethnic connection to Bulgaria or the Balkans. My ancestry is Norwegian on my mother's side and mostly Scottish on my father's, and I've lived all my life in the United States. For many years now, home has been Columbus, Ohio.

I first encountered Bulgarian folk music through international folk dancing in college in Southern California around 1970. Soon I found myself particularly attracted to Balkan and specifically Bulgarian dances, which eventually led to an interest in the music. By 1981 I was interested enough in Bulgarian language and culture to apply for an IREX grant to attend a summer seminar in Sofia, where, besides studying the language, I had a chance to do some dancing and singing. Either that summer or the next, when I attended the seminar a second time, I bought a cheap kaval at a tourist shop at the Black Sea, not knowing if it was even playable. If I couldn't learn to play it, I thought, it would at least be a nice souvenir to hang on the wall.

For several years I occasionally tried blowing on that kaval but could never make a clear sound. Once I took it to a folk dance weekend in Chicago where someone was teaching a kaval class, but he basically told me it was a piece of junk. A few years later, however, in 1990, I took it to my first East Coast Balkan Camp at Buffalo Gap in West Virginia, signed up for Chris Rietz's beginning kaval class, and was able to play a tune by the end of the week. I did eventually acquire a much better instrument.

By now (2025) I have attended East Coast Balkan Camp about 25 times and taken kaval classes there from Georgi Zhelyazkov, Ivaylo Kuchev, Lyuben Dosev, Valeri Georgiev (many times), Nedyalko Nedyalkov, Nikolay Doktorov and Temelko Ivanov. I also went on dance trips to Bulgaria several times in the 1990s with Ron Houston and had opportunities to take a few kaval lessons with teachers whose names I don't remember. I took kaval lessons from Lyuben Dosev at a two-week Bulgarian music and dance seminar organized by Vedafolk in 2000, held mostly in Momchilovtsi in the Rhodopes, and at the 2008 folk music and dance seminar in Plovdiv.

After all those lessons and classes I ought to be a pretty accomplished kaval player by now, but I've never practiced enough, or worked hard enough on learning ornaments, to achieve that goal. I have never taught kaval and have never performed or recorded with any prominent musicians.

Since the early 1990s I have played kaval in "Hajde," a band based in Columbus, Ohio, that performs Bulgarian and Macedonian music on traditional instruments (kaval, *gayda*, *tambura*, *tŭpan* and sometimes *gŭdulka*). Our repertoire consists mainly of tunes that band members have learned at Balkan Camp. We have two kaval players, the other one being Bob Snider, who started playing about the same time I did but worked harder and made much more progress. Hajde no longer rehearses or performs regularly, but the band still plays occasionally for Balkan dance evenings in Columbus.

As for other aspects of my life, I'm a retired Russian-to-English translator, and I continue to be an enthusiastic international and Balkan folk dancer. I play recorder for our local English country dance group and participate in other music and dance activities as well. My husband and I kept the Columbus Folk Dancers alive on Zoom through the pandemic. Although I enjoy playing kaval, I'm a dancer first, as my email address suggests.

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Bill Selden *(USA)*



Bill Selden

I was born in Akron, Ohio in 1946. My ethnic background is English, with family coming over to Virginia in 1606 or to Connecticut mid-19th century. Currently I live in Highland Park, NJ.

My first encounters with kaval were recordings and Mile Kolarov in person in the late 1970's. My first, futile attempt to make a sound was in the early 1980's.

My kaval-playing friends are Rich Schultz from 40 years ago, and Chris Rietz, from East Coast Balkan Camp. Chris has also been one of my instructors, along with Valery Georgiev, Lyuben Dosev, Temelko Ivanov, and Nikolay Doktorov.

I regularly attended EEFC East Coast camp starting in 1983, with time out in the late 1980's to start a family.

I've taught once or twice informally to beginning students, giving advice to hold a note on one breath on the sweet spot. I've performed almost nothing: one tune at the camp *kafana* and one melody for a contradance band in Princeton, NJ.

I was the Collections Manager for Rutgers University Geology Museum for 33 years and am now retired.

My motive for learning kaval was to improve my understanding of Bulgarian folk music. Growing up in Dayton, Ohio, I was entirely unaware of it. I had a high school friend whose mother and grandparents immigrated from Bulgaria after World War II, but none of them ever mentioned their folk traditions. I play accordion and thought playing a traditional instrument could give me a better insight into understanding more about what folk "composers" wanted in their music. The specific transfers are mostly a sound in my imagination and asking myself, "How would a kaval play this line?" Also, a kaval player must take a breath. On accordion you don't have to do that, but it is much more musical if you do. There are also kaval ornaments and combinations of ornaments that occasionally transfer to the keyboard. When playing a slow melody, I sometimes play held notes with a fourth below to imitate *kaba*. The 4th below really doesn't work for moving passages.

I love playing the kaval. Part of that is because of the reward of progress on the instrument, and part is just its sound. Unfortunately, I have a ringing in my ears that is intensified by notes from a high D and above. Just where the kaval makes its most lovely sounds.

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David Shochat *(USA)*



David Shochat

I was born in 1944 in Los Angeles, CA and now live in Portland, OR. My ethnic background is half *Ashkenazi* Jewish (father's side) and the other half mostly English. My father was a high school music teacher and later taught foreign languages. One day, he brought home a poster showing the instruments of the orchestra so I could choose. I chose flute.

I first discovered Bulgarian music in 1963, while in college. I actually fell very much in love with the music of the Balkans, obviously including Bulgaria. At UCLA, I attempted to play a kaval that was in the collection of the Ethnomusicology Institute there, but could not get a sound. But then a fellow musician named Stuart Brotman picked up this same kaval and proved to me that it could actually be played. Also, I played flute, so I knew that I just needed to keep trying and would probably succeed eventually.

In 1968, I was introduced to an instrument maker in *selo* Kameno, Burgasko, named Slavi Ivanov, and I returned in 1972, buying a *gayda* and 2 kavals from him. I started trying to play the gayda, but soon joined with some other musicians in Los Angeles and was encouraged to try the kaval, since they already had a *gayda* player! I had no access to a teacher, so I used a book on the kaval that I had bought in Bulgaria. I worked on kaval initially with another flute player, but we were both starting from scratch and had no access to any teacher. The group in question (eventually called "Pitu Guli"—we also played some Macedonian music) continued for several years, playing mostly at dance events. This was my motivation to continue practicing and to improve my playing. During this time we often played in somewhat rustic camp-like environments such as Camp Mattole, in Humboldt County, CA, Sweet's Mill in the Western Sierra of California, and in a redwood forest in the Mendocino Woodlands near the Northern California Pacific Coast. In addition to playing for dancers, we sometimes would teach others to play our instruments. I did this with a group of beginning kaval students at one of these camps in 1977. Largely through the efforts of our gayda player, Mark Levy, these camps were subsequently formalized under an organization called the East European Folklife Center (EEFC).

On one occasion at Sweet's Mill, I met Alex Eppler, of Seattle, WA, whose kaval playing was far advanced compared to mine. I believe I got a few pointers from him there. He actually played all the instruments superbly. Sadly, he is no longer with us.

On another occasion, the Balkan dance teacher Martin Koenig came to Los Angeles, and our group played for his teaching events. This led to an after-party in my tiny home in Echo Park, CA (a neighborhood of Los Angeles). There was so little space, we musicians had to sit on the back of the sofa while others danced. This event included some *zurla* playing and the party ended upon the arrival of the police. But all this later resulted in Martin Koenig flying Mark Levy and me out to New York where we played for dancing at Columbia University with some local musicians including Elli and Dov Buk.

In 1972, I received my Ph.D. in Mathematical Logic and Set Theory at UCLA. My choice of this field was the result of my interest in linguistics, which was the result of my interest in Slavic linguistics, which was the result of my determination to learn South Slavic languages, including Bulgarian, which in turn was the result of my having fallen in love with everything related to Balkan music and dance. Starting in 1973, I taught mathematics at Santa Monica College, and in 1982 I switched to aerospace software development and integration, continuing for 14 years in Southern California and then 14 more years in the Boston area.



Ivaylo Kuchev, David Shochat, Larry Gordon

In 1997, my wife and I moved to Chelmsford, MA where we lived for 19 years. While there, in 2001, I attended a singing camp in Vermont called Village Harmony. At that camp, the featured teacher was Petrana Kucheva, and her husband, Ivaylo Kuchev was there with her. I happened to have brought my kaval along and only discovered at the camp that Ivaylo was a kaval player (he also plays *tŭpan*). So I was able to have private lessons with him every day at this camp! It may have been my first kaval instruction from a real kaval player. We performed a duet (a *kopanitsa*) as part of our concerts. But without access to a regular teacher and without a group to play with, my playing languished.

In 2016, we moved to Portland, OR. Very recently, I joined a group of musicians here to play mostly Bulgarian music, and this has inspired me to get back to work on my kaval playing. We have already played for dancers in Portland a few times.

I have received occasional instruction from Valeri Georgiev, most recently in a kaval class at EEFC's East Coast Balkan Music and Dance Workshop in August 2025.

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David Skidmore *(USA)*



David Skidmore

I was born in Illinois, USA in 1948. My ethnic background is Irish, German, Welsh, French, and the British Isles. I currently live in Boston, Massachusetts, USA.

I was probably around 25 when I was first interested in the kaval, specifically, but I had been dancing to recorded Bulgarian music (among many other nationalities' dance music) since I was 18.

My initial experiences with trying to play kaval were frustrating, but also challenging to the point of continuing the attempt. I had studied playing clarinet so fingering wasn't a problem but the mouth position for getting a solid sound from the kaval was a tougher proposition. Also, I did not have a kaval at first so I made one out of PVC plastic pipe, copying a Thracian kaval borrowed from a friend.

My kaval-playing friends are Patrick Yacono, David Bilides, Ralph Iverson, Brian Wilson, Michael Gage, Eran Fraenkel, and Lyuben Dosev.

I have not actually studied with any kaval teacher. I am primarily self-taught. I'm pretty sure that I attended a kaval class at EEFC Balkan Camp either in 1989 or 1990. I think the teacher was Michael Gage. I have not taught kaval to anyone. I can play but I don't feel proficient enough to pass on anything but basic playing concepts.

I have not played kaval for performances or recordings with any prominent singers or musicians, but I was recorded for Bulgarian TV at Koprivshtitsa in 1991, playing *tŭpan* with other members of the Boston, US based Bulgarian music ensemble "Zdravets." We were a happy curiosity—an American group playing and singing Bulgarian folklore music.

I continue to play with Zdravets in Boston—we are a singing and instrumental ensemble of 8 people. I am primarily the drummer for the group but I occasionally play kaval. Patrick Yacono is our primary kaval player and Ralph Iverson also plays kaval occasionally. The group plays for a monthly dance from September through June and also plays upon other special dance occasions in the area.

During our time at the Koprivshtitsa festival in 1991 I did not actually have a tŭpan with me, so the first few tunes we played for the TV folks I was using a *tambura* case for a drum! They eventually found a tŭpan for me to borrow for the filming.

Jon Skinner *(USA)*



Jon Skinner

I was born in Boston, Massachusetts, in late spring, 1941, son of a long line of Americans of mixed ethnicity that includes English and Swedish immigrants from centuries ago. I have a few memories of World War II in southeast Massachusetts, watching the blimps on patrol and the excitement of my mother at VJ day. I am ending my years in Albany, New York, USA. I first met Balkan music around 1980 and was instantly captivated by it, even though I knew nothing about it, unable to tell Bulgarian music from Greek, let alone Thracian from Dobrudzhan or Pirin. It was great to hear music that I could dance to in spite of "two left feet" and a weak sense of balance.

Soon I began to learn about the many different strains and to want to make music, though I could barely carry a tune. I loved—and still do—the sound of the kaval and admire its elegant simplicity, which offers unlimited opportunities to an expert for varying the sound and the same to a novice for making mistakes. As Nikolay Doktorov pointed out to me, a kaval is a chromatic instrument, and one can make all kinds of music, including Scottish and American folksongs with it. And I do.

In 1983, a friend made me a Macedonian style kaval from a piece of PVC pipe, which I still have and "play" in my car at stoplights. In 1986, 1991, 1995, and 2005 I attended the festival at Koprivshtitsa, and I bought a pair of Bulgarian kavals ("re" and "do") made by Todor Stoyanov there in 1991.

My sole source of kaval instruction has been through the Balkan music and dance camps held by the East European Folklife Center on the North American East Coast. I attended every year from 1987, when I first managed to play notes in all four registers, until COVID shuttered the camps. Such is my love of the kaval that simply playing a scale with or without vibrato, trills, separations, or *hlopki* takes me into a world of pleasure and peace. Like all pleasures, kaval playing is indescribable—though the technical language makes a valiant effort.

My first instructor was David Bilides in 1987, who taught us the Rhodope tune, *Oy choban*. I am deeply and wondrously grateful to the many Bulgarian kaval instructors who have helped me with encouragement and cheerfully put up with my idiosyncrasies and weaknesses: especially David Bilides, Lyuben Dosev, Nikolay Doktorov, Temelko Ivanov, and Valeri Georgiev. I am still amazed that a weak intermediate player like me can take classes from world-class master musicians. And, of course, I have also learned from my fellow students. Kavals have expanded my understanding to an extent I would never have thought of in 1980. Thank you, one and all!

Bob Snider *(USA)*



Bob Snider

I was born in St. Louis, Missouri, United States, but I've lived most of my life in Columbus, Ohio—I studied computer science and electrical engineering at Ohio State University. Almost all of my career has been writing computer software for mainframe and embedded systems. I am currently retired.

I first heard the kaval when I started folk dancing in 1989 and heard recordings of Bulgarian folk music. I fell in love with the music, which was very different from the classical and American music of my musical training, using complex rhythms and unusual key signatures. In 1990 I made my first kaval out of plastic pipe. Later that year, I bought my first wooden kaval from a kaval player who was on tour with an ensemble. Soon after that, I bought a lathe, and over the next 15 years I made kavals from wood and plastic, and I also bought kavals made in Bulgaria.

Most of my lessons were at the EEFC Balkan Camp in the U.S., including Bulgarian teachers Georgi Zhelyazkov, Ivaylo Kuchev, Lyuben Dosev, Nikolay Doktorov, and Valeri Georgiev. Fellow Balkan Camp kaval friends also helped me in my studies: Chris Rietz, Mike Gage, David Bilides, and Rich Schultz. I traveled to Bulgaria twice and studied with Dr. Dosev in Plovdiv.

Around 1992, some of my friends from camp and I formed the ensemble "Hajde," playing Bulgarian folk music on traditional instruments: kaval, *gayda*, *tambura,* and *tŭpan*. Over the years, we played at Balkan Camp, at various folk dance workshops, and at festivals. We are still actively playing in 2026.

In the spring of 1999, Lyuben and I visited the kaval maker Vesselin Hasabaliev in Haskovo, Bulgaria. We toured his workshop, played music with him and his wife, and received some wooden candlesticks for his friend in the U.S. After some delicious *Shopska salata*, Vesko walked with me and Lyuben to catch our bus back to Plovdiv.

We were having beers in the café above the station, when a bus pulled out. "Is that our bus?" I asked. No, they said, not for another half hour. But shortly they discovered that they had been looking at the wrong schedule, and it was, in fact, our last bus.

I imagined sleeping in my clothes at Vesko's house. But no. He hurried us down to the street and hailed a cab! "Follow that bus!" We all got in, and the cabbie was amused as I buckled my seat belt, revealing myself as a foreigner.

It was a wild ride. One minute we were passing cars on both sides; the next, slowing politely to the speed limit for the police at the roadside; then off again at high speed. I thought we were probably going to take this maniac cab all the way to Plovdiv.

But soon we came to a hill, rising gently up from the valley. And there it was: our bus, laboring up the slope, blowing out blue oil smoke as it geared down. We pulled alongside and waved our tickets wildly out the window. The bus pulled over. Lyuben and I bade rushed farewells to Vesko, who would ride the taxi back to Haskovo. The other passengers on the bus were curious, but probably relieved that it wasn't a breakdown.

"What about Vesko?" I asked Lyuben as we took seats. "I didn't even pay for my ticket." "It's OK," he said. "You are taking things to America for him. It's enough." We watched the farmland and apricot trees streak by. Then he repeated one of his favorite phrases: "Welcome to Bulgaria."

Olea Stevens *(USA)*



Olea Stevens with her mother, Irene Treesong

I was born in August 1995 in a California olive grove. I am of mostly Western European heritage, with a little mystery mixed in (which my mother would like to think is Eastern European or *Roma*). When I was 7 years old, my mom went to a music camp in the redwoods (Lark Camp) to play Irish mandolin. While there she heard Bulgarian music for the first time and fell in love, especially with the *gayda*. She brought home a CD by [Santa Cruz gayda player] Karen Guggenheim and showed it to me. I was captivated, and returned to camp with her the next summer, where I was immersed in the magic of Balkan music and dance. I was already an avid dancer, focused on ballet but also loving all the folk dancing I could get my feet into.

I was utterly captivated by Balkan music, but especially Bulgarian, due to the unique rhythms, and also having been welcomed into such a loving community. We became close friends with so many lovers of this music, including Sue Williard, Karen Guggenheim, Vasil Bebelekov and family, and the Genetti family, even though we only saw them once or twice a year at Lark Camp and at Kolo Festival. Closer to home, we were welcomed by Linnea Mandell and Craig Kurumada into the folk dance community in Arcata, where my mom and I would drive two hours over two mountain passes each month to go folk dancing. With all of these lovely folks I've experienced some of my most transformative moments, rawest emotions, and the deepest belly laughs.

Around the time I was 10, I started learning *tŭpan*, and played very basic casual rhythms for a couple years, mostly just accompanying my mom on gayda. A few years later, I shifted my attention to kaval, and my mom found instructions online about how to make one out of a PVC pipe. Once I figured out how to make sounds on the plastic pipe, she found a cheap wooden kaval, possibly on eBay, she doesn't remember exactly. I had one or two lessons with Mike Slama at Lark Camp, then tried learning on my own in rural Northern California. We didn't have internet (we didn't even have a phone in our home), so I was quickly frustrated by trying to teach myself, and after a year or so, I gave up and switched to *gŭdulka*. I already had some experience playing a bowed instrument, as violin had been my first instrument as a young child. I played gŭdulka through high school, mostly with my mom, and also at EEFC Balkan Camp with Todor Kirov and Ivanka Paunova.

When I left for college, I fell out of practicing any music whatsoever, but during my senior year of engineering school someone mentioned to me that my paternal grandfather had played violin. I never met this grandparent, but I asked around and found out that his violin was locked away in a storage shed, which reignited my desire to make music. I got my hands on the violin, and after graduating and entering the engineering workforce, I found myself very unhappy so I quit my job and went to Bulgaria for 3 months. While there I worked on a farm, travelled to Shiroka Lŭka and stayed with the students there for a week, explored places I had only heard about for years, and ended up in Varna where Dragni and Petya Dragnevi welcomed me like family. I learned some tunes from

Dragni and some songs from Petya, and as often happens when I'm around a lot of instruments for a while, I wanted to try them all out. So I squeezed the gayda for ten minutes one day. And another day I picked up a kaval and couldn't make a single sound. Dragni said, "Just whistle," then when I did, he put the kaval to my mouth and moved it around until it made a sound. It was a hilarious re-introduction to making sounds come out of a kaval. And when I could reproduce the sound on my own, I was once again fascinated by the fluidity of sound that comes from air through a tube!

When I returned home to the USA I started driving for Uber full time. My mom mailed my old kaval to me and I began playing it in short bursts between passengers. I kept the kaval assembled, lying between the driver and the passenger seats. It was a great conversation starter, and sparked many conversations about Bulgarian music, and even passengers asking if they could try to play it. I always agreed, some were successful, many more were not, but I always hoped they left with a little bit of curiosity about this music from this beautiful region.



Olea Stevens

Since then I've played kaval in waves. I took Valeri Georgiev's class at the EEFC Mendocino Camp, and had two lessons with Temelko Ivanov, as well as a handful of lessons with Dragni Dragnev. Kaval friends that come to mind are Maria Noel, Gaelen Genetti, Jenette Sellin, Evaonne Hendricks, Victor Robin and many others, and I meet new kaval friends every year!

I'm always encouraging others to toot on the flute and try to make a sound, but I've never really taught and I'm not performing. I'm just here for the pure enjoyment of making this tube sing! I love kaval and I love the challenge it presents, but it's in constant competition with my other main interests, textile and fiber arts.

I currently reside in Portland, Oregon, USA and make a living as a truck driver delivering organic fruits and vegetables to the local supermarkets. And yes, of course, I do sometimes bring the kaval with me in the truck!

Patrick Yacono *(USA)*



Patrick Yacono

I was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1965, into an Italian-American family. (My father's parents and my mother were all born in Sicily.) I currently live in the greater Boston area.

I first encountered Bulgarian folk music as a 19-year-old at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), where I went to college. I happened across an outdoor folk dance event run by the MIT Folk Dance Club, where they did dances from many countries, including several dances from Bulgaria. I found the music very interesting, and soon became a regular attendee at their dance parties, eventually dancing two or three nights per week.

In 1988 I joined the Mandala Folk Dance Ensemble, a folk dance performing group. Each year they produced a ninety-minute show featuring dances from all over the world. During my first year with the group the big closing number was a suite of Bulgarian dances from the Shope region, which opened with one of the dancers playing a kaval on stage while a group of women danced and sang. At the time none of the dancers in the group knew how to play the kaval, but since I could play the clarinet, I wound up playing the part on the clarinet instead. After doing that for a couple of months one of the musicians in the group gave me a plastic kaval and showed me how to make a sound with it. At first I was not able to get any sound from it, but after a few weeks of trial and error I was able to reliably produce some sort of tone with it and eventually played it on stage.

At about the same time a group of Bulgarian musicians was touring the US and gave a concert in the Boston area. While they were in town, they offered instrumental lessons, so it was then that I had my first kaval lesson, with Ivaylo Kuchev. I attended the EEFC Balkan Camp for the first time in 1990, playing kaval in the Bulgarian ensemble class, and took the kaval class with Georgi Zhelyazkov the following year.

Just prior to my first Balkan camp, I joined "Zdravets," a group focused primarily on the dance music and songs of Bulgaria, and not long afterwards, I joined "Zornitsa," a men's choral group newly started by the Bulgarian singer Tatiana Sarbinska. Besides numerous performances and dance events with both groups (including in Bulgaria at the national folklore festival at Koprivshtitsa), I have also played kaval as a member of bands accompanying Tatiana Sarbinska in concert, both in the Boston area and in Washington, D.C.

Glossary

Ashkenazi *n. or adj.* A Jew of Central or Eastern European origin, whose musical and cultural traditions (including klezmer) are distinct from those of Sephardic Jews.

Baba Bulgarian and Macedonian word for "grandmother" or an elderly woman, often used as a term of respect.

Bai A Bulgarian honorific title used before a man's first name, roughly equivalent to "uncle" or "elder brother," implying familiarity and respect.

balalaika A Russian plucked string instrument with a triangular body and three strings, associated with folk and classical Russian music.

Belchenski [Belchinski] rŭchenik A traditional Bulgarian handkerchief dance (rŭchenik) tune, played by Teodosii Spassov as a kaval solo on his album, *The Long Road.*

bitov A Bulgarian adjective meaning "everyday" or "folk," used to describe a style of folk music that is accessible and popular rather than regionally specific or traditional. Often describes the following instruments in an ensemble: gayda, kaval, gŭdulka, tambura, and tŭpan.

buenek Refers to specific melodies and a traditional men's dance from the region of Elhovo in Eastern Thrace. It was usually danced in winter or early springtime. Women also do similar buenek dances for the St. Lazarus Day ritual.

Bŭlgarska mayka "Bulgarian mother"

Bŭlgarski bratia "Bulgarian brothers"

Bŭlgarski tatko "Bulgarian dad"

čalgija A style of urban folk music from the Balkans, particularly North Macedonia, rooted in Ottoman-era ensemble playing that features instruments such as the clarinet, kanun, violin, oud, and def.

chetvorno horo Refers to specific Bulgarian melodies, and folk dances in a 7 meter (grouped as 3+2+2), performed in a line or open circle.

chifte kavali Literally "double kavals," in Bulgaria, single-bore kavals made in a matched set, without regard to a specific key, sold together, played together (one producing a drone, the other a melody, or played in unison), and in perfect tune with each other, so thin they are always stored together in a case, or kept on sticks. Played almost exclusively by Muslims of the southwest Rodop region.

cimbalom A large hammered dulcimer of Hungarian origin, central to Romani and Eastern European folk music, played by striking strings with mallets.

davul see tŭpan

daychovo refers to specific Bulgarian melodies and folk dances in a 9 meter (grouped as 2+2+2+3), possibly associated with a person named Daycho.

def A frame drum with or without jingles, used in Middle Eastern, North African, and Balkan folk and classical music traditions. (Also: dajre, defi)

dryan *(cornus mas)* Cornelian cherry tree

duduk A Bulgarian end-blown flute similar to the kaval but shorter and with finger holes closer together, producing a brighter, more compact tone.

dumbek A goblet-shaped ceramic or metallic hand drum originating in the Middle East and North Africa, widely used in folk, classical, and popular music across the region and the Balkans.

dvojniče A double-pipe folk flute from the western Balkans (particularly Serbia and Croatia), similar to a twin-bore recorder, played to produce simultaneous drone and melody. (Also: dvoyanka - Bulgaria)

Dyado Bulgarian word for "grandfather" or an elderly man, used both literally and as a term of affectionate respect.

Eastern Rumelia Created as an autonomous province within the Ottoman Empire by the Treaty of Berlin in 1878. The region roughly corresponded to today's southern Bulgaria, and was known by its inhabitants as "Northern Thrace."

frula A medium sized end-blown or fippled flute with six holes, typically made of wood, traditionally played as a shepherd's instrument in rural Southeast Europe, primarilyi n South Slavic countries. (Also: šupelka - North Macedonia, floghera - Greece, kaval - Turkey)

Gagauz A Turkic-speaking Orthodox Christian ethnic group that lived for centuries in the Ottoman Balkan provinces. Most of the Gagauz who lived in what is now eastern Bulgaria (Dobrudzha and the Black Sea coast) were relocated by Russia between 1812 and 1846 to Bessarabia. Numbering up to 200,000 people globally, the Gagauz today are concentrated in the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia in southern Moldova.

gayda A Balkan bagpipe, common in Bulgaria, North Macedonia, and northern Greece, consisting of a goatskin bag, a blow pipe to input air into the bag, a melody pipe (fingered), and a drone pipe (not fingered). (Also: gajda - North Macedonia, gaida - Greece)

gŭdulka A Bulgarian bowed string instrument held vertically, with no fingerboard. The three main strings are not pressed down by the fingers but merely touched with the nails (the highest string) and the pads of the fingers (the lower two strings). Additionally there can be up to 16 sympathetic resonating strings underneath the main ones. The gŭdulka is central to Bulgarian folk music.

hlopka (*pl.* hlopki) A kaval ornament often used as a rhythmic accent.

horo A traditional Bulgarian circle or line dance, and the music associated with it, performed in a wide variety of meters and regional styles. (Also: oro - North Macedonia, choros - Greece)

izvoren orkestar Literally "source" or "authentic" orchestra; in North Macedonia, an ensemble playing in a traditional village style, typically featuring instruments such as the zurla, tapan, kaval, tambura and gajda.

kaba An adjective meaning "deep" or "bass" in Bulgarian and Turkish, used to describe lower-pitched instruments or playing styles, or the unique sound produced on the kaval by combining the first and second registers.

kaba gayda A large-bore, low-pitched Bulgarian bagpipe from the Rhodope Mountains, producing a deep, resonant tone associated with the region's distinctive slow, ornate playing style.

kafana From the Persian, Arabic, and Turkish, a coffeehouse, a traditional Balkan tavern or café, also known as a venue for live folk music performance.

kalpazanin, hayde A Bulgarian phrase meaning roughly, "Come on, you rascal" or "Let's go, scoundrel," used in a playful or humorous context.

kanun A large zither with numerous strings, plucked with plectra attached to the fingers, capable of being tuned in microtones on the fly, central to Middle Eastern and Ottoman classical music traditions, as well as čalgija.

kaval A long, open-ended end-blown flute found across the Balkans, Anatolia, and Central Asia, traditionally made from wood in one to three sections, known for its breathy, expressive tone and use of cross-fingering techniques to produce a wide range of pitches and timbres.

kavaldzhia (*pl.* kavaldzhii) A Bulgarian word for a kaval player

kemane A fiddle used in Persian, Turkish, Middle Eastern and Balkan music traditions, held vertically and played with a bow.

kemenche A small, bowed instrument held upright against the knee, associated with folk music from the Black Sea region of Turkey and Greece.

klezmer A musical tradition of Ashkenazi Jews, rooted in Eastern Europe, featuring expressive improvisation, distinctive ornaments, and genres such as freylekhs and nigunim.

Komsomol The youth wing of the Communist Party in Bulgaria.

kopanitsa Refers to specific Bulgarian melodies and folk dances in an 11 meter (typically grouped as 2+2+3+2+2), associated with lively, energetic performance.

koro An alternative spelling or transliteration of horo, a traditional Balkan line or circle dance.

Kulsko horo Refers to specific Bulgarian melodies and folk dances from the area around Kula in northwest Bulgaria.

laouto A long-necked fretted lute used in Greek folk music, particularly in the Aegean islands and Crete. Usually plays the melody or provides chordal and bass accompaniment.

leva The plural of *lev*, the basic monetary unit of pre-EU Bulgaria.

longa A compositional form in Turkish and Arabic classical music, typically in a fast duple meter and structured in multiple sections, often used as a finale.

maystori The plural of maystor (from Italian maestro), used in Bulgarian to mean "masters" or expert craftsmen or musicians.

makam A system of melodic modes used in Turkish, Arabic, and other Middle Eastern classical music, defining scales, characteristic phrases, and expressive qualities.

meden kaval A phrase describing a kaval with a "honey sweet" tone (from the Bulgarian word for honey, *med*).

mehana A traditional Bulgarian tavern where food, drink, and folk music are enjoyed, similar to a kafana.

mushmuli The Bulgarian word for loquat (*Eriobotrya japonica*), a small orange-colored fruit grown in the Mediterranean region and the Balkans.

ney An end-blown oblique flute made of reed, central to Turkish and Persian Sufi and classical music, known for its breathy, expressive tone.

neyzen A player of the ney, especially a master flutist in the Ottoman or Turkish classical tradition.

oud A short-necked fretless lute with a large pear-shaped body, central to Arabic, Turkish, and broader Middle Eastern classical and folk music.

paydushko horo Refers to specific Bulgarian melodies and folk dances in a 5 meter (grouped as 2+3). (Also: pajduško - North Macedonia, baiduska - Greece)

pravo horo Literally "straight dance". Refers to specific Bulgarian melodies and folk dances in a duple meter (2/4 or 4/4), often used as the first dance at a party or celebration.

rakia A strong brandy distilled throughout the Balkans, most commonly from plums or grapes (also from apricots, peaches, pears, and other fruits).

repetitor A musical coach or rehearsal accompanist..

Roma (*adj.* Romani, Romany) An ethnic group of South Asian origin dispersed throughout Europe, whose musicians have played a central role in Balkan, Hungarian, and broader European folk music traditions.

rŭchenik Refers to specific Bulgarian melodies and folk dances traditional to Dobrudzha, typically done by men, featuring work and related gestures.

rŭchenitsa Refers to specific Bulgarian melodies and folk dances in 7 meter (grouped as 2+2+3). Can be danced solo, as a couple, or in a line.

samaï A classical compositional form in Turkish and Arabic music, typically in a 10/8 meter, structured in multiple sections with a recurring refrain.

šarkija/šargija A long-necked fretted lute in the western Balkans (Bosnia, North Macedonia, Albania) used for accompaniment in folk song traditions.

saz A long-necked fretted lute from Turkey and the broader Middle East, central to Alevi, Bektashi, and Anatolian folk music traditions.

selo The Bulgarian and South Slavic word for "village."

Sephardic Relating to Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origin and their descendants, whose distinct musical and cultural traditions spread throughout the Mediterranean and Ottoman world.

Shopska salata A Bulgarian salad made from tomatoes, cucumbers, onion/scallions, raw or roasted peppers, and sirene, a white brined cheese similar to feta.

sirto A compositional and dance form in Turkish classical music, typically in a fast 2/4 meter, often appearing as a lively closing section within a suite.

slanina A Bulgarian and South Slavic word for cured or smoked pork fatback, a staple of traditional Balkan cuisine.

sodina An end-blown flute from Madagascar.

Staro Horo Literally "old dance" or "old horo". Refers to specific Bulgarian or North Macedonian folk dances associated with older, more traditional regional styles and repertoire.

Strandzhansko horo Refers to specific Bulgarian melodies and folk dances from the Strandzha mountain region in southeastern Bulgaria.

šupelka A small end-blown shepherd's flute from North Macedonia, similar to the kaval or frula, used in rural folk music traditions.

tambura (*pl.* tamburi) A generic term for various plucked string instruments related to the saz family; in Bulgaria, usually a 3- or 4-course instrument of doubled strings, while in North Macedonia, often a 2-course instrument of doubled strings. The lowest course(s) can be played as drones to the melody played on the upper course(s).

tamburitza A family of plucked string instruments of the lute type, used in Croatian and Serbian folk music, often played in ensembles.

tarabuka A variation of darbuka or dumbek; a goblet-shaped ceramic or metal hand drum widely used in Middle Eastern and Balkan music. (Also: tarambuka - Bulgaria)

Thrace see Trakia

Trakia/Trakya/Thráki The Bulgarian, Turkish and Greek name for Thrace, the geographic and cultural region spanning parts of southeastern Bulgaria, northeastern Greece, and northwestern Turkey.

Trakiyska rŭchenitsa A rŭchenitsa in the Thracian style, characterized by a slower tempo than that of other regions (e.g., Shop).

Trakiyski stil Literally “Thracian style"; the regional folk music and dance aesthetic of Thrace.
trite pŭti Literally “three times” in Bulgarian. A term used for specific melodies and folk dances, common in Bulgarian Thrace, in a 2/4 meter.

tŭpan/tapan The Bulgarian and North Macedonian name for double-headed cylindrical bass drum used throughout the Balkans, Middle East, and Central Asia , typically played with one heavy beater and one thin stick. (Also: davul - Turkey, daouli - Greek)

Yörük A term referring to nomadic or semi-nomadic Turkic peoples of Anatolia; also used to describe a lively rhythmic style or folk dance genre associated with them.

zurla A loud, double-reed shawm used in outdoor folk music across the Balkans and Middle East, typically played in pairs (one on melody, one droning), together with a tŭpan. (Also: zourna - Greece)

Author Biography



Professor Lyuben Dosev, Ph.D. was born in Pleven, Bulgaria, in 1953. His father, Tsvetan Dosev, who was a professional kaval player with the Severnyashki Folklore Ensemble, started him playing kaval at the age of seven. He graduated from the Plovdiv Music High school (today "Dobrin Petkov"), and subsequently from the Music and Pedagogy Institute in Plovdiv (today, The Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts "Prof. Asen Diamandiev").

Dr. Dosev taught kaval at the High School for Folk Music in Shiroka Lŭka, as well as at the Music and Pedagogy Institute. He later taught kaval, chamber ensemble, and folk orchestra at the Academy in Plovdiv, where he was Dean of the Department of Music Folklore, Choreography and Arts. In 2013 he was awarded the honorary title "Academician" by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Sofia.

He has worked with numerous performing groups, including Ensemble Trakia in Plovdiv, the folk orchestra of Plovdiv Regional Radio and Television, and Bulgarian National Radio and Television in Sofia. In 2005, together with a small team of American and Bulgarian enthusiasts, Dr. Dosev founded the Bulgarian Folk Music & Dance Seminar which takes place each summer at the Academy; he continues to be active in the production of the seminar each year.

An exceptionally talented award-winning performer, Dr. Dosev has given concerts live and on television and radio in Bulgaria, Europe, Asia and the United States. He has produced recordings of Bulgarian folklore and is the author of *Mastering Thracian Kaval Ornamentation: A Handbook* and *Authentic Tunes for Bulgarian Kaval*, both available through the Izvor Music website.