

The Story of Ne Klepeci

by Jim Gold

I am the folk dance teacher who choreographed Ne Klepeci.

Using traditional steps to create such dances has been my love, quest, and passion during my many years of teaching.

I am surprised at the controversy Ne Klepeci has generated and the direction it is going.

Since starting my international folk tour company in 1984, I've led 85 tours, mostly to Eastern Europe to learn about the Balkans, its culture, history, geography, and folk dance traditions.

The highlights of these trips are our meetings with folk dance teachers and local folk dance groups. The dances we learn from them often become part of our repertoire back home.

Sometimes curious people ask "Who choreographed that dance?" Or "Is it authentic?"

The answer I give is: All dances in our international folk dance repertoire are choreographed by someone. In fact, most of the dances we enjoy are modern folk choreographies. Cultures borrow from one another, so most of the time when we dance, we don't know who choreographer is, or even if he or she comes from the same culture.

My tours give the opportunity to see and experience the Balkan traditions and cultures up close and personal. With this knowledge, I try to be faithful to local styles and traditions when dancing or choreographing a dance.

Now to the story of Ne Klepeci.

In October of 2014 Lee Otterholt and I led a four-country Balkan tour to Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia/Herzegovina, and Montenegro. We drove from Osijek (Croatia) to Sarajevo in Bosnia. In the worst rain I'd ever seen, we stopped for gas in the Bosnian town of Banja Luka, where among other things, the owner sold CDs of local music. I asked our guide Gabriella, who was born in Banja Luka, if she could recommend a CD with Bosnian folk music that she could recommend. She picked *Starogradski Biseri (Old Town Pearls) Najljepse Starogradski Pjesme*.

We played the CD on the bus. I immediately fell in love with the first song, Ne Klepeci.

When I got back to the USA I listened to the Starogradski Biseri CD again and again in my living room. Moved by the haunting melody. I started improvising with steps I had learned in the Balkan countries until I found ones that expressed the beauty, sadness, calm, and solemn majesty of the music. These became the dance steps for Ne Klepeci. I wrote down the choreography. Later I began teaching the dance in my folk dance classes and to local groups. Everyone seemed to like it. Our folk dance class "presented" it at the New Jersey Folk Festival

in 2015.

(See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DrbH9AdyFck>)

Soon after that Lee Otterholt began teaching Ne Klepeci on the West Coast. Other teachers picked it up, began to teach it, and soon the dance spread.

Ne Klepeci, created with love, appreciation, and respect for the Bosnian culture in particular, and for Balkan dance in general, is now becoming part of the international folk dance repertoire.

What is “international folk dancing?”

I see it as a new art form, unique in structure, influenced by its surrounding culture, and thus different from the historical dances it is derived from. International folk dancing has its own form of authenticity. (More of this in my upcoming book.)

On a larger scale, I’d say the best way to be authentic is to be yourself, whatever culture or country. Couple this with intense study and learning about its traditions, and you’re on your way.

When this happens, as you create, you’ll remain faithful to its traditions. I improvise and choreograph from that base.

Most important: Never give up the joy, freedom, and total fun of moving to music.

Dance on with joy and gusto!

Jim