

## Ethnic Dance Music in Northern Indiana

### **Bill Skimos Band**

*IH201* Fort Wayne - November 1, 1986. Macedonian dance music.

Bill Skimos (clarinet), Jim Skimos (keyboards-vocals), Steve Jugloff (accordion), John Skimos (drums) & Tom Bliznoff (trumpet-bouzouki-vocals)

St. Nicholas Orthodox Church's 16th Annual Macedonian Ball; recorded by Paul L. Tyler

The Macedonian Ball, a dinner and dance sponsored by St. Nicholas Eastern Orthodox Church, was held in the ballroom in the basement of the Scottish Rite Cathedral of the Fort Wayne Shriners at 417 West Berry in downtown Fort Wayne. The entrance to the ball room was marked by a table set diagonally that led to a flower-decorated arch that pointed to the center of the room. A woman took tickets--they were sold by the church for \$25.00-- and told guests how to find their table (a number was written on the back of the ticket). The church secretary asked ticket buyers who they wanted to sit with.

In the ballroom, tables were set up on each side of the room in parallel lines perpendicular to the edge of the dance floor. Each table sat alone in a row with three others. There were ten lines, totalling thirty tables, on the east side and an equal number, with perhaps one or two extra rows, on the west side. Drinks were served at three tables set up along the south wall. The bandstand, centered along the north wall, was composed of foot high risers forming an eight feet by twelve feet main section and a six feet by four appendage at the rear for the drummer. The dance floor was a forty feet by forty feet area in the middle of the room. Three large circular columns marked the middle and edges of the dancing area, though the dancers did stray beyond the side columns into the ten foot path between the columns and the tables. The east column was flanked with an arrangement of fountains, flowers, and lights. The bandstand was also decorated with flowers, lights, and greenery.

The evening started at 6:30 with an open bar and American popular music provided by the Dick Seeger Trio (actually a quartet of drums, bass, guitar, and trumpet) who were set up on the floor just in front of the bandstand. At 7:30, people were asked to go to their tables so the meal could be served. Salads were already on the tables, and while a few people started taken their seats before the cocktail hour was over, most had stood around the edges of the dance floor visiting and drinking. After several announcements over the band's P.A., people went to their assigned tables. The President of the St. Nicholas church board, George A. Lebamoff, welcomed everyone and introduced Archpriest Fr. George Nedelkoff. Fr. Nedelkoff said a prayer of thanksgiving in which he mentioned those "dear ones" who had died in the last year, gave thanks for the gift of life, and asked that everyone remember to come to church the next morning. This last topic came with a chuckle from Fr. Nedelkoff, and it brought laughter from the crowd.

After the meal, Mr. Lebamoff once more got on the microphone and introduce a Macedonian folk dance troupe from Toledo, Ohio. He said their performance of ethnic dances would last fifteen minutes (in fact, it lasted nearly 30). The performance started with a trio of singers, who did three numbers from the stage. Then the troupe of four men and about twenty women

performed several suites of dances. The first sweet featured the women, including four women who carried large pans of bread, decorated with flowers. This suite took place on the west side of the center column. The remaining four or five suites took place to the east of the column. The women danced in small lines of four, six, or eight dancers. The men danced together in a line, or separately in pairs with props such as spears, capes, and casks. A large number of people left their tables and stood along the south wall in front of the bar tables in order to see the performance. A number of people took pictures.

The Bill Skimos Orchestra started playing at about 9:15. The floor immediately filled up with dancers. Anywhere from seventy-five to 150 people were on the floor dancing during any number during this first 45-minute set. After the band took a break, the Dick Seeger Trio played again for slow dancing. Twenty to thirty couples were on the floor during each number. After forty-five minutes, the Trio quietly quit and the Bill Skimos Orchestra started up again, immediately. They played for an hour and three-quarters until 12:30, when the dancing ended. There were fewer dancers on the floor for their second set, as the crowd had thinned out considerably during the break. The dancers dwindled from about seventy-five to about twenty or thirty hard-core dancers, mostly young people, who were still going strong at the very end. The pattern was for dancers to stay on the floor after a number was over and to talk in groups of two to four until the next tune began, when they would run to join the end of a line or break into the middle of a close line. Others would return to their tables after a dance, or go off to visit at another table, or talk with someone around the edges of the dance floor. All in all, the dance floor was usually clear of bystanders. Most socializing was done at the tables or in front of the bar.

All the dances performed to the music of the Bill Skimos Orchestra were line dances of southern Slavic derivation. Most, of course, were Macedonian (or pan-Slavic). A few were identified as Greek, Bulgarian, or Rumanian. The basic repertoire of the Macedonians includes the syrtos, a slow horos, the paidushko, and a few specially named dances danced to specific tunes, such as "Oi Devoiche" and "Eleno Mome". The latter were performed only once, while the former are types which were performed to several different tunes of that type.

The repertoire of dances seemed much more varied than I remembered from a church dance I had attended in 1978. Lena Gianakeff told me before the dancing started that there were some new steps. Her daughter, Jeanette Thompson, agreed that the repertoire is more varied now than it used to be, but she finds it boring compared to the repertoire of international folk dance groups.

When I asked Lena about the etiquette of joining a dance, she said just join the end of the line or break in anywhere. There are no rules restricting who may dance next to whom, according to age or sex. The only special role is held by the leader of a line. The leader sets the step and phrasing that the rest of the line follows (though in some dances there is occasional disagreement as to which foot leads). Style seems an individual matter, so long as the dancer's style is within the accepted limits of taste and it doesn't interrupt the directions, accents, and general flow of the dance. Dancers who are struggling to learn the steps are accepted. Hand holds between dancers varies even within a line to shoulder height or down and waist level. Only a few times did

dancers use shoulder holds, and then usually only at the beginning of the line. The beginning of the line is usually formed when two or three friends quickly agree to start a line in the first few measures after the music has started, and often the leadership role would be swapped during the dance by the first group of friends. It would probably be hard for an individual by himself to start a line with one or two others there to join on. Most people seemed to join a dance in small groups or pairs, but singles were fully accepted.

### **Bill Skimos**

*IH204* - December 6, 1986. Interview.

Bill Skimos is the leader of The Bill Skimos Band, a second and third generation orchestra in Fort Wayne's Macedonian community. Bill was born in Greece, and immigrated to the United States when he was a boy. He became interested in the clarinet as a boy and fell under the tutelage of Elia E. Calcoff [see ACC# 80-108-F/C], the leader of the first Macedonian orchestra in the United States. The Bill Skimos Band also includes Steve Jugloff, Elia Calcoff's grandson [see ACC# 80-108-F/C], and Bill's son Jim Skimos.

The interview took place in Bill's Palace, a bar and restaurant owned and operated by Bill Skimos in downtown Fort Wayne.

