

Ukraine (Lugansk, Kiev)

December 5 –12, 2002

The Ukraine

The Ukraine is with 603.700 km² and 50 million inhabitants far from small. It was part of the USSR and became independent after the fall of the Communist regime. The Ukrainian language is as close to Russian as American English to British English and Russians and Ukrainians don't need a visa for traveling to and fro. The general faith is Ukrainian/Russian Orthodox and everywhere you can see churches. It is a poor country, also when compared with Russia. Everyone is extremely well educated, but there are no jobs. We met with two incredible musicians, blind twins, masters on the guitar who surpass most blues, jazz or rock guitarists in style, speed and ingenuity. They play on the street, as they earn more this way than when teaching... Dance teacher Olga is a music teacher (flute and recorder) with a regular job. She lives on the brink of poverty and can't afford any traveling. For this reason she also had to skip last year's Russian Solstice camp (she is offered a free ticket every year).

We did an earlier trip to the Crimea (a very independent province of the Ukraine and actually always more part of Russia than the Ukraine, but 'given' to the Ukraine by Stalin) and this is our first real trip, the training and camp being organized from St-Petersburg. It is also the first time international Dance teachers visit this country. With one circle in Lugansk and a camp in the Crimea (about this more later on), the Dances can use some outreach work and input from abroad. Our aim is also to try and open Kiev, the capital, for the Dances and historically the place where the Russian empire started some 1,500 years ago, so Olga can start working there.

Outer Circumstances

We thought we'd seen poverty in Russia, but the Ukraine beats Russia easily. We have traveled in many airplanes, but never once had to carry our own luggage aboard. The plane itself would do well in a museum and makes a tremendous noise with its two propellers. It can hold about thirty people and the stewardess keeps her coat on, as the plane too is cold. Wali has to bend his head in the aisle and we all get a candy before taking off. Later the stewardess pours us tea from a teapot.

In Lugansk there's no water the whole afternoon: no money for the electricity to pump the water. Yes, it is a problem, especially for mothers with small children. When we visit Olga – she lives on the 14th floor – we have to climb all the way up with our two guitars: no electricity for the elevators. Public buildings are cold and everyone keeps their warm coats on.

After our arrival the temperature drops to minus 10 F, but the central heating (Russian communist style: not adjustable, so the heating is equal for all) stays tepid in our apartment. The apartment itself (one room plus kitchen) isn't the best, but what can you expect? Our host bought it for \$1,000 all in. The warm water system is dangerous and only works when the water is running. The little stream is not enough for taking a shower, so we do without. Despite all this we feel at home and cherish our apartment as a haven completely for our own.

Our Dance hall in an old broken down theatre once was beautiful, as was the whole theatre. Now a quart of the floor is covered with broken tiles instead of wood. It gives a very Shiva like breaking sound on our first dance in honor of the Lord of the Dance. During Om Mani Padme Hung the orchestra next door starts to rehearse the Bolero. We can enjoy it fully, as the walls to the corridor that separates the concert hall from our Dance hall are completely open. Ravel and Buddha mix wonderfully. Is the applause for the orchestra or for us?

For us everything is cheap: a taxi will take you anywhere within half an hour for 10 gr. (\$2), the bus or metro is a mere grivne (0,20). For the locals money is a very big problem. For our workshop the fee is 20 grivne (about \$3.50 to \$4) for the whole weekend or accordingly for one day or evening, but most people can't afford this, so they get a free ticket. With 30 to 40 people the opening night and some 25 – 30 on the weekend days, the total income is between Gr. 300 and 400 (between about \$ 60 to \$80), half of which goes to the rent of the room.

In Kiev the situation is better. No wonder, says Olga, like in Communist times all the money goes there.

We visit the monastery of St. Sofia, a venerable 1,000 years old. Opposite, with equally golden onion shaped roofs, is the monastery of St. Michael. The communist regime blew up this monastery in the thirties. War prevented the same fate for the Sofia monastery. The government rebuilt the whole complex of churches and monastery for St. Michael in the late 1990's. It must have cost a fortune, but Sofia and the archangel Michael are the protectors of Kiev, so the city again is well protected.

The Dance situation

Lugansk is the only city with a Dance circle. Olga has kept it going for about ten years now. Her weekly sessions (Sunday evenings from 5 – 9 pm) draw between 10 and 30 people. The session is donation based and when there's not enough to pay the rent of the room (which was in repair and unfortunately not available for us) a man named Valeri donates the rest.

Since three years there's a camp in the Crimea. The camp and also the training offered by us earlier this year, is St-Petersburg organized and outside the holiday season, so Olga and other possible participants from the Ukraine itself didn't participate. It is one of Olga's wishes to change this, as she too needs more dance food and training and other people in the Ukraine are also interested in the Camp.

When we talk about the situation – as Dance friends and colleagues, but also with Wali in his capacity as World Wide networker – Olga declares she very much wants the Ukraine to become a separate region, as it is an independent country. The Ukraine until now resorted under the Russian Network, who found an independent Ukraine not necessary ('Why separate from us?'), but left her with neither voice nor vote.

Also Olga has asked to be mentored some years ago, but the person in question said she was developing well without a mentor. You can feel the relief in the atmosphere as we address these topics and do have an ear for them. See also our letter on this to the Russian network, attached at the end.

We also promise Olga to try and get funds for the series of CD's (INDUP, Abwoon, UK) for the Ukrainian Network.

The Dance Program

Friday evening we offered a three hours program with a variety of Dances to introduce the dances, ourselves and the theme 'Show me the Path', centering around the perennial questions: Where do we come from, Why are we here? and Where are we going? The theme allowed us to break the program with dharma talks and stories, mainly from the Jewish tradition and Inayat Khan (the journey of the Soul).

On request we started every morning at ten am with singing the Fatiha as received by Saadi, which we introduced earlier at the Crimea.

The whole session was both on Saturday and Sunday from 10 am – 6 pm with a lunch break between 2 and 3. We broke the sessions with dharma talks on the three questions and esoterics behind the Dances and questions from the participants. This opportunity was eagerly used. People wanted to know all about the Dances, Sufism and also us & our family.

We used mainly Foundation Dances, as we felt this was what the group needed most of all. We explained this in earlier reports (see e.g. our report on Archangelsk). We had to turn down Olga's request for our Creation Mass, as this would have given the weekend a route that to our feeling didn't match with the group or our purpose for being here, namely strengthening Olga's position in Lugansk, enlarging her repertoire with solid Dances and 'training' her with our way of treating a weekend like this. We refrained from leading the Walks, although this would have suited Olga's training, because we felt this wouldn't serve the group this time. We or other teachers will have to come again for this.

All participants were local, except for Katya from Seratov, who we'd met earlier on the Solstice Camps and the Crimea training. Katya leads with her 24 years a circle in Seratov and has been dancing for 10 (!) years.

Both Katya and Olga (and of course our interpreter Mila from St-Petersburg) joined us on our trip to the capital Kiev (2 million inhabitants). The workshops there were covered with mystery beforehand. In September organizer Roman mentioned a Sufi group in Kiev, who followed a Gurdieff like path. In Lugansk we heard we were going to meet a group of Agni Yoga

people, following a Russian yoga teacher who created a Temple for all religions. He has a wide following in Russia and the Ukraine throughout.

In the end we met with a group of over thirty Reiki people, all of them not knowing what to expect and most of them not too eager to Dance. As we barely fitted in the living room of 40 m², we decided on the spot for chanting around the main traditions, followed by an explanation of our work with the Unity of Religious Ideals and SAM's philosophy on embodied spirituality & the Dances. Through questions the obvious request for a Dance came and we closed the evening with a short Dance session. In these situations the Dance often goes down best after a request!

Olga later comments this talk was very useful for her as a Dance teacher as well, as most was new to her.

The next morning we're up early, for we made contact with the 'Sufi Dancers' who whirl at 7.30 am. Up at six, the cold wind making us even colder, we manage to be there on time. The leader immediately starts interrogating us: Why are we here, what do we want, what is our training and did we ever whirl before? Our answers seem to pass the test and we are invited for a Gurdieff type exercise and whirling afterwards. After this experience we join the group for a tea or coffee. Unfortunately our aim to share experiences fails, as the leader of the group has set his mind on cross-examining us, trying to prove his superiority. We're no real party, as we don't want to play this game. The whole undertaking proves worthwhile, for Vita, a young woman who is enthused by the Dances even before experiencing them, is our Kiev guide for the day and shares some of her questions, thoughts and doubts with us. Through her we quickly understand what we already felt: her Master Sia is a self-proclaimed master in the Osho style (who never went to Osho by the way as he felt he didn't need it).

That evening Vita joins us for the Dance and we have a group of 15, just right for the room. Everything falls into place. Afterwards Olga says this was the best Dance session ever. She makes contact with Vita and two other women who want to start and lead Dances. The contact is made, mission accomplished, the rest is up to Olga.

December 2002, Ariënne & Wali van der Zwan.