

RUMELAJ - additional information

THE DANCE:

I described *Rumelaj* in the 1992 *Problem Solver* with the best information available at that time. Subsequently, Sanna Longden sent notes providing a source and corrected choreography (described below).

Steve Kotansky inexplicably set the Turkish-Macedonian dance *Jeni jol* (or *Yeni yol*) to the Hungarian Gypsy music on Hungaroton MK 18132, *Fekete tűz* [Black Fire]: *Magyarországi cigány népzene* [Gypsy Folk Songs from Hungary] - *Kalyi Jag Együttes* [Kalyi Jag group]; A-9, *Rumeláj - Balkáni románcigány kolo* [Roumanian Gypsy dance from the Balkans], with József Balogh - voice and mandolin, Béla Balogh - bass voice, and Ágnes Künstler - voice. Zlatne Uste did another on *No Strings Attached*, Rounder CD or C 6054. The subsequent furor demonstrates the power of a good choreography and illustrates cultural appropriation for better or worse: a Hungarian group without Roma (Gypsies) singing a Rom song, or an American setting a Balkan dance pattern to the Rom song. See the 1995 *Problem Solver* (below) for more information.

THE SONG:

I told a friend what the song meant, and she told others. As ensembles and groups across the country discovered how degrading the song was to women, the dance disappeared from repertoires. You should have the same information and option but, lest you think the decision obvious, let me briefly broaden the discussion.

THE ISSUES:

Con:

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. When you sing or dance *Rumelaj*, you tacitly condone the concept of women as commodities and desensitize yourself to their degradation. This desensitization increases with each repetition.

Pro:

Why do you folk dance? Right. You love the movement, the people, and the music. Me too.

So why not perform aerobics to folk music? Some do! Most, however, have interest in the peoples, history, culture, and traditions represented by our dances.

So what? Well, degradation of women is an integral but shameful part of human history, and ignoring that fact will not erase it. If you want only happy milkmaids flirting innocently with virile peasant lads, you should move to Peter Pan's Never-Never Land.

A SUGGESTION:

All our folk songs and dances potentially insult an ethnic, economic, religious, or gender group. We can express this potential as a position on an "appropriateness continuum" with the vast, vast majority of our material at the appropriate end of the scale. *Rumelaj* falls toward the inappropriate end, if not at that end.

Why look for controversy? Your group must evaluate each song or dance on its merits, but I would suggest that, with tens of thousands of songs and dances available, no justification exists for dancing a Turkish-Macedonian dance unexplainedly set to the Romany-Romanian *Rumelaj*.

Should we censor? NO! If you don't like the song, let it perish in the bright light of knowledge and not hide in the darkness of ignorance. Present all the facts and let your group decide. (And then hide it!)

(concluded on next page)

Rumelaj (concluded)

BARS ACTION

4/4 Introduction.

1-8 No action. Start dancing when the singing begins, if you don't mind waiting.

The dance. Face diagonally forward to R and dance to R, CCW around the circle.

1 Touch R toe forward to R, twisting hips a bit to R (ct 1), step forward to R onto R foot (ct 2), touch L toe forward to R, twisting hips a bit to L (ct 3), step forward to R onto L foot (ct 4).

2 Touch R toe forward to R, twisting hips a bit to R and turning to face center (ct 1), step to R onto R foot (ct 2), step forward in front of R foot onto L foot (ct 3), step back onto R foot (ct 4).

3 Facing center: raise and lower R heel (*čukče*), touching L toe forward (ct 1), step to L onto L foot (ct 2), step forward onto R foot (ct 3), step back onto L foot, turning to R to repeat the dance (ct 4).

Turning variation.

1-2 Turn once (actually 315°) CW as you travel a bit to R during the 3 touch-steps.

2-3 As before.

Zetur minji maj mundra kurva me	Give me your (euphemism for external female genitalia) you beautiful (euphemism for one who engages in sexual intercourse for money)
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zetur minji maj mada mundra da meri.	Give me ... Give it today.
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Rume- Rume- Rumelaj hojdi hojdi hojdi. Rume- Rume- Rumelaj hojdi hojdi hojdi.	Rume- Rume- Rumelia come come come. Rume- Rume- Rumelia come come come.
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Zetur . . .	Give . . .
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A la-la laj na-na naj ...	A la la la ...
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This song is a mixture of Romany (the language spoken by the people called Roma or Gypsy) with a bit of Romanian. In other words, this is a dialect of Romany spoken by Roma in Romania. The song has no Macedonian or Bulgarian in it, other than "hojdi," which is common to virtually all the Balkan languages. The song made complete sense to the native speaker of Romany whom I asked, so why bother pretending that scattered words in it are of Slavic origin? Want to show off your Slavic linguistic abilities? Go pick a Slavic song.

Hojdi is the same as *hajde*, or *'ajde*, the Turkic word found in so many Balkan songs and meaning "come on" or "let's go." And as you probably know, *Rumelaj* is the Byzantine (and then Ottoman) name for the province that we call Rumelia. It's located south of the Stara Planina (Balkan) chain of mountains, north of, and including parts of, Macedonia and Thrace, and stretching from the Dinaric Alps to the Black Sea. The Byzantine Greeks named Rumelia in reference to the Roman heritage of the region and, in fact, I occasionally walk an "Old Turkish Road," said to be built on Roman foundations, when I am over there.

End of **RUMELAJ**.

RUMELAJ - additional information

Folk dancing has gone high-tech with dancers around the world talking to each other via the Internet, an electronic communication network of telephone-linked computers. We send written messages to individual addresses around the world nearly instantaneously with E-mail, and we also read and post notices on two of thousands of the Internet's electronic bulletin boards: rec.folk-dancing, and the East European Folklife Center (EEFC) mailing list.

One folk dancer, Jan Root, posted her question about the meaning of the lyrics for *Rumelaj*. I took her question to Dr. Ian Hancock, Rom ambassador to the U.N., and sent his translation to a friend. She sent the answer to others, and before long our entire "electronic village" was arguing about translations.

Linnea Mandell and Craig Kurumada took a particularly delightful and novel approach by writing the following words for performance at a Živio dance party in Salt Lake City. For more information, write (or E-mail!) them directly. The Society directory, which you all have, contains their addresses.

ROOTELAJ

Jan Root a question set, before the Balkan net,
"Has anyone out there seen what these unknown words mean?
A favor we would ask, a simple little task.
If the English words you know, please e-mail to Živio."

Chorus:

Rumors, rumors, rumors, lies! Hide it, hide it, hide it!
This song they translated and found it was x-rated.
Rumors, rumors, rumors, lies! Hide it, hide it, hide it!
Please don't ask me to say what this means in Romane.

Translations she did get, from all the Internet.
Only then was she to learn she'd opened a can of worms.
E-mail boxes jammed, all across the land
No one knew just what to do, and oh, how the comments flew!

(Chorus)

"Oh, what shall we do?" cried out those who knew.
"Perform this song do we dare, now that we are aware?
Oh my, woe is me, this song is on CD!
This will leave an ugly scar on our favorite repertoire."

(Chorus)

What language do you speak? Turkish, Chinese or Greek?
Search the language of the Kurds, we've got to find some other words!
So we wrote this song. Did we do so wrong?
Now you know the reason why we can't sing you *Rumelaj*!

End of **RUMELAJ** (for now).