

LM - Lydia McAnerney; RB - Rolla Breitman; ES - Ed Stern

LM Welcome. My name is Lydia McAnerney. I'm a volunteer at Tapestry Folkdance Center working on the Tapestry history project. And today on July fifth 2021 I'm here with Rolla Breitman and Ed Stern, who were the owners of Soltari Folkdance Emporium, which transitioned to Tapestry Folkdance Center. We're going to talk about that today. I'm curious first of all how you each got involved in folk dancing.

RB I was actually in my late 20s when I did that and for me I was just looking for something that was me, that I really could enjoy, and a friend of mine suggested I try folk dancing so I started at International actually and then went over it Israeli and within less than a month, I was hooked and I been active ever since.

LM And Ed, how about you?

ES Well, in my case, I was in college when I first had contact with international folk dancing and other kinds at the University of Chicago, where there was a ton of it on campus at that time. And I had friends who did it. I grew up a person who really didn't want to dance. I was a dance hating person until about that time. And without going into a lot of details, I would go visit my friends at the folk dance, and then go home after that, didn't participate for about a year. And then at one point I decided hey I'm going to try this. And again, as Rolla said, I did it for a few times and I got totally hooked. And, I've been a folk dancer ever since.

LM So, how did you decide to open Soltari? What was the germ that got you together and got you to do that?

RB Well, Ed actually was the impetus for it, and I was at the time teaching Israeli dancing at Hillel. As I remember it, and he may have a different story, and certainly he has a different one from me. He came to dancing, and he pulled me aside at one point, and said to me, and I still remember, if it's different from me, I don't know Ed, I am thinking about opening a folk dance coffeehouse sometime in the future and I really liked the way you teach, would you consider teaching at my coffee house. And my response to him was, do you remember Ed? What else can I do, and that was it.

ES Yeah, and my recollection was, it was sort of like, Yes, and how would you like a business partner, which was really, really lucky for me I have to say, because in fact Rolla is definitely the person who was the business head of Saltari. And she had a lot more knowledge and understanding and capabilities in, in many regards the having to do with business and I, and probably still do you know I mean basically Yeah, I'm not a business person.

But, you know, in terms of the original motivation. After I had been folk dancing for several years. I really wondered if there was a possibility if I could earn my living at it. And, You know, when you're totally addicted you start thinking crazy thoughts, and that was one of them. And so, after I moved to Minnesota. And this is such a dance place, the Twin Cities in Minnesota in general. I started thinking, well hey maybe there is a possibility. And I knew about these folk dance coffee houses that were largely in California. At the time, and I started thinking, Okay, can I really give up my science

which is what I was doing, and do folk dancing for a living, and the coffeehouse concept, really was a part of that. And so I started thinking seriously and looking around and trying to get it organized and I guess if that's not the answer to the question asked me more.

LM Yeah, that's, that's great, that's great to know and and so how did you find the Coliseum. And with that said, how did you find put all those pieces together. And how long did it take, I mean, what sort of what was your process to do that.

ES Well we did look for about a couple of years I think almost. We looked at a lot of places. We knew we had some physical requirements like you have to have enough open space. You need to have a reasonable open space without columns in the middle of it. And we wanted it to be accessible through people in coming to it. And my recollection is that having looked at a lot of places and having a lot of people knowing that we were looking. One of the other folk dancers. John Cavanaugh was married at that time to a woman whose father was a realtor. And he knew that the Coliseum ballroom what business was for sale. And that was how we got in touch with it. Is that pretty much what you recall Rolla?

RB Yeah, I don't remember how much of that, except that we ended up taking over the ballroom business we kind of bought out the Coliseum ballroom business so that we had something to start with, and we needed some money to start went to a bank, and to this day my mouth drops open to think they actually loaned us money.

ES It was crazy. but yeah, so we we took over the Coliseum ballroom business. And then months later, started, you know, opening up Soltari in the same space. And I have to add the there were a lot of individuals that we knew who also basically lend us money for the startup so it was definitely a community effort. Back then, but it was set up as a for profit, business, it was not non-profit.

LM I heard a lot about what was offered but I'd like you to tell. Tell us a little bit about what what kinds of things you did so that was the ballroom business and with that I heard that that was sort of the big moneymaker at the beginning but and then other things started happening.

RB So, yeah, I think the ballroom we had three nights a week. I think it was open three nights a week and we . It was an ongoing running business. And so we did get some from that and it also gave us time to figure out, you know, what we wanted to do with the folk dance part and have the two, we ended up having both of them at the same time although the ballroom business was older and older people as well and it eventually \_\_\_\_\_. Now that we have been toward the end we ended up leasing our space during the day to some of the dance groups around town, as well, to help bring \_\_\_\_\_.

ES And I don't know, you know, it was Nancy Hauser. And in terms of the offerings. In addition to ballroom dancing. There were nights that were international for dancing, Israeli folk dancing. There was a night which was a combination of country dancing of various sorts in British Isles, and American mixed in with Scandinavian dancing. We had some Contra dances up there. Over the years there were a variety of things that

sort of came and went, including a Balkan only night, Irish Ceili's. So basically, over time, the ballroom part diminished from three nights to two nights. And, you know, got replaced. And in addition, there were some other groups that were up there meeting, and not part of the program but we're focusing on this thing is like the my Morris group practice up there on Tuesday nights and what else. What am I forgetting there's gotta be more other groups. That probably does continue, at Tapestry. And then, so then if things went on.

LM You know we'll sort of skip to the end, which is kind of what we're interested in, is what happened at the end? Why did you decide to close that?

RB We had a three year contract, lease and then a three year option to renew which we did so we were in six years. At the end of six years, we really neither of us took any money out of it. It was not profitable for us, and I believe for Podani, the owner of the building, was happy to see us go. He didn't like us up there very much as far as I remember, and we just decided we couldn't keep going. Financially even to think about any other place that was. It had run its course for us.

LM Yeah, well I remember an experiment that worked for a while.

ES Well, I think, in my mind, there were a couple of issues. And one of them actually is political. In terms of our attendance in the folk dancing stuff. For the first four years, every year, the attendance really increased. And it was going up and up and up. And then a certain person got elected president, and it all stopped, it didn't go up anymore after that, and there was also a period of high inflation, that I recall I think that was about the time when our interest rates in all kinds of things were in the teess. Yeah, percentage. And that plus the fact that Podani was way overcharging us for things like heating the space in the winter, and being really pretty ugly in a lot of other ways.

You know, I don't know whether he would have renewed the lease, even if we had asked.

RB To be honest, I don't think so either.

LM Oh, then I've seen the letter that was sent out. How did you do that, did you send that to everybody or were there a select group of people who got that letter? Can you talk a little bit about that.

ES Which letter are you talking about?

LM The letter that was written I think from you, from both of you, telling people that Soltari was going to be closing and were people interested, you know were people interested in figuring out a way to continue a folk dancing organization.

ES So, well, I guess the starting point is to say that we had a tremendous amount of support from a lot of people, and everybody like us was pretty much working for free, they're all volunteers. And so I think that when we realized about a year before we were going to be ending the lease, that it was going to be that way. Then we communicated to all our volunteers and I'm pretty sure that's who it went to, not the general public, and the concept we were asking about was, here is a place that is sort of centralized folk dancing of many different kinds, all happening together, and has

this organization. If you feel that that's a good concept, then would you like to continue on with it. And that was probably the origin of that letter.

LM And how are you both involved with that? Is that both of you working with that group or zero?

RB I actually did not have much involvement in that. I was tired, and I had a family.Two children, two young children at the time, and I felt like I just needed a breather. And that people who were still interested asked about keeping something happening. My blessings for them, but I think I needed to take at least a break from that and concentrate on my family.

ES Well, in addition we had other work we needed to do to close up the business, and that you know included ultimately things like arranging to sell the furniture and the other assets of this, this business that we had purchased.And, you know, there was a need to keep the programming going, and the business going. So we weren't looking for an additional job.And beyond that, as well as, you know, we were, or I guess I shouldn't speak for myself. I was thinking, you know, okay, I've done this heart and soul for more than six years. You know the time up before, plus after we opened. And I also think it's time for other people to carry it on. And they did, you know, basically, they formed a group. They sat down and they made decisions, they decided to become a nonprofit corporation. And they did everything without a lot of input from us.

LM Okay. What were your hopes for the new organization?

RB Well I hope that they would be successful and that people would come and dance and keep, keep it going. I know that I did a fair amount of teaching at Tapestry, Israeli. I was the main Israeli teacher for many years there and, you know, and and just hoping that they would be successful.

ES I would say the same. You know, basically. I love the concept. I love the activities. I personally wanted to keep dancing, a lot, myself, and I was hopeful that this would be a successful, wonderful new organization in the Twin Cities.

LM Yeah, rather you dance the tapestry at all, I don't know.

RB I don't come regularly to Tapestry anymore. Occasionally I will show up, and I'm always happy to be there and I always have people that I'm so excited to see and they're happy to see me. But Friday nights were international nights and those are difficult nights for me to get out. So, I'm still dancing. I am certainly over the pandemic. I was on zoom dancing twice a week.

LM Right.

RB And still will do it for a while because it's still not doing in person for the Israeli, which is my first my main love.

LM And are you still teaching though.

RB I am not teaching. Occasionally, Shira and Michael Schwartz are really running the show and have for quite a while. And that's, they're doing a great job, especially in zoom, but a great job, and occasionally. She will ask me to do some teaching and I

will, and love it of course it just feels right, but I'm not mostly teaching now I'm learning any new dances and doing the old ones.

ES Somebody reasonably estimated that they are choreographing about 200 new Israeli dances every year.

RB Well is that all?

ES I'm surprised that so I'm not sure that I mean that was, that was somebody off the cuff comment.

RB but it certainly seems like a billion to me.

LM Ed, I know you're still doing some teaching, and I know you dance all the time. So I see you, it's very a thing.

ES This is all true. Yeah, I'm still involved with international folk dancing, which is one of the places that I sometimes teach, they have a rotating teaching schedule. And I'm in that rotation. And I go to Contras I'm looking forward to their post COVID resumption. Yeah, and also a bunch of the other things that go on at Tapestry that are kind of, I guess, programs but rental groups that are dancing there. It is still the place where my Morris group practices. And so I'm over there, a lot.

LM Yeah. Well great. Anything else that you want to add about, you know, Saltari, Tapestry, the transition, any other comments that you'd like to make?

RB Well, it's just hard to think back when you said you wanted to talk about it and I started thinking about how long ago that was and we started that over 40 years ago maybe 44 years ago and it's someone's didn't comprehensible at that point but thinking that it's continued in a way from us, passed on to Tapestry and hopefully Tapestry will continue. That's a lot of years, and it's a wonderful kind of legacy I think that is left, those who still love it.

ES And I totally agree. You know, for me, I'm very very glad that it has lasted this long and continues and looks like it's going to continue long into the future and bringing a lot of joy to a lot of people through folk dancing.

LM It's a great place. This is the 38th year, I think, starting, starting the 38th yea, so hopefully we'll have some kind of a celebration for the 40th anniversary which will come up in a couple of years so that'll be great. Well thank you so much for your time this afternoon, I really appreciate it I know it's just a short glimpse of where things started but I think it's a really important part of the history of Tapestry to know where it came from and how that whole thing came about. So, thank you so much for your time. You're the beginning of folk dancing in the Twin Cities and know that you are important to people. So, thank you so much thank you video.

LM Thank you.