

Hungarian, Polish dances pep up Brecksville Center for the Arts

By Ingrid Schaefer Sprague
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The Csárdás Dance Company and Living Traditions Folk Ensemble founders and performers, clad in colorful traditional costumes of Hungary and Poland, offered an introductory workshop in ethnic dance to students of all ages Saturday at the Brecksville Center for the Arts.

BCA was transformed into a lively village inn, or *csárdá*, by the dancers who twirled and stepped to the rhythms of ethnic melodies played by Living Traditions Folk Ensemble co-founder **Tom Katrenich** on the accordion.

Toni Gras, Csárdás Dance Company managing director, assured the attendees they would "lose a couple of pounds by the end of the workshop, just in time for their Valentine's Day dinners."

Gras introduced Csárdás founder **Richard Graber**, who provided instruction in Hungarian dance, and Living Tra-

ditions co-founder **Cathy Katrenich**, who taught Polish dance.

"This is the fourth year Csárdás has offered lessons here at the Brecksville Center for the Arts," Gras said. "However, it is the first year we're offering Polish dance instruction, as well."

Katrenich, of Brecksville, taught about 20 participants how to perform the gallop, a sliding step, and the *krezesany*, a sliding and stomping move, in addition to other Polish dance steps.

Katrenich spoke about the history of dance in Poland, which includes five national dances known as the *Krakowiak*, polonaise, *kujawiak*, *mazur* and *oberek*, and the significance of the traditional Polish costume.

"As a suitor, you would want to look for a male with lots of coins on his sash," Katrenich said. "As a young man, you would want to look for a young lady with perhaps not so many red ribbons in her



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From left, Leah Vasarhelyi, 12, of Sagamore Hills, and Sara Katrenich, 14, Catherine Katrenich, 12, and Thomas Katrenich, 16, of Brecksville, perform with Csárdás Dance Company and Living Traditions Folk Ensemble.

hair, which signifies the number of suitors she has."

The Katrenich children — Thomas, 16, Sara, 14, and Catherine, 12 — who were

dressed in ethnic garb, are the Living Traditions Folk Ensemble performers.

"We have done this our entire lives," Sara said. "When

we were really young, we were on stage in our little costumes."

Another student, **Leah Vasarhelyi**, 12, joined Csárdás after taking a workshop at BCA two years ago.

"I'm half Hungarian," said Vasarhelyi. "I like the music and rhythm, and wanted to continue. It's kind of like a sport."

Graber taught students the basic steps of the *csárdás*, dance steps that are used in many of the traditional Hungarian dances. The North Royalton native, who relocated to Houston, continues his involvement with Csárdás Dance Company.

"I am now the guest choreographer of the company, which I started in 1994," he said. "I was the executive director for 12 years before I relocated to Houston, and I am now working in the arts down there."

"Twice a year, I come up to Ohio to set new work in choreography. I also attend

whenever I am scheduled to teach."

Csárdás, a repertoire company with adult and youth performers, has a performance ensemble as well as an educational outreach program. The group has performed at schools and festivals, and at Severance Hall.

"We have two directors here: **Stuart Meyer** for the adults, and then my sister **Judi Horvath**, who provides instruction to the kids," Graber said. "To attend weekly rehearsals requires quite a bit of dedication. The unique thing about our group is that we advocate that we are open to both ethnic dancers as well as non-Hungarians."

Graber said the focus of Csárdás Dance Company has shifted to the children's ensemble over the years, and is comprised of 15 dancers who range in age from 8-15.

Those interested can schedule an audition through csardasdance.com or (216) 533-4194.