

collage

DANCE ENSEMBLE

Company Mission and History

Ahmet Lüleci, Artistic Director of *Collage Dance Ensemble*, has a dream of making folk dance and music more accessible and interesting to a general audience. When he moved to Boston in the late 1980s, Ahmet began working with a local Turkish traditional dance group, which, as the repertoire expanded to include more international material, evolved into Collage Dance Ensemble. Today, it has become the Collage Dance Ensemble, featuring 15-25 dancers, performing in the **U.S., Canada**, and, for the first time in July 2003, in **Bursa, Turkey**. The company presents a wide range of pieces, from traditional choreographies to more modern interpretations that remain true to the spirit of the dance. Collage was officially granted non-profit status in 1998 and is a 503 (c) (3) Corporation, and is the recipient of numerous awards and honors:

- **Dance Straight Up** from Crash Arts (a division of World Music), 2003 (Premier in 2004). One of four winners
- **Outstanding Achievement in Arts and Humanities** from the ATAA (Assembly of Turkish American Associations, 2002)
- **Boston Moves** from Dance Umbrella, 2001. One of five winners.
- **Turkish Embassy Arts Grant, 2000**
- **Boston Cultural Council Grant, 2000**
- **Turkish Embassy Arts Grant, 1999**
- **Program of the Year Award, Boston University, 1998**
- **Program of the Year Award, Boston University, 1997**

An invitation to dance in Turkey

Folk dance groups from over 20 countries and 4 continents gathered for the **17th annual International Golden Karagöz Folk Dances Competition** (<http://www.bkstv.org>) in Bursa, Turkey, from July 7 – 12, 2003 to contribute to the “*idea of peace and friendship*.” A member of IOV (International Organization of Folk Art) and UNESCO, the Bursa Culture, Art and Tourism Foundation (BKSİ), receives support from the Ministry of Culture under the auspices of the Bursa Metropolitan Municipality to bring different cultures together through dance. The festival is renown throughout Turkey and the world of international folk dance.

Challenges for a small dance group

With little funding available for the arts, and being an entirely volunteer run organization, Collage has not had the opportunity to do significant fundraising to offset the costs of travel, costumes, and the many details

involved in the performing arts. The desire to participate in the festival was strong enough – despite recent political and military events that might, for some, be reason to cancel a journey abroad - that each of the 20 dancers paid for his or her travel expenses (approximately \$850 per round trip ticket) out of pocket. Once at the festival, Collage was assigned several plain-clothed police to ensure our safety through out the festival. The initial feelings of uneasiness from those in the group not accustomed to having to travel with security were quickly replaced by mutual trust and friendship.

Achievements

Of the seventeen groups who danced in the competition, three of those were professional groups, and unsurprisingly, they took first, second and third place in the final show/competition on the last day of the weeklong festival. Collage took fifth place, an incredible achievement for an amateur group that has never travelled out of the continent before and never competed together internationally before. More impressive, however, is that the Dance Ensemble entered the stage to a jeering audience and left a cheering one.

The international events that took place just days before the dance festival put a strain on the historically close relationship between America and Turkey. Many audiences were not initially friendly, and it was extremely difficult for the dancers to keep smiling and dancing, trying to ignore the negative atmosphere. At each show, after performing the expected American dances, Collage broke out into expert performances of traditional Turkish dances -- while still wearing American cowboy hats and boots! The audiences - a little stunned at first - warmed up immediately. They clapped along, they swayed to the music, and the negativity of moments before was gone; no audience remained unmoved after the Americans extended the cultural olive branch in this manner. By the end of the trip, Collage had been featured in at least four Turkish newspapers (see addenda of translations of two articles), had been invited back for next year's festival, and most importantly, had made innumerable friends and opened a lot of hearts. Collage eagerly awaits the next opportunity to share a passion for dance with a chance to contribute to international peace and friendship.

Addenda:

Sabah Newspaper

Sunday Edition
July 13, 2003

Page 24 / Back Cover

He's not a Cowboy, He's our Own Ahmet



Forty three year old Ahmet Lüleci who went to Boston 18 years ago as a dance instructor teaches Americans Turkish Folklore

By Ümit Tütüncü

A Turk is the leader of the American dance group attending the 17th International Karagöz Folk Dance Festival in Bursa with attendance from 17 countries. Lüleci got interested in folk dancing while studying music at the Ankara Gazi University and started teaching Turkish folk dances to American dancers visiting Turkey. Upon receiving an invitation in 1985, Ahmet Lüleci left for the United States and teaches Turkish folk dances to groups in different universities. Ahmet who met his American wife Elisa through folk dancing now travels the world teaching our dances.

Ahmet Lüleci mentions that the audience at the Bursa festival is surprised when they realize he is Turkish: "*I hear someone shout out 'Hey cowboy!'; when they realize I can speak Turkish and that my name is Ahmet, they are very shocked.*"

Ahmet Lüleci, who also works as a graphic designer in Boston, won the Culture, Arts and Humanity Award of the Turkish-American Association last year. In addition, he has won a special award from the Boston Culture Foundation, two separate choreography awards and the Function of the Year Award twice from Boston University.

Photo caption:

American Style Folk Dancing

The American team, under the leadership of Ahmet Lüleci, pleased the audiences with their Turkish dances as well as American folk dances.

Olay Newspaper

"The Largest City Paper of Turkey"

July 10, 2003

Page 1 / Front Cover

On the Stage with Protests, Off the Stage with Applause

By Ibrahim Yesiltan

Very interesting events took place during the performance of the American folk dance team at the Amphitheater last night. The American team danced for a while in a tense atmosphere because of the audience's reaction due to the arrest of the Turkish troops. Yet, the tense atmosphere reversed as the Americans started displaying dances from the Bingöl region. The Americans who finished their show with great applause from the audience carried their teacher Ahmet Lüleci on their shoulders after the performance.

Line Dancing Turkish Style

American folk dancers become more Turkish, like the characters in the 'Cola Turca' commercial. The Americans who arrived at Bursa for the Golden Karagöz received applause in place of protests after dancing Bingöl region dances finishing with a halay.

Ibrahim Yesiltan



The American folk dancers subjected to protests in the Bursa Festival due to the arrest of Turkish officers in Iraq by the U.S. troops, this time came in front of their audience under a complete different identity. As in the frequently viewed 'Cola Turca' commercial on TV these days, the Bostonian dancers shocked the audience by becoming 'Turkified' and dancing a Bingöl dance. This secret of the Americans that changed the protests to applause was revealed later on. It was learned that the person who taught the 'Johnnies' [an endearing term used for Americans in Turkish colloquial language] how to dance Turkish line dances was Ahmet Lüleci, a Turkish choreographer living in the U.S.A. As their leader, the members of the Collage Dance Ensemble of Boston carried Luleci on their shoulders after the performance. Lüleci went to the U.S. 18 years ago as a choreographer and teaches folk dances from 14 countries. He said, "I am happy to be the architect of such a performance in Bursa." He said that he understood the symbolic protest coming from the audience, "If I were in the audience I probably would have reacted similarly. But the current crisis of mistrust between the U.S.A. and Turkey should not reflect heavily on this festival of peace and friendship.

Photo caption:

The Man Who Makes the "Johnnies" Dance Turkish

The choreographer Ahmet Luleci who taught the American team Turkish dances was carried on the shoulders of his dance team.

