

Kálmán Magyar

Director, American Hungarian Folklore Centrum, New Jersey



For many, many people in America, for decades, Kálmán Magyar has been and remains the face of Hungarian traditional music and dance.

Kálmán arrived in the US in the early 60's after learning dance performance in Hungary. As a teenager, he immediately became involved in the New York-based dance group, Hungaria, which was made up of young Hungarians – he was one of the group's first members. First a star performer, Kálmán, together with Judith, who joined the group in the mid 1960's and eventually became his wife, soon became the artistic directors of the group, performing at innumerable events, including the World's Fair in 1964. Because of limitations imposed by the Iron Curtain, Hungaria's repertoire was often the result of research done by the Magyars, pulled from whatever musical and dance sources they could find, including books, performances of the Hungarian State Ensemble and records of classical composers.

In addition to working with Hungaria, Kálmán and Judith taught at many different American dance camps, and cultivated relationships with many Hungarian and American groups in the US, as well as fostering dance and music research in Hungary and Romania. One of the major records of the founder of dance and music research in Romania, Zoltán Kallós, was produced in the US by the Magyars.

Being the knowledgeable expert in field has not stopped Kálmán from doing the footwork. With Judith, Kálmán was the founder of a series of Hungarian Dance and Music Symposia beginning in 1978, offering the chance for Hungarian groups to become skilled in their culture and for Americans to participate in this world treasure. Working to control costs and make it possible for many people to come, Kálmán developed an agreement with camps on the West Coast to share the cost of bringing over Hungarian bands and teachers. He canvassed the Midwest and East for affordable campsites, and made all the arrangements. He found the musicians and dance teachers, applied for their visas, worked out airfare and transportation and all the arrangements they needed for their families.

At the Symposia, Kálmán was tireless in making sure everything ran according to schedule, doing the work of enrollment, checking food, bringing water, cooking midnight meals, and innumerable other tasks. If a camper had any sort of problem, he helped them, including finding and counseling a depressed teen who had run off into the woods. He did this all while having a great time himself. We couldn't figure out when he slept!

Kálmán is always ready with advice for travelers in Hungary, and he often takes them out to see the sights in Budapest and elsewhere. In 199, Kálmán led a tour group to Romania to learn about traditional music, dance, and arts in a local context. He brought his group to many events and places, and introduced them to his friends in Transylvania. Those who came will remember this forever, and those who missed it hope he will go again soon!

Several years ago, Kálmán founded Centrum Management, in order to foster the touring of Hungarian musicians and dance groups throughout the US and Canada. Groups who were seen here through Centrum Management have included Rajkó Gypsy Orchestra, Kálmán Balogh, Szászcsávás, the Kodály String Quartet, the Hungarian State Folk Ensemble, the ensembles, Ifjú Szúvek, Űsztűrű, Ökrös, and Dűvő, and Gypsy Spirit and Csárdás, Tango of the East, shows of the Budapest Dance Ensemble. Kálmán worked with his American friends in many places to find venues and lodging for these groups, often filling out the proceeds at various events out of his own pocket, as well as sponsoring himself the socializing with potential hosts that could lead to these tours.

Kálmán has been tirelessly involved in Hungarian events in New Jersey, and in the work of many Hungarian organizations, including churches, community centers, athletic centers, and museums. Many times he has been the MC of Hungarian Day in New Brunswick, and he will pitch in wherever necessary—one time I saw him playing drums at the Hungarian Day dance! Kálmán works with local museums, including the American Hungarian Foundation in New Brunswick and the Hungarian Museum in Passaic, with local exhibits and events. He has acted as a go between for Hungarians throughout the US for all these decades. Knowing everyone, helping them to meet each other, he is an unparalleled resource for finding out what is happening in the Hungarian world in the US and Europe. His computer skills in the websites Hungaria.org and Magyar.org have put this information at the fingertips of everyone.

Finally, there is the tremendous help that Kálmán has given the American Hungarian Educators Association. As one of the early members, he recognized the importance of fostering Hungarian research, whether in Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, or the far flung lives of Hungarian émigrés. Modestly saying that he is not a scholar and casting himself in a supporting role, he has contributed an incredible amount of energy and wisdom to the organization's events, and he occasionally presents a paper, himself.

Kálmán's contribution is astonishing in its depth of knowledge, his dedication, his organizational skills, his presentational and personal skills. He is the perfect person to receive this award!

Best wishes,

Judith Olson, M.Phil., NYU