

# INTRODUCTION TO FOLK DANCE

Welcome to the wonderful world of dance! You are about to experience folk dancing, the oldest form of dance. It is the basis for many other dance forms. The term *folk dancing* is usually defined as "the dance of the common people." Just where or when it began is impossible to document. Archaeologists and historians say it was a basic part of early peoples' culture as they used dance to communicate their emotions through movement and rhythm. People have danced and still dance for celebration, for survival, to socialize, to communicate with the spiritual, and to express their membership and identity in communities.

The purpose of this combined video, music, and booklet package is to provide simplified, hands-on tools for those wishing to participate in a meaningful and enjoyable program of folk dance. On the video, each dance is taught by an expert or a native of the country from which the dance originates. The dances have been carefully chosen to provide a successful and meaningful experience to all involved and an optimal mix of cultural diversity and samples for different levels. The dances selected were a result of a nationwide survey. Each dance has appropriate musical accompaniment that was specifically developed for use with the videotape and this booklet. The music was derived from original, authentic compositions of the popular songs used with the selected dances.

## Folk Dancing Benefits

This volume gives you an opportunity to learn about nine cultures. Each dance reflects the geography, climate, music, lifestyles, beliefs, and history of a people. It takes on the characteristics of the locale. For example, climate is a factor of great importance. Generally, the dances from frigid climates are quick-moving with strong, vigorous movements and sustained action. Dances from very warm climates have fluid movements and are more flowing and slow. In temperate climates, the dances seem to be more balanced between the vigorous and quiet actions. Mountain dwellers tend to be more isolated and less mobile than those who live in the plains, and their dances tend to be done in one place, while the dances of the people of the plains fly across the floor as though the dancers were riding horseback across the great open plains.

The forms, patterns, and functions of folk dance vary as much as the cultures. The dances can be done with or without partners; in circles, squares, or long lines; in threesomes, foursomes, or alone. As a means of expression, dances such as wedding dances, war dances, contest dances, courtship dances, work dances, religious dances, and special holiday dances have been created.

Folk dancing is very social and recreational in nature. Each dancer is a member of a larger group, and dancers change partners frequently during many of the dances, promoting communication between people who might otherwise be too timid. Folk dancing helps to develop rhythmic movements, neuromuscular coordination, balance, and poise. It is a challenge to learn new skills, and dance allows participants, regardless of their ages, the satisfaction of both achievement and acceptance.

## How To Use This Book

Selected photographs taken from the video illustrate portions of the dance and show the dancers in action. As appropriate, a diagram is included to show the formation of the dance. You may use the modification suggestions either to simplify the dance or to add variety. The nine dances in this volume are presented in easy-to-difficult order and reflect three degrees of difficulty--easy, moderate, and advanced. The easy dances are shorter and less complex than the advanced dances, which have more intricate steps performed to a faster tempo. Each dance concludes with an interesting bit of trivia to enhance your understanding of the culture.

If you are a teacher, you'll find the For Teachers Only section to be helpful. It includes suggestions for presenting, managing, and introducing dances in order to keep things fun and interesting for all. Lastly, there is a Resources section that identifies the selected dance instructors and lists equipment sources.

Authentic music and rhythm are important in all folk dances. Rhythm is the beat that drives dance movements. It is the musical sound that catches the essential style and quality of the dance. Time signatures of 2/4, 3/4, 4/4, and 6/8 are commonly used in Western cultures. Eastern cultures tend to use irregular meters such as 5/16, 7/8, and 11/16. Both the specific music selection and the time signature are listed per dance.

The folk dance experience involves more than performing the steps correctly. It is an opportunity to develop a better understanding of the customs and traditions of other cultures through a nonjudgmental curiosity, and to discover that dance can be a common bond between people of all nations. Folk dance is an expression of the human spirit.

*Welcome to an exciting adventure of dance!*

### Diagram Key

○ = women

□ = men