

Report for Alex's Virtual Folk Arts Series in 2021

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Alex's Virtual Folk Arts Series Entertains Fans Far and Wide

In 2021 the Alex Wilson Legacy Fund expanded its offerings to give people more chances to participate in folk music and dance and storytelling during the COVID pandemic. One of these programs, called Alex's Virtual Folk Arts Series, broadcasted five performances by local folk artists throughout the year.

The goal of Alex's Series was to create opportunities for artists to perform in a safe environment and have their programs livestreamed out to fans who were isolated by the pandemic. We wanted to showcase Colorado folk talent to the rest of the country and the world, while giving people a chance to experience these cultural events from the comfort of their homes and other remote locations.

Sherefe

[Sherefe](#) kicked off Alex's Virtual Folk Arts Series with a concert in Sodal Hall at the Avalon Ballroom on April 17. Sherefe is a Boulder-based ensemble that specializes in traditional music from Greece, Turkey, Egypt, Lebanon and Bulgaria. Dance tunes are performed in the native tongues, on traditional and modern instruments, with elegance and great enthusiasm.



Nearly 100 viewers took in the greatly-anticipated one-hour streamed set, with fans and newbies checking in from Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, California, Hawaii, and British Columbia, among others. The set included simple Greek island dance tunes, deeply romantic urban songs, and complex Arabic compositions, among others. James Hoskins, Dexter Payne, Julie Lancaster, Jesse Manno, and Brett Bowen showcased their widely varied vocal and instrumental skills in this very dynamic and energetic series opener.

Fairy Tales with a Twist

On May 18, “Fairy Tales with a Twist” delighted virtual audiences with their versions of new and old traditional fairy and folk tales. This show was a creative collaboration between local storytellers from [Stories with Spirit](#) of Longmont (Cooper Braun, Rachel Ann Harding) and [Storysmith®](#) of Boulder (Susan Marie Frontczak.) These three well-known storytellers each brought their own unique styles and embellishments to create nearly three hours of colorful, inspiring tales: funny, poignant, dark and touching.



Including the large followings of the individual storytellers, nearly 350 viewers tuned in for this enchanting evening, and another 90-plus people watched later following the broadcast.

Espresso: Gypsy Jazz and American Swing

The third program in Alex’s Series featured [Espresso---Gypsy Jazz and American Swing](#) on June 12. By this date a live audience was able to gather at the Avalon Ballroom in Boulder, and dancers filled the floor with their brilliant moves to the fiery, vibrant music. The live-streamed concert, in-person dancing, and online viewers reached a total of about 140 people.



Espresso’s repertoire features jazz tunes made famous by Django Reinhardt and Stephane Grappelli from the Hot Club of Paris, and many American swing tunes from the 1940s and earlier. Espresso was started 18 years ago by Emily Reynolds (rhythm guitar and vocals) and Bill Pontarelli (clarinet). They were later joined in 2010 by Jordan Ramsey, and bassist Duane Webster in 2016. Together and with other players they have thrilled audiences all around the Denver/Boulder area with their fun, dynamic, and expertly delivered music.

Planina—Songs of Eastern Europe

[Planina-Songs of Eastern Europe](#)

graced the Avalon stage for the fourth program on July 24. For their first performance in 16 months, the group wowed the audience with an hour-long program of folk songs from Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and countries around the Black Sea. The fourteen singers gave the audience a rare treat: simple village-style melodies, passion-filled choral arrangements, and compelling dance tunes. Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Greece, and Romania were represented. Planina was joined by a special guest: mandolin, guitar, and tambura player Steve Mullins. About 165 people viewed the show on line and in person.



Planina was started 33 years ago when seven women, who had met at folk dancing in Denver, started learning words and melodies to dance tunes. They performed at many of Alex Wilson's First of Fall Parties and have appeared in concerts and festivals all over Colorado. Planina members travel to Eastern Europe periodically to collect folk songs from singers in villages and cities there. They are dedicated to bringing music from that part of the world to educate and entertain audiences here in Colorado, and now the rest of the world through the miracles of technology.

Barbelfish Balkan Band

[Barbelfish](#) Balkan Band, Boulder-Denver's own pan-Balkan international folk dance band, wrapped up the series on October 23 with a livestreamed concert and dance party at the Avalon. Barbelfish has been playing music from many parts of Eastern Europe for dancing and listening since 2003. The members have a shared



fascination with the rhythms, melodies, harmonies, and expressiveness of the music from these regions. They have all been studying and performing this music in groups and as solo artists for many years. The October show reached nearly a hundred people virtually and in person.

James Hoskins, Julie Lancaster, Jesse Manno, Steve Mullins and Amy Self have performed together as Barbelfish since 2003. Laura Osterman joined the ensemble for this performance in lieu of regular singer Loren Uecker.

Overview

Alex's Virtual Folk Arts Series was declared a great success, having reached 841 people during the performances and live broadcasts, and 972 people following the shows, for a total of about 1813 individual encounters with guests and fans. For a first-time effort, Alex's Series made a larger-than-anticipated, and outstanding contribution to the folk life scene in Colorado in 2021!

Thank-Yous

Tom Masterson, Series Director

Cooper Brown: Technical expertise for Zoom broadcast and publicity for the storytelling

William Garrison for sound, technical, broadcasting and recording, on four of the presentations.

Avalon Ballroom and the Boulder Dance Coalition for providing low-cost performance spaces for four of the performances.

Alex Wilson Legacy Fund Board Members Scott Gregoire, Judy Wong, Mary Ann Sausotte, and Ingvar Sodal, Emeritus

Julie Lancaster, Alex Wilson Fund Administrative Coordinator

We would also like to thank:

The Boulder Dance Coalition, Boulder International Folk Dancers, Denver Area Folk Dancers, and the numerous ensemble leaders and teachers who helped publicize the broadcasts to people on their contact lists.