

Tanhukurssi (Finnish Folk Dance Course)

Instructors; Leena Yläneva (Lennu) and Juha-Matti Aronen (Jussi)



Lennu and Jussi have been teaching Finnish Folk dance and folk traditions together off and on for over a decade. Lennu was director of Pro, a masters level dance group from Turku, Finland and she choreographed and directed the Finnish National Performance at the 2006 Nordlek Festival in Gothenburg, Sweden. Jussi has a Masters degree in Finnish Folk Lore from the University of Helsinki, and has taught at the University in Tartu, Estonia and in Sweden. The two have also taught at several courses in the United States and Japan. The picture was taken in March 2007 in Japan, where they were teaching Finnish Folk dances. The theme of this year's tanhukurssi will be name day dances. They will teach folk traditions, dances, games and songs associated with Finnish name days.

Name Day Dances

In Finland, name day celebrations are considered to be accepted tradition. In neighboring Nordic countries not everyone has felt at home with name day celebrations, and for the past decade they have no longer been celebrated. Even in Finland there have been changes: One hundred years ago birthdays were never celebrated in Finland; while name days were the high point of one's year, but because of foreign influences, birthdays have begun to be celebrated more frequently, but adults continue to observe name days, for example, in work places.

The continued special role of name days in Finland can be explained by its history. Originally, name day calendars were based on the Roman Catholic calendar of the saints days, which was followed everywhere. But after the reformation, in places where there were still Catholics, Protestants wanted to dissociate themselves from Catholic traditions, including the observation of name days. In Finland, however, Catholicism was not practiced at all after the reformation, and therefore Finns never felt it was necessary to dissociate themselves from the observation of name days. The result was that the status of name days was not only preserved but was strengthened..

During the 19th century the celebration of name days became secular, especially the summer name days, which became occasions for large children's festivals. In contrast, religious festivals maintained a deeply religious tone. Often name day celebrations grew to include the youth of the entire village, providing them with the opportunity to dance and to observe and participate in many interesting activities, including songs, puppet shows, pole dances, and special name day foods. On those name days when lots of people were assembled, they could even organize large community dances.

More recently, there has been a resurgence of interest in old given names and in name days. Also, people have been creative in inventing new applications for name days: Because laina means "loan," libraries celebrate Laina day and because the name of its trademark is "Pirkka," K-kauppa (K-shop) observes Pirkka day. Politicians observe their name days by serving name-day coffee, and now even a calendar of name days for pets is published.

The theme for his summer's Tanhukurssi (Finnish folk dance course) comes from name day celebrations and traditions. In the course, Lennu and Jussi will teach traditional dances, sing traditional songs, and teach us about Finnish name day traditions.