

Making the World a More Beautiful Place

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by Chris Ricciotti



Except for the first paragraph, which is from recent correspondence, this essay was posted on Facebook; it's reprinted here with the author's kind permission.

"I think it's important to see that dancing and music, song, community, the intentional connections we all make as a part of this tradition, is incredibly spiritual, and healing, on so many levels. In a time when there are so many distractions in our fast paced technology driven society that can pull us away from being connected face to face with others, here is one thriving tradition that continues to break the rules of our modern day society and gives us a fun and playful excuse to come together to share in something much greater than we are individually."

FACEBOOK POST

In 1985 at 25 years of age, when I came out as a gay man, the world was a very different place than what it is now. At 55 years of age now, those of you who are much younger than I may not have the perspective that we who are a bit more mature have. Back then, there were few social groups, and most of the community was based around bars and other associated events.

I can't speak for anyone else, but I can speak for myself when I say that this was just not what I was looking for in my coming out process. I really wanted something very different that was not the mainstream part of what it was to be gay back then. I wanted to be a real human being, not just a gay human being, and I wanted to share good times with good folks, sharing healthy social time in a warm and inclusive environment. Never in all that time did I ever imagine that I could intertwine two very different worlds, my love of music and dance and my exploration of being a gay man. In fact early on, before I came out, I distinctly remember the moment when I had this amazing epiphany, and in that moment, it was the most exciting thing that had ever come to mind. And just as quickly I dismissed it.

It wasn't until I joined a men's choral group in Providence, RI in 1986 where all that was to change. I overheard a conversation one evening, a friend of mine at the time, Bill Wilson, mentioned he has gone to see a Gay Rodeo out in Denver, CO. I couldn't even imagine of such an event back then, but then he went on to say that afterwards he went to a square dance. My ears immediately perked up, and I turned around and asked, "You mean, a GAY square dance??" He replied, "Yes, they have been doing it out there for years." As soon as I heard that, I knew I had to find a way to merge these two worlds together, and now 30 years later, we have a documentary of the power of what the vision of one person, shared with an entire community, can do.

To all those who have shared this vision, and who continue to help in its course and in its future, to all those lovely individuals who have at one time or another graced our dance halls and dance camps with your presence, and to all those who have shared that this amazing community has helped them through their rough times in their lives, and have helped connect them to a warm and accepting group of like-minded individuals and lifelong friendships, I say a heartfelt thank you.

It is because of all of you, who like myself, needed something a bit out of the ordinary, who desired a community of warm and accepting individuals, who understand that we can all make a difference, who understand the social power of dance, music, song, hugs, and the social interactions, that some 30 years later, we have this amazing community that continues to welcome lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender, asexuals, intersex, queer, questioning, and straight friends. What an amazing diversity in a social time where there is so much extremism pulling at us from all sides. I take great comfort in sharing myself within this community. I know my life would be very different had it not been for LCFD.

Please take a moment to watch this video. Please share this with your friends and families. Invite people to come and join us, and share this love with others. Each of us has the power to make this world a more beautiful place!

Lavender Country and Folk Dancers (LCFD) has been working with filmmaker Nate Daniel on a full-length documentary about their dance community which is expected to be released in 2017. This short video is a preview of the longer documentary.

LCFD sponsors, supports and promotes a nationwide network of local gender-free community dances and dance camps. Their groups are mostly contra and English country dances, but they also encompass several other dance traditions. While their focus is LGBTQ communities, they welcome everyone to their dances and camps.

Chris Ricciotti is a dance caller and organizer and a member of LCFD's Board of Directors; he lives in Massachusetts.