

Bazaar season

Foreign-flavored festivals put culture on display

BY ANDREW UJIFUSA
STAFF WRITER

Mary Madsen married her husband Egil, a native of Denmark, on Nov. 8. Then they took off on their honeymoon – to the kitchen, to prepare open-face sandwiches for the Danish Christmas Bazaar on Saturday at St. Elizabeth Church in Rockville, where the Madsens now live.

"If I knew Danes were this good, I would have gotten one a long time ago," said Mary, laughing.

The sandwiches were getting rave reviews as well, on a day when three cultural bazaars put their goods and goodwill on display in the downcounty area.

While the Turkish danced to folklore favorites at Thomas W. Pyle Middle School in Bethesda, patrons of the Czechoslovak bazaar at River Road Unitarian-Universalist Church down the road eyed the sheep cheese (not quite as sharp as its goatish cousin) and the sugar-saturated grapefruit rinds.

All three Saturday bazaars were sponsored by cultural groups. Some of the proceeds went to scholarships, children's schools and hospitals. And everyone felt united by common cultural ties, no matter how small those cultural communities were.

"That is quite important to us," said Alexej Borkovec of Silver Spring, who came to the United States from Prague on scholarship to Virginia Tech.

To describe the Danish bazaar, Danish Club of Washington, D.C. President Joe Weisskopf

of Bethesda used a word that looks like it's missing at least one vowel: hyggelig. It translates as "cozy."

"It keeps getting bigger and bigger," he said.

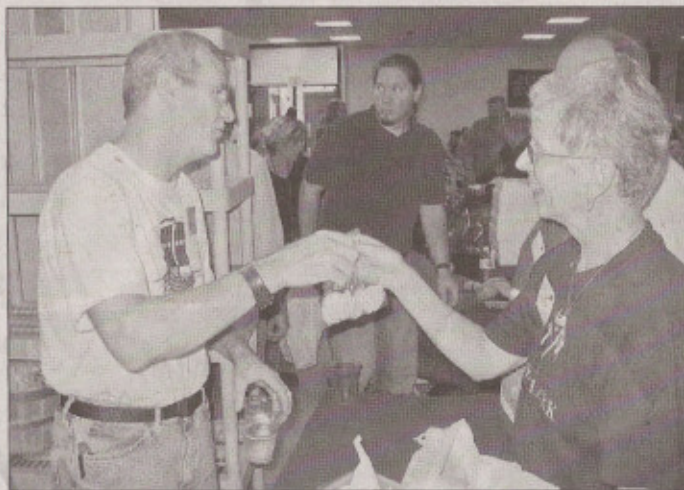
Jorn Nielsen, who used to operate a Danish bakery in Potomac but is now retired, breaks out his baking skills only once a year, when he helps churn out 6,300 flaky cream-filled pastries. They were all sold out, perhaps even consumed, within two hours.

"It's a lot of teamwork," said Else Jensen of Virginia, in between spoonfuls of another literally heart-stopping Danish specialty, a cup of apple cake.

Over at the Czechoslovak bazaar, Kay Cartwright (half Czech, half Slovak) informed a customer who is examining a miniscule porcine sculpture, "Pigs are good luck in Czechoslovakia." The country split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993. Some patrons were hoping for luck at the-auction, where cut glass, lace and other goods were up for sale.

Dagmar White, chairwoman of the Washington, D.C. chapter of the Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences, displayed a series of hand-painted jewelry boxes and Christian icons overlaid onto oyster shells. She said she had to get the shells from Washington State, since the Chesapeake Bay is "fished out."

While some patrons lined up for schnitzels, strudels and cabbage soup in the Czechoslovak kitchen, Juraj Slavik presided over a Czech drink of fruit-based



ANDREW UJIFUSA/THE GAZETTE

Steve Galeski hands a bag of Danish cookies to Inge Harbaugh at the Danish Christmas Bazaar at St. Elizabeth Church in Rockville on Saturday. The bazaar was sponsored by the Danish Club of Washington, D.C., and featured open-face sandwiches, pastries, and traditional embroidering from Denmark.

syrup. The syrup can be diluted with water, soda, or for those with more leathery palates, vodka. The tray on his table had cups of malinovka, raspberry syrup, mixed with something less than fully Czech: Sprite.

Diverse influences aren't a problem for traditional Turkish musicians like Cemil Akca, a Takoma Park resident and Istanbul native.

For hundreds of years, a typical Turkish bard, or ashik, would travel from village to village, accumulating the musical accents from Arab, Persian and other cultures, and memorizing various bits of songs on love and tragedy. He would incorporate

some lyrics, drop some others, and meld various sounds and rhythms into his own unique pieces.

"Some songs are mixed, some songs keep their originality," said Akca, as he watched his fellow musician Osman Kabasakal play a seven-string saz to the delight of old men at the bazaar, sponsored by the Washington Turkish Women's Association.

On the more material side of things, the Turkish delight, yellow chickpeas and feta cheese were the hottest sellers, according to Ediz Eren, who moved to Rockville from Turkey and is studying chemical engineering at Montgomery College. The bazaar

is not that different from his home life, since he is surrounded by family.

"Everybody's Turkish near me," he said.

Following in the wake of Saturday's bazaar trifecta is the Ukrainian Christmas Bazaar from noon to 5 p.m., Sunday, at St. Andrew Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral in Silver Spring. Val Zabijaka, parish president at St. Andrew, which is sponsoring the event, said one of the highlights will be high-quality Ukrainian beer, which is only a recent development in the country's history.

"In the Ukraine, under the Soviet Union, they had one beer, and it was horrible," Zabijaka said. "...in the Ukraine right now you have a great variety of beers."

The Swedish Bazaar on Nov. 8 at St. James Episcopal Church in Potomac preceded Saturday's bazaar trifecta with Jansson's temptation, a traditional dish of potato gratin and anchovies, sweet cardamom bread, and cider.

Weisskopf said the diverse makeup of Montgomery County helps support the number of cultural bazaars in the area. The timing, meanwhile, anticipates the holiday season without getting overwhelmed by the Christmas shopping rush.

"We've been doing it that way for many, many years," he said.

Despite the strong regional ties at the bazaars, most believe that a diverse group of people attend.

"Lots of Americans come too, because it's bazaar time," White said. "Everybody loves bazaars."