

serTA Sweet Sixteen Weekend – 23-25 September 2022

Summary of the weekend

I recently attended the SERTA Sweet Sixteen weekend. It was an excellent experience - extremely interesting classes, thought provoking talks and conversations and great social dancing.

The venue was slightly out of our normal area, near Norfolk, but the journeys were worth it! With over 40 fellow teachers including a few spouses plus our team of teacher, Jimmie Hill and musicians Ian Robertson and Ewan Galloway it succeeded on every level.

Jimmy Hill's classes were informative, challenging and fun. His Saturday morning class was titled "Never Stand Still" and gave lots of tips on teaching. On Sunday morning Jimmie focussed on the Heart of Midlothian Book. He talked about the history of dance and the research and thinking behind the dances being updated and republished before teaching us some of them in their old and new forms. In the other class, he encouraged us to consider our teaching practices, including that not all dancers are able to be advanced dancers and how to adjust expectations so that everyone can achieve their best and enjoy dancing's fun, friendship and fitness. He also gave some tips on teaching new dancers and recommended some dances he used. The accompanying music from Ewan McGregor and Ian Robertson was excellent, particularly as for the Sunday class they had researched and practiced old and difficult tunes.

On the Saturday afternoon, there was a series of short talks led by experts and then conversation around the topic. This included the effect on bands and musicians of all dances being talked or walked at events; starting a new class; teaching beyond unit 5 and safe dance practice; teaching young people; and gender-neutral calling. There were some interesting information and debates, and gave us lots to consider. There was also an update about the RSCDS's centenary plans.

The dances in the evenings were very enjoyable with great music from Ewan and Ian, and interesting programmes including dances that had been taught at SERTA workshops. During the Saturday social dance we toasted serTA with a glass of bubbly and celebration cake.

SERTA workshops are always full of useful reminders of good teaching practice and tips for improving and developing your own style but from this special weekend I will take away in particular:

- Jimmy's tip to try teaching step practice in a formation was extremely interesting and one I will try, particularly with more experienced dancers.
- Trying to make calling dances gender neutral is an interesting challenge, but worth pursuing as so many 'ladies' have long danced as both 'ladies' and 'men' but it is becoming more common to have men dancing on the "ladies" side and gender can be a delicate topic.

The Sweet Sixteen weekend also reminded me that not everyone is capable of improving their footwork, particularly older dancers. For them it is better to focus on rhythm, sociability, and getting to certain places in the dance at the correct time, and I will remember this to encourage dancers to enjoy the fun, friendship and fitness aspects of dancing despite their personal limitations.

Altogether a fantastic weekend and I am looking forward to another such weekend before too long. Thank you to all involved especially Jane Rose, Chair of serTA and the serTA Committee.

Report by Kate Thomson

