



South East Region Teachers Association

Putting on a Display Paul Plummer September 2015

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Photo: Stephen Webb

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Paul Plummer led the latest SERTA workshop entitled on 27th September at Finchampstead. Having been a demonstration dancer since childhood, and the teacher of the London demonstration class for many years, he was able to bring first hand experience to the subject. Peter Jenkins had worked with Paul as the demonstration class musician and provided excellent music throughout.

Displays can be semiprofessional corporate events, a display with participation such as Burns Suppers, or entertainment at an old folks' home. Whatever the type of display, the audience is likely to be looking mainly from the waist up. An entertaining display needs smiles, eye contact and engagement between the dancers, good posture and good covering with dancers in the right place at the right time. Paul's warm up included emphasis on many of these requirements, making sure that we looked up and at each other, smiled and maintained an upright relaxed posture throughout. It sounds simple, but it was surprising how different it felt.

The teacher should consider the abilities of the dancers and what looks good to an audience when devising a display. Good footwork, but not necessarily high impact dancing is needed. A display programme may be quite demanding for a small team if they are all required to dance most of the time. Whilst a strathspey may fill more time, it can get dull for an audience expecting more lively dances. Paul also taught us a few simple highland steps and a simple broadsword which increase variety for the audience.

Good display dances may not be the dancers' favourites. The complexity of Schiehallion reels may be fun for the dancers, but the simple patterns in Round Reel of Eight are more easily understood by the audience. It is also a great dance for covering, eye contact and engagement.

After lunch, Paul's emphasis was on developing spatial awareness. A simple dance such as Linton Ploughman can be modified to change its orientation. This will increase interest for the audience, but requires focus from the dancers. The covering and shapes must still be good, and of course with smiles and good posture and no evidence of the concentration required. We also looked at how dances may be adapted to link with the next dance in a choreographed medley. If the team is dependent on recorded music it may be necessary to modify a dance or a medley to fit recorded tracks unless someone can splice tracks together.

Finally, Paul put together the dances and medleys we had learned into a display programme. Everyone joined in and put into practice what we had learned.

It was an enjoyable day with lots of practical tips for display organisers and dancers alike. Displays provide an excellent showcase for Scottish dancing and raise funds for branches and clubs. Our thanks to Paul and to Peter whose music kept us dancing all day. Thanks also to the BHS Border Branch for providing tea, coffee and excellent cakes.

Pat Davoll