



South East Region Teachers Association

SERTA 10th Anniversary Weekend,

**Hotel Piccadilly, Bournemouth (South East Region Teachers' Association)
Friday 16th – Sunday 18th September 2016**

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Photo: Stephen Webb



At the end of the week in September when temperatures were over 30degrees and beaches packed in the south of England, with trepidation my husband George and I headed to Bournemouth for the SERTA 10th Anniversary Weekend. Massive thunder and lightning storms the night we arrived thankfully reduced the temperature, making the prospect of dancing for the next 3 days more inviting.

The Hotel Piccadilly in Bournemouth has a ballroom with a sprung floor and is a popular venue for a variety of dancing classes and dance holidays and was an ideal venue for the SERTA weekend. On the Friday evening, following a welcome drink and introductions prior to dinner, attendees enjoyed a short

Social Dance dancing to the fabulous music of the musicians for the weekend, Judith and Ian Muir. The majority of attendees were from the South of England, one from Wales, one from the Isle of Wight, two from France and George and me from Scotland, though George was just there for a holiday!

On Saturday morning, Pat Houghton, the teacher for the weekend, facilitated a class entitled 'Getting the Most from your Class,' accompanied by Judith and Ian.

Following discussion on tailoring classes to try to get the best out of each individual at the same time as making the class enjoyable for everyone, we split into 4 groups. Each group was given an 8 bar phrase of Lord Eglinton's Reel (Miss Milligan's Miscellany) to teach - to include the steps used, any step transitions, the formations involved, highlight any difficulties and teaching points and include a relevant skills exercises. It was good to see how the groups approached the different aspects of the dance and liaised with and involved the musicians.

Following a very welcome coffee break, the groups were each given one dance from the new RSCDS book 50. Groups were to choose the phrase in the dance they felt needed most attention and, including any relevant skills exercise and teaching points, teach it to the class.

In the afternoon, dancers got a chance to sit down and rest their legs during three sessions of different talks.

The first session, 'Mixed Ability Groups, How to Keep Everyone Involved,' was led by Anne Carter. In pairs we discussed what we hoped to get out of the session and wrote on a post-it what we find most challenging when teaching a mixed ability class.

Anne outlined a scenario where all the sets are managing well but one set is struggling and the teacher ends up spending a long time concentrating on that one set while the rest of the dancers are standing for a long period. How would we deal with this?

In pairs, we shared a situation (not necessarily to do with dancing) that had not gone well and also something that had been successful. What was the difference in what made it a success or not?

From the discussions, the key points highlighted to consider when preparing classes / teaching were:

- Avoid over-complicating things
- Simplify things when possible
- Think about what strategies you have to spot / cope when you're getting into a 'black hole'
- Have a Plan B

With reference to some of the points highlighted on the post-its from the start of the session, Anne discussed what teachers require to think about to teach a mixed ability group –the different elements in planning the lesson and considerations for the varying levels of experience within the class. The main challenge most teachers highlighted was 'helpful' dancers talking and teaching within the sets.

A short break to stretch the legs prior to the 2nd session of the afternoon "Keep Teenagers Dancing' led by Marilyn Watson. Marilyn was accompanied by one of her young dancers, Keely.

Marilyn outlined the background of 'The Macauley Dancers,' the children's class she taught for many years, a high proportion of the children continuing to dance as teenagers and into adulthood. Marilyn read out letters she'd received from several of her teenage dancers, now adults and scattered across Britain, of their memories of their time spent dancing with The Macauley Dancers, the enjoyment and satisfaction they got from it and also their recognition of the time and effort Marilyn put in to making the classes enjoyable and producing accomplished dancers.

The main theme throughout was the importance of having other activities to attend and focus on to maintain the youngsters interest, rather than just having the weekly dancing class. The Christmas parties were a highlight of the dancing year, Festivals and Medal Tests gave something to work towards and the prospect of progressing to attending adult dances, Summer School and Spring Fling was always on the horizon. Marilyn also involved the teenagers in composing dances and producing a dance book.

The session finished with Keely giving a beautiful performance of the Ladies Step Dance Blue Bonnets accompanied by Judith & Ian Muir.

Another short break and we were ready for the final session of the afternoon, Ian Muir giving a talk on 'Music (the musician) and the Dance' – the chicken

and the egg or (the egg and the chicken!) of Scottish Country Dancing' - a very intriguing title!!

To get us tuned in, Judith and Ian started the session with a lovely selection of music. Ian discussing the role of the class musician and what they bring to the class followed this. 'Drive' and 'lift' were two words heard frequently over the next hour – the music being phrased to help drive the dancers and give them the impetus to lift off the floor. Ian highlighted variations in phrasing and timing of tunes and played samples so we could hear the different styles of music and different tune types of jigs, reels and strathspeys (12 tune types in total!) and the importance of similar types of tunes being played together.

Just to make sure we were listening, this was followed by a wee quiz where we were to name the dance and tune type from the 12 choices – Jigs (double jig, single jig, two-step jig, pipe jig); Reels (hornpipe, single reel, double reel); Strathspeys (slow air, song type, traditional). I'm afraid I failed miserably!

The types and speed of music played for step practise and also depending on the level of experience within the class, the teamwork required between the teacher and the musician and what the musician expects from the teacher was also discussed.

Acknowledging that a lot of classes do not have a musician, Ian, who is the RSCDS Music Director, brought to our attention that the RSCDS website now has sets of teaching tracks for Books 49 and 50, with the music broken down into sections for teaching purposes. These are available as free downloads and can be found in the Media section (in a zip file which can be downloaded).

Ian also mentioned there are two Scholarships available for musicians to attend the music course at Summer School - something for teachers to consider if you know of a musician who may be interested in playing for SCD and would benefit from attending the musician's course at Summer School.

With reference to the 'chicken and egg' title of his session, Ian highlighted that teachers, dancers and musicians need each other - dancers need music to dance to and musicians need dancers to play for. Judith and Ian closed the afternoon sessions with another lovely selection of tunes before everyone made a beeline for the bar and to meet up with the non-dancing/non-teaching partners who had enjoyed a very relaxing day.

Dinner on Saturday night was followed by the second Social Dance of the weekend. Any weariness was quickly forgotten once Judith and Ian's lively music started. To celebrate the 10th Anniversary of SERTA wine and cake was served during the evening and Brian Rose gave a brief celebratory speech and proposed a toast to commemorate 10 years of SERTA.

The first class on Sunday morning was on 'Book 50,' led by Pat Houghton and accompanied by Judith and Ian playing. Four dances were covered, some of them relating to the session carried out the previous day on Book 50 dances.

This was followed by a session facilitated by Jane Rose on 'Attracting Beginners & Keeping Them.' There was discussion around the various reasons why people start dancing and coming to classes and different methods used for advertising and attracting newcomers. The importance of structuring the classes to provide consistency and progression was highlighted as well as recognising people learn things at different rates.

With reference to Marilyn Watson's methods for keeping her teenagers dancing, involving beginners in various social occasions rather than just the weekly class was viewed as being beneficial in retaining new dancers. Suggestions were drink breaks during the class, parties with bring & share suppers, garden dances (you can tell this discussion is taking place in the south of England & not in Scotland) and weekends and events that non-dancing partners could attend. Arranging to meet less experienced dancers and taking them to their first dance was also considered to be helpful as well as giving guidance on which dances to avoid.

Pat Houghton led the final session of the weekend on 'Suitable Ceilidh Dances for Warm-up.' This was a good way to finish the weekend as everyone could let their hair down and enjoy getting some new ideas for warm ups for the start of classes.

Thanks were given to all involved in arranging the SERTA 10th Anniversary Weekend, especially to Mervyn Short and Rachel Wilton. Those who didn't have to rush away for trains and other commitments had lunch at the Piccadilly Hotel prior to departing. Photographs taken during the weekend by Stephen Webb can be seen on the SERTA website.

This was a very good, well organised and enjoyable weekend and I would recommend attendance at similar events in the future to any teachers wanting

to refresh their skills, gain new ideas, share experiences and continue to make sure Scottish country dancing is kept sociable and fun for all involved.

Jane Meikle