



South East Region Teachers Association

Dancing Now and In the Future –virtual meeting and discussion – 27 September 2020

Reporter: Marie Montague

SERTA held its first virtual meeting, using Zoom, on Sunday 27th September 2020. Thirty–eight dance teachers and group organisers joined the meeting to hear four invited speakers talk about their experiences of maintaining engagement with their classes during the lockdown and since. The short presentations were followed by open discussion.

1. Welcome and introduction

Jane Rose, SERTA Chair, welcomed the meeting participants and speakers. She gave notice that the meeting was being recorded, following requests from members who could not attend it. Jane told the meeting that some dancing was taking place in continental Europe, held outdoors and without giving hands and that group dancing was also taking place in Guernsey whilst observing strict isolation if COVID cases occurred. She also reported that Andrew Kellett (RSCDS Chairman) had sent his best wishes to everyone and reported that voluntary arts groups including RSCDS and English Country Dancing had met with the Dept of Culture, Media and Sport to look at ideas about how to

move forward <https://www.voluntaryarts.org/News/response-to-dcms-guideline>

2. Zsofi Jozsef and Phill Jones: Bo'ness Dance

Zsofi formed the Bo'ness Club in Scotland 2 years ago and the members were all beginners at that stage. When lockdown started, she and Phill looked at how they might continue class dancing online and this developed to a weekly class and a few ceilidhs. They use Facebook Live to run the classes, but also tried Messenger and Zoom. The online class is a Chat group and material is posted every week. To create the class content, Zsofi uses 2 cameras, one focussing on her feet, and two screens. Phill sorted out the technicalities of the equipment set-up and recording to make this all possible. Phill plays accordion to accompany Zsofi's teaching. Dances such as "De'il amang the tailors" were adapted to 3 couple sets for the purpose of the online classes. Considering the challenges of online classes, Zsofi's main points were

- Online classes did not suit everyone because space and a certain amount of technical skill was needed for the participants.
- The online class group had a very wide range of levels of dance skill, from beginners to teachers, so this had to be accommodated.
- Dances needed to be adapted to keep them short enough for interest and feasible to perform in a limited space
- The online classes attracted 10 participants from overseas • Classes covered 4-5 dances and lasted an hour
- There was time for chat at the end Reflecting on the classes, Zsofi reminded everyone that it is important to keep in touch with all group members even if they cannot attend online classes.

Zsofi finished by suggesting that those who wanted to see the class activity should go to the Bo'ness dance page in Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/bonessdance/>

3. Peter Marshall: Alderley and District Caledonian Society

The hall used by Alderley and District Caledonian Society re-opened after lockdown in August, so the group looked at how to restart dancing indoors with limited numbers of dancers and meet all the requirements. There was considerable consideration given to how dances could be performed while observing social distancing.

Key points for dance technique were:

- Minimum width of set needed to be 4 metres to allow one dancer to go down the middle and up again
- Sidelines needed 2.5 metres between dancing positions
- A couple turning without hands needs a diagonal distance of 6 metres
- Casting up or down needs 2 metres outside each side of the set
- Very large sets need more steps and moves did not fit well with bars as a result

From this consideration, a list of what was possible to dance and what was not was produced and dances were modified. Peter reported that a couple of dance classes had already been held in September using very simple dances and 2 x 3-couple sets at a time. The classes have now to be prebooked because of the limit of 6 in groups and the sets were kept in 2 separate groups, with socially distanced chairs for each dancer to use. The hall has an entry door in the middle of the hall, so a set could dance in each half of it. The age range of the group was 50-80 years and Peter pointed out that the size of the sets exaggerates the issue of agility for dancers. Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Community-Organization/Alderley-District-Caledonian-Society-294655117312474/>

4. Amanda Peart: Peterborough and District RSCDS branch

Amanda talked to the meeting about virtual dances which were an idea she credits to Ayr Branch.

- March –Afternoon Tea Dance

This was originally part of the normal class events programme but lockdown prevented a physical dance, so Amanda produced a dance list and found videos for each to post on the branch website. Usually, the tea dances attract 20-30 dancers. On this occasion, some dancers said that they enjoyed the virtual version.

- April –Sunday Class

The list of dances was a mix of previously learned dances and some new ones to try and followed the format of the usual monthly Sunday Class. Feedback on the dance class was received from abroad but none came from local participants.

- May –Birthday dance/ceilidh

This was to celebrate the birthday of the branch Secretary, Sheila. She chose the programme and the videos for it. It was an event that included non-dancers, so there was a larger amount of video material to select from.

- June –Tea Dance/Summer Social

This was requested for the branch. The dances were chosen by name only and had to have a video available and be do-able by class members. Scottish Dance Database was the main source for this event. The social also made more use of webpage graphics and was more interesting to work through than the original lists posts for earlier events. Again, there was virtually no feedback from the target audience.

At this point, Amanda does not think that she will produce more virtual dance events. She is interested in providing classes for dancers where the aim is to improve technique for formations, looking at timing and phrasing rather than footwork. Improving formations can be difficult in mixed-experience classes, so it would be an opportunity for some to gain skills in the current

environment. Website: <http://www.peterboroughscds.org.uk/social%20events.htm>

5. Judith Jones: London branch, Richmond class and Surbiton and District Caledonian Society

For Judith, COVID restrictions came at a bad time for the Richmond class. After falling numbers caused by having to change hall, the numbers attending the class were increasing and she wanted to retain that growth. Her solution was virtual classes which she used to keep in touch with the group. In all, 7 classes were produced to get to the end of the dancing season in summer 2020. Each class was produced on a word document containing links to videos for suitable dance material. Content included:

- Steps –from YouTube and Scottish Dance Database
- Warm-up
- 3 dances: jig, reel and strathspey
- Plus, a fun dance
- Teaching points to improve the performance of dances

The classes have stopped because Judith was not getting feedback from the potential class group. So, she contacted the class members and found that there were a number of barriers to participating using the class documents: not interactive, not enough room to dance in, problem with accessing email and content, not all class members on WhatsApp. At present there are no classes but Judith is thinking about using Zoom. For the Surbiton class, the dancers met in gardens during the summer, dancing in groups of 6 and using a set 2.5 metres wide. Classes in a hall started again in September with limited numbers of dances for each class. The hall is big enough to allow 2 sets of 3 couples (6 dancers per set) <http://www.surbitoncaledonian.co.uk/id27.html>

6. Mervyn Short –dances with minimal physical contact

Mervyn talked about compiling a list of dances with minimal physical contact as a response to the boredom caused by the cessation of

dance classes and events. Three are completely hands free in the original published versions:

Touch me not! written for ambassador's children (Imperial book),
Red House for practising eye contact (Book 7)
and Kiss me quick my mither's coming (Book 12).

The rest of the list normally use hands but could be modified.

The list comprises 10 jigs, 8 strathspeys and 25 reels and is a mix of those identified by Mervyn and dances suggested by other teachers <https://my.strathspey.org/dd/list/28546/>

7. Discussion

a. Wands

One teacher reported that her group had danced in gardens in the summer and have since held one class in the hall. She is using wands to avoid touching hands, with a bow on the end for safety, and maintain safe distancing. The class have responded well to using the wands and are very pleased to be able to see each other again. The teacher had started with a circle dance to get the dancers used to the wands and keeping distance. Jane Rose commented that a group in Europe have been using hooks to replace holding hands.

b. Limited dances and class sizes

One teacher reported that her group has held small classes for 1 hour, twice a week, for very keen dancers, held independently of their regular club as a private venture for those keen to resume. They found it necessary to avoid some formations such as crossing down and double figure of 8 round 2s. Amendments were also made to dances such as Culla Bay and Bon Viveur so that they were danced by 4 dancers and not 8, while other dances like Joie de Vivre were danced with ghosts. The dancers and teacher use visors. In all, 40 dances have been tried and tested for small group/restricted contact dancing. A question was raised about insurance for classes. The response was that halls are insured for social activity and that dancers take responsibility for their own safety, as with other

independent bookings such as parties.

c. Dancing holidays

A planned dancing holiday was cancelled but the participants decided to continue with the holiday and held a limited amount of social dancing organised by themselves. Two sets of 3 couples had enough space to dance, with a gap between sets. Dances were chosen to avoid close formations and wider sets were used. Dancers also wore masks and did not touch other dancers. Recorded music was used.

d. Dancing classes in Paris

It was reported that most French groups had started classes again from the start of September, using masks and handwashing. Social distancing in France is 1 metre and there was not the restriction on numbers in groups that is in place in UK. Fewer dances are danced in classes and there is care about the type of dances performed. Infection rates are increasing in France and Paris has now stopped holding classes

.e. Mechanisms for making normal classes possible

- There was discussion about possibility of defining Scottish country dancing as a team sport to make it possible to resume classes.
- Availability of halls – some halls willing to let to dance groups as long as proposed safety measures are agreed and meet requirements at the time.
- Class members - some members more willing than others to return to public classes
- Use of fans to increase distance between dancers
- Gloves versus handwashing: gloves increase awareness of touching things while uncovered hands can be more easily washed more

frequently

- Visors –one teacher found them better for working with dancers who have hearing problems, worn in conjunction with a microphone below so that lip-reading is possible, (NB visors do not offer as much protection for either the wearer or those around them, not being closely fitted to the face.)
- Risk assessments -these were seen as important to document consideration of legal and health requirements.
- Economic matters –cost of hall may prevent resumption of dancing with small classes

The conclusion was that it was a local-level decision based on hall and group agreement about what was feasible and safe within the limits of prevailing restrictions.