



## South East Region Teachers Association

### **Controlled Abandon Helen Russell March 2017**

**Reporter: Lizzie Conder**

After a lovely evening of dancing to Marian Anderson's Band at the Watford and West Herts Scottish Society Caledonian Ball, I was fortunate enough to attend my first SERTA workshop. I was even more fortunate with the leader of the workshop, experienced teacher and current Chair of the RSCDS Helen Russell with Barbara Manning providing inspiring music throughout.

The subject of the workshop was "Controlled Abandon! How to achieve good phrasing, elegance and musicality without losing sociability." Helen covered this topic from the perspectives of

teacher, dancer and dance deviser throughout the course of the workshop. "Controlled Abandon", Miss Milligan's famous description of good Scottish Country dancing was explored in detail through Helen's workshop in a style that was accessible to new teachers, such as myself, as well as being thought provoking for more experienced teachers.

Helen used the warm up to explore the elegant posturing and movement of all parts of the body and how teachers can encourage classes to think about this area of dancing from the start as well as

learning habits that protect the body when dancing with controlled abandon.

We then looked at phrasing along with the creation of dynamics to ensure that there is light and shade in our dancing. As a teacher in training, one of the key things is remembering what learning Scottish dance formations feels like to a beginner as most formations come as second nature. Helen cleverly put the whole workshop back into the shoes of the beginner by teaching the Hello Goodbye Poussette in quick time, a formation that only one person in the workshop had done before. Suddenly trying to maintain a good pas de basque step while travelling became quite a challenge!

In the second part of the workshop, we moved onto looking at musical dancing and how important the music is to a dance being enjoyable. Helen taught us The Sow's Tail, a traditional dance, which we then danced to a set of tunes chosen by Barbara. We all found it a nice dance. We then tried dancing The Sow's Tail to the original song tune from the Georgian period and all struggled with fitting the phrasing of the dance to the phrasing of the music.

In small groups, we then worked on individual dances. This continued the theme of the importance of considering the phrasing of the music when devising dances by highlighting the extra layer of difficulty added to a dance just by placing a repeated figure or formation onto a different phrase of music.

I would like to extend many thanks to Helen Russell for a fascinating workshop; Barbara Manning for superb musicianship; and finally Maggie Westley who kindly organised our hall and refreshments on the day.

Lizzy Conder