

## The Monthly Journal of the Society for International Folk Dancing

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## FIRST PRINCIPLES XII: DANCE OF DEATH

This article is, in effect, a footnote to last month's discussion on ecstatic dances. In Europe the dance of death was contemporaneous with chorea major, tarantism and the like. But the lore of many peoples reveals that death dances in one form or another were widespread and of ancient origin. Among primitive folk we find the idea of a mystical union between the dead and the living. This is particularly true of civilizations where religion has been based on or developed from ancestor worship. The dance became a means of transporting the living into the spirit world of the dead. In other words, the dance could be used to induce a trance in which the dancer dreamed of the dead. In these dreams the dead themselves often tripped a measure - in fact some of the dreams reported are gruesome enough to be rated as nightmares. Witness this macabre vision of a Chavante Indian: "a host of skeletons whirled about in a dance, in chaotic confusion. The putrified flesh hung from their bones and their eyes were withered and sere in the sunken sockets. The air was heavy with the foul stench." Frazer sites more than one example from primitive Africa and from primitive Europe of dances at funerals where either the corpse itself is manipulated, puppet fashion in a grotesque dance or one of the mourners draped in the dead man's shroud and wearing a portrait mask performs a dance of death. Greek and Roman vases show shriveled corpses and/or skeletons dancing. The Romans, moreover, in typical eat-drink-and-be-merry-for-tomorrow-we-die spirit often had small silver skeletons dancing on the festive board.

By the time of the Middle Ages, however, the dance of death had become a "truly hideous spectacle". People calloused by long and close familiarity with death now tended to look on the dance macabre with a somewhat perverted sense of humour. Johnston gives us this description of the dance as performed in the Cemetiere des Innocents by people whose homes had actually been desolated by war, famine or pestilence. "Mummers were dressed to typify the various orders of humanity from the monarch to the beggar, and each representative was led by a companion mummer dressed in black and painted to resemble a skeleton, the head being covered with a skull-like mask. In this manner the dancers went up the centre walk of the cemetery, each skeleton endeavouring to rival its fellow in the execution of grotesque and distorted antics". Johnston adds that such was the humour of the day that the spectators found the sight "mightily laughable and diverting". It is worth noting that our own forbears in this country were thus diverted by similar "dances macabres". In England it was known as the "shaking of the sheet".

However, before we become too morbid we had better shake this News Sheet free of graveyards and such, and let the danse macabre rest in peace.

## WALL-FLOWERS AND HARDY\* ANNUALS

Chairman Bert Price offers below a few suggestions to those newcomers who, rightly, resent a tendency to clique-ish-ness on the part of the older members.

It is very disturbing to read so many letters complaining of the unfriendly attitude towards newcomers by older members. As an occasional

\*No connection with All Nations Cavalcades, etc.

M. C. and at Cecil Sharp House I have noticed this and have tried to combat the tendency toward aloofness in various ways as well as by a direct appeal to the dancer - this last not always very heartily received!

In fairness to the older member, however, I would like to add that the fault is not entirely theirs. However, it is easy to forget that we were all new members once. Now may I suggest to new members that they must meet the older members more than half-way? Enter the dance hall with a smile, do not take a seat away from the rest but join them. It is easy to say, "May I sit here?" And the ice is broken. Again, do not always wait to be asked to dance but rather ask someone if they will dance with you. If any newcomer approaches an older member and says, "I don't know this dance but I would like to try. Will you show it to me?", then I am sure it will be found that the older member will always be pleased to do so. On the other hand, when asked to dance, whatever you do, do not say, "I'm sorry, but I don't know it". Rather say, "Yes please. You'll have to teach me but I'll do my best". And smile! A friendly approach and a friendly face draws friends. Furthermore, do not always wait for the older members but consider other newcomers and ask them to try a strange dance with you. Show that true spirit of folk-dancing yourself even if you think it lacking in older members, and when, after some four or five classes - you'll be surprised how soon it is - you yourself become an older member think in your turn of the beginners.

(For other comments on this subject see Correspondence. Ed.)

#### NEWS FROM THE GROUPS: THE ESTONIAN GROUP.

The Estonian Group, some eighteen members strong, meets every Monday evening from 9-10 p.m., at the Cosway Street School, W.1. (just behind the Edgware Road Station) and under the able and cheerful direction of Aily Eistrat. Aily tells me that, unlike the S.I.F.D., she generally has a slight excess of men dancers and, therefore, there may be openings for women. The Estonian dancers have been among our closest supporters and friends for many years and, indeed, were one of the first outside, national groups contacted by the Society; Bert Price and Irene Fyffe met them first at a dance at the University College Hospital. This contact and all the new material it brought to the Society gave our affairs a great filip. For some years Gladys Noble acted as chief liaison between the Estonian dancers and ourselves, attending their classes and then teaching the dances she thus learned to our own members. When Gladys left London for points north she was "mourned" by her Estonian friends. This group has taken part with a minimum of fuss and bother and with a maximum of success and charm in all the festivals staged to date in the Royal Albert Hall. They will, of course, be dancing in the next show on March 26th.

Before that, however, they will be appearing at the Estonian Independence Day celebrations at Caxton Hall on February 24th next, where they will present, among other dances, Setu Kargus and the dance that belongs especially to this day: Tulyak. We wish them great success on this very important occasion and we hope that our own dances and festivals will long be enlivened and enhanced by their presence.

J. F.

#### CANFORD SUMMER SCHOOL OF MUSIC

This annual summer school held in what was the Manor House of Canford Magna on the lovely Dorset border is including, for the first time in its curriculum of music teaching and dancing, a course on International Folk Dancing. We quote from the School's prospectus:-

"First Week: 7th - 14th August.

Course D1. International Folk Dancing  
(In association with the Society for International Folk Dancing)

Under the direction of Herbert Price



Instructors: Anna Kellgren-Cyriax and Partner  
from Jonkoping, Sweden. Dances of Sweden, Norway,  
Denmark.

Aily Eistrat and Partner  
from Tallin, Estonia. Dances of Estonia, Lithuania,  
Finland.

Barbara Slawinska and Partner  
from Warsaw, Poland. Dances of Poland, Silesia,  
Carpathia.

Members will be able either to specialise in the dances taught in a particular section, or to divide their time as they wish between groups. . . . An International Folk Dance Party will be held on the Saturday afternoon (August 13th)."

The fees for the course range from the full, inclusive fee of nine (9) guineas per week, down to four (4) guineas per week. Odd sessions 7/6. If any member is interested in attending either full time, or part time, or in making up a party to go down to the folk dance party, would he or she please get in touch with Bert Price.

#### TO TEACH OR NOT TO TEACH

By courtesy of Dr. Cyriax a meeting of the ad hoc panel of experts was held at her apartment recently to discuss the whole tricky and delicate question of accrediting teachers of international folk dancing. Among those who "took arms against this sea of troubles": Mrs. Lucille Armstrong, (Spain and Portugal), Dr. Cyriax (Sweden), Aily Eistrat (Estonia) Heinz and Ilse Striegel (Austria), Kostak (Poland) and Mr. Douglas Kennedy, O.B.E., of the E.F.D.S. Margery Latham and Larry Howell represented the Society, and Bert Price was in the chair.

Mr. Kennedy in an extremely valuable summary of the experience of the E.F.D.S. in these matters considered that the issuance of formal teaching certificates (as a result of examinations) to be "completely artificial" and destructive of the real spirit of folk dancing. He believed that the Society should form a "panel of experts" and then, upon the advice of this panel, compile a register of approved working teachers, such a register to be supplied to any enquiring educational authority. Mr. Kennedy also considered that some form of attendance voucher was a good thing. (Mrs. Armstrong: "Hear, Hear. Very necessary".)

After a full discussion of the points raised by Mr. Kennedy and Mrs. Armstrong, the meeting agreed that formal certificates should not be issued but that a Panel of Authorities be formed, and that, upon the recommendations of this Panel, a Register of Working Teachers be drawn up. Teachers on this Register would be approved by countries and for the information of the Panel be classified as either "Elementary" or "Advanced".

#### DEPARTMENT OF SWEET WORDS AND LONG SENTENCES

We are very happy to congratulate our Hon. Treasurer, Bob Symes and Rita Jeffries on their engagement. They plan to marry "some time in the summer". Our warmest good wishes to them, and also to Bill Nixon who has quite a summer ahead of him, too! Bill, at present studying hard for examinations in the summer, plans immediately these are over to marry and sail for Canada on the same day. Good luck over there, Bill.

#### DEMONSTRATION NOTES

My apologies for the absence of the Demonstration Notes last month. In the rush of getting the Albert Hall teams launched I quite overlooked

them. It seems a long way back now to New Year's Eve. The team paid yet another visit on that night to the Esperanto Club at Fred Tallast Hall, where we co-operated with Tom Amasarti in running a Folk Dance evening. It was, as usual, very successful. The oldest member there, a little old lady, confided that she worked 19 hours a day and danced in her spare time!! Marie Le Fort and Bob Symes went out on one of the teaching assignments which have been coming in lately. They went to the Thurrocks Dance Club of Grays, a teachers' group, where, despite very bad weather which kept many people away, they had a very successful class. The group have now asked for a full scale demonstration team to follow it up.

Saturday, February 12th was a very populate date, three different groups asking for demonstrations. The team went to Student Movement House, Gower Street, as theirs was the first request. It was a return visit, but with their floating population it was a new audience. The men were chiefly West Indian and West African, but the girls were Norwegian, Danish, Indian and English. They were shy at first, but enjoyed the dancing once they got started. My thanks to the team who put in a strenuous evening.

Margery Latham

SEE HOW THEY DANCE

In case there are any members who need reminding, this year's Albert Hall show is on Saturday, March 26th next. All members, whether dancing or not, are urged to help sell as many tickets as possible. Tickets should soon be available at classes or from the Secretary.

CORRESPONDENCE

Sir,  
Whereas there is substance in the complaint voiced by Rosemary Daniel and others in your correspondence last month, I feel that those who are privileged to attend the advanced classes on Fridays and do not bother to come to help the newcomers on Wednesdays are the members who are mainly to blame. At one time, admission to the advanced class implied an obligation to help newcomers and their friends on Wednesdays. Is this still not so? At present, one finds a number of people who remain just long enough in the Wednesday class to become sufficiently proficient to attend on Fridays. This is reflected in the difficulty which teachers sometimes experience in finding a competent partner with whom to demonstrate the dance which is being taught.

Yours etc,

Jack Richardson

WARNING

Members are reminded that the L.C.C. elections are coming up next month and any candidate who wishes may take over our hall at Carlyle School with as little as two hours notice. This has not happened in the past, but it is a possibility which members should bear in mind.

BOATING! SWIMMING! DANCING! WALKING!  
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Take your choice during the Whitsun weekend at Thamesfield, Henley-on-Thames. We have been offered the use of this pleasant house on the banks of the Thames for the whole of Whitsun. Make up your mind and come NOW. Enquiries and bookings to Jack Richardson or Joan White.

MARCH PROGRAMME

Classes at Carlyle School, Hortensia Road, Chelsea, S.W.10.

Time: 7.30 - 9.30 p.m.

Music by Mme Barbara Duleba

Admission: Tuesdays Dances and  
and Rehearsals 1/-  
Fridays\* Classes 1/6  
Wednesdays: Members 1/-  
Non-members 1/6

\*Invited members only.

Tuesdays	March 1	Members' Dance	M.C. Jack Richardson
	8	Balkan Class	Phillip Thornton
	15	Austrian Rehearsal	Heinz & Ilse
	22	Kolo Rehearsal	
Wednesdays	March 2	French Class	Ken Ward
	9	Silesian Class	Irene & Kostak
	16	Silesian Class	Irene & Kostak
	23	Polish Class	Irene & Kostak
		(Krakowiak, Kujowiak)	
	30	German Class	Joan White
			M.C. John Hughes
			M.C. Joan White
			M.C. Bob Symes
			M.C. Ken Ward
			M.C. Jack Richardson
Fridays	March 4	French & German Class	Ken Ward
	11	Hungarian Class	John Ungar
	18	Ukranian Class	Irene
	25	Royal Albert Hall Rehearsal	

Sunday Rehearsals at Baker St. School of Dancing, 97 Baker St., W.1.

Time: 4.0 p.m.

March 6 Swedish  
13 Hungarian

Dress Rehearsal at Cecil Sharp House, Sunday, March 20th, at 3.30 p.m.

Sunday Dances at Queen Alexandra's House, Kensington Gore, S.W.7.

Time: 7.0 - 10.0 p.m.

Music: Mourie Pfeffer

March 6	General Dance	M.C. Len Sawyer
13	" "	M.C. Mourie Pfeffer
20	" "	M.C. Roland Minton

General Dance at Cecil Sharp House, Regent's Park Rd., N.W.1.

Time: 6.30 - 9.30 p.m.

Music: Wallace Collection

Sunday March 27th M.C. Ken Ward

Classes in Scottish Dancing by Marie Le Fort are held every Sunday afternoon from 3.30 - 5.30 p.m. at Churchill Gardens Estate, Pimlico. Admission 2/-.





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