

SIFD NEWS



JUNE
1999

Polish Folk Costumes

SWEDISH FOLK DANCE - TRADITIONAL OR BALLET?

By G.D.Towner

In an earlier article (SIFD NEWS, October 1996) the origins of Israeli folk dances were discussed. It was pointed out that these dances have been devised in recent decades and most have known choreographers. They cannot therefore be classified as folk dances, at least within the older, narrower definition of the concept. However, the same is true of many English folk dances that are performed in today's folkdance clubs. A compromise solution is to refer to the older dances, such as those that were collected by Cecil Sharp and others from country villages and towns around the turn of the century, as "traditional" folk dances. It would therefore seem to be a reasonable assumption to extend this distinction to the present-day repertoire of Swedish folk dances, bearing in mind that the foundation collection was put together towards the end of the 1800s. Unfortunately, the situation is more complicated. Several of the older dances were not collected from village or town events, but from romanticised stage productions! Others were put together for special occasions. The problem was introduced at the beginning by the enthusiasts who initially set out to promote and popularise Swedish folk dances among the general population.

A group of students in Uppsala established The Dance Association in 1880. A team of six members toured the Country in 1883, visiting some 35 places, giving lectures and performances on dance, song, music etc. The Association was renamed PHILOCHOROS in 1884. They were clearly very successful in their quest to spread enthusiasm for Swedish folk dancing, not only across Sweden, but also Overseas. Thus within ten years of their first tour, the Friends of the Swedish Folkdance (Svenska Folkdansens vänner) Society was founded to practise the dances, including giving public displays at the then recently-opened open-air museum Skansen, in Stockholm (where incidentally such performances are still regularly given today). They published a dance instruction book, "Lekstugan", in 1900. A decade later, "Swedish Folk Dances" was published in English in London (translated by N.W.Bergquist), and three years later, another book, "Lekstugan" (translated by Lindelöf) - both acknowledging the Friends of the Swedish Folkdance. Incidentally, both English translations described more or less the same dances. And in 1920, the Swedish Youth Ring for Rural Culture (Svenska Ungdomsringen för bygdekultur) was founded to spread interest on old Swedish folk dances, songs, music, games, crafts etc. among Swedish youth. They subsequently published a number of comprehensive dance instruction books with new editions and revisions into recent times. For example, "Beskrivning av Svenska Folkdanser - del.1", published in 1975, gives instructions for performing some 130 dances, including those "collected" originally by Philochoros.

Leffler, a former student member of Philochoros, writing in 1908, acknowledged the valuable part that Philochoros played in generating interest in Swedish folk dances, but noted with regret that it had debased its idealistic aims by performing ballet-master dances and invented dances. Thus he added that this presented the well-heeled upper-class enthusiasts with a highly distorted representation of Swedish folk dance and music.

Klein, writing in 1928, makes similar criticisms. Thus he noted that Philochoros failed to establish in its day scholastic criteria for its dances; that subsequently the Friends also failed to do so; and "in our day" (1928) "the Swedish Youth Ring does not apply any rigorous historical critique" (but see further). Klein critically analysed the Philochoros repertoire of dances in relation to what was known or could be deduced from original and other sources - in general terms in regard to, for example, the character of performance, and in particular about specific dances.

Serious dance collecting was still in its infancy in 1880 and there was little material readily available for the students to draw on. This influenced their sourcing of dances. For example, "Daldans" was first performed publicly in 1843

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at the Royal Theatre, Stockholm, and likewise "Jösse Håradspolska", "Skrållät" and "Fryskdalspolska" in 1846; all under the ballet-master, A.Selinder. It seems almost certain that Selinder arranged these dances himself for the stage presentation, and that he probably actually choreographed them himself as no earlier trace of them has been discovered. That does not, of course, rule out the possibility that he was familiar with village dances and that he was therefore able to skilfully capture their original essence. However, given that he was presenting high art, he is more likely at least to have reproduced the refined movements and etiquettes of the upper class Society Balls rather than those of uninhibited country folk.

The story of the "Gotland Quadrille" provides a different example of a possible lack of authenticity. The students of Gotland Nation* were organising a student review and wished to include as much Gotland background material as possible (*students of Uppsala University belonged to different "Nations"). One of them, a fiddle player, remembered the music for the "Gotland Quadrille" and, with the aid of fellow students, put together a dance based on their dim recollections. But time was pressing and there was no time to obtain further information from their Gotland homeland. Hence, experienced members of Philochoros were consulted and a practical dance was created. Thus the "Gotland Quadrille" was first presented in 1893 and received rapturous applause. Philochoros added it straight away to their programme and launched it that summer during a tour in Southern Sweden. And so this version became established in the Swedish consciousness and was that adopted by the Friends of the Swedish Folkdance. Later attempts, based on reference back to Gotland, drawing the Friends' attention to possible corrections, were rebuffed with the declaration that Philochoros was the authority on such matters. For the record, the Philochoros version is that given in "Lekstugan" (1913 English language edition). It is also given in Beskrivning av Svenska (1975) together with other versions collected from original sources.

We have mentioned above some dances that are known to have been performed on the stage, and we described at length the origin of the "Gotland Quadrille", but what do we know about the sources of other dances introduced by Philochoros? It seems very little. What confidence can we therefore have on their authenticity? Klein concluded that, "Of the dances that Philochoros and the Friends took up and disseminated, and which still (i.e. in 1928) constitute the main folkdance repertoire, a number do carry the unmistakable character of genuine folk dance, if also modified".

Kelin's criticisms of the Youth Ring were originally expressed in 1928 (re-published in 1978 after his death) and may not represent the Youth Ring's attitudes today. Their instructional manual, "Beskrivning av Svenska Folkdanser - del.1" (1975) does include Philochoros dances, such as those choreographed by Selinder, but with appropriate notes on origins, given in a matter-of-fact style rather than critical. However, from my laboured translations of the introductory chapters and some of the notes, I get the feeling that they do accept, even welcome, these creations as representative folk dances.

In conclusion, the Swedish folk dances that appear to correspond chronologically to the so-called "traditional" folk dances of England include dances choreographed for stage productions, and others created by the early folkdance enthusiasts. Bearing in mind that they have become accepted in the Swedish consciousness as Swedish folk dances, then they satisfy the criteria required to be classified as folk dances by us as discussed in earlier articles and letters (J.Graman, April 1996; D.Crook, May 1996; G.D.Towner, May, June & October 1996; J.Webb, Jan. 1997). However, I would be hesitant to rank them as "traditional" as I think that this term should be applied only to those dances actually collected from the folk at the turn of the century and earlier (or even later if there is evidence for earlier origins).

G.D.TOWNER

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NOTES

I found the following publications useful in writing the above.

Isaksson, B (1979) - "Folkmusiken i Sverige". Published by ICA Bokförlag (Sweden). A popular account of all forms of folk music, past and present, in Sweden, including dance; well illustrated with B & W as well as colour illustrations and photographs.

Klein, E (1978) - "Operaballett och Folkdans (originally published 1928) in "Om Folkdans". Published by LTs Förlag. A collection of scholarly essays on Swedish folk dances, originally published separately during 1927-1933. Illustrated with B & W photos and reproductions from art.

Leffler, K.P. (1908) - Quoted by Isaksson.

Lindelof, E (1913) - "Lekstugan - Old Swedish Folk Dances". Published by Curwen (London). Gives basic instructions for some 21 dances, with full musical scores.

----(1975) - "Beskrivning av Svenska Folkdanser - del 1". Published by Svenska Ungdomsringen för Bygdekultur. A comprehensive manual giving instructions for over 100 dances. Although in Swedish, its use is facilitated by many photographs of dancers illustrating various elements, such as holds and formations, but unfortunately not the steps. (Incidentally, there is also a second part which was published in 1971).

G.D.TOWNER



PLEA TO S.I.F.D. MEMBERS OF PARTICULARLY LONGSTANDING

I have embarked on the task of indexing the bound volumes of SIFD NEWS deposited with the Archives. These were the Editor's copies but unfortunately they do not include the earliest issues. The first complete volume is 1960, but the January issue of that year lacks pages 10 and 11. Of 1959 there are three entire issues missing: June, November and December; and there are three blank pages: May page 7, August page 7 and October page 1. Of 1958 only three issues survive: January, July and August, and there are none at all from any earlier years.

If anyone, whose membership dates back that far, was blessed from youth with the hoarding instinct and still possesses copies that would help fill these gaps, I should be delighted to hear from you.

TONY LATHAM, S.I.F.D. Archivist
Flat 9, 118 Avenue Road, London
W3 8QG. Tel: 0181 992 9445



TEACHER REQUIRED for a children's/student Summer School. To be held on 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th August inclusive. Approximately 3-4 hours per day. Payment per hour plus travelling expenses.

They would very much like a teacher who is able to teach the folk dancing from their country of origin. Any country considered.

Contact: Miss Tanya Allen, Principal of Allenova School of Dancing, 98 Wokingham Road, Earley, Reading, Berkshire RG6 1JL. Tel: 0118 966 3102.

Eastbourne Folk Festival, 1999.

First of all we would like to thank everyone who came and supported the event. Without you all we wouldn't have a Festival.

WORKSHOPS.

Maggie O'Regan, Roberto Haddon, and Eddy Tijssen were in fine form attracting so many to their workshops that, for safety reasons, we may have to attempt to create more space or limit the numbers at future events. (We hope that we won't have to do the latter as its extremely frustrating to be among the numbers left outside of your favourite workshop, and difficult to administer fairly.)

Many thanks to everyone who accepted the swapped sessions on Monday morning which allowed Eddy to reach his Mother's bedside just in time. She died about half an hour later. Our thoughts and condolences go to Eddy and his family at this time.

Opanka's workshops were great fun, especially as they took the trouble to come fully costumed to their sessions. Thank you to Alison Scrimshaw who was the Group's Festival Guide. The 'Party Practices', taken by Jill Bransby and Marina Wolstenholme, allowed people to brush up on several dances for the evening programmes. Members of *Jacob's Ladder Dance Band* worked especially hard, playing for Jill's session as well as leading five other music and dancing workshops.

EVENING DANCES.

Jacob's Ladder also played for the dances on Friday and Saturday night. It was a great pleasure to have live music every night. The Welcome Dance was led by Julie Korth who gently broke us into the rigours of a dancing weekend. On Saturday Night Jill Bransby led the costume dance which included a fine demonstration of Serbian dancing by *Opanka*, revision spots by Eddy and Roberto, interval dancing by Julie, and some beautiful instrumental playing on Kavel and bagpipes by Eddy. Sunday night saw the arrival of the Dunav Balkan Group with their authentic instruments and fine sound. This special Balkan Dance was ably led by Maggie and Marina, and also included revision spots and a display of Romanian dancing by *Opanka*.

OTHER THANKS

Richard Mellish set up and maintained the amplification equipment at the workshops and at the dances. The new 12 channel mixer was put to the test and seemed to pass. Thank you Richard for all the work that you do on the SIFD equipment (not just at Eastbourne).

We must say how much the Society is indebted to Claire and Geoff Steeley for all their hard work in running the SIFD shop, a tiring occupation, which they always fulfil so cheerfully.

Thanks to Frances Horrocks for chauffeuring Eddy to and from Gatwick and John Walford who looked after the gym at lunchtimes.

Thanks to Rowena Martin and all her Willingdon group who did so much at the Festival. They rallied around to decorate the gym on Friday afternoon and did a lot of stewarding throughout the weekend. Thanks especially to Rowena who represented us at all the Festival Committee meetings. Thanks to any other stewards who gave up a dance session for the unenviable task of inspecting tickets and shoes.

ODDS AND ENDS.

On the subject of shoes, in spite of our efforts to remind people in the *News* about the rules to protect the gym floor, there were the usual grumbles. We are looking into the whole issue and will keep you informed.

Jill has a brown belt with stitching that was left in the gym on Monday afternoon. She will also send tapes of 'Ten Chi' to those who attended her workshop if they send her a blank tape. (Phone 01462 457791 for address)

Offers of help, suggestions of teachers, with names and addresses, could be passed on to Julie (01942 831141) or Jill, for future consideration.

NEXT YEAR.

WATCH THIS SPACE.....

Julie Korth and Jill Bransby.

BALKANPLUS, 12th June 1999, at Cecil Sharp House, 2 Regent's Park Road, London N.W.1. 7.00-10.30 p.m. N.B. £5.00. The M.C. will be Malcolm Shaffer, with Dunav. Malcolm will be including dances from the recent Eastbourne Festival, from previous courses, e.g. Arnside, and a selection of "Golden Oldies". Dunav will also be playing some of the dances from the Sunday evening social at Eastbourne. During the interval, some dancers might like to pop upstairs and take a peek at a Playford Ball which is taking place in the Main Hall (but don't stay too long!). There is something for everyone, so do come along.

FRANCES HORROCKS



S.I. The S.I.F.D. WEST MIDLANDS BRANCH ANNUAL COTSWOLDS SAFARI on SUNDAY, 13TH JUNE starts at 11.00 a.m. at Moreton-in-Marsh, followed at 12.30 p.m. by lunch and perhaps a few dances at Bledington Village Hall. We then move on to Blockley, where we are joining in the village charity open gardens day. Ten gardens will be open from 2.00-6.00 p.m.; we shall be dancing at Mill Dene Garden in the centre of the village at 3.00 p.m. and 4.00 p.m. Though there is a charge for garden visitors, dancers will not be charged, but please come in costume. Blockley is three miles from Moreton-in-Marsh, a short distance to the right off the A44 towards Evesham. Car parking will be at Park Farm, a few minutes' walk from Mill Dene. For anyone from further afield who wants to join us, B. & B. is available at Mill Dene at £25.00. Tel: 01386 700457.

MAVIS LOWE



POLISH FESTIVAL AT BLETCHLEY PARK, 24TH/25TH JULY 1999

Bletchley Park Trust and The Federation of Poles in Great Britain are commemorating handing over Enigma secrets by the Poles to the British. There will be many interesting exhibits and activities including Polish folk dancing. Polish folklore and music will also be featured.

Further information may be obtained from Merryl Jenkins, Festival Director, on 01525 261565 (e-mail majenkins@aol.com). Bletchley Park is near Milton Keynes. Joan and Simon Guest, on 01992 577065, can provide travel information.

SIMON GUEST



RESIDENTIAL WEEKEND COURSE OF ISRAELI DANCING WITH FIONA HOWARTH
12TH-14TH NOVEMBER 1999

This year Fiona will be teaching her popular weekend course of Israeli folk dancing at Bourton-on-the-Water in the heart of the Cotswolds. There will be two levels to choose from, depending on your experience of Israeli dance. Non-dancing friends and family are also welcome. The area offers easy walking and picturesque Cotswold villages to visit. The weekend cost is £82 and includes two nights full board, en-suite facilities, and a plentiful choice of food. The weekend course is £14 and includes dancing during the daytime and evenings, with some free time to explore the area. For details, please send s.a.e. to me at 115 Chetwynd Road, London NW5 1DA.

CATHY MEUNIER

Llangollen International Eisteddfod July 6th./11th. 1999 - Preview

July approaches and with it the last Musical Eisteddfod of the 20th. century, This, and the fact that this year, for the first time in ages, the opening concert will feature a folk dance group, (from Slovakia), I think justifies a short pre-event 'puff',

As members know I always give a report on the Folk Dance and Folk Music Competitions and as I have been visiting the little town for about 44 Julys and reviewing for 30 or so of them, this adds up to a lot of serious dancing and music. There are far too many memorable occasions to recall them all, but some are outstanding, such as when we Harrow Greenites appeared on stage and danced English to Wilf's lovely music, when the whole place went mad the year the Macedonians won the trophy, and the last Eisteddfod when the Dungeer Mummies took part.

These were a group of elderly men who had appeared every year for at least 25 years. One must assume that the personnel changed several times during this time, but since they all were so similar, it wasn't very obvious. They always performed the same two very traditional dances using short sticks or "swords", and were very dignified. From the academic point of view, they were very interesting, but after a few years a change of pace would have been welcome. They always took their training very seriously, but on this occasion a little too much so. There was a great panic on the field when they failed to appear for their slot, but eventually they found their way back from the pub and I am sorry to say their performance was not as stately as usual and they haven't been seen since.

The town itself has changed little over the years; just a few of the egg and chips catts have gone all haute cuisine, but that's all. The old bridge (a bit modified, true), and the parish church with the most wonderful wooden roof are still there and within a short distance are Valle Crucis Abbey, Horseshoe Pass and Chirk Castle to name a few of the places of interest. Also, the local railway service has been extended to Carrog, running alongside the river Dee, a pretty little trip. Bookshops are always a favourite of mine and the local one is a real oddity as it is housed in the old cinema. The seats have been taken out and shelves for the books put in, but the projection room and proscenium arch are still in place.

For those who prefer to dance rather than listen to choirs, the authorities now provide a series of workshops given by some of the competing teams and under the direction of our old friends, Naren and Francis Feybli.

It might be worth mentioning that if you have a valid seat ticket and feel the need for a hot meal, there is a gate at the edge of the field which leads into the garden of the 'Jenny Jones' where a variety of dishes can be obtained at a reasonable cost and coffee is available for non-drinkers.

Finally, if by any chance you are going for the first time, why not buy and wear an SIFD badge so we can all recognize one another? I shall wear mine.

George Sweetland.

P.S. You need the ticket otherwise they won't let you back on the field.

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International Musical Festival in Catalunya

The XVII Festival will be held at the village of Cantonigros, just outside Barcelona, from July 15th to July 18th, 1999.

The format is based closely on that of Llangollen with a strong emphasis on traditional forms in the folk sections and on friendship between peoples through an understanding of their different cultures. The folk dance competition last year was won by the Czech group, followed by Navarre, Spain and Latvia.

Further information is available from The Secretary, Festival Internacional de Musica de Cantonigros c/. Muntaner, 305, entl., 2.a 08021 Barcelona, Spain. Tel. 93 201 52 47. Fax. 93 201 77 11.

E -mail: fimc@abaforum.es

George Sweetland

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

- S.I. July 2nd BARNET SUMMER PARTY. A merry, final fling before the summer break. Music by Dunav. £4.00 including refreshments. 8.00 p.m. at Church House, Wood Street, Barnet, Herts. Further information from Brian Dowsett, 01992 582717.
- July 2nd/4th MILTON KEYNES INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL.
- July 3rd "REFLECTIONS OF DANCE: Tetry Polish Group Hosts Chelsea Ballet", 2.30 and 7.00 p.m. at The Polish Centre, 238-245 King Street, Hammersmith, London W.6. Tickets £7.00 (concessions £5.00) from Tetry on 0171 736 6169 (ansafone) or Chelsea Ballet, 0181 961 0519; seats unnumbered.
- July 6th/11th LLANGOLLEN INTERNATIONAL EISTEDDFOD.
- July 11th BALATON HUNGARIAN FOLKDANCE GROUP and PHILHELLENES GREEK FOLKDANCE GROUP, 3.00 p.m. at Victoria Embankment Gardens, London.
- July 17th OXFORD BALKANSKO ORO SUMMER PARTY, 7.00-10.30 p.m. at St.Margaret's Parish Institute Hall, Polstead Road, off Woodstock Road, Oxford. No price given.
- July 18th MERTON PARK and WOODVALE INTERNATIONAL FOLKDANCE GROUPS, and the IBERIAN FOLK SONG & DANCE SOCIETY, 3.00 p.m. at Victoria Embankment Gardens, London.
- Aug.14th/21st BILLINGHAM INTERNATIONAL FOLKLORE FESTIVAL.
- Aug.14th/21st HF HOLIDAYS RESIDENTIAL WEEK IN ST.IVES with Phil and Brenda Steventon. A course aimed at Beginner/Intermediate dancers; all dances will be walked through. To book, ring 0181 905 9558, or for further details contact Phil or Brenda on 0181 397 9649.
- S.I. Aug.27th/30th MINI DANCE FESTIVAL by local groups at Roedean School, Brighton. International Folk, Circle Dance and a country walk. Live music from "Labyrinth" Band on Saturday evening. Full board, mostly single rooms, swimming pool. £110 (deposit £20). Please send s.a.e for details and booking form to Rowena Martin, 60 Anderida Road, Eastbourne, East Sussex BN22 0PZ. Tel: 01323 503991.
- S.I. Sept.12th DAY OF BALKAN DANCES with Frances Horrocks, 10.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. at Stone Cross Memorial Hall, near Eastbourne (at junction of B2104 and B2247, map on request). £6.00. Drinks provided, please bring packed lunch. Ring Rowena Martin on 01323 503991 to reserve your place.
- Oct.22nd BRISTOL I.F.D. 25TH ANNIVERSARY PARTY.
- Nov.12th/14th RESIDENTIAL WEEKEND COURSE OF ISRAELI DANCING. See p.8.
- Nov.27th ZIVKO FIRFOV BALKAN PARTY at Moorfields School, London E.C.1 (N.B. The party will be a week earlier than in previous years).



MUSIC Two Israeli tunes from Wilf Horrocks this month on p.12. If you would like the music for any particular dance, please let Wilf know, on 0181 642 3629.



S.I.F.D. books and cassettes are available from Eleanor Gordon, 70 Chestnut Grove, New Malden, Surrey KT13 3TS. Other S.I.F.D. goods are available from Claire Steeley, 34 Broadwater Avenue, Letchworth, Herts. SG6 3HF.

Hearing Music

I generally try to put forward ideas that musicians may find useful in performing International Folk dance music. The following is of no practical use, but is relevant and as I found it interesting I am going to write about it anyway.

We tend to assume (or at least I tend to assume) that hearing music (or any sound for that matter) is a straightforward activity – that all we have to do is listen attentively to the various instruments and we hear the music (of course with a lot of instruments playing together this is often not easy, but the idea is straightforward).

The first problem is how to identify what one instrument is playing as opposed to another. Psychological experiments

have shown that if two instruments play  and  most people will hear

something like 

Apparently we perceive different sounds as coming from the same source more by closeness in pitch than by similarity of timbre. The closeness in pitch necessary for us to perceive sounds as coming from the same source varies with the speed of the change. That is, notes a semi-tone apart will almost always seem to come from one source, notes an octave apart will generally seem to come from different sources (i.e. form part of different melodic lines) and anything in between may or may not seem to form part of a melodic line depending on the listener and the speed of the tune. Composers have sometimes used this potential for ambiguity as a deliberate device. In fact we continually, and unconsciously, look for patterns in the sounds and relate these patterns together. This can be confusing when unfamiliar music has totally different and unexpected patterns from what we are used to.

Timbre itself, by which I mean the sound of one instrument or voice as opposed to another is also not clear cut. The initial part of a sound (possibly as short as the first 1/100 of a second or less) of sound is vitally important in identifying the source of the sound. If a recording of the first part of a note played on an oboe is attached to the remainder of the note played on a clarinet, most people will identify the source as an oboe. This gives us another reason for paying particular attention to articulation when playing a variety of musics (see my previous article on articulation).

The next problem is pitch itself – and this also has some direct relevance to playing music from around the world. Experiments have shown that if the chord of A is played, but the pitch of the middle note varied in small steps between C and C# most people will hear A minor to start with, not hear any difference until the middle note is about half way between C and C#. They will then hear A major and notice no difference between the varying shades of A major as the pitch continues to vary. This seems to be partly 'natural', but also partly culturally determined. We hear notes as being at definite steps on a scale – and the scale we expect is determined by the musical culture we are brought up in. In the case above, we recognise (even if we could not name it) C and C#. Anything in between is forced into a pre-existing category – although we may be aware of something wrong with the tuning.

The consequence of this is that if we are brought up listening to Western music we expect to hear pitches at fixed steps on the Western diatonic scale. When we hear something that isn't, we shoehorn it into the nearest equivalent. Which means in short that we do not hear music of other cultures in the way that those brought up in those cultures probably do. This applies equally to whether an unusual mode has more, less or the same number of steps (but differently tuned) as ours. There is also some experimental evidence to suggest that we force awkward and unusual rhythms into pre-defined templates in an analogous way.

In summary then, we do not hear the pitch, the rhythm or the melody of music the way the would be heard by someone from within a tradition. The good news is that listening to a lot of music from around the world can accustom us to different scales, rhythms and musical patterns and go some way to alleviating these problems.

Mike Gilbert

This article is drawn from bits of 'The Musical Mind – The Cognitive Psychology of Music' by John Sloboda *OUP* which I would recommend to anyone who wants to read further on this subjects.