

## 1. Introduction

The lessons in this review have been taught in Ghent, Belgium, either during the weekly classes or during our yearly workshops.

For the weekly classes the number of dancers have been 8-12 or up to 16 if the lesson included the children. For the workshops we have had around 25 participants.

Both for weekly classes and workshops the level of dancing is intermediate to advanced but the classes including children are usually taught with a lower level and at a slower pace than the classes with only adults.

All dancers in the weekly classes are Belgian and the classes are therefore taught in Flemish. However, we use the English names for all steps and formations. Sometimes we also use made-up Flemish names for some figures to make it easier for the younger children to understand. The aim however is to make also the young children accustomed to the English names.

In the weekly classes I do most of the step practice and formation practice during the mixed part of the class (with both children and adults) whereas the kids only class is more "fun dancing" and in the adults only class we focus more on social dancing or preparing demonstrations. This is why the lessons in this review are mostly from the mixed classes.

### *Music*

For weekly classes I always use recorded music, either on CD or MP3. For one of the workshops we had musicians so I have had some experience with teaching to live music. I find it is quite time consuming in a class to work with recorded music and also you often have to put on the tune from the beginning every time you practise a formation or part of a dance which means there is not so much variation in the music. But there are no musicians to be found in Ghent who are used to scottish country dancing so we have to make do.

I try to use the original music for dances as much as possible and can manage this for most dances published by the RSCDS but I don't have all the recordings.

### *Warming up and cooling down*

For warming up I usually do a series of walking exercises combined with low impact steps for approx 5 minutes, either in jig time or to march music and then a series of stretches to waltz music, approx 3-4 minutes. I only do stretches with the adult's class though. Children usually join in the adult's warm up and stretches but since this is right after their own class they are already properly warmed up. I sometimes then do an easy dance around the room instead of warm up exercises. I do encourage the children to join the stretches so that they would get used to it and become more aware of joints, muscles and posture.

I don't find there is need for extended warm-up and stretches since the average age in the adult's class is quite high and most lessons are rather low impact.

During the winter period when our dance hall is quite cold I tend to spend more time on warming up then during the summer period.

We usually do not spend time on cool-downs unless we have had an especially energetic lesson after which I will encourage the dancers to do some stretching. We often end the lesson with an easy jig or reel which will then serve as a cool-down.

## 2. Details of teaching

Lesson of 19 September 2015: mixed ability and ages (9 years and up), 90 min

*Aim of the lesson:* introduce double triangles and turn corners and partner to the younger dancers; practise Grand chain for 3 couples; practise pas-de-basque moving

Activity	Teaching points	Music (recorded)
<p><u>Warm up:</u> - walking/dancing around the room: 4 bars no hands, 4 bars turn RH, 4 bars no hands, 4 bars turn LH, 4b no hands etc – walk for 2x32 bars, skip change for 2x32 bars</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- giving of hands</li> <li>- eye contact</li> <li>- phrasing/anticipation - strong arms when dancing in jig time</li> </ul>	Denise's delight (from Dancing on Air by Muriel Johnstone), jig 4x32
<p><u>Formation practice lead down the middle and back:</u> Arrange class in circle with couples facing anti-clkw, right hand in right hand: dance 8 skip change of step clkw and 8 skip change back then dance 4 skip change clkw and 4 back, wait for 8 bars, repeat, etc</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Change of rythm from jig to reel</li> <li>- giving of hands</li> <li>- eye contact (esp in change of direction)</li> <li>- phrasing</li> <li>- finishing step</li> </ul>	Flight to Melbourne, RCDS recording for Book 47, reel 4x32
<p><u>Step practice pdb moving</u> Class still in circle, with new partner, facing aclkw, nearer hands joined: dance 2 pdb on the spot, 2 pdb moving forward, etc; then 4 pdb forward, 4 backward</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 3rd position in front</li> <li>- move on the spring</li> </ul>	Flight to Melbourne, RSCDS recording for Book 47, reel 4x32
<p><u>Formation practice double triangles:</u> Class still in circle but back to back with partner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 2 pdb on the spot , 2 to change place w partner</li> <li>- 2 pdb on the spot, 2 to move onto the next plae behind</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- stay back to back with partner</li> <li>- make sure pdb doesn't become skip change when moving</li> </ul>	Flight to Melbourne, Book 47, reel 4x32
<p>Dance: Lady Dumfries, MMM1, 3C reel Walk in 3 couple sets, then dance in 4 couple sets</p>		Lady Mary Menzie's reel, Book 7, from RSDCS Music for Book 7 Plus 2 Dances for 2009

<u>Formation practice, grand chain</u> Arrange class in circle around the room, M facing a-clw, W facing clw: first walk then dance grand chain with two steps per hand finishing	- giving of hands - eye contact	Bill Clement MBE, RSCDS recording for Book 47, jig 8x32
with polite turn; then, first walk then dance as in dance 1+1+2 +1+1+2 steps per hand, finishing with polite turn; then face other direction and practise again	- finishing step when curving in on bar 8	
<u>Formation practice, turn corners and partner:</u> Class still in circle, M facing a-clw, W facing clw: turn partner RH, "corner" LH, partner RH, "corner" LH, 2 steps per turn	- giving of hands: strong firm grip, elbows down - 3rd position in skip change when turning	Bill Clement MBE, RSCDS recording for Book 47, jig 8x32
Dance: Lady Home's jig, MMM1, 3C jig, practise in 3C sets, then dance in 4C sets		Just in time (Campbells, Birl, Muriel Johnstone and Keith Smith), jig 8x32

*Evaluation:* I intended to teach the whole lesson and both dances during a 1 hour lesson but the first part took longer than I expected because the class included younger dancers who needed more explanation with the exercises and more walk-throughs in the dance than a class of only adults would have needed. I therefore interrupted the lesson after the first dance and saved the rest of the lesson plan until the week after. So in the end this lesson was taught as two lessons of 45 minutes.

I realised when teaching this lesson that a class with mixed ages is not ideal for some formations if you want the giving of hands to be correct and elegant. It is difficult to handle 2bar turns with right or left hand when you dance with a person who differs a lot in height. The children will get around in time if helped by the adults but they do not learn how to manage quick turns with the correct giving of hands. For the 2 bar turns I changed the exercise into practising 4 bar turns first (RH with partner, LH with "corner") before moving on to 2 bar turns because I realised it would make it easier for the younger dancers to know where they had to go.

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3. Review of the music

As mentioned above, I use recorded music for my weekly classes. I try to use a variation of music for warming up and for exercises. I prefer newer recordings but I also use the old ones sometimes so the class would hear all varieties. For exercises I often use the piano recording "With the music... ready and" by Muriel Johnstone, but not always since this is only piano and my dancers have sometimes expressed that they feel like they are in a ballet class. It is easy to use though since you get the right number of bars you need.

For the dances I teach, I try to use original tunes/recordings when available. If there is no original tune or if I don't have it I listen to some alternative recordings and try to find something that will suit the formations in the dance.

For the one workshop I taught with live music I discussed the lesson plan beforehand with the musicians and asked for 8 bar or 16 bar phrases where appropriate. I tried to involve the musicians as much as possible both for demonstrating steps and formations as when the class practised.

#### 4. Self evaluation

I find the most challenging part of teaching to make sure there is something for everyone in the class. I do try to think about this when preparing the lesson but since some dancers will like step practice and others only dancing it is difficult to keep everybody happy. I tend to do more lessons without too many exercises and more dances since this seems to be what most dancers prefer. I think however I should try and find ways to incorporate more step practice and formation exercises in the class in a way that will make it fun to the dancers rather than have them see it as hard work. So this is something I would like to improve in my teaching. I also find it difficult to estimate the timing of the lessons so I often find myself preparing for more than I can teach during the class – most lessons usually take longer than I have anticipated. I do think this has improved since I started teaching but I can certainly improve it more. It is usually not a problem though for the regular classes, since I can always use what was left over for the next week but in a workshop where dancers don't come back the next week it is better to be able to keep to the set plan so that participants get a consistent lesson. During the years I have taught this class in Ghent I think I have managed to keep the class interested and inspired and there is a quite high attendance level (although the group is small) which I consider to be a good mark. Also the children seem to always look forward to the next class but I do try to keep finding new things to challenge them with since the ages are varied and some would get bored with too easy dances. The balance here is sometimes difficult to find.

I do enjoy looking for new dances to teach both groups and I spend quite some time going through publications and video's on the internet to find dances. Here I find it very useful to go to day schools and weekends where you will often be taught dances that are not danced very often and therefore difficult to find yourself. I also find I learn a lot from other teacher's methods during these classes so this is an important reason to attend, apart from the fun and social aspect of the classes of course.

I have certainly improved my knowledge of formations while I have been teaching but I feel that I am still not confident teaching some of the more unusual formations so this is something I need to work on. My general self confidence in teaching has improved quite a lot though and although I haven't had any problem teaching my own group of dancers whom I have known for many years, I used to find it difficult to stand in front of a group of total strangers, but I find this has improved a lot with experience.