

Using Music in Our SCD Class

REVIEW OF TAS AUTUMN WORKSHOP 2022

“Involving, enthused and insightful” – the words Oluf Olufsen used in his vote of thanks to Luke Brady and Fiona Mackie for their TAS workshop. I could not agree more. Their workshop on using music in our SCD classes kept us all engaged with the right balance between discussion and dancing. This is exactly the sort of thing to which all SCD teachers should have access in order to help inform and reflect on their own teaching practices.

I was certainly informed at this workshop. The first session discussed how to effectively use a musician in class. We started off with the warm-up looking at how the musician can assist with helping dancers to get warm. Luke showed us how the tune choices assist the class – in the first few repetitions of a warm-up dance when dancers are marching a brisk tune is needed to make the dancers walk at a fast pace then, when dancers begin to dance lightly, the tempo of the music should drop to allow the dancers to dance comfortably. The tune choice is also important – as the warm-up progresses and the teacher wants dancers to swing arms, a more ‘jolly’ tune helps.

The class, directed by Fiona, then moved on to looking at step practice. We were reminded of how to bring in the music – a hark back to Unit 3 for many! Luke then exhibited the importance of different types of tunes to help correct different dancing faults. For example, a strong strathspey tune should be used to help support and emphasise the urge in the first step of strathspey travelling or a softer tune, like the Lea Rig, to look at smoothing off the step – particularly for younger dancers. There was also great discussion about the importance of the correct tempo.

The next session looked at how to use recorded music. When selecting recorded music, Luke suggests a good place to start is the RSCDS collection. Outside this repertoire, Luke’s mantra was “variety is important” – but he reminded us to be mindful of the abilities of the class. Luke shared with us the importance of the variety of instruments dancers should be exposed to. As was clear in the discussion, many dancers become familiar with Scottish dance band music and subsequently don’t like dancing to other instrumentation. Luke challenged us to use recordings of different instruments in our lessons – he suggested one band track, one piano track and one fiddle track.

The last session looked at programme compiling. Luke recommended that compilers should involve the band in this process by asking for dance suggestions, as bands are often in a position to advise on what dances work well, (for example, both at the beginning and ends of programmes) from musical understanding, past experience and gained knowledge. To support bands, Luke challenges all branches to ask a new band they have not invited before to play for them in the next year. This will help support the Scottish dance band community and help it thrive in years to come.

After such a fruitful workshop, I think it is important to reflect upon what we have learnt and relate it to our own teaching practice. Upon reflection, the three ‘take-aways’ I will try to implement in my own class this term are for warm-ups, I plan on communicating more

effectively with my musician and instead of asking for a 4 x 32 march, I am going to try to adopt the variety of tunes and tempos as Luke suggests; I plan on asking for different types of tunes to try and fix faults in step practice and, on the next opportunity I get to devise a programme, I will ask the band for suggestions. I am certain that this workshop allowed all attendees to reflect on their teaching in relation to the music and the musicians and were enabled to take away something to try in teaching their own classes.

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