

Stepping Into the Future

INTRODUCTION

This is a discussion document following an initial meeting in Exeter on 15th May 2017 to explore ways of supporting future development of Devon step dance after the end of the *Taking Steps* project.

While not a record of that meeting it has attempted to include the points that were raised. It should be seen as a living document, aimed at eliciting responses which will be incorporated into future versions.

The aim is to support both the participation in, and development of, step dancing. An integral part of any development is an understanding of what it is, and what distinguishes it. The main sources for that are the tradition-bearers, those who have learned stepping and passed it on to others; but like any traditional art-form it can only be fully understood by taking into account what it means to those watching it, as well as to those taking part. *Taking Steps* includes collecting oral reminiscences to help that understanding.

For the tradition to thrive the following may prove beneficial:

- More opportunities to dance
- More opportunities to learn to dance
- More visibility
- More information about the tradition

MORE OPPORTUNITIES TO DANCE

There is currently only one competition each year, and two workshops that take place immediately before the competition. While *Taking Steps* will give many others a taste of step dancing, and has two Community Showcase Events planned, it does not involve any long term addressing of this scarcity.

Possible actions:

- Additional showcases/step dance events. These could be of many different forms such as flash mob, dancing in unusual places (with or without videoing to upload), joint evenings of mixed dance, educational visits to community groups etc.
- Additional competitions, probably at existing community events such as fairs and festivals
- Stepdance-friendly music and song sessions, including new sessions in different venues such as cafes

Resources Needed

- Seed-corn funds needed to cover costs of setting up some events (venue hire etc) though the long-term aim would be to create self-supporting events.
- Volunteers to co-ordinate, originate and participate
- Pool of musicians
- Pool of experienced step dancers to participate, adjudicate, publicise

MORE OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN TO DANCE

Taking Steps will give many people the opportunity to attend taster sessions, but doesn't provide for ongoing support or permanent access to teaching. Nor does it provide a means of improving and developing.

Possible actions

- Training teachers to teach the basics of step dance
- Providing a register of experienced/qualified dancers to develop intermediate skills
- Providing access to historic video footage of dancers, including variations of style
- Providing access to suitable music to dance to, for musicians and dancers
- Finding other contexts for dance, including social, particularly for experienced dancers. Instead of directly providing these it may mean signposting to opportunities that already exist. There may also be an overlap with creative dance practitioners and this may indicate that networking and partnerships offer the best opportunities.
- The question of development and change is a more difficult one, but some way of encouraging and permitting innovation must be found if the tradition is to be more than a museum piece, frozen in time. One way of starting to think about that may well be the "*Fellowship of Step Dancers*", suggested below. This might include new 'permitted' steps, new routines, and new tunes.

Resources Needed

- Guidance for teachers. Simple downloadable instructions to create taster sessions. Someone to do that, and time to do it.
- Training the Trainers Workshops to develop more detailed and advanced knowledge for those who need/want it

- Some way of identifying 'qualified' teachers. The DFF championship provides an effective way of signalling excellence but it may not be appropriate for all cases. (*Could a' Fellowship of Step-Dancers' work? Created by some of the existing champions, and extended to anyone felt to have reached the required standard/understanding? PF*)
- Volunteers to source annotate and upload material. *Taking Steps* will make a start on this, but provision for future collecting is needed.
- Opportunities for further discussion about what development of the tradition may mean, and how the tradition marries continuity and change. This is a frequent subject in traditional arts and may call for a symposium, and that may best be done nation-wide or regionally.

MORE VISIBILITY

This may be harder to plan for, and starts with developing awareness of the importance of letting others know about the tradition, and what it is. Different approaches may be needed for different situations.

Possible Actions

- Sharing with dancers of other disciplines
- Educational visits (see *More Opportunities to Dance* above) to schools, community groups etc.
- Offering demonstrations at various shows and gatherings
- Developing on-line content with links
- Active networking with other organisations and/or other disciplines.
- A planned marketing campaign, which might be more appropriate once some of the other actions are under way and has some definite goals.

Resources Needed

- Volunteers
- An active and effective network within the community of dancers and musicians so that opportunities can be shared, responded to, and taken up.

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE TRADITION

It's clear that a large amount of information already exists out there, but much of it is in the form of raw data. While additional material still needs gathering, or even creating, a prime need is to organise it, collate it, explain it and present it.

A beginning on this will be made by *Taking Steps* but future work needs to be informed by how people accessing it would like the material to be presented, what they find useful etc.

Possible Actions

- Developing an awareness of the different users (see Website below)
- Ensuring feedback from those different types of users is digested and acted upon
- Integrating appropriate information about the background material in many of the other actions (workshops, presentations, performances)

Resources Needed

- Volunteers, particularly different types of users
- Presentational, archiving and related skills, which can be sourced or developed
- Website (see below)

WEBSITE

In developing a website for this project there are three main principles:

- To create a database that works with different types of material e.g. photographs, video, tunes, teaching aids, sound files, sheet music, external links)
- To make material accessible for different types of users:
 - Local communities
 - Dancers
 - Musicians
 - Historians
 - Dartmoor enthusiasts
- To take into account that all categories will include people at different entry levels, so that casual browsers, those with intermediate skills/knowledge and specialists are all catered for

Actions

- Commission new website
- Get in touch with various potential users and user groups
- List some of the existing sources and resources

- Look at existing websites to learn from best practice and develop links and networks . Examples include:
 - RAPPER SWORD DANCE <http://www.rapper.org.uk/intro/rapper.php>
 - INSTEP RESEARCH TEAM <http://insteptrt.co.uk/>
 - ENGLISH FOLK DANCE & SONG SOCIETY <https://www.efdss.org/>
 - ORAL HISTORY SOCIETY <http://www.ohs.org.uk/>
 - BRITISH LIBRARY <http://sounds.bl.uk/World-and-traditional-music/Peter-Kennedy-Collection/025M-MSMUS1771X1X-0345V0>

Resources Needed

- Feedback groups
- Volunteers to create new content (e.g. interviews)
- Volunteers to upload content

CONCLUSIONS

This section is very brief, as it should follow discussion and refinement of the above, but some conclusions seem inevitable:

- A strong volunteer base is needed
- The best way of utilising that base is by co-ordinating efforts and investing in training
- Those volunteers need to be kept informed and in touch with each other in some way
- That not all work can be done by volunteers and that collaboration or paid staff/contractors will occasionally be needed
- A co-ordinating body of some kind is needed to co-ordinate the work and to secure funds where necessary