

CIRCLE *dance*

Dancing in a circle is an ancient tradition common to many cultures for marking special occasions, strengthening community and encouraging togetherness

WORDS: CAROLINE SHERWOOD

In 1976 Bernhard Wosien, a German ballet master, arrived at the Findhorn community in Scotland bringing with him folk dances he had collected while travelling through Europe. “He intuitively knew which dances contained energies that would be needed in our present world, and would help heal the rift between humanity and the earth,” says June Watts in her book *Circle Dancing: Celebrating the Sacred in Dance*.

A former member of the Royal Shakespeare Company, June Watts is one of the world’s leading Circle Dance teachers. Once a Somerset resident, she now lives in the high Alpujarras of southern Spain to which sanctuary she returns from her busy teaching schedule, but she still visits the Levels during her regular trips to England.

June met Bernhard Wosien in 1982 and

she counts dancing with him among her happiest memories, as well as dancing what has become known as the Israeli Blessing Dance around the crib of the three-day-old son of good friends of hers.

“The circle is a powerful symbol, echoing our planet, the sun, moon or the cosmos,” says Frances Fawkes, South West co-ordinator for the Circle Dance Network. “Dancing in a circle means there is no hierarchy, there is acceptance, there are no wrong steps only variations and you do not need a partner. Many traditional dances embody an ancient world view of sustainability, community and reverence for the earth.” Dances acknowledge the changing seasons and celebrate births, weddings, greetings and partings, and deaths.

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Frances says that circle dancing has allowed her to “become more open and accepting of other people. Moving to music as part of a supportive group enables inner emotions to surface and although they are not necessarily expressed as part of the dance, it means they are acknowledged. This is very therapeutic. It is a form of meditation which enables me to contact an inner

stillness. It is a resource that helps me cope with my life. It is also fun and good exercise!”

Many dances originated in Eastern Europe. “We dance the joyous syrto and kalamatianos from Greece, sensuous

Rom (gypsy) dances, and lyrical dances from Israel,” Frances continues. “We dance to haunting melodies from Turkey or the Kurds or to the intricate rhythms of the Balkans – Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, Hungary and Armenia. Occasionally we visit the earthy andros and hanter dros from Brittany and flowing dances from Russia.”

“There has been huge expansion, and





diversification in terms of the approaches of so many different teachers,” June Watts explains. Contemporary circle dancers draw on this immensely rich heritage while creating a growing repertoire of newly choreographed pieces to classical and, sometimes rather unexpected, music.

For June, choreography is “...an intuitive process. Sometimes the dance drops in ready made, sometimes I have to leave it to mature, and revisit it from time to time to get it right, very occasionally I will have to work out in a linear fashion how many beats, how many repetitions of a musical phrase etc to get it all to come together.”

June’s future dream is to create a Centre and Community to explore, with committed people, how the Dance can expand and evolve, and to offer courses in Circle Dance and Permaculture, both of which would be integral parts of the community’s daily life. ■

Classes and events near you...

Bath

Tuesdays, 10-11.30am, Scout Hut, Grove St.
Contact: Dorothy Jerrome – 01225 830200;
dorothyjerrome@btinternet.com

Brompton Ralph

Mr and Mrs Canney discovered Circle Dance as part of Canon Peter Spink’s Omega Order initiative to offer spiritual resources for the 21st century to those of all religions and none. The Canneys host a regular Circle Dance in their home near Brompton Ralph and welcome new members, when there is space! Contact: 01984 656236.

Chedzoy

Most Mondays, 7.30-9.30pm
Chedzoy Village Hall.
Contact: Frances Fawkes – 01278 653787;
francesefawkes@gmail.com

Frome

Third Sunday (generally) 6-8 pm, Christchurch Hall with the Fabulous Frome Circle Dance Band led by Nickomo and Rasullah.
Contact: Tara Greaves - 01373 302219;
taragreaves@yahoo.co.uk

Glastonbury

Fridays, 10.30 am-12.15pm
St Mary’s Church Hall
Contact: Frances Fawkes or Jeanette Whitford –
01275 541688; jeanettewhitford@gmail.com

Minehead

Wednesdays, 2.30-4.30pm
St John’s Ambulance Hall
(under the auspices of AgeUK Somerset)
Contact: Frances Fawkes

27 October, A day of Greek Dances, led by Hazel Young with music from a band led by Greek musician, Kostantis Kourmandis.
Contact: Frances Fawkes

22 December, Winter Solstice seasonal dances to live music by Balamouk
Contact: Frances Fawkes

Somerset is unique in the Circle dance network in that it has two live music venues: Frome and Puriton.

For further information on circle dance visit circledancenetwork.org.uk or junewatts.com