



Folk Education Network

Folk Education Development Day

Church Hall, Okehampton, EX20 1HN
Tuesday 6 June 2022

Presented in partnership with Wren Music

Theme: Fostering a Living Tradition



Lowenna Hosken leading a Cornish dance workshop. Photo: Rachel Elliott

Review by Jen Cox

The day was opened and the group of around 25 delegates were warmly welcomed by **Amy Wilson (Development Officer, Wren Music)** and **Kerry Fletcher (Co-ordinator of EFDSS' Folk Education Network)**, both of whom were on hand as facilitators during the day.

Jenny Read (Community Musician, Wren Music) and **Jon Dyer (Community Musician, Wren Music)** led the group in a fun participatory warm up session, offering a physical and a vocal warm up in the manner in which Wren Music delivers sessions in special education needs and disability settings (SEN/D). As I also work in this field I immediately felt right at home, and very much enjoyed learning some of Jenny and Jon's techniques and the reasoning behind some of their work.

Rachel Elliott (EFDSS Education Director) then gave a presentation documenting her wide-ranging work. She gave some background information on the Folk Education Network, as well as detailing learning resources available through their award-winning Resource Bank and the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, and introducing some short films about the National Youth Folk Ensemble, the Inclusive Folk SEN/D project, and creative clog dancing at U.Dance national youth dance festival, showing how these projects have enriched young people's lives. The National Youth Folk Ensemble is now co-funded by Arts Council England and the Department for Education, which represents a great success in bringing folk to the recognised 'National Youth Music Organisation' (NYMO) table. Rachel clearly has a huge passion for what she does, and offered a very positive and inspiring outlook on the work with which she is involved. It will be great to see the fruits of this labour 'building bridges across sectors' in the future.

The session entitled 'Creating the Folk Songs of Tomorrow', introduced by **Marilyn Tucker (Creative Director and Chief Executive, Wren Music)** offered some very interesting insight into processes of using traditional material in modern educational settings. Marilyn's introduction touched on the issues of propriety and the social contexts of material that we'd discuss at more length later in the day. We were then given the opportunity to learn short songs that had been created using different methods: **Rebecka Lyons (Community Musician, Wren Music)** talked us through the process of translating a traditional Swedish children's song into English, **Paul Wilson (Community Musician, Wren Music)** showed us how a song had been adapted to be accessible for a particular group, and **Sarah Owen (Community Musician, Wren Music)** taught us 'We Can Change The World', lyrics included in 'Sound the Alarm', a piece composed for a recent project. These sessions were extremely well presented and offered a lot of insight into working processes.

Ben van Weede (Devon and Torbay Music Education Hubs) then spoke about the challenges of his work in putting music education in schools, and the upcoming changes to the National Plan for Music Education. Ben has involvement with funding Wren's project, the Devon Youth Folk Ensemble, and it was great to see folk music standing on a valued footing with this organisation.

After lunch **Dr Angeline Morrison** skilfully presented a new educational resource she has produced for EFDSS, a pack for teachers, working to take Black History 'out of the footnotes and margins'. We were privileged to see a preview of the resource and learn about some of the background to its content, which sits alongside Angeline's research for her latest album, 'The Sorrow Songs: Songs of Black British Experience', which seeks to re-story hidden Black presence throughout history. To finish her presentation, Angeline led us in learning a song to demonstrate the use of one of the group singing exercises from the resource. This work is hugely important, and the publication of the resource (scheduled for Autumn 2023) can't come fast enough.

Lowenna Hosken then led an energising and very accessible dance workshop, showcasing the Cornish 'Scoot' or step dances she has been teaching in the community after receiving an EFDSS mini grant. The workshop culminated in a 'challenge dance' which worked really well to reinvigorate the delegates at the mid-afternoon point and led to some interesting discussions of regional cultural differences in folk dance. As a step dancer, again I was in my element here and particularly enjoyed this workshop.

The final session, entitled 'Inclusivity and Relevance in Folk Songs', was facilitated by **Amy Wilson**. This took the form of workshopping problematic song lyrics and took us into smaller groups to discuss how we might approach such lyrics in different contexts. This highlighted that there are indeed many 'songs of a questionable nature' around on the folk scene today and began discussions about how best they should be approached, educated about, and perhaps ultimately left to reside in museums whilst more inclusive and appropriate material is given centre stage. These discussions were fascinating and conducted and facilitated in an extremely professional, yet open and intelligent manner, and I think we all felt that we could have taken far longer to delve deeper into the subject. There is a body of work to be done around such content and there was a very open discussion about racist, misogynistic, homophobic, transphobic, and disablist material on the folk scene. I applaud the organisers here for taking steps into addressing this.

I was delighted to be able to attend my first Folk Education Development Day, and having signed up before the programme was announced, felt like I'd hit the jackpot when I discovered what was lined up. The day didn't disappoint, and I look forward to attending more such events in the future.

Jen Cox is the Chair of Open Morris, and serial Morris and folk dancer and musician, with well over 25 years dance and teaching experience, and has been organising folk festivals since she was a young teenager. She currently organises dance events for Wallingford BunkFest and Folk Weekend: Oxford, and is a committee member for long running dance series Oxfolk Ceilidhs. She works supporting young people with special needs, and delivers accessible folk and music sessions alongside this work.

Email chair@open-morris.org

Web www.open-morris.org, www.oxfolk.org.uk, www.bunkfest.co.uk, www.folkweekendoxford.co.uk.