

WHAT FORM FOR A COTSWOLD MORRIS COMPETITION?

Many dancers like the morris because it is currently not competitive and there are no examinations. Yet there is a concern for standards and the achievement of excellence. Anyone who has been on a joint tour knows the needling that can develop and most dancers respond to the stimulation of dancing against others. There was a place once for competitions.

The objective of a competition is the encouragement of sides and individual dancers in the pursuit of excellence in the Cotswold morris style of dancing by the following of those standards known to have been observed by the older generations of Cotswold dancers.

Experience with other competitions, stepping or sword, is that there must be no ambiguity in the rules and no area of interpretation unclear to competitors. There must be no change in the rules once the competition has been announced.

JUDGES

The judges need to have been dancers. There needs to be 2 or more. They must appear to be independent both of the organisers and of each other and their names need to be announced at the first notice of the competition. They should score independently. Because of the importance of rhythm one judge should concentrate on listening to the bells.

Competitors should have the right to ask for spoken or written comment on their performance and to be able to ask for a written explanation of judging policy if it is unclear but the judges policy is not to be challenged. There should be a channel of appeal but only on the interpretation of the rules. In general the judges decisions are final on what happens during a dance. Frivolous or disruptive objections should lead to suspension.

CLASSES

There are 4 classes of dance that need to be encouraged.

1. Set Dances in traditional form to nominated tunes.
2. Solo jigs to recognised Cotswold Morris tunes.
3. Baccapipes.
4. Original dances of own devising.

The relationship of dancers to music is very important and all entries must be encouraged to provide their own musician. If they have to use/^{one} provided by the organisers they must be given facilities to practice.

The question of "traditions" is difficult. For many such the exact form is unknowable and individual interpretations should not be penalised. Even the well known "traditions" with recognised characteristics are subject to several authoritative versions differing in the detail that could become issues in a competition. It is believed that the consistency and quality of movement of a true tradition will bring its own reward artistically and technically. Organisers could consider allowing competitors to hazard some marks against the judges understanding of a nominated tradition.

SOME RULES FOR SET DANCES

1. Traditionally the tunes were nominated and also whether they were to be handkerchief or stick dances. Of course particular variants of tunes can not be demanded. As an objective is preservation it may be adequate to ask for a variant of any tune in a recognised authoritative book such as the "Handbook of Morris Dancing".

Competitions 2.

2. The performers must declare beforehand the rules they are adopting for starting foot and direction of turns. For example left foot start or first half left and second half right are common forms. If the declared rules are complex the side must accept the risk of the judge making an error. The judge's ruling is final and the judge does not necessarily give the dancers the benefit of the doubt. A side that tries to avoid this by declaring no rules will lose heavily on artistic grounds!
3. Traditionally feint steps were frowned upon - they could be detected by listening to the bells and technical merit should be recognised by skill in avoiding them.
4. Entry and exit is part of the dance and its presentation and should be judged as part of the performance.
5. Mistakes should carry a fixed penalty, say 5 points (out of 100 at risk), and the judges should list them for the benefit of the performers.

JIGS

1. In any class the points that can be awarded should be divided according to some declared plan.
 - a. Dance technique - say 50 - to cover the quality of stepping, arm movements, posture, height.
 - b. Artistic impression - 30 - to cover the linking of movements, pace, excitement, internal self consistency (authenticity).
 - c. Technical difficulty - 20 - inclusion of shuffles, capers, slow passages, galleys.It is believed that the dancer attempting more complex movements has the greater chance of mistake and poorer quality of movement and should have the chance of scoring higher.
2. A solo dancer should score a bonus if they can dance each movement leading off with either foot as this was considered a prized skill in the Cotswolds.

BACCAPIPES

1. The floor on which the dance is performed is to be covered with sand or flour before each competitor tries his dance to allow the judge a measure of where the foot grounds.
2. The pipes may be of any material but at least of a certain length and diameter. The specification would have to be like at least 18 ins long, at least 1/8th in diam and bowed at least 1 in. The pipes are to be supplied by the competitor.
3. The pipes are to be placed over a reference point, marked on the floor, by the dancer to the satisfaction of the judges to an accuracy of about 1/8 in.
4. A dancer retires if in the opinion of the judge the baccapipes have been touched during the dance.
5. The judge checks at the end of the dance whether the baccapipes have been moved relative to the reference point.
6. The dancers are expected to use during parts of the dance a true "heel and toe" step and to step over the baccapipes using both toe and heel taps at different times.
7. The winner is that one judged to have touched closest into a vertex of the crossed baccapipes without touching the baccapipes as measured by the closest smudge of the floor dusting to the reference point.

The above include all the known features of the old competitions. They should allow equal opportunity for simple dances done well and for "traditional" sides.

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