Presidents Report 2021

This year we have celebrated the 60th Anniversary of dancing in the Wellington region. Given our desire to mark this event in style the dancing calendar has been very full and we have been amazingly lucky to continue to enjoy dancing with limited disruptions from the continuing Covid pandemic.

The first event on the calendar was of course Hogmanay. Due to the cancellation of Summer School the event was considerably larger than usual and we were able to see in the New Year with not only our own Wellington dancers but a good number of those from around the country. While Andrew (Oliver) and I were the named “organisers”, we had amazing helpers from right across the region. Thanks to everyone who helped make the event a success.

In January and February Summer Dancing again took place at the Old Government Building. The weather unfortunately was inclement on a number of the nights making us head indoors. The venue is however lovely and in a good central location which enables dancers from around the region to meet and greet after a few weeks holiday, helping to get brains and feet into gear for the dancing season.

In line with the region mission statement, “To promote and facilitate a vibrant and sustainable Scottish country dancing community in the Wellington region”, in addition to the usual half day classes for Advanced and Intermediate levels, and the May-June block of Basics classes, the Region Committee ran :

* Teachers’ workshops in April, for which we invited Katharine Hoskyn down from Auckland as the class facilitator. This initiative was well received and it was great for teachers to share ideas and experiences to allow them in turn to encourage and inspire all levels of dancers across the region. In conjunction with these workshops an Advanced Technique class was also held, to make the most of Katharine’s visit to the Capital. An invitation only approach was adopted for this class as a trial. While this is a new approach for Wellington it is common overseas.
* A second block of Basics Classes from July – September. These classes were well attended and allowed us not only to extend the dancing of those who starting at the beginning of the year, but also to cater for a few who had just started , and who would otherwise not have been able to attend such a class until 2022.

To address the concerns raised in last year’s survey, regarding the need to improve communication, the committee has this year made the region newsletter, the Harbour City Happenings, free to all, and actively distributed it to RSCDS members and clubs in the region. We are hopeful that that having this newsy publication, so competently edited by Désirée Patterson more widely distributed will ensure everyone is kept informed.

To recognise the amazing talent of our many devisers in the region two books of dances have been put together this year.

* The first is the Covid Dances (published on the region website) these resulted from a challenge I set in May 2020 to devise a dance which allows for “Social Distancing” to be demonstrated in the dance. Two afternoon sessions were held in April and May to trial these dances. I was impressed by the incredible imagination of our devisers and the huge variation in interpretation of the challenge. It was extremely difficult deciding on the winners. Well done to all who took part and I do hope we see some of these dances picked up and added to our regional repertoire.
* The second book, shortly to be launched, is the Wellington Region 60th Anniversary Book. This book is made up of dances by local devisers who were personally invited to submit unpublished dances. The dances were then selected by blind trial by a group of volunteers. My thanks to Elaine Lethbridge and her subcommittee for their efforts in putting this together in a relatively short timeframe.

Then of course to celebrate the 60th year of the Region we held a Dinner and Dance at the Lower Hutt Town Hall in early August. This was an evening of formality and fun, and an event at which the lifetime friendships that are very much part of our dancing community were evident. As part of the evening we remembered the many people who have contributed to dancing in our region? over the decades, and without who we would not be dancing today. Our reminiscing was greatly aided by the photos and videos shown throughout the evening, prepared as part of the Archival Project initiated this year.

The dedicated efforts of the Dance sub-committee, led by Duncan McDonald and the Archival Project sub-committee, led by Philippa Pointon ensured that the evening was enjoyed by all. My thanks to all those who helped to make the evening a success.

Unfortunately we have been unable to follow up the success of the 60th Dinner and Dance with the regular success of the New Dancers Celebration. After a good run this year, Covid has reared its head again and the current restrictions prevent gatherings of this type. It is very disappointing that this event, which is always so eagerly anticipated and well attended, has had to be cancelled and I want to recognise all the hard work that has gone in to organise the event. Thank you very much Elaine Laidlaw and the Carterton Club, and thanks also, to the Saltire Band who I know would have put in many hours of practice prior to the cancellation.

The year has been a very busy one and I would like to recognise the hard work of the Region committee and all those who have helped this year to add to the vibrancy of the dancing community. Thank you. In particular I would also like to thank Ann Aspey, who after three years of supporting us as Secretary is standing down from this position. Thank you Ann.

Ann Oliver, President

10 November 2021