

IMPERIAL SOCIETY OF TEACHERS OF DANCING

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FORMATION DANCING and MEDAL TESTS

Notes for Teachers

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Price 1.00

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This book was prepared by Peggy Spencer, assisted by Anne Lingard, for the Ballroom Faculty Board of the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing.

Introduction

I am very happy to write this introduction to these notes on Formation Dancing. It seems a long time ago now that I started working on what I thought of as "Ballroom Ballet" — but experiment showed that one could not choreograph Ballroom Dancing in the same way that one can choreograph in other forms of dance technique. It was too restricted, both technically and in movement; that is, if one was going to adhere to the standardised form in vogue at that time. The whole idea being to use only recognised Ballroom steps and style.

Watching aeroplane formations before the war gave me an idea which I thought would work, and it was in 1932, through the courtesy of Mr. Bourne who was manager of the Astoria Ballroom, Charing Cross Road, that I was able to give the first public presentation of this type of work. He gave my team of four couples a fortnights engagement. From this beginning followed other engagements and we demonstrated at most of the big dance halls in and around London. We were very well received (except at the Salon Bal, Harringay, where pennies were thrown on the floor). At that time we were only allowed to use four couples and stick strictly to the standardised technique. These first four couples included Charles Thiebault, who was then a student, the late Arthur Norton, the late Malcolm Stewart, who had worked with me on the presentation, and another young ballroom student. The girls all wore extremely simple cream coloured dresses in very straight style. How different things are today when the clothes are so fantastic! Now one is allowed up to twelve couples (although most teams use only eight), much more flexibility of movement, and many more spectacular steps with "lunges" and "overthrows", which help so much in the presentation. Also a certain amount of open work is often seen now whereas in the early days one was "glued" to one's partner all the time. Over the years many celebrated dancers have helped me with demonstrations and presentations. The first time we went to Blackpool to compete in the big Ballroom Festival held there every year, we had a marvellous team, consisting of John Wells and Renee Sissons, Len Scrivener and Nellie Duggan, Sonny Binnick and Joyce Hayward, and Guy and Anne Hayward. We came second losing by only a point to the team from Denmark, who used a spectacular gimmick; the hall was blacked and the team continued to dance with little lights on their shoulders. It was, of course, a wonderful effect and a clever idea, but on pure dancing and movement and appearance (the girls all wore lovely flowing white chiffon dresses) our team were congratulated. This led to other important demonstrations, but the highlight was when the first four leading professionals in the English style in the world formed a team and danced at the Palladium Theatre at one of the ISTD Matinees. Josephine Bradley with the late Frank Ford, Dolly and Victor Silvester, Pat and Alex Moore, Phyllis Haylor and

Charles Scrimshaw. No wonder they brought down the house and in fact stopped the show and had to give an encore. Just as the curtain went up for the encore it was discovered that Victor was missing! But they had to go on — Dolly valiantly dancing solo, when suddenly a miracle happened, and Victor was there. How he managed to get there, no one knows as it is most difficult to pick up an exact step and place at any given time in a set dance and without rehearsal. But he slipped in somehow and never missed a beat.

Those were the experimental days. Since then formation dancing has become popular and is now seen at all the big ballroom festivals and on television. It has developed and expanded so much that it is time there was a form of discipline and standardisation of rules which this book so admirably gives. My congratulations to Frank and Peggy Spencer for the work they have done in writing this book, and my thanks to them too, for the support they gave me during the early days. Their interest and sustained work coupled with their excellent handling of pattern and design — rhythmic and musical interpretation has given them the position of the leading and most popular Formation Teachers of today.

Olive Ripman

These notes are a comprehensive guide to Medal Test formation dancing, and form a natural base for competition work.

The contents provide a sound basis for this work and outline, analyse, and provide the answers to many practical problems. The suggestions for patterns and sequences are most informative and the diagrams are excellent. Obviously much care and thought have been put into the compilation of this work and it should be a great encouragement to those who are considering for the first time forming teams for Medal Tests and perhaps later for competition work.

Constance Grant