

6 Letters



Weekend dance for experienced Square dancers, October 2009. Photo: Susie Kelly.

I've looked up the next issue of the magazine online to read Rachel Elliott's article (Animated winter 2010). I look forward to receiving my copy by post so that I can show it and discuss various points with the RPM Committee. (Set up by the Square Dance Callers Club of GB and the British Association of American Square Dance Clubs, the letters stand for Recruit, Promote, Maintain).

It puzzles me that more non-performance-based dancing isn't included in the magazine. From what I've seen it's the artistic side of dance that is prevalent. Couldn't more emphasis be placed on the fun and friendship within communities that occurs in square dance, folk dance, circle dance, etc?

I also want to express some of my (our) feelings about the way square dancing is viewed by the media. We sometimes manage to get on the radio or TV for short interviews or quick demonstrations, and every time the interviewer or presenter ends up making fun of us by giving us the old Hi-de-hi routine. I've never seen other forms of dance mocked in this way. Even line dancing receives viewing time, and ballroom dancing now has a cult following.

There's so much in square dancing outsiders just don't understand. It's an inclusive form of dance that almost any person off the street could do. Square dancers can move about the world and find immediate friendship. However in square dancing the caller is improvising, and the dancers have to know the moves well enough to react upon command. It may take six months to learn them this well, but there has to be a teaching period for any form of dance. (How many hours of practice go into learning just one of the dances in Strictly?) And once learned, the variety of choreographic intricacy possible is well-nigh infinite. It appeals to puzzle solvers and mathematicians, and keeps your brain stimulated as it promotes physical wellbeing. And you don't have to be beautiful, athletic or have perfect rhythm to do it. You just need to be able to walk, know your right hand from your left and enjoy having fun.

Susie Kelly, Hon Secretary of the Square Dance Callers Club of Great Britain.

<http://sites.google.com/site/squaredancecallersclub/>

Reading Sunanda's article on women in Hip Hop (Animated winter 2010) reinforced for me how during the past 30-odd years Hip Hop has become a culture of major global significance. In the last year I've been working on a piece of research for my Fellowship on the Clore Leadership Programme (www.cloreleadership.org). The topic is Hip Hop culture in the UK and the roots and aspirations of the community. In the early '80s the UK was widely regarded as second only to New York in Hip Hop circles. The culture died out a decade later as music in clubs changed, but some of the innovative pioneers innovators kept it alive underground.

Now, as I write this in 2010, Hip Hop dance and dance-theatre is more visible than ever. Sunanda described the impact of b.supreme since 2006, but there's more. Boy Blue Entertainment's Pied Piper won an Olivier Award winner in 2007. ZooNation's Into The Hoods was a major West End success in 2009, and is back at the Southbank this summer. It's just a few weeks before the seventh annual Breakin' Convention (BC) festival of International Hip Hop dance-theatre at Sadler's Wells that to date has been attended by over 54,000 people. The UK B Boy Championships celebrates its 15th anniversary this autumn, and BC will embark on its fourth UK tour.

Throughout my research I met Hip Hop artists at events and in studios. The resounding message was that they're passionate about the contribution Hip Hop has made to their lives and to the world. One of the major recommendations to come out of that research regards the infrastructure for Hip Hop culture in this country. We're at a critical point. Hip Hop has been mass-produced and many of its essential elements stripped, but there are living pioneers in the UK and overseas who are still teaching and developing knowledge of the foundation techniques and styles. The dancers, DJs and promoters I spoke with all feel strongly about the need for high-quality training through a unique Hip Hop Academy, and for greater support and investment in UK choreographers who are moving the art form forwards. It's a case of watch this space.

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Breakin' Convention freestyle circles. Photo: Paul Hampartsoumain.