

9th Annual Irish Set Dancing Weekend, 11 – 13 October 2013

This annual event, which is now in its 9th year, drew a record number of 110 participants to all or some of the sessions of a packed program that ran from Friday 11th to Sunday 13th October at the Cook Neighbourhood Hall. Because the event is in Canberra, the numbers from the ACT and New South Wales usually outweigh the other States, but this year there was an especially strong contingent from Victoria, as well as representation from Queensland. It was a great opportunity for dancers to polish up their skills, learn something new, socialise with familiar friends in the Irish Set Dancing community and welcome some new faces. The event aims to cater for the experienced dancer and to attract others to Irish Set Dancing; great to see the new faces, including a number of younger dancers.

The program got underway on Friday evening with a welcome ceili. A feature of this year's event was live music at each of the three separate ceilis held during the course of the weekend. On Friday night and Saturday night, the Jimmy Mullarkey Ceili Band from Sydney performed their magic, creating music that set feet tapping and made us eager to get up on the floor. For most of Friday evening there were eight sets dancing and a handful of non-dancers just enjoying the music. At the supper break, the Band was prevailed upon to accompany us singing 'Happy Birthday' for one of the well-known and long-standing members of our dancing community, Lance Court, who was celebrating his 70th birthday. Happy Birthday Lance!

Saturday (morning and afternoon) and Sunday morning, were devoted to workshops with three teachers – Ina Bertrand from Victoria, Arthur Kingsland from New South Wales, and David Arnold from Canberra. Ina taught three traditional Irish sets – the Ballyfin Set from County Laois and two sets from County Waterford: the Black Hill Set and the Melleray Lancers. Figure 3 of the Melleray Lancers, dubbed the 'kissing' figure, was the source of some humorous exchanges among workshop participants. Arthur Kingsland taught two more recently created sets – the Charlestown Set and the Drumbo Lancers. The Charlestown Set was created by Julia Smith of the Newcastle Irish Set Dancers who dance in the suburb of Charlestown in Newcastle, NSW, and is dedicated to them. The Charlestown Set was entered in a competition for newly created sets held at the Sweets of May Festival in Tralee, Kerry, in May 2013.¹ The Drumbo Lancers was created by Teresa Quigg of County Down for the people who dance in Drumbo and to evoke the rolling hills of County Down. David Arnold taught two traditional Irish Sets – the Armagh Set, and then something a little different – a half set: the Dromgarriff Half Set from West Cork. With so much variety in the workshops, there was plenty of interest for both the experienced dancer and those newer to Irish Set Dancing. In addition to the set dance workshops, Ina Bertrand offered a practical session on musical rhythms and how to identify if a piece of music is a reel, or a jig, or a hornpipe.

Traditionally, the Saturday night ceili is the highlight of the weekend. This year was no exception. Ten sets formed up on the floor for a program of eight set dances, including three of those which had been taught at the Saturday morning and afternoon workshops. The Jimmy Mullarkey Ceili Band was again in fine form, and again was called upon to

accompany us in singing 'Happy Birthday': this time for Graeme Bertrand who was celebrating his 78th birthday. Happy Birthday Graeme!

With the exception of the sets mentioned below, all sets danced at the ceilis were called; and called by experienced callers drawn from Canberra and the visiting States – 13 callers in all. To practice our skills at memorising sets, two sets were uncalled at the Saturday ceili – the Cashel Set which we had practiced as a called set at the Friday ceili, and the Balyvourney Jig Set which is a favourite and danced often.

The farewell ceili on Sunday afternoon featured local band, Dave O'Neill and Friends, whose uplifting music easily motivated the now somewhat sore feet and tiring legs to find that last drop of energy to keep on dancing with spirit. We are very fortunate to have access to such quality musicians who enjoy playing for dancers, as much as we enjoy dancing to live music. By the end of the farewell ceili, those who had attended the full weekend had danced a total of 22 sets in three ceilis and been taught seven sets in 1½ days of workshops. We had reason to be tired, but also very happy.

For those not needing to travel home immediately, there was a final opportunity to socialise, listen to more music and chat about the weekend over a meal at King O'Malley's Irish Pub in Civic. As people farewelled each other it was clear the weekend was deemed a great success.

'Fantastic weekend, great music, great food.'

'Really enjoyed Ina's class today. Very clear and enjoyable. Thanks.'

'Ceili Saturday night is very good. Thank you!'

'Good classes, good music, good catering, good venue.'

This year's organising team would like to again thank all of those who helped to make the event such a fun and rewarding experience for everyone – teachers, callers, the bands, volunteers and everyone who worked behind the scenes – you know who you are. Thank you.

2013 Organising Team: Kate Armstrong, David Arnold, Christine Briton, Paul Wayper.

Photographs by Allen Bills. Further photographs can be viewed at

<http://www.mabula.net/setdancing/workshop.html>.

¹ The winning set was the Hunter Valley Set written by James Garner of Sydney to commemorate the 10th anniversary in 2009 of the Newcastle Irish Set Dancers. It was taught by Arthur Kingsland and Julia Smith at the 8th Canberra Irish Set Dancing Weekend in 2010.