

The early years

The original collection of Circle Dances was made by Bernhard Wosien, who was a German dance professor. He travelled to Greece and former Yugoslavia and learned many local folk dances. Realising that he had something very important, he searched for a suitable place to take them where they would be appreciated. He knew they created a very special atmosphere and a feeling of group cohesion and harmony that he thought was unique in our busy everyday lives.

Eventually, he learned about the Findhorn spiritual community in Scotland. This was started in the 1960s by Eileen and Peter Caddy and Dorothy Maclean when, as a result of meditation and acceptance that a higher power was at work, they transformed an area of sand dunes in north-east Scotland to soil rich enough to grow record-breaking vegetables. Soon people started to flock there to enrich their own spiritual lives and to find a meaning that had escaped them before.

In 1976, the community invited Bernhard to take his collection of dances to Findhorn, which he described as 'fertile ground' where 'they would flourish' - and they did.

The dances spread

When, inevitably, some people left Findhorn to start new lives elsewhere, they took with them the Circle Dances that had been such an important part of their life in the community. Groups were started in various parts of Britain and abroad. Gradually the word spread and the wonderful feeling generated by this type of movement together was a necessary part of life for an increasing number of people.

The list of teachers grew dramatically; from a handful back in the early 1980s, there are several hundred teachers today. The repertoire has grown with hundreds more dances being added over the years. Some are traditional, from countries such as Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, Israel, France, Russia - in fact anywhere that they dance in circles. Others are newly choreographed, inspired by a whole range of pieces of music.

Music

In the early days of Circle Dancing, the music was gathered wherever it could be found and many of the recordings were of poor quality. In recent years, wherever possible, teachers have obtained their music from original recordings from the country of origin. In addition, there are an increasing number of groups of musicians that play live music for various events. Some of these bands have recorded their own CDs. The quality of the music we dance to has been greatly improved from both these directions.

Centre of the circle

An important feature of Circle Dance is the centrepiece - perhaps a decorative square of cloth with a candle in the centre, a plant or some flowers and possibly some crystals. It provides a lovely focus for the dancers, making sure that the circle stays in the same place in the room and that its energy is always directed towards that one centre and thus the candle.

The dances are like a moving meditation, so, after each one, we have a short pause to absorb the feeling of the dance. This can be a very personal experience, because each person reacts differently to every dance. In the moment after the dance, there is the essence of the dance. We do not clap after a dance, as this dissipates the energy that the movement round the centre has created. This moment of quiet is often a very powerful experience.

At the end of a session of Circle Dance, the dancers hold the silence and consciously direct the light of the candle, to bring healing and comfort to a particular person or a part of the world in need of positive thought. The light of the candle represents the energy of all the dances that were danced in that session. Blowing out the flame in this simple ritual symbolises sending that energy from the centre out to the world.

What's in a name?

In recent years there has been much discussion about how to refer to these beautiful dances. Bernhard called his dances *Heilige Tanze*. In German, *heilige* means holy or sacred but it also has connotations of healing and wholeness. The English translation of 'sacred' is inadequate and we have no single word to cover the multiplicity of meaning of the German word.

Bernhard wrote of these dances:

One has to dance them and be totally present to discover their meaning and healing power. Only then does their religious origin reveal itself – the way to Oneness, from separation to community to vibrant togetherness.

Some teachers call them Sacred Circle Dances. Others have found this is intimidating to those who have not experienced it and have opted for more approachable names, such as simply Circle Dances or World Dances. Whatever the name, it has the same effect of bringing people together in a community atmosphere that is rare in our rather separated lives. After all, in their countries of origin, the dances were used to bring people together to celebrate significant events in the life of the community - weddings and births, the agricultural cycle and the connection of

humanity with Nature and the Divine - but also to commemorate deaths both of people and animals. Many dances marked these 'rites of passage'.

Put on your dancing shoes

Teachers now lead regular dance groups in halls and homes around the country, take Circle Dances into churches and cathedrals, to hospices and prisons, to schools and youth clubs, to special needs groups and many other places.

If you have never Circle Danced, do try it. It is a wonderful experience, but be prepared to get hooked!

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The Development of Circle Dancing

