

**Folk Educators Group
Folk Education Development Day
19 June 2020**

Theme: Celebrating folk education in the North West

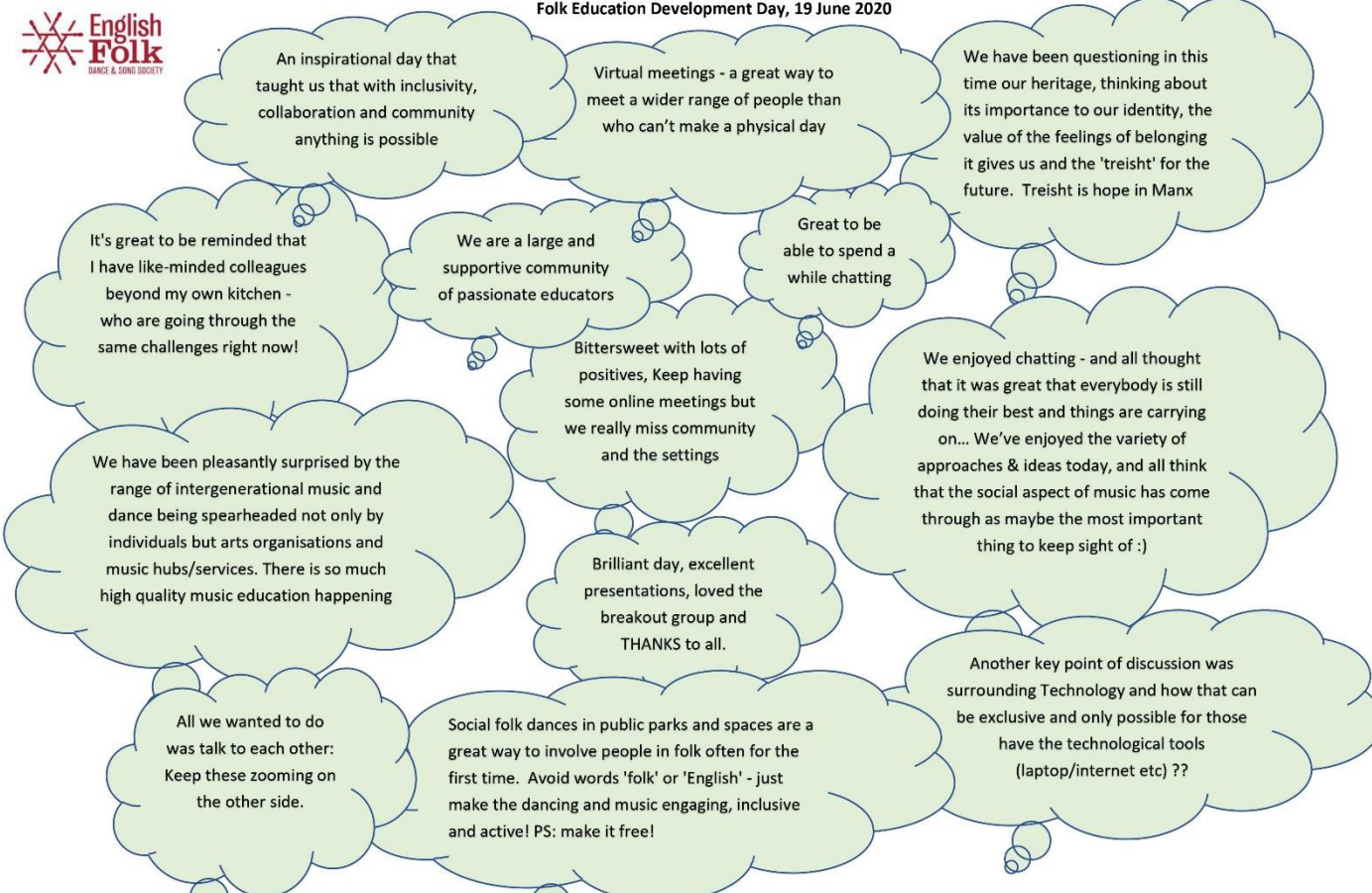
This was the first ever online Zoom Folk Education Development Day and was attended by 70 people from all over the country and overseas, including the Isle of Man, Wales, Scotland, USA, Canada, Italy and Belgium. Delegates came from a wide variety of backgrounds and encompassed freelance folk arts educators and staff from music education hubs, folk arts development organisations, and a range of other cultural organisations. As well as presenting their work and projects, the speakers all shared their experiences of digital delivery and developing resources, having moved online during this challenging time. There were also some short practical clog dancing and singing workshops too, getting everyone on their feet and taking part. It was a lively and thought-provoking day!

For a snapshot of the day, please see comments from our virtual 'white board' created at the end of the day, and read on for the two reviews below by delegates Isobel Bloomfield and Keith Allen.

The next Folk Education Development Day will be on Zoom in November.

[Click here for more information about the Folk Educators Group and the Folk Education Development Days](#)

Folk Education Development Day, 19 June 2020



English Folk
DANCE & SONG SOCIETY

An inspirational day that taught us that with inclusivity, collaboration and community anything is possible

Virtual meetings - a great way to meet a wider range of people than who can't make a physical day

We have been questioning in this time our heritage, thinking about its importance to our identity, the value of the feelings of belonging it gives us and the 'treisht' for the future. Treisht is hope in Manx

It's great to be reminded that I have like-minded colleagues beyond my own kitchen - who are going through the same challenges right now!

We are a large and supportive community of passionate educators

Great to be able to spend a while chatting

We enjoyed chatting - and all thought that it was great that everybody is still doing their best and things are carrying on... We've enjoyed the variety of approaches & ideas today, and all think that the social aspect of music has come through as maybe the most important thing to keep sight of :)

We have been pleasantly surprised by the range of intergenerational music and dance being spearheaded not only by individuals but arts organisations and music hubs/services. There is so much high quality music education happening

Bittersweet with lots of positives, Keep having some online meetings but we really miss community and the settings

Brilliant day, excellent presentations, loved the breakout group and THANKS to all.

All we wanted to do was talk to each other: Keep these zooming on the other side.

Social folk dances in public parks and spaces are a great way to involve people in folk often for the first time. Avoid words 'folk' or 'English' - just make the dancing and music engaging, inclusive and active! PS: make it free!

Another key point of discussion was surrounding Technology and how that can be exclusive and only possible for those have the technological tools (laptop/internet etc) ??

Review by Isobel Bloomfield

A lovely chance to connect regarding experiences before and during lockdown in the first Folk Educators Development Day held online.

The realm of folk may deal with ancient traditions but the team at the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS) and many of the speakers demonstrated the field's brilliant adaptations and innovations to the covid-19 lockdown. Although this was not the topic of the day, the positive methods organisations and individuals have used to cope in this restricting time in order to maintain the innately social nature of the folk activities they do was nothing short of inspiring. As for the technical element to the day itself, the zoom experience felt very well managed and easy, with the team going to the aid of anyone who had difficulties and talking us calmly through how to navigate the technical interface. Some speakers used technical aids while others poignantly demonstrated technologies shortfalls, while noting the added benefits it may have.

The day began by gathering virtually in a zoom room, eventually filling four separate pages, while Kerry Fletcher, the Folk Educators Group Co-ordinator, welcomed us. To manage technical delay, and the large number, introductions were made in the chat, allowing a good overview of the many people present in an otherwise quite impersonal situation when reduced to a small square on a screen full of people. Then, at 11am sharp Kerry began by introducing the day, thanking the attendees, especially those from overseas.

After a short zoom etiquette introduction, the day was kicked off by the EFDSS Education update shared between Sarah Jones, Programme Manager for the National Youth Folk Ensemble; Esbjörn Wettermark, Education Manager and Rachel Elliott, Education Director. The team summarised EFDSS' educational activities during lockdown, including the National Youth Folk Ensemble, Youth Sampler Days, Inclusive Folk, Saturday Folk Music Workshops and the Cecil Sharp House Choir. This started a precedent for sharing challenges and successes in the shift to online and digital methods during lockdown. Useful approaches for managing activities was shared and provoked much interest in questions from other attendees. Rachel signposted some events and gave us a useful reminder to utilise the online Resource Bank. It was noted that some people have struggled with the shift to digital activities, but the use of online methods overall has been largely successful.

Tom Besford, Chief Executive of English Folk Expo (EFeX), then brought the days focus of the North West to the fore. He clearly introduced EFeX's activities in supporting the English Folk, Roots and Acoustic music industry, drawing particular attention to their artist and promoter mentoring and training programmes. Tom's engaged presentation showed how despite their lack of the usual opportunities to help artists gain audiences and attention of bookers, they have made use of artists online concerts in lockdown by creating a webpage, Lockdown Live, to help artists gain audiences and financial support. Similarly, they have begun an international collaboration showcasing bands to help cross-pollinate audiences prepare for future touring. It was exciting to hear about the numerous activities both usually performed by EFeX, and in response to lockdown.

The next session, and probably my favourite of the day, was a discussion and short workshop with Georgia Leigh Woodhead, clog dancer and teacher with Oakenhoof Folk Arts. After introducing herself, she explained how Oakenhoof were founded to continue the local rushbearing tradition and have become a lively and creative community dance group. She highlighted the difficulty not being able to meet socially at the moment, but the continuation of group practice online. Georgia taught us two steps of Pat Tracey's Old Lancashire Air, using a thumb-ometer feedback system to confirm if we had got the steps. It was a welcome shift to standing, and it was great fun to try. Conducting a dance workshop online is not easy but Georgia held her audience and introduced a vital element of participation to the day. She finished by impressively demonstrating the two steps we had learnt at full speed, while simultaneously singing the tune. This session had me so inspired that I spent most of my lunch practising.

Before lunch we heard from Kath Becker and Sorrel Harty, tutors with Bolton Music Service. This session outlined the development of the Greater Northern Folk Ensemble. Kath introduced the ensemble and explained the importance of not using 'dots' (stave notation) with a mixed ability group, instead using movement, singing and other techniques to build on peoples' abilities to learn and play by ear. Sorrel followed this by explaining how methods such as bee-hiving were inspired by the National Youth Folk Ensemble, and

she played us a piece of music recorded from a session using the methods. In summary, the success of this approach has led to the group learning at a quicker pace, being confident folk players.

The time for lunch had arrived and we were sent to our breakout rooms, should we want to converse over the break. My room was quiet, and I took a break from the computer to practise my clog dancing. The social aspect of breaks and lunch was a difficult element to emulate online, and despite EFDSS creating opportunities for this, it is one area that was not equivalent to sharing a room together.

After lunch we launched into the enthusiastic and engaged presentation of Rebecca Denniff, Artistic Director, and David Owen, Creative Director, of Flash Company Arts. Their presentation vividly introduced us to the organisation and its strong focus on arts as a celebration of heritage and identity. They gathered our opinions on the Mentimeter app, about community, our favourite folk song and more, later demonstrating how they use this method in song-writing workshops. Rebecca sang The Penny Hedge for anyone who wanted to join in, and it was nice to see faces singing even if we couldn't hear them. David highlighted the reintroduction of the mummers play to their area and the confident political approach to the characters. The zoom room was buzzing after this information-full presentation with humour throughout.

The final presentation of the day was led by folk singer, fiddler and new Learning Programme Manager at Band on the Wall in Manchester, Bella Hardy. She explained that her role at the famous venue is part of an exciting new development of the building and accompanying learning programme. Bella detailed the plans to focus on music and its heritage from the area, paying particular consideration to migrant communities. As the only presenter to mention the Black Lives Matter movement directly, it brought a needed acknowledgement of the multiple heritages influencing British music and the importance to speak about this. The activities planned for the next four years focus on supporting young people, critical awareness of heritage, and accessible learning. These have been directly impacted by the lockdown, forcing quick action to create online resources and reinvigorate their website. Bella leads the World of Music Choir, currently online, and she closed her session by teaching us a short round. I have been singing it all week particularly while changing my niece's nappies – it's rather catchy! She also amusingly demonstrated the hazards of singing simultaneously unmuted on zoom, much to my aural displeasure. Bella was a great speaker who sparked a lot of conversation which was conducive for the following break-out discussions.

The task for our breakout sessions, made particularly short as we had overrun, was to discuss the day and create a sentence together. It was really lovely to talk, especially after not having many opportunities for this, and our group struggled to reduce this discussion to one sentence. It was great to hear how different people had taken away different things, and this was even more apparent on re-joining the whole group to see our tagline sentences posted on a collective slide. Ideas of community, heritage, identity, hope, as well as approaches to aural learning and the difficulties and benefits of online activities stood out to me most. Overall, this was a cathartic end to an interesting day, allowing an element of cross-group connection in an otherwise tricky situation. Albeit slightly rushed, it was an emotional climax to a digitally and socially engaged day celebrating the power of folk arts.

Isobel Bloomfield is a postgraduate dance student, academic and producer from Cornwall. Her background is in Appalachian clogging and flatfooting, and further contemporary dance training. She is a community performer with Shindig Cloggers, as well as an independent artist and researcher.

<https://www.facebook.com/IsobelBloomfieldFlatFootAppalachian/>

Review by Keith Allen

The day began with Kerry Fletcher (FEG Co-ordinator) welcoming all the participants to the day and acknowledging the tremendous technical effort involved, which, as it turned out, was masterfully overseen by Esbjörn Wettermark (Education Manager). Esbjörn then went through the 'house rules' & techno-etiquette so that things would run smoothly, assuring us that there would be plenty of opportunities for shared discussions – as indeed there were. The collected ensemble of attendees remained content & confident in dealing with the technical aspects throughout the whole meeting.

First up was Sarah Jones (National Youth Folk Ensemble Programme Manager) who gave an overview of the National Youth Folk Ensemble's work through a well-illustrated and engagingly musical PowerPoint slide show. It included video interviews with staff & students alike, allowing us an insight into their work & showcase events. Of particular note was Sarah's description of the NYFE's successful transition to online rehearsals, embracing the necessary technology in a variety of creative ways, such as through their use of BandLab & Zoom. She explained that future events around the UK may well remain 'virtual' for some time to come and therefore some considerable financial investment has to be made to achieve this outcome.

Esbjörn Wettermark (Education Manager) further developed the theme of how technology was being embraced to move the Inclusive Folk pilot project online, citing the use of the Acapella app & other ways using video creatively. It was interesting to note the team's perception that they expect there to be some long-lasting advantages of these interactive platforms over and above the more traditionally employed, face-to-face teaching methods. He emphasised that this current investment of time will prove to be invaluable in the organisation's ability to offer greater diversity of teaching methods in future. Sarah added that aspects of their pastoral role were still very high on the agenda - and not everything is destined to become 'screen-driven'.

Rachel Elliot (Education Director) contextualised the role of the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS), referring to both its historical role & ambitions, under the current COVID19 climate. She explained that the financial challenges of this current situation are significant, and appealed to people attending the day to consider donating to the EFDSS Covid Emergency Fund, reminding everyone that this free event costs staff time and resources to run. The team then took some questions about the benefits & pitfalls of moving into the world of virtual involvement, which demonstrated how positive we can feel about future innovations.

Tom Besford (Chief Executive, English Folk Expo) described the strategy that EFEx had employed in response to COVID19 which included live streaming, on-line tuition, live digital Folk Talk & the Folk Charts. In an attempt to create global collaborations, they've explored various platforms, providing opportunities for musicians around the world to perform together. EFEx are keen to retain the 'public presence' of Folk music in these stay-at-home times, not least through their Promoter Training Programme.

A confident description of the work of Oakenhoof Folk Arts was enthusiastically presented by Georgia Leigh Woodhead (Junior Foreman, Oakenhoof Clog Dancers), drawing particular attention to the community based and inclusive nature of the work and events run by this dynamic group. We were left feeling very optimistic about the guaranteed future inheritance of folk-arts in the North West after her explanations of the ways that a wealth of opportunities are being presented to the very young. She then followed this up with her lively & precise clogging demonstration; at this point I'm sure everyone welcomed the chance to arise from their desk-bound screen trance and learn one of their local dances.

Bolton Music Service, represented by tutors Kath Becker & Sorrel Harty, again clearly have a cross-generational approach to their work. Kath explained her professional journey from Primary Teacher to Music Teacher with a particular need to develop and deliver an aural strategy to teach folk music in the cross-generational Greater Northern Folk Ensemble. This initiative has included lots of rhythm games & body response activities combined with opportunities for independent learning & folk-related research. Sorrel focussed on the benefits of this cross-generational approach, drawing our attention to the wealth of ideas & influences that such groups can generate from within, which in turn leads to very diverse outcomes and unexpected successes. She emphasised the support that the group had had from the National Folk Youth Ensemble in delivering some of the projects. Together they have developed what they call the Beehive teaching strategy and a recording of their practice was shared; it certainly demonstrated the wide variety of instruments they have combined: brass, reeds, strings and percussion all were woven together to create pleasing fluid structural arrangements. Fellow practitioners in the room would have no doubt related to their sense of satisfaction on achieving these successful outcomes.

After lunch and opportunities for some informal 'chat-room' networking, Rebecca Denniff (Artistic Director) & David Owen (Creative Director) from Flash Company Arts explained their backgrounds, personal provenance and roots across a broad cross section of the folk arts.

Their organisation has produced a range of well designed, eye-catching posters to promote the Whitby Folk Festival Fringe and many other local community-based events where actual participation was the prime motivator. Several of their projects, based on resurrecting defunct traditions & festivals, have adopted contemporary characters to retain a certain degree of authenticity to their origins in these revived adaptations. Much of their work has been in conjunction with Goathland Plough Stots in North Yorkshire, whose tradition is clearly a resilient one and one which is firmly rooted in a relatively small, tightly knit community. Rebecca & David's finale was to introduce the assembled audience to the web-based 'Mentimeter' interactive presentation tool as a means of collective, remote composition for prose, poetry & songs!

Bella Hardy (Learning Programme Manager, Band On The Wall) gave us an enthusiastic introduction to the aims & aspirations of Band On The Wall; a charity run venue in Manchester promoting World & Roots music, particularly when derived from the heritage & legacies of the local migrant communities. They have a laudable & noteworthy programmed plan for nurturing locally based musical leadership, developing an archive and establishing a World Music Choir. Bella also provided us with an introduction & overview to their World Of Music online resource, revealing its potential in our current lock-down situation. It seems equally as useful for teaching establishments as it does for individual practitioners. Finally, Bella raised the question of how we as a group can maintain the momentum of developing new & creative resources gained during lock-down.... but ended her session with a tongue-in-cheek round sung deliberately chaotically to exemplify the limitations we've all encountered with video conferencing!

The day was rounded off with a plenary of feedback from the chat-rooms, and condensed into a graphic display by Esbjörn – all were very positive, focussing on the breadth and range of activity currently spearheaded by a combination of individuals & organisations based in the North West, especially in the light of our current circumstances. Rachel summed up the vision for the day perfectly when she expressed her optimism for future Folk Education Development Days when we're no longer locked in & locked down

Keith Allen – coordinator of **Cornwall Folk Education Collective** & peripatetic teacher for **Cornwall Music Service Trust**; also instrumentalist musician (with **The Murmurations** / **RushAllenVaughman** / **Tatters Morris**) Director of **Cornwall Harp & Gurdy Festival** kallen@cornwallmusicserVICETRUST.org
<https://soundcloud.com/rushallenvaughman> <https://www.facebook.com/themurmurationsduo/>
<https://www.facebook.com/CFECollective> <https://www.facebook.com/cornwallharpngurdy/>