

LIFE



Scottish dancing has its roots in the royal courts of the Renaissance; ((left) Carole Binbrek (middle, first line) with her students at Arabian Ranches. Photos: Brian Salter

Dancing, à la the Scots

DON'T BE SURPRISED, BUT YOU CAN LEARN SCOTTISH COUNTRY DANCING HERE, IN THE DESERT!

Brian Salter

To the newcomer arriving in the Emirates, Dubai can be a confusing place and it is sometimes not that easy to make the connections in order to hear about the myriad societies and social gatherings taking place all over town. Dance groups are numerous and there are meetings one could attend every night of the week if one has the desire (and energy) to do so.

But one particular form of dancing may well be new to many expatriate visitors, albeit that it is now practised all over the world. Scottish Country Dancing has sprung up across the GCC in places as diverse as Riyadh, Muscat, Doha, Abu Dhabi and, of course, Dubai.

SCD is a form of social dance involv-

ing groups of usually eight dancers tracing progressive patterns according to a pre-determined choreography. It has its roots in dances of the royal courts of the Renaissance — becoming popular in the 18th century — and involves groups of six to 10 people dancing to reels, jigs and strathspeys played on the fiddle, accordion, flute, piano, drums — or CD player!

Carole Binbrek runs two SCD groups in Dubai's Arabian Ranches — one on Sunday evenings and the other (for ladies only) on Wednesday mornings. She explains that Scottish Country Dancing is typically done in sets of three, four or five couples, arranged either in two lines (men facing ladies) or in a square, and involves the participants dancing a sequence of set formations enough times to bring them back to their starting positions.

"SCD is a very social form of dancing, not only because you get to dance with seven or so people at once, instead of just with one

partner, but also because there are workshops, balls and social dances being held in places all over the world," she says.

Scottish country dances can be either fast or slow. Reels and jigs feature fast tempos with quick movements and have a lively feel to them. Strathspey, on the other hand, has a much slower tempo and a more formal, stately feel to it. Many of the dances have exotic or interesting names — such as 'Wind on Loch Fyne', 'A Trip to Bavaria', or 'Reel of the 51st' — some of which have an interesting story to tell in their own right.

"The main point about SCD is having fun," Carole continues, "and while, for many dancers, getting the footwork right is a very important element, a much more important aspect of good SCD technique is to ensure that one is at the right place at the right time."

In common with most SCD groups, Carole starts each dance by getting the participants to walk through their places, so that

when the actual dance begins, everyone has a much better idea of what they should be doing. "There are well over 11,000 dances catalogued by the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society, and it would be impossible for everyone to know them all. But there are only four basic steps and several basic formations such as a circle or a wheel, so after quite a short time, most people can fully participate in a dance."

"SCD is all about social dancing — interacting not just with a partner, but with all the other dancers. It is very much a team effort, and when you get to the end of a quite complicated dance, there is often a feeling of elation just for having got through it all and ending up in the right position," she adds. "If a dance collapses occasionally then we also just end up having a good laugh."

"I am often asked if SCD is just for Scottish people," Carole continues, "but in fact it appeals to all nationalities. You do need a sense

of direction though, in order to be in the right place at the right time. Many engineers make excellent Scottish country dancers as they are used to seeing patterns. It's also a good aerobic exercise and is the equal of any session you will get in an aerobic dance class or the gym — and much more interesting."

A new study on the effects of Scottish dancing on retired people was done recently. One group learned Scottish dancing for six months and the other group did other forms of exercise. The group doing the Scottish dancing was by far the fitter at the end of the experiment.

There is also the added bonus that an SCD dancer can take off to the other side of the world and be welcomed by a local group almost anywhere. "What better way could there be of making new friends?" Carole concludes.

"Anyone interested in joining one of Carole's sessions can get further details from her on dubai.scd@gmail.com

Scout's honour

A Danish princess talks about being a Girl Guide once upon a time — and what makes the movement a force to reckon with

Karen Ann Monsy

The first picture of them tends to bring smartly-dressed young girls — loaded with cookie tins for sale — to mind. But ask Princess Benedikte of Denmark what she thinks of Girl Guides/Scouts around the world and she'll tell you: they're the most dynamic girls she's ever come across. And considering the world personalities some former Scouts have become today — Hillary Clinton, Mariah Carey, Sheryl Crow and Martha Stewart, to name a few — that's not too hard to believe. In fact, with 160,000 of them in the Arab region and over 10 million worldwide, the UAE's own Girl Guides seem to be quite a well-kept secret — one the Princess hopes will be an open one before long.

A strong supporter of the Movement for a few decades now — since taking over as President of the Danish Girl Guides from her mother — Princess Benedikte was in town last week to promote the Global Girls Fund, a campaign launched by the World Association

of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) to mark the Movement's centenary years. It's a movement very close to her heart, she says, as being part of WAGGGS allows her to "connect with young people and their development in society."

Now more than 25 years on, the mark of a true Scout/Guide is a pretty clear one to her. "A Girl Guide is a person you can trust," she states. "Someone who is inquisitive, eager to learn, has her eyes and ears open for new things — and is as prepared as possible to deal with those new things".

Dr Margaret Treloar, chair of the Association, explains: "We call it learning by doing. It's a very attractive concept to young people — which is, of course, why Girl Guiding/Scouting has grown and survived for 100 years. It's the opportunity to try something new that they would perhaps never have had the chance to try in another environment. And the girls are usually successful because they're not on their own; they learn to work as a team." The girls have opportunities to work for programmes collectively with young women from other countries," adds Treloar, referring to the organisation's network that extends to 145 countries worldwide. "I think the younger you are, the more chances you have of getting into a position to make decisions for your family, your community — and in many cases, for the country."

According to the Princess, the Girl Guides/Scouts movement is instrumental in developing self-esteem as well. "You'll probably



Princess Benedikte of Denmark — KT Photo by M Sajjad

see more and more women in higher positions who are doing very well for themselves in the long term — and if you ask them what they were as children, they'll say they were Girl Guides who were taught skills that came to be pretty useful in later life as adults," she predicts. Interestingly, Princess Benedikte's work for the Movement is hardly in 'the line of duty'; it's her personal connection that actually has a lot to do with it. A former Girl Guide herself, she shared how her own experience moulded her life and still guides her

today. "Being part of the Girl Guides opened my eyes to many lessons: tolerance, friendship, self-confidence — an awful lot that I'm thankful for in my everyday life, be it at home or in my travels."

While she's met thousands of young women during her travels, her message to all of them is the same: "Work hard to better yourselves. Keep some goals to aim for and know that what you're doing is making a difference" — even when it seems like anything but. "Sometimes people help out with

a small local project which they don't feel is contributing much," elaborates Treloar. "But it's very important to understand: it all adds up. All those small differences which are made in towns, villages and communities across the globe are how we will make a difference worldwide. Even though one at a time it doesn't seem like much, 10 million times means each of those small efforts will have a big impact." And then, she concludes, they will be a force to reckon with.

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