

Chippenham has an excellent Children's Festival with a variety of activities for different ages and abilities. Our 8-year-old especially enjoyed a rapper workshop run by members of NYFTE (National Youth Folklore Troupe of England). The young women and men of NYFTE organised the children into two groups where everyone was roughly the same height (very important in rapper) and instructed them in how to hold the two-handed swords.

Robert's group was led, step-by-step, through several figures and then practiced what they had learned to some music provided by a NYFTE melodeon player. The children's faces were a picture of intense concentration, and when they got to the end of the dance and held up a star made from their swords, their excitement and pleasure were evident. NYFTE's instructors were very patient and good at directing the children, even very shy ones like Robert.

Rapper wasn't the only dancing opportunity available at the Children's Festival this year. There was the ever popular family ceilidh, suitable for children under 7 and fun for the entire family. Children are often seen at the adults' lunchtime ceilidhs, of course, but the relaxed atmosphere of the Kids' Castle is an excellent place for the younger set to hone their dancing skills.

And it wasn't all dancing. Children attending the festival could choose from a wide variety of activities: crafts, singing, learning a musical instrument, watching a concert or a magic show, or creating their very own show at Gacko's giant puppet booth. The puppetmaster gave the large group of children a quick series of lessons on how to move their puppets and how to speak in a loud, clear voice when behind the puppet booth. He displayed excellent crowd control skills, organizing the boisterous crowd into manageable groups and helping each group create a story of their very own. Everyone had a good time, and the shows were also hugely entertaining for the adults. We all roared with laughter as our children introduced their puppets ("My name is Mr Blokey Guy!") and improvised their own hilariously bizarre dialogue.

*Emily Hendren-Allwright*