

FASH Chat - Eastbourne International Folkdance Festival

Fran Sly and Margaret Linton went to Eastbourne International Folkdance Festival over the early spring bank holiday at the beginning of May. It is a compact festival taking place on two adjacent school sites on the east side of the town. Many people stay in the many seafront hotels in central Eastbourne, which is a short drive away. The Travelodge is also very conveniently located. There is space for about 30 caravans and camper vans on the main school site, with access to showers. Hot and cold food and drinks are available in the school both at lunchtime and in the early evening.

The festival is unusual in combining English social dance and International dance streams. There are up to 5 halls in use at any time – 3 English/American events and 2 international.

There were 6 excellent social dance callers and 6 bands – all home-grown. The festival attracted many experienced social dancers but there were also a couple of large club groups which included less experienced dancers, some of whom had never been to a festival before. So although the workshops mainly assumed a good level of knowledge of dance figures, callers had to accommodate the 'newbies'. This year there was also a Contra basics workshop with Geoff Cubitt and maypole workshops – basic and advanced – with Chris Turner.

On the international side there were teachers from Netherlands and Italy as well as those established in this country, and a band called Maggie's Mix which includes Rod and Frances Stradling.

Our impressions?

The highlight of the festival for Fran was the Playford ball, with Colin Hume and Momentum. The music was sublime and there was lots of room for the dance moves to flow as they should. Margaret, who is fairly new to Playford enjoyed it too. Fran also went to two quite different 'Zesty Playford' workshops. Colin's was moderately complex but still very lively; Rhodri Davies' used simple dances. Plus there were several fantastic zesty contra and squares sessions and social dance workshops on various themes.

Margaret ended up doing mainly International. Israeli dance was exciting, Armenian lyrical using arms and heads as well as feet. She also had a go at Italian, Balkan and South Seas. South Seas turned out to be done mainly sitting down and involved, among other things, playing pebbles from the beach in the manner of castanets, and tossing sticks between us in groups of four, a source of much hilarity. She had a go at quadrilles for the first time, including a version from the Philippines. Nobody seemed to mind lack of experience or ignorance of the steps. There was always an expert to copy. The dances we did ranged from simple to long and complicated.

Dancing all day with lovely music, different rhythms and steps, good company, and excellent food in the café. What more could anybody want?

Fran Sly and Margaret Linton