

DAWNS GERALD

Gerald's Dance

Introduction

The first written record of dance in Wales came in 1188 from Giraldus Cambrensis' *Itinerarium Cambriae* (Gerald of Wales' Itinerary through Wales). It's very different to the folk dance we practice in Wales today with neat rows of dancers following set pathways, who, apart from holding their partner's hand or to manipulate a prop such as a shawl, broom or hanky, as part of the dance, rarely raise their hands above their waist. It should be noted that the pathways of Welsh Folk dance have intricate weaves and figures of eight, that from the outside seamlessly move from one to the next allowing the viewer to become delightfully lost in the crossing of dancers amongst themselves before they emerge back to their neat rows. The influence of a Catholic ideology inflects Gerald's writing, it references unlawfulness, which is assumed to be to unlawfulness to Catholic values as he was traveling with the Archbishop of Canterbury, at the time. He also gives us some descriptive language that leaves open questions as to what this dance was and why people did it (in bold in the quote below).

Gerald's description

*You may see men or girls, now in the church, now in the churchyard, now in the dance, which is **led round the church yard with a song**, on a sudden **falling to the ground** as in a **trance**, then **jumping up in a frenzy**, and **representing with their hands and feet**, before the people, **whatever work they have unlawfully done on feast days...**¹*

Context

The folk dance we know in Wales today is a broken tradition, it almost completely stopped during the Methodist revival of the 1700s. Apart from clogging which remained unbroken thanks to the Romani Gypsy families who continued to dance. What we have is a patchwork of notated dances and remembered dances that have informed the writing of many new dances.

The dances are notated in a particular way, an attempt to safeguard what has been remembered and what has been created since the revival that started in the 1940s.

¹ Giraldus Cambrensis (1806): [*Itinerarium Cambriae*] *The Itinerary of Archbishop Baldwin through Wales*; translated by R.C. Hoare, (London: W. Miller, 1806, 2 vols).

12th CENTURY DANCE NOTATED FOR THE 21st CENTURY

What follows is an attempt to capture the description from Gerald of Wales (without the inflection of unlawfulness) in the form of a Welsh Folk Dance from the 21st Century.

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Formation: As many dancers as are available to dance, whom wish to do so, following figures of their pleasing which may include any of the Figures 1-3 below, as well as multitude of other variations.

Tune: Beginning with song, any song to which the majority of dancers are familiar and able to sing together. This may change depending on the dancers. Music that speaks to the dancers internal rhythms or no music at all. This could be played live or recorded and from any genre. This music can change each time dancers gather to dance this dance.

1. ***Led by song***

Led by song the dance meanders, turning and looping around objects and obstacles. Dancers follow one another with any dancer choosing to take the lead at any point.

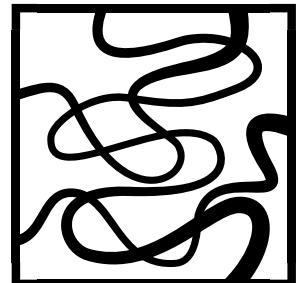


Figure 1

2 ***Trance***

- Dancers move their bodies with the idea of playing with the gravitational pull of the earth, finding momentum in their limbs and finding where that momentum takes them. What do they get for free? This may take dancers to floor, before they rise up again just as quickly as they fell. Seemingly distorting their relationship to gravity and appearing as though in a trance.
Dancers move individually.

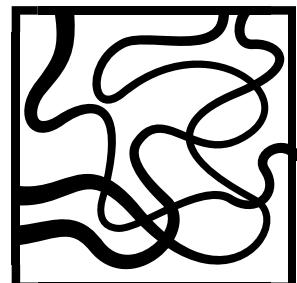


Figure 2

3. ***Representing with their hands and feet***

Rhythm enters the dancers movement in their hands and feet, rhythm of the heart, rhythm of the breath, rhythm of the pulse of blood through their veins. Dancers may move together or individually, they may connect through movement, breath or touch.

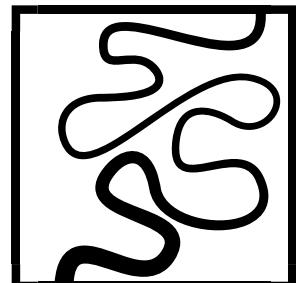


Figure 3