

**Folk Educators Group
Folk Education Development Day
Online 13 November 2020**

**Theme: Inclusive Folk Arts and Disability
Review by Alex Cumming**

Well here we are, the second Online FEG Development Day. It's 5.30am as I am on the East Coast of America, large cup of coffee in hand and a lot of excitement about the day to come. As somebody with disabilities, this was an event that seemed very important to attend, not only to connect with others but to also learn much more about the vast world of disabilities and how we can all work to be much more inclusive. The day started perfectly with entrance music in the background, the announcement of Closed Captioning and a very prompt delegation which meant things kicked off 5 minutes early. Kerry Fletcher and Esbjörn Wettermark welcomed us all in their ever smiley way and we were off.

Kicking us off in fine style was Jane Bird, a great caller with experience of running dances for people with a wide range of SEN and disabilities. This was a discussion rich session which was well moderated by Jane with contributions from many about experiences of dancing with dyspraxia and mobility issues. Jane got us to dance the Canadian Barn Dance, a great couple dance which is easily adaptable to many situations. Due to a pain and fatigue flare I danced whilst sitting down, but this did not take away from the enjoyment. The main reason for dancing this together (other than to wake us all up) was to discuss our own experiences dancing that dance and how we may adapt for different situations and include those who may feel excluded. Adaptations discussed included doubling figure lengths or using unphrased dances, a particularly helpful tool for people with mobility issues or wheelchair users (of which I have much experience). The subject of terminology was also discussed, the importance of gender free terminology and Left/Right free terminology. A very fruitful and important discussion overall which had myself bubbling with new ideas, but considering I am a caller I could geek out on this for the whole review, so best I move on.

Next up was Miryam Solomon, Programme Coordinator at Drake Music. She gave a presentation on Drake Music's work on increasing the number of disabled music leaders through their Emergent Trainee Scheme. In particular Miryam covered the amazing ensemble, Soundbox which is an inclusive music group for young Disabled and non-disabled musicians based in East London. This group uses a mix of instruments, voices, percussion and incredible music making technology to create a full and exciting sound. Truly inspirational work, of which I would have loved to have more time to learn about, but alas the 20 minutes was done.

Pete Sparkes, the Artistic Director of Drake Music Scotland followed next with an insightful look at their work of creating equal opportunities for disabled musicians. This was particularly fascinating as Pete talked a lot about technology, particularly their MusicSPACE programme's move online due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Some innovative technology and music resources were discussed including an amazing music notation system called Figurenotes which uses colours and shapes to dictate pitch, rhythm and more. This was completely new to me and I am very excited about the opportunity to learn more about this system in the future. Tablets were also discussed and it was confirmed that the iPad was the best for music making, and with it some incredible apps like ThumbJam are available. Pete also shared some video examples from Drake Music Scotland's inclusive group, Equilibrium, which uses traditional Scottish music as it's inspiration, including a

collaboration with Aidan O'Rourke. This all too short session wrapped up with some important words, "To create inclusivity you will need to change, even if it is uncomfortable".

Rachel Elliot, EFDSS Education Director graced our screens next with an update on the incredible work EFDSS is doing to address two key issues, safeguarding and abuse and racism. Rachel explained about the organisations new safeguarding webpage with the EFDSS safeguarding policies, code of conduct and links to resources, organisation and advice for setting up your own safeguarding policies, where victims of sexual harassment can seek help and more. Rachel also touched on the work EFDSS is undertaking to combat racism, underlying that this "falls within our work striving towards greater Equality / Equity, Diversity and Inclusion within folk – across all nine 'protected characteristics,' - including race, disability, and gender, plus socio economic status". She sums up saying "a lot more will - and needs - to follow".

Part two of the EFDSS update comes from Sarah Jones, Programme Manager, National Youth Folk Ensemble. Sarah updated us on the Ensemble's strange year moving online, but despite not being able to meet in person the group have had a lot of time together. A great video collaboration was shared featuring tunes learnt during virtual gatherings. The new cohort and tentative plan for the year (pandemic pending) was introduced as well.

After a break for lunch (breakfast for me), Folk Singer and Educator Rosie Hood shared her knowledge and experience of working using folk music with children and young people in SEND schools through organisations such as Live Music Now (LMN). Rosie got her session off to a great start by sharing an interactive multi track video of her leading a hello song along with sign language. Rosie guided us through some of her work with LMN including a 10-week residency with Jamie Roberts at SEMH school in the North East, multiple residencies with Dovetail trio and a 1 year solo residency at an SEND school in Hull. Rosie shared some wonderful examples of creating an inclusive, educational and rewarding experience. Using My Bonnie Lies Over The Ocean, Rosie demonstrated actions and sign language to use as well as ideas for creating musical soundscapes on the ocean theme. Another multi tracked video of this song was shared. Rosie also touched on the importance of songwriting to help develop creativity and interaction and the important role folk songs can play. The example of Drop of Nelson's Blood was used by participants suggesting ideas, for example someone shouting *chocolate* can be turned into '*a nice chocolate bar wouldn't do us any harm*".

Rosie also touched on continuing to work during the pandemic and how she learnt a new way to deliver music both through online conference calls and via pre-recorded videos which she learnt to edit together. Rosie shared some great tips on how to create engaging video content including making virtual eye contact, making a short but varied program with different sounds, activities and songs, plus also finding the right day to record, the right mood is everything. Rosie also shared her experience of starting back up in some schools under new Covid-19 regulations, and though there are more hoops to jump through, the live music and ability to connect in person with the children was important. Rosie wraps up, "The importance of music making has not gone away".

The Inclusive Folk team at EFDSS gave an insightful look at their work in creative music making using storytelling frameworks. Esborn Wettermark (Project Manager), Emmie Ward (Lead Tutor), Nick Goode (Tutor) and Alice Barnard (Trainee Music Leader) all shared their experiences and knowledge during this session. This session mainly focused on their work with people with PMLD (Profound and Multiple Learning Disability) through programs such as Folk UNlimited. The importance of multi sensory experience was explained, and the idea of using not only music and sound but also movement, touch and smell as well. A great example of this was given with the

song Tree In The Wood. For each verse a different sensory experience was suggested, these included a wood scented candle for the line 'All in a wood there was a tree', shredded paper for 'And on that branch there was a nest', Egg shakers for 'And on that nest there was an egg' and the idea of a slightly crushed fresh leaf for the refrain 'And the green leaves grew around'. This idea of Sensory Storytelling is pretty new to me, so this really has got me excited to explore this idea more. The important role of Soundscapes featured again with some great examples from their London themed sessions; River Thames used rainmakers, ocean drums samples of nature sounds, tuned instruments and the London Cityscape used cowbells drums loud urban type sounds samples of city sounds. The team also shared their experiences of moving the program online. Despite the time lag, they discovered soundscapes work well in this situation. Despite best efforts, the online experience did not work for everyone, so maintaining the connection with students through the pandemic has been really tough. This was a really educational insight into the work of the Inclusive Folk team at EFDSS, with one of the highlights being Alice Barnard's amazing work using the Acapella app.

The day rounded off with discussions in small groups using Zoom breakout rooms. This was a really great opportunity to discuss thoughts, feelings and insights from the day with a small group or around 5 or 6. Each group was tasked with coming up with providing a piece of feedback from the day to share with the delegation. The overarching theme of feedback was Folk music should really be for all people, and in the pursuit of achieving this you will need a change in mindset, be okay with making mistakes along the way and never underestimate anyone's ability. The ceilidh dancing lead by Jane at the start of the day really caught a lot of people's imaginations and many groups discussed dance adaptations. This culminated in the day finishing up with a wonderfully silly historical dance, sadly though I was so engaged in the dance I forgot to write the name down. [ed. Monk's Branle]

This was a truly inspirational, educational and enlightening day. This day really was an important step forward for the folk scenes journey to become more inclusive and I cannot wait to see the knowledge shared today continue to grow in our community. Traditional Folk music has always been an ever evolving thing, and our work to make our community more inclusive should be the same. Today gave me hope and reassurance that this work is happening.

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