



Charming Luxembourg

Andrea Forstner

A view of Luxembourg city centre. Photographs by Pat Murphy.

As May turned into June, a wonderful set dance weekend got under way in a beautiful hotel just outside Luxembourg city. It was the first set dance weekend here in seven years. From my home in Erlangen in Bavaria, it is a long way to Lux but the trip was well worth the drive. In beautiful weather I left various counties in Germany behind me and crossed the Rhine and Mosel valleys before entering little Luxembourg.

Right at the hotel door I got a great welcome from Gerrie Paulus, one of the three lovely ladies who organized the weekend for the Luxembourg branch of Comhaltas. Gerrie, Mary Butler and Rose McCabe are the most warmhearted ambassadors for set dancing. Rose and Mary are both Irish living in Lux for a long time and Gerrie is a native. They invited top class teachers, Pat Murphy and Tony Ryan.

Before the workshop started, the ladies carefully checked the wooden floor which was laid out on carpet in a spacious room of this big hotel. The floor was bouncy and soft, the same way dance floors are often provided for set dance weekends in Ireland. Regular dancers know how important a good dance floor is: a well-built floor saves energy, avoids accidents and is good for your knees which is most important for your continued ability to dance. Anybody who has suffered knee problems after dancing on inappropriate floors knows that.

After a nice light meal, dancers gathered in the hall looking around to spot well known faces. Participants from all over Europe attended the weekend. Many dancers came from Brussels and Antwerp and from Germany and Switzerland. There were couples from as far away as Paris and a big group from Galway and other corners of Ireland. I

thoroughly enjoyed the company of many dancers that I had never met before and became friends with during the weekend.

Tony Ryan started the Friday evening workshop with the Cuchulainn Set, one of the sets which came 'new on the market' in recent years. After this set we were well warmed up and ready for more. Pat Murphy now continued with the Seit Doire Colmcille, a beauty from County Derry. Each set has parts which are tricky and in the Doire Colmcille this is in the second figure where ladies can easily move too far while going under the arch. Pat explained the difficulties effectively and with charm so that everybody had good fun.

After the workshop dancers gathered in the hotel bar on Friday night for a chat and some singsong. One of the dancers found a piano in the bar and performed some talented entertainment for everybody.

Saturday morning, it was Pat's turn and he started with the popular Antrim Square Set. Tony Ryan continued with the Fermanagh Set, another great set containing many different interesting parts. In the afternoon we continued with the Inis Oírr Set from the smallest of the Aran Islands. This time we were provided with live music by James Hogan and Colin McGill from Ireland, two polite and friendly young men. They used the opportunity to set up the sound for their accordion and keyboard—a great boost for all of us. Our hosting ladies had invited them to play for the ceilis. A great choice!

What a pleasure to see James and Colin back on stage again Saturday night! The mixture of people from all over Europe made this ceili a great success. We danced all the workshop sets plus another interesting selection of sets like the West

Kerry plus many common sets. James and Colin played powerful lively tunes which suited dancers very much. To everybody's surprise, James put on his dancing shoes and came onto the dance floor. He gave us a mighty sample of solo steps! To great clapping and cheering, this talented young man went back on stage to provide us with more tunes.

So that I could enjoy a sightseeing tour with two friends in fine sunny weather, I skipped the Sunday morning workshop. We did a little walking tour through the romantic Müllertal region very near to the venue and took a drive to the historic town of Echternach, well worth another visit.

Just back in time for the afternoon ceili, we once more danced to our boys' music and again we were rewarded with a great selection of sets before the final applause. The lovely weekend slowly came to an end. I have met good old friends and made many new ones thanks to the dedicated organizing work of Gerrie, Mary and Rose.

I was one of the lucky visitors who didn't have to leave until Monday morning. The three ladies took mighty care of all those who could stay on, the teachers, band and a few more. A group of about fifteen was guided through the town of Luxembourg, and what a most charming town it is! We had great fun together, chatting all the way. We finished our tour in a lovely Italian restaurant with pizza, pasta and dessert. And the evening was not over: back in the hotel, participants from Ireland, Luxembourg, Belgium and Germany gathered in the bar to sing Irish and German songs, reciting poems and playing music. We finished the evening with a polonaise through the bar.

The weekend felt like a family gathering!

Andrea Forstner, Erlangen, Germany

The workshop with Tony Ryan teaching left. Pat Murphy, James Hogan, Guy Blitgen, Colin Butler, Tony Ryan, in front Gerrie Paulus, Rose McCabe and Mary Butler.

