

Report to MFS Committee

U3A Classes for Bush and Folk Dancing - Beginner

The Monaro Folk Society (MFS) ran a new series of dance classes in February and March of 2020.

- Average attendance (excluding musicians and organisers) was **28 dancers** per week, who were almost all new to MFS.
- A **profit of \$478.97** was made.
- The dances were from **many genres** but pitched at the **absolute beginner level**.
- The series was run under the University of the Third Age (**U3A**), as well as the MFS, and the U3A did the advertising to their thousands of members.

Lessons Learnt and Discussion

This series was an experiment and the organisers learnt many things that might be interesting to others.

- This series attracted many new dancers in part because it was deliberately **different** from most of the MFS dance series. It was held on a weekday afternoon, not the evening. It included dances from many genres, not focused on one style. It targeted absolute beginners, not a broad range of skill levels. It partnered with another organisation (ie U3A) that had an existing list of thousands of members and that did the advertising.
- The series had a **different demographics** of dancers. They were mostly women (about 90%), were mostly in their 60s and 70s, were all U3A members (or became so), and covered a range from those who hadn't danced since their youth to a few experienced dances (eg international folk dance, Scottish) and everything in between.
- The "bush" and "folk" dance **brands** have considerable appeal amongst this demographic. This dance series successfully competed with other U3A dance courses in Tango, Scottish, International Folk dance and historical dances.
- The dances were selected to be **very easy**, to have no or few special moves, and generally avoided the ballroom hold or other features of couples dances.
- The **low skill level** of the class (lower than many teenagers) meant if most of the dancers had gone to other MFS dances then they would have likely been overwhelmed (by new moves, new terms and the demands of more complex dances) and so would have been unlikely to return. In these dances, the planned progression to more involved dances was largely postponed and additional easy dances were found. A lot of time was spent teaching rather than dancing.
- The **live music** provided was much appreciated by the dancers and organisers.
- The **pandemic** meant that the final four classes in the planned ten week course were cancelled because all U3A classes were cancelled. The drop in attendance in the last

two weeks (ie March) was also likely pandemic affected based on discussion in the class, people wearing gloves, etc. The test of a successful dance course is that people return and, while indications are positive, only time will tell whether dancers will return.

Details

The series made a net **profit** of \$478.97.

- That comprised gross receipts of \$866, room rental of \$340 and incidentals of \$47.03 (for shoulder-to-waist bands in red and blue to reduce confusion in some of the dances).
- Since the course was cancelled early, there is a credit or refund for four weeks of room rental and we owe dancers either a refund for the four dances not provided (though no dancer has asked for a refund) or four free dances when the dance series resumes.

Attendance on each of the dance dates was between about two and three dozen. Each dance was from 2 to 3pm on Thursdays at the Yarralumla Uniting Church Hall.

| Date | Attendance (excluding organisers) |
|------------------|--|
| 6 February 2020 | 30 |
| 13 February 2020 | 28 |
| 20 February 2020 | 30 |
| 27 February 2020 | 34 |
| 5 March 2020 | 24 |
| 12 March 2020 | 24 |

The dance series was run as a U3A course, as well as a MFS series.

- The U3A is an organisation for people who run courses for each other as volunteers. While anyone over 50 can join, it is mostly attended by retirees.
- This was a successful partnership. While it necessitated fitting within the U3A rules, that was not a large burden. The greatest benefit is that U3A advertises the course to their thousands of members.

The course **organiser** was Bruce Taplin, who was assisted by Christine Gifford, Roger Gifford and Anne Mathas. Dances were called by Bruce, Christine and Roger.

Thank you for the **live music** that was organised by Ray Mulligan and played by Ray, Margaret Anderson, Moir Holmes and Madelaine Johnson.

Bruce Taplin
[date]