

RSCDS New York Branch – Survey of dancers. Spring 2014

Results

25 surveys were returned. Some surveys were received from a couple. Not all dancers answered all sections.

Facilities

1. Please rate the following aspects of a dance venue in terms of how important they are to you.

Sprung wooden floor

Very important	Somewhat important	Not at all
17	8	-

- doesn't have to be sprung but not concrete
- wooden floor even unsprung, very important

Street parking nearby

Very important	Somewhat important	Not at all
3	7	15

- not at all for me-but I want teachers & other dancers to be able to get to us.
- not at all – but convenient public transport
- nice but not a deal breaker

Separate room for a basic class

Very important	Somewhat important	Not at all
7½	15½	-

Air conditioning

Very important	Somewhat important	Not at all
14½	8½	3

- very important for summer dancing
- nice if available
- fans are nice if no a/c

Good acoustics

Very important	Somewhat important	Not at all
12	12	1

- not at all as long as we can hear the teachers and the music isn't distorted
- separate room for basic class helps beginners but cost should be considered
- very important!

2. In terms overall ambience, please circle any of the following items are very important to you:

Convenient place to sit during the break

Circled	Not circled
12	13

- nice to have, not crucial to me
- yes, although I find I rarely sit during the break

Tea-making facilities

Circled	Not circled
5	20

- nice to have, not important to me

Other: Please explain:

- Convenient rest rooms, no obstructions
- Convenient garage parking and subway stop.
- Convenient to Penn Sta/Port Authority, either by walking or subway
- Kitchen, Place where we can run a Burns night

- These are nice to have because they set a “community” atmosphere, but I’d be willing to sacrifice them if the venue is otherwise perfect.
- nothing too formal/clinical; a club feeling rather than a gym
- pleasant bathroom
- place to sit and tea adds sociability

3. In terms of cost, would you be willing to pay more per night?

Yes	No
23	3

- Yes but only if it didn’t cost us people.
- \$2 would be fine
- It would depend upon the premises
- Yes \$25
- Yes, \$1 OK, may be open to \$2 with convincing
- \$8 is too cheap
- Pearl seems unpopular
- yes, but not at Pearl

4. Please add any comments that you think would help the search committee find a suitable venue.

- St Barts is looking good.
- Floor space would be my first priority; ideally no columns.
- not too many stairs to climb
- a storage cupboard
- consider Brooklyn Heights – it’s only one stop on subway from Manhattan and there are lots of churches
- an organization should not only think of breaking even
- good acoustics are of crucial importance to me
- to me, Scottish Dancing is more than a dance class in a sterile room with mirrors. It’s a community in a social setting. and I think there should be some amenities/aspect of comfort, “hominess”.

B. Class structure

5. How important is it to you that a separate basic class takes

Very important	Somewhat important	Not at all
8½	14½	1

Comments:

- I think it’s very important to make sure that EVERYONE learns the basics.
- Open to different options
- No separate basic class leaves insufficient time for the more advanced dancers.
- Answers to the above depend on if there are true beginners. If a viable class of at least four routine attendees exists then a separate basic class is very important
- Our experience with other groups indicates that having separate basic classes makes attracting and retaining new dancers much easier.
- I have accepted the Scotia format for 30 years. But I do appreciate their new “experienced only” series. If Branch finds a separate room impossible, maybe they could have a similar “experienced only” short series (not overlapping with Scotia’s)
- Add a class after Beginners class that focuses on technique.
- I do really like this structure, but I’d be willing to sacrifice it if there was no other choice cost-wise.
- an RSCDS Branch should be offering basic instruction
- I feel it is not necessary to rent a second room but rather to have the beginners class at the beginning of the evening and then gradually moving up to cover the needs of intermediate and advanced dancers. The Scotia example worked well (it being understood that the present structure was probably geared to prepare for the

Pawling weekend and the Westchester Ball, but presume this will return to the regular format thereafter). The Dunedin FL SCD group also has the same format as Scotia's regular programme

- it would help the beginners
- it would always come down to cost
- as long as we do something that makes beginners feel included, and welcomed
- skillful teaching can make a basic class useful even for the experienced dancer. Beginners benefit from teaching as well as more experienced dancers.
- having a beginner class for one or two dancers really doesn't work, especially if they don't come back. The problem is made worse if experienced dancers are recruited to help. We don't really have a large group of intermediate and experienced dancers. The intermediate dancers need the more advanced class and they need the advanced dancers to help them improve. If there are five or six beginners a beginner class is essential. As with anything else in life there will be some who have an innate ability for this type of dancing and there will be some who don't. The ones who are more likely to keep coming back if they are doing interesting dances paired with experienced dancers. Later, after they are hooked, the technique will come as they are ready for it.
- This is fine with me. The structure of the teaching has improved so that there is continuity in learning figures and dances within the dancing evening and from week to week – as opposed to the total randomness and confusion I experienced when I was learning – at least, that's how it seemed.

C. Content of classes

6. Overall, how satisfied have you been with the classes at the New York Branch over the past year

Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Not satisfied at all
11	11	-

- somewhat satisfied - Varied by series and location
- (very satisfied) We haven't been able to attend many classes over the past year. We have been satisfied with the classes we attended.
- depends on the teacher
- it depends on the teacher and on the number of geographically challenged dancers.

7. In your first hour class

Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Not satisfied at all
11	11	-

Did you feel that, in general, you did [too many / about the right number / too few] dances?

Too many	About the right number	Too few
-	12	5

Did you find the dances were mostly [too easy / about right / too difficult]?

Too easy	About right	Too difficult
5	10½	1½

Did you find the pace of the class [too fast / about right / too slow]?

Too fast	About right	Too slow
-	10½	7½

Was the attention given to dances on upcoming Ball Programs [too much / about right / too little]?

Too much	About right	Too little
-	14	3

Was the attention given to footwork and handing [too much / about right / too little]?

Too much	About right	Too little
2	10	5

Comments

- varied greatly by series
- The answers to these questions varied totally by series and therefore in my view can't be answered.
- Since the answers to this question vary from night to night, I find it difficult to answer. In general the classes are about right overall.

- On the question of footwork, I have this comment: As we reach a point in life where maintaining the quality of our footwork is difficult due the health issues or the general decline in physical capabilities that accompanies advancing maturity, we can benefit from attention to those aspects of dancing, such as handing, phrasing, covering and practicing formations, both familiar and unfamiliar.
- The answers to these questions depend greatly on the series/teacher. I find that some teachers spend too much time on the real fine points for footwork but never address the real problems with phrasing and formation knowledge. Others spend too much time on “dances” and forget about “dancing”.
- Some teachers did too much technique, some not enough. Some did too few dances, some a good number, but not necessarily appropriate to the room.
- The above is my overall impression. Teachers vary in these respects. One or two teachers were way too slow for my liking. I did notice some other dancers getting impatient.
- We can’t properly answer this section as we have only danced once at the Pearl. However we intend to be more or less regulars now that our Thursday evenings are free.
- I wish there was a bit more attention paid to timing and “handing” – when do hands come up. How to hold hands in the circle (e.g. right hand down left hand up), four hands round (pistol grip with the person opposite), eye contact etc. All too often it’s a scrum and not at all graceful.
- the attention given to footwork too little (except Isabel & Ellen)
- All spot on, teachers are terrific
- Sometimes the teaching was a little slow—i.e., too many walkthroughs or too much explanation (vs. practice). I also would personally like more emphasis on practicing footwork and technique (actually practicing it, not just describing it or injecting it into dances).
- too few dances, especially in the 3rd series
- too much attention given to footwork in the 3rd and 4th series
- bit difficult to rate because varies with teacher
- not interested in learning steps I never use in a social dance setting
- some teachers make the first hour class as hard as the second hour class; other teachers make the first hour class as easy as the basic class. Based on my experience in Westchester, I think it would be better to have one teacher do both the 1st and 2nd hour classes. It would provide a more useful focus for the evening and at the same time make the distribution of easy and difficult dances more flexible.
- I like a teacher who keeps us moving - for the most part
- too few dances sometime during the year
- too slow sometime during the year
- just one difficult dance per evening is enough for me. And if it is a difficult dance teach it thoroughly.
- I think we have great teaching!

8. In the second hour class:

Did you feel that, in general, you did [too many / about the right number / too few] dances?

Too many	About the right number	Too few
-	13	3

Did you find the dances were mostly [too easy / about right / too difficult]?

Too easy	About right	Too difficult
½	14½	-

Did you find the pace of the class [too fast / about right / too slow]?

Too fast	About right	Too slow
-	14	4

Was the attention given to dances on upcoming Ball Programs [too much / about right / too little]?

Too much	About right	Too little
-	14	2

Comments:

- I’d like us to consider starting at 7 so we could break earlier as the second hour feels rushed.
- Same comments as above

- Make it much more fun.
- I very much appreciate how flexible the teachers are in modifying their planned programs to account for the level of ability in the group on any given evening
- I feel that every dance on the evening programme in the last few weeks before the Pawling Weekend or the Westchester Ball should be geared to these events. They shouldn't be crammed into the last couple of weeks (except of course for beginners). The same would apply to the JC Ball. For other 'local' events where there would probably be fewer Branch members attending there could be more of a mix of dances
- the teachers are too shy about asking geographically challenged dancers to sit out. We need to keep the intermediate and advanced dancers enthusiastic about coming on a regular basis. Being in several sets in the course of an evening which you know will break down can be very distressing, especially if you only dance one night per week. (Teachers tend to have more of a missionary focus, otherwise they wouldn't be teachers).
- way too much walking especially in series 3&4
- I think that it is very important to have thorough ball prep, especially last week/class before the ball should be exclusively ball prep. I like doing a ceilidh dance as a warm up – 1st dance before starting classes. It adds variety to the dance format, but is still in the tradition of Scottish dancing. I would also enjoy doing a waltz at the end of class, since we do them at balls and parties, but I feel unprepared to do them and would like to improve or, maybe have a waltz workshop before a ball.

D. Other topics

9. Do you like receiving crib notes and links to videos in advance of the class

Yes	No
20	-

- nice, but not necessary
- Yes (though, admittedly, I don't use them very often)
- ESSENTIAL
- I also like the new Pillings attached to the crib notes. Videos are great when available – we should make our own! When I see a video of myself dancing (which is not often) I see my dance flaws and realize where I can improve, which makes me think it would be fun to choose a more advanced dance with figures and technique that would take several weeks to perfect as an interesting challenge for intermediate/advanced dancers, improving skills, technique, body carriage, timing, covering etc. in the process.

10. Do you like the fact that the Branch has an annual Dance List

Yes	No
15½	1½

- Still not sure – waiting to see if it attains its stated goal.
- No opinion
- Not really
- nice, but not necessary
- no opinion
- yes, but I must have missed it
- seems sometime repetitive
- yes, but rules for programme content are too restrictive

11. What is your opinion about the total number of dances on the Dance List and the level of difficulty of the dances?

- About right!
- It would be fine if all the programmes that our dancers attend came from the list. As things stand now, I'm just not sure.
- The number could be reduced a little, provided it does not stop teachers from introducing interesting new dances from time to time in their classes.
- Seems appropriate to the amount of non-class dancing that is done
- The number is fine; I would prefer a larger proportion of advanced dances on it.

- The number is about right. There are enough dances for a nearly 4 unique programs. A few more A or I/A dances would be nice particularly among the jigs and reels, as would some more B or B/I strathspeys.
- This is more a question than a suggestion; What happens to the dances that are retired from the dance list annually? Can they be included in future programs without being considered being dances from outside the list?
- Both are fine
- Add a dozen more of the “difficult” dances.
- Very good
- Should have more dances, and dance difficulty should range from very easy to rather difficult.
- I honestly don’t think I’ve ever surveyed the dance list as a whole and I never know if what we’re learning is on the list or not, so it’s hard to say!
- OK
- number is OK. Like to try dances from other places eg. dances by teachers at Pawling
- I think it’s a good balance
- Honestly, I haven’t ready the dance list, although I do usually read the weekly notes. And I don’t watch videos. However, I guess these things should be available if someone is using them. What does annoy me, however, is when, after I have read the crib notes, the teacher does something completely different. Could they at least explain briefly why they have switched?
- nice assortment. I like having the dance list as a reference for the dances we do, and it gets us to think about the dances we really like to do.

12. Any other suggestions you would like to make?

- Series teachers teach, as they should, some neat non-list dances. I’d like each series teacher to be able to suggest 1 non-list dance for a series party program if they have taught it during the series.
- Consider voting for teachers as they do in the San Francisco Branch.
- I think that our first priority must be getting and keeping new dancers. Then we need to teach them how to dance successfully so they enjoy the dances, and they more experienced dancers enjoy having them around and are able to make them feel welcome.
- Do more to encourage beginners to dance the second hour. Use the beginner class time to promote membership.
- Should have an active demonstration team or other outreach program to bring in younger dancers
- would like a system that facilitates progressive teaching of beginners – i.e. some incentive to come on a regular basis and not a succession of different new dancers every week
- Encourage the teachers to make clear, audible communication a priority. If that means using a mike, so be it!