

# Resource Pages: Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 5 Fusing Morris and Contemporary Dance

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Royal Albert Hall. Photo: Photos2U

## INTRODUCTION

This article gives excerpts from a new web-based resource produced by the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS), comprising freely downloadable film clips, audio files and teachers' notes. It introduces a creative, contemporary approach to using morris within the secondary dance curriculum.

It shares working methods developed during *Spring Force* a morris/contemporary youth

dance project, produced in 2010 by EFDSS in partnership with Pavilion Dance/Dance South West, working with youth dance group So We Boys Dance. The project culminated in the performance of a four-and-a-half minute dance work fusing Cotswold morris with contemporary dance in the Queen Elizabeth Hall foyer, the Royal Albert Hall and the Pavilion Theatre, Bournemouth.

The resource is currently being trialled by Kirsty Biggenden, Children and Young People's Dance Lead, Pavilion Dance, who reports that 'students in a diversity of school settings have engaged with this resource in a really positive way.'

The complete and detailed Morris Contemporary Dance resource can be found at [www.efdss.org/morriscontemporary](http://www.efdss.org/morriscontemporary). The 'Film clip' links relate to films you can watch of the warm ups, steps and figures used below. There are also links to written notes and music you can use.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Cotswold morris is probably the most widely known form of English traditional dance. Its roots lie in the South Midlands, with distinct *traditions* developing in different villages. Teams or *sides* can now be found across England and beyond. Morris is danced by men and women, in single and mixed-gender sides, with live music. Dancers usually perform with handkerchiefs or sticks. Morris is danced with an upright posture in a neutral, parallel stance which is relaxed but not floppy.

A *set* is the *home* or formation for a morris dance, usually six people – a line of three facing another line of three. The musicians stand at the *top* of the set facing the dancers. A morris dance is structured like a song: verse/chorus/verse/chorus/etc. The correct term for the 'verses' is *figures* – a distinctive series of movements following a particular floor pattern. The *chorus* is essentially the same throughout the dance, though it may develop as the dance progresses.

Although highly structured and rooted in tradition, it is important to be aware that morris is constantly evolving, with new dances regularly being created.

## Before you start using the resource:

- Watch the film of *Spring Force* to familiarise yourself with the dance approach taken in the resource. With students, it may be more productive to watch it when they have already experienced some morris and worked creatively with it.
- Be aware that morris is a high impact form of dance, especially challenging on the lower limbs. Therefore, depending on the floor surface it may be appropriate for students to wear trainers.

## WARM UP GAMES

The resource uses movement games to prepare dancers physically and mentally.

### Forcefield

- Dancers in pairs - facing each other. Starting slowly/gently and building speed/intensity as they circle around and mirror each other, randomly changing direction (*Film 1*).
- The game develops with dancers swapping places by springing across the space between them. The small spring (little more than a step), increasing in size as dancers become warmer; they could also add a spin (*Film 2*).

## MORRIS STEPPING

- Once dancers are warm and showing skill in the above game, introduce some key morris stepping.
- **Single step** – step, hop. Usually come in pairs on alternate feet, i.e. step, hop; step hop. Stationary and travelling step. Give a good push upwards on every step, using the hop to recover (*Film 7*).

- **Double step** – step, step, step, hop. Often comes in multiples of two or six, followed by two single steps. Once achieved, try travelling down the room, experimenting with both the height of the hop, distance travelled and turning corners (*Film 8*).
- **Jump** – two-footed jump comes at the end of most phrases, landing on the beat, often preceded by two single steps, prepare feet together and jump. Jumping is stationary – on the spot or turning (*Film 9*).

## CREATIVE WORK

### Creative stepping sequence

Having learnt morris stepping students can create their own sequence from the above steps – solo or with a partner.

- Students decide where to travel and turn during the sequence, as well as explore variation in height by jumping higher on some steps.
- This should be an 8 or 16-count sequence and should be shared with a partner, with both partners doing the same movement, whether in parallel or in mirror image.
- Students can add arms to the sequence. Arm movements in morris are more distinct between traditions than basic stepping. The resource includes examples that assist beginners with stepping and travelling (*Films 11 and 12*).

### Adding step sequences into figures

The next progression is for students to learn some morris figures. The figures below are straightforward and involve swapping places and back again with a partner so are good ones to start with:

- Back to back (*Film 17*).
- Back to back (*Film 18*).

- Working in pairs, students choose a figure, and add the 16-beat stepping sequence created earlier.
- Encourage students to experiment with their own creative steps within the figures – exploring the variation in the sense of momentum or space coverage within different figures.
- Once students are comfortable combining their steps with their chosen figure, they can move on to starting to teach their sequence to other pairs, and perform their figures in sets of four or six dancers. Any number will work, and there is room to be creative with odd numbers!
- Students can then develop the figures further (e.g. direction of turns, positioning of jumps), extend the movements within the figures and develop their steps.
- They can devise a movement to mark the moments where lines naturally form along the set whilst performing figures (a key feature of morris).

### Further developments

Once dancers have begun to use and understand the patterns of movement and how the dancers relate to each other in pairs, fours or sixes, they can begin to explore the creative potential of fusing morris with other dance forms. There is a great deal of scope in this area and dancers can be encouraged to experiment with what can be created using morris as the basis.

*Morris Contemporary Dance Resource*  
**credits: Producer/ Editor: Rachel Elliott; Choreographers/Writers: Benjamin Dunks (contemporary dance) and Laurel Swift (morris); Composer/ Musician: Robert Harbron; Film Maker: Roswitha Chesher.**