

Interview with Ted Hodapp on November 29, 2021

LM - Lydia McAnerney

TH - Ted Hodapp

LM: Thank you, Ted for joining us tonight on November 29 2021. I really appreciate that you joined us for the founders video back in July and I wanted to follow up with some questions about your involvement with Tapestry and how you got started and some of those kinds of things. So, how did you get started with folk dancing?

TH: Well, I took a class from Ed Stern. He taught a class at the University of Minnesota, which was all kinds of folk dancing and, and one of the requirements for the class was to go to a couple social dances and so I went to the Saltari Folkdance Emporium back in 1979. And, instantly fell in love with that dancing and I started going every Sunday night. And, they had English, American, and British Isles, and Scandinavian dancing. So, I did that for many years until Saltari folded, and then on to Tapestry.

LM: How did you transition from dancing to teaching. Would that, just sort of been, automatic or, how did you move onto that?

TH: I'm not sure I have the memories perfect on this but I'll say is, since I was going every Sunday night I started to do all the dances and I have a reasonably good memory for figures, so I started calling with Ed, some of the English country dances, and some of the contra dances that were being taught on Sunday nights and so start doing that a little bit. And then there's a bunch of people. So, some people wanted to do English country dancing at the Renaissance Festival and so I got together a bunch of people to form a little English country dancing performance group which was ultimately called the Woven Ring. And so, I choreographed dances and started teaching that, and that kind of led me more and more to teaching dancing into thinking about that. And then I went into a lot of workshops around the country and various things and kind of eased into it sort of thing.

LM: Thanks, and when you started getting involved with Tapestry did you get involved with any of the administrative parts, which are pretty much just the dancing part.

TH: As Ed announced that he was going to close Saltari, a bunch of us started having a conversation about what can we do to carry this on and so we formed a little group which ended up being the first, or most of the first Board of Directors for Tapestry Folkdance Center.

And we started meeting on a regular basis to have discussions about what we would do and how we would do this and changing from a for profit business, which didn't make a lot of money to a non not-for-profit business. Getting a 501 c three classification and starting to think about where we would go and those kinds of things. So I was on the first Board of Directors, and we defined everything from, you know, finding the space and finding the music and getting a sound system to getting this kind of incorporation, writing the bylaws and things of this nature. And so I served on the Board of Directors, I don't, I can't remember exactly how long maybe two years or something like that., and helped get things off the ground. I was primarily involved with Tapestry as a teacher and started running Sunday night dances. O ran the Sunday night dances for many years, which was mostly English country dancing but they had some other things as well. And so, was active in that way through Tapestry.

LM: And how did you get interested in Morris? Was that something you found when you were went away or is that Ed started a Morris Team, MTM, here in the Twin Cities and you jumped right on board

TH: Ed had started the team back in the mid 70s, Minnesota traditional Morris dancers. And Ed took me out to the Renaissance Festival and I got to watch the Morris dancers. I got to dance in the Abbot's Bromley horn dance, actually, before I even joined the team, which was really quite a life changing activity for me. It was really if you haven't seen this dance, which is kind of eerie and fun and mesmerizing. Plus also, you know, dancing out at the Renaissance Festival and enjoying that. And then, we decided I wanted to do that. I was about to leave town and left town to start graduate school. So, I spent a year in Rochester, New York, going to graduate school and ultimately ended up transferring back to finish my PhD at the University of Minnesota, and then joined the MTM in February or January of 1983 I think. And so, have been Morris dancing and then ultimately, a lot of sword dancing after that as well.

LM: And how, how was it balancing graduate school and dancing, being on MTM and I know you are doing rapper at that time .

TH: Yes, I did rapper for many years. I did rapper up until about two years ago, actually. And then long sword eventually. The English country dance team - I think we stopped dancing. I can't remember But doing a lot of Morris dancing actually dancing is kind of one of the things that kind of kept me sane. Working the lab, long hours and things like that. And I remember, kind of near the end of my studies. You know I was spending more than 100 hours a week in the lab doing things and the only thing I would do is, go out dancing one night a week and that was my kind of salvation for doing that. So I always put it in a little bit. But, you know, I think, when I was dancing, a lot. Obviously before the pandemic. You know I used to be out dancing three or four nights a week, pretty, regularly, either. Either performing groups like with MTM, or with one of the teams or social dance like a contract dance or a waltz dance or something like that, or some swing dancing and things of this nature. So I did a lot, as much as I could and really enjoyed it. It was a big part of my social life.

LM: How about I know you're a Scandinavian dancer as well. You do that. I don't know if that's still happening right now, probably not much dancing happening, but I know you were pretty involved with that too.

TH: Yeah, not a lot of social dancing, other than the Contra dance right now. But yeah I got hooked early on, learning the Hombo, this is in the early 80s, and this was a cool dance. And so when I went to graduate school I went to some classes by Ingvar Sodal, I who was a Scandinavian dance teacher at the time from Colorado, and he was out teaching dance classes and the Rørospols and some other things. And so, got a chance to learn some other dances. Also went to folklore village down near Dodgeville, Wisconsin to learn a bunch of dances, went out to Mendocino dance camp in California, and ultimately went to Scandinavia, a number of different times to study. In fact, I took Swedish language lessons while I was in graduate school because I wanted to study Swedish and Norwegian dancers. So got a chance to learn a little bit of the language and then be there and learned from some of the people in those countries and had great fun doing that and still do a fair amount of Scandinavian. It's a really lovely tradition for working on things. I've been to Norway, doing the Springar dances and things like that, some of these older dances, which is a lot of fun and fits my style very well.

LM: What is it about dancing that intrigues you?

TH: Well you know, it's very social which is really a lot of fun. And so, and I think, for me the matching of the music, and your partner, and the space in which you're dancing in. It's also very physical, which I like, I like very physical things. Morris dancing especially Swod dancing. But Scandinavian dancing too and or contra dancing. Very physical, which I really enjoy. But it's, it's just lovely to have an artistic out, you know, an output and being able to interpret the music or work with your partner to interpret, how you want to dance together and things of this nature, so that I think has been a big draw for me and thinking about what I like to do and how I like to do it. Specifically, and I'm a little bit weird so you know, doing some strange fun things to kind of surprise your partner. That gives you a lot of joy, so I appreciate that quite a lot.

LM:, So, back to a sort of Tapestry question. What made Tapestry at the beginning, and how do you see that happening now? How do you see Tapestry working now, any thoughts about, about how it's moving in a different direction?

TH: Yeah, well, so you know we were pretty green back then trying to figure out what we're doing, we're probably just trying to replicate what Ed and Rolla had been doing at Soltari, which is to say, have a dance space for traditional dancing. So we got that off the ground and you know it was propelled by ton of volunteer work. You know everything from taking money to figure out the books and things like that, and just kind of figure out how we would actually organize and run the space advertise, and get the word out, things like that. We were never really kind of out there, I think, in the early days kind of doing much more promotion, other than putting advertisements out. I think that one of the ways is changes is the role that I think the executive director has played at Tapestry to try and raise the awareness of folk dancing in the community, and either through getting grants and doing activities that are socially out there, are also reaching out and other forms of marketing through social media and things of this nature.

I think the biggest change really came when we got our own space, got the building on Minnehaha, and that changed the dynamics of things because now you had a space that you could program. And, as we had existing programs that were there, but now we had space that not only could we, but we kind of needed to fill to keep the revenue up to be able to pay for the rent or mortgage or the upkeep on the building. And so, that kind of changed the dynamics a little bit to bring in other groups which I think significantly diversified the kinds of dancing. Seeing Bollywood there and there's been a lot of swing dancing and Zoomba and other kinds of things that I think all fit within the general idea of what Tapestry set out to do, but were never things that happened early on. We were just trying to get together to do some social dancing, so now it is expanded quite a bit.

I think, you know, there's always been some space for traditional teams, so the Morris teams practice there, things of this nature. But that's kind of been the biggest thing I would say, but also, it became a more organized opportunity to kind of think about what you could do if you had some people thinking about what's going on. So, having an Executive Director that had some experience in arts management, stuff like that changes the dynamic of what's going on. And, I think that's been a significant thing. Aso, I think as organizations get a little bit more mature they start to develop - how do you want the board to act, and how do you want it to be thinking about sustainability, thinking about outreach, to thinking about bringing new people

in that sort of thing. So that's all activities I know they've been active in as they move the organization forward.

LM: Any frustrations with the organization?

TH: You know I haven't. I think one of the things that became an issue is when we lost some swing dance, a big swing dance group a couple of years back. That was really challenging I think for the organization. I was not plugged into it directly but I know the people involved. Part of that is personalities and how people deal with that on both sides of the issue. I think the biggest thing, at least for me and what I do now, which is Contra Dancing, is to make sure that there's high quality music and high quality callers. That we have an inviting space and that we think a little bit about all the people who are coming there. Folk dancing, like lots of other things, is kind of on the margins money wise. So to think about it from that perspective, if you're coming there as a dance caller or as a dance band, you're not making a lot of money to do that. So you're definitely doing it kind of on a pseudo volunteer sort of basis or just because you love it. Which is different than most musical venues, in which people are doing it because they get paid to do it and this is their profession to do that. So that's been I think the biggest frustration and seeing how you make it into an organization and an operational sense that allows the talent to kind of make enough money that it makes a difference that you can attract people who are really good at it. And so, attracting bands from outside of town and things of this nature. We're not there. But you know, I'd say we have good musicians in town, we have good callers in town so it's not that it can't be done. But, you know, how do we increase that so that when people come they're really having a great time. They really enjoy the music, they really enjoy the calling, the teaching is first rate and that sort of thing. And, that helps to bring people back and also I think, you know, making sure you've got new musicians and new callers coming up all the time. And that there's a continual kind of influx of folks who are interested in carrying out the traditions, for changing.

LM: Well, thanks. I guess my last question would be, you know, any particular stories or memories, events that stand out that you'd like to highlight, like something that you probably will never forget, or something weird that happened.

TH: At Tapestry specifically?

LM: Yeah, something that something that stands out, a memory that you have that, you know, you'll always, always have that, maybe when you talk to people you say it's happened at Tapestry Folkdance Center. Here's something that means a lot to me.

TH: Yeah, sure. I'll just tell you one story about Saltari which preceded Tapestry first which is.

For those of you who have never been to this place it was this lovely third floor ballroom, The magical thing about it was the floor, which creaked when you walked on it because it was a sprung floor, a fully sprung floor with interweaved wood underneath it. It had this really delightful feel and dancing on it that sprung. So, whenever I think about that space I can remember the sound that the floor made which was really quite lovely. As for Tapestry, I would say, you know, a ton of really good memories. Going there dancing, and meeting people, and enjoying myself and enjoying their company, hearing great music. We've had a lot of great bands that have come through, a lot of great callers. A lot of people who have, you know, met there and had fun, enjoying it being physical, things like that. I would say there's a couple of people that I remember, especially Fred Kedney, who was a long time dancer in the dance scene, he's since passed away.

But, Fred even though he was a little bit too old to dance he would still come every Saturday night and he would sit and listen to the band . He was just a very cheerful friendly guy and it was just fun to see him come out even when he couldn't dance there.

LM: I danced with him many times.

TH: Yeah, yeah, yeah. We went and danced - actually, when he was in a nursing home just before he died and he still had that bright, bright light in his eyes about dancing and about all things. To my mind that's kind of the thing that typifies what folk dancing can do for you in your life. To provide that nice center for fun activity that has lots of friends and lots of social community that's associated with it. I think Tapestry has done a pretty good job of thinking about that social community. And you know it also has inspired other organizations. There's a nice dance hall in Ann Arbor right now. It really modeled itself after what Tapestry has done. It has a full time space that is being programmed to do folk dancing. And so, I think it's an interesting model of having your own space and thinking about that. It has its challenges associated with it, but that's for sure. I would say, you know, the one, you know, again, lots of memories, but one that kind of comes to my mind is the dance that we used to do at Saltari and we continue to do, usually on New Year's Eve, at Tapestry, which is a dance from Sweden called Långdans från Sollerön. And it's done in line dance, which is kind of unusual for Scandinavian dances. But we always do it around a candle. You always do it kind of at the end of the evening, and it kind of typifies the community coming together, thinking about and dancing together. And that to me, I think is just one of the lovely things about folk dancing that kind of brings you together and makes you think about stuff. So that's a great memory that I, well I will always have for that as well.

LM: Okay, thanks. Anything else you'd like to add?

TH: Anything else well. I'll just say, I've danced in lots of places around the country and a lot around the world as well. But the nice thing about Tapestry's space is it's air conditioned and it's heated. And, you know, it's kind of fun to think of just a little bit, wow, okay big deal - it's climate controlled. But there's a lot of dance spaces that are not. And so I danced out in Washington DC for a number of years. There's a huge dance hall, which is really a lovely place if you have never been to it, called the Spanish ballroom at Glencoe. But it's not heated in the winter and it's not it's not cooled in the summer. And it's kind of an abysmal place to dance in that regard. Lots of good people and fun dancing, but coming back to Tapestry with its climate controlled space. It just makes it a lot more fun especially on those hot summer days and those cold winter days as well. But I really my hat is off to the Board of Directors and the Executive Director and all the people, staff and the volunteers who make these things happen. Because, you know, you see people at the door every time taking money or checking on the Covid status right now. People who are helping run the sound and do the setup and take down. All these events and that's just, you know, that's a bigger part of the community that's really - I think, it says something about people are willing to come and give their time to help out what's going on. And just the people that we see walking through the door who are seeing the organization and the space is being a really accepting place where they can come in and try some dancing and, and not have to worry about it too much. An alcohol free place that keeps everybody in the same place. I think that's nice as well. It's a lovely place to do that.

LM: Well, thank you very much. We'll talk to you later.

TH: Thanks Lydia