Mystic Garland Celebrates 40 years

By Mystic Garland Dancers

The Mystic Garland Dancers, formed in the fall of 1979 in Stonington, CT, celebrated our 40th anniversary in September 2019 with a day of dance and an evening party.

Our day-long tour was a morris family reunion! The Westerly Morris Men, founded in 1974, was the first morris team in our area. Mystic Garland formed when, true to the times, the morris men would allow women dancers to practice, but not to dance out. In the early ‘90s, the rowdier Westerly Morris Men created the Not For Joes, whose stick-breaking joy inspired a former Mystic Garland dancer to create Ladies of the Rolling Pin. We all joined together, along with New Haven Morris and Sword and Hart’s Brook Garland Women (one of the only other garland teams in the U.S.), to round out our dance teams to two of each style: garland, Cotswold, and border.

Following a tour of our home town, including a midday stop with all the teams at the popular Mystic River Park dock—a wonderful, resonant dance surface—we celebrated with team alumnas, family, and friends sharing team memorabilia, songs, and stories.

Mystic Garland originally started as a sword team under the name Mystic Garland Morris and Sword Team. However, we quickly added Cotswold to our repertoire. Having discovered Northwest Clog on her own trip to England, “Queen” Joan Nickel transitioned the team to both clog and garland in the late ‘80s. A trip to England in 1988 cemented the team in those traditions, and the subsequent group purchase of clogs, with the help of host team Rochdale Morris, has kept team members (mostly) shod. Today we continue to dance Northwest clog, garland, and longsword once a year for an annual solstice performance.

As with many teams, our numbers have ebbed and flowed throughout the years. Some old team photos show us 21 strong, while the early 2000s found us writing a dance for three dancers and taking up jigs. Today we are happy to report new dancers joining, and we are returning to our archived notation to revive forgotten dances. While we never stopped dancing at some of our annual events, we have added more the last few years to share in the busy spring and summer months.

Of course, the beginning of our second 40 years has not been what any of us expected. When it became clear earlier this year that practicing together would not be safe, we looked to our repertoire for something to practice at home and dug up Nutting Girl. This Fieldtown jig was new to many members, although some of us had begun to learn it in the late 2000s. Then word of a world-wide May Day virtual dawn dance out reached us, and we had a goal! Everyone who was able practiced at home along with the Morris Federation instructional video, and we met virtually each week to show our progress and talk through what we’d figured out or needed help with. On a soaking wet May Day morning, we were scattered dancing the sun up and virtually gathered back together for breakfast with current members and alumni. After May Day, we started learning Celebration (a North West-style jig), hoping that we will indeed be able to dance for a celebration sometime soon. We’ve continued to meet weekly to dance; chat; and share our gardens, crafts, hobbies, and homes, as we take a break from the news and our worries. We are grateful we were able to celebrate our anniversary last year and are looking forward to dancing together in person again. Here’s to the next 40 years!


BELOW: A delightful pot-luck and team memorabilia table at the 40th anniversary celebration. Photos by Katrina Bercaw.