

International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM)
Study Group on Ethnochoreology: Virtual Round Table
“Ethnochoreology in the Time of Physical and Social
Distancing” and Study Group Business Meeting, 20–21
July 2020

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Due to the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic, the 31st Symposium of ICTM Study Group on Ethnochoreology, that had been postponed for Klaipėda (Lithuania) in 2021, was held symbolically as a virtual meeting on 20th and 21st July 2020. The two-day meeting was organized by the Department of Ethnomusicology, University of Arts in Belgrade, Faculty of Music, and led by an initiator Dr. Selena Rakočević (Faculty of Music, Belgrade). The historically first online meeting brought together 94 dance researchers from 34 different countries around the world. Since the main part of the organization belonged to an Institution from Serbia, the dance researchers and students from Serbia took part in the largest number (11).

A virtual meeting of the Study Group consisted of two parts: Business Meeting related to elections and initial planning for the 32nd symposium in 2022, as well as two roundtables focused on the newly formed topic: Ethnochoreology in the time of physical/social distancing. The business meeting provided an election about the place and topics of the next Symposium, as well as voting for a vice-chair position. However, the focus of this review will include the thought-provoking roundtables when eight persons presented their works, while three researchers were unable to present. Not only by the presenters but with the other participants of the meeting, the plethora of questions was raised regarding the influence of pandemic to dance transmission, dance education, likewise doing dance research in the time of physical and social distancing. Moreover, affected by new pandemic experiences, the rethinking of concepts of dance itself, dance event, and dance field has been born, as well as what should be the most appropriate methodologies today.

Looking at the first day of the virtual meeting, the 20th of July, roundtable No. 1 started after the official opening speech by a chairperson Dr. Catherine Foley, and two deserving organizers: Dr. Selena Rakočević and Dr. Anne von Bibra Wharton. The first presenter was Egil Bakka, profes-

sor emeritus of the Programme for dance studies (Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim). Egil Bakka opened the first roundtable with a five-minute presentation related to the critical remark about the development in the dance research field during the Covid-19 pandemic emphasizing the influence on thinking and discourses from the needed turn to the virtual. Moreover, he had raised the fruitful discussion into the participants' chat about the ontological question of 'duality' between real and virtual, as well as what should be considered as a core or essence of dance today. Egil Bakka highlighted the need for redefining and delimitation of the dance and dance field nowadays, since those have been drastically changed during the present-day surroundings.

Sevi Bayraktar (University of Music and Dance, Cologne), the second presenter within the first roundtable, followed up on the topic of Covid-19 effect on the field of dance research. Through a deep self-reflection – recollections of moving to a new country and starting a job as a dance teacher right before the lock-down in March – Bayraktar pointed out the importance of togetherness and collegiality into the field of Ethnochoreology nowadays. By discussing the potential of ethnochoreological methods to create collective, egalitarian, and pluralist collectives of scholars in times of crisis, she raised multiple questions, such as: how these tools and methods of dance may be used to keep social proximity despite physical distancing, and how to empower the community members among different generations of dance scholars, students, and practitioners. Sevi Bayraktar's presentation has carefully reminded us that rethinking of fieldwork tools will help us to overcome the crisis.–

The third presenter, Georgiana Wierre-Gore (Blaise Pascal University, Clermont-Ferrand, France) introduced considerations about doing a dance ethnography online in the field of Ethnochoreology and Anthropology of Dance. Wierre-Gore underlined that there is not a radical difference between doing fieldwork online and "offline" (as it is conventionally established), saying that "online research has become an ethical obligation in the twenty-first century". Moreover, Georgiana Wierre-Gore displayed possibilities, advantages, such as strategies for how digital research may be provided in the present technological era.

Observing the dynamic and mind provoking roundtable No. 1, the fourth and fifth presenters: MA Stephanie S. K. Marbach (Irish Dance Studies, University of Limerick) and Dr. Könçzei Csilla (Babeş-Bolyai University, Romania) displayed their reflections on the experience of Covid-19 impact and doing previously planned research projects. Having been presented the initial ideas and research questions of projects, Marbach and Könçze discussed how they were supposed to adapt and modify projects to the newly established circumstances. Additionally, they underlined the significant

problem of how to apply already acquired knowledge and values about doing research in a new online framework. Furthermore, they offered possible solutions throughout online platforms, but on the other hand, they exposed all the difficulties they were dealing with. These persistent researchers observed the impact of technology and electronic devices on the quality of their fieldwork, likewise how the face-to-face corporeal interactions have been replaced into the ways of communicating through electronic media having distancing effects.

Unfortunately, roundtable No. 2 included only three presenters, while the other three were unable to illustrate their thoughts. However, some of them uploaded the PowerPoint presentation or abstracts. Observing all the six presentations, it may be concluded that the second roundtable was related to the impact of virtual reality to the dance transmission, teaching of dance, as well as the direct influences on dance and its numerous elements.

By relying on own teaching experience, Dr. Selena Rakočević (Faculty of Music, Belgrade) opened the roundtable No. 2 with the focus on teaching methods online, likewise about kinesthetic aspects of transmitting a round chain dance *kolo*. With a wide theoretical framework, Rakočević discussed changes in movements from somatic perspectives, as well as numerous sensorial aspects of dancing *kolo* virtually. Since *kolo*, in its usual practice, requires holding hands of a different number of dancers, Rakočević inquired "How the hierarchical ordering of visual/auditory/tactile stimuli during simultaneous dancing of physically separated dancers influence their (dis) joint experience and, consequently, performance?" Moreover, she underlined and concurrently questioned the role of a teacher/professor in this context of a chain dance transmission.

Following a similar topic about dance education online, Dr. Maria I. Koutsouba (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece), as the second presenter of the roundtable No. 2, discussed the necessity of written documentation for dance transmission virtually. Beyond written documentation, Koutsouba implied the Labanotation scores and morphology-typology of the dances specifically of Greek dances due to her personal experience. She underlined the importance of dance notations for practical dance classes, since their usage improves cognitive processes of learning dances and thus helps students to understand their structures. However, like Selena Rakočević in her presentation, Koutsouba observed the kinesthetic properties in online dance transmission, claiming that dance notations do not change the need for physical experience through 'kinesthesia' in a dance, but they are useful as a teaching method.

The last presenter of the first day and both roundtables was Sonja Helena Graf (Irish World Academy, Limerick), who presented her research

project in the *forró* social/partner dancing pre and during social distancing. Graf introduced examples of touching in a dance, its performative impossibility, likewise other perceptual modifications in the situations of virtual performance. Having illustrated the close embrace as an essence of the *forró* dancing community that symbolizes care, acceptance, and belonging, Graf questioned what is happening with its symbol during the time of 'illegal hugging'. Since her project is ongoing, Graf presented early results, explaining that some *forró* dancing communities have found an alternative to dance online via the Zoom platform, while the others withdrew by returning to the interpersonal touch-based *forró*.

Although three of researchers could not share their thoughts during the Virtual Round Table "Ethnochoreology in the Time of Physical and Social Distancing", it is possible to summarize their ideas because of the uploaded presentation and abstracts. Helene Eriksen (Germany), Tóta Árnadóttir (University of the Faroe Islands), and Sille Kapper (Tallinn University, Estonia) addressed issues related to online dance education, as well as the impact of the pandemic on social and chain dances. They inquired what may be (dis)advantages of virtual transmission, what skills can be transmitted online: a way of performance or experience or a flow? Moreover, they asked what will happen with interactive dances and dance events, and should they be reformed to the currently appropriate solo dances.

Even though previously planned Symposium and its formed topics have been moved to the next year, I believe that by virtue of the organization by the Department of Ethnomusicology, University of Arts, Faculty of Music in Belgrade, the virtual meeting "Ethnochoreology in the Time of Physical and Social Distancing" brought numerous contributions for the academic field. Since one of the focuses of dance research is an examination of the present-day happenings, this Virtual Roundtable brought a prolific discussion, ideas, and raised many questions related to the current Covid-19 impact on all dance's spectrum.

What are the (dis)advantages and consequences of dancing alone in front of a computer/smartphone screen? What is an outcome for all interactive social dances that count more than one people in its 'usual' practice? How to experience them throughout solo formation virtually? Further, how to teach and transmit the essence and flow of a specific dance online, what methods and approaches are the most appropriate? How to do digital research, to gain the trust of informants, to document information? Moreover, what we may define as a dance today when it has become mostly individual and separated practice? How to define the online classes, workshops, performances, concerts that are holding daily at multiple platforms? Should the concept of a dance event be redefined, or even delimited? Finally, is

it necessary to make an opposition between real and virtual, is a virtual world became our reality nowadays?

Personally, as a current student of the “Choreomundus” – International master in Dance Knowledge, Practice, and Heritage, I could experience the discussed pandemic’s impact on dance research, since I have been learning to plan and realize a dance research project for the summer 2020. All the knowledge that I had been acquiring until March, unexpectedly needed to be modified and supplemented by data concerning netnography and digital ethnography. Although some literature has already existed, its range has to be presently extended, especially for young and inexperienced researchers. Therefore, I believe that the meeting “Ethnochoreology in the Time of Physical and Social Distancing” has, and will have, a great impact on rethinking and redefining crucial concepts and tools in the field of dance research. Hopefully, this newly established environment will vanish soon in the future, but it should not be overlooked since it has also shown the novel potential and perspectives to experience a different frame of research and reality.

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Примљено: 15. 7. 2020.
Прихваћено: 2. 8. 2020.