

# The Dance of Life

I created this exhibition to accompany my dance workshops, using my own photographs as well as images from books and postcards. The text draws on my long-term research into folk dance, folk art and community rituals for healing. I hope you will enjoy this brief glimpse into the rich tapestry of culture, belief and symbolism which lies behind the traditional dances in our Sacred Dance repertoire.

I have been searching for the heart of Sacred Dance since I fell in love with it here at Findhorn in 1985. Many research trips throughout Eastern Europe and the Near East, postgraduate training in Dance/Movement Therapy, and hundreds of workshops all over the world, have all helped me on my journey towards the source of Dance and its essentially healing energy.

Circle dance is the most ancient form of community celebration. Many traditional dances have their roots in the earliest civilisations in Europe and the Near East, back when European indigenous culture, in common with other indigenous cultures on the planet, embodied a healthy worldview which honoured the earth, the body and the feminine. Beyond mere celebration, the dances were primary carriers of a hidden wisdom which has survived changes of language, location, religion and nationality for hundreds, even thousands, of years.

In recent centuries, European civilisation has lost touch with sustainability and instead, sadly, has become synonymous with the forces of colonisation and exploitation relentlessly infecting the world. Many people of European descent look towards indigenous cultures from the Americas, Asia, Australasia and Africa for models of ritual and ceremony which can teach us to live in balance. It's good to remember that originally, European culture also included a sustainable, earth-based spirituality, whose ritual circles - in the form of dances - have survived virtually unchanged.

The dances carry the cellular imprint and instinctual memory of all those who have gone before, dancing these same steps and rhythms. Like living beings, the dances are far older than the individuals who dance them and, if we learn and transmit them well, may yet outlive us by many generations. By banishing malevolent influences and invoking all things good, the dances are powerful invocations of the spirit of healing. This is equally true for those who still dance them in their countries of origin, and for those of us who approach them from totally different places all over the world.

As the influence of globalisation reaches even the most remote parts of Eastern Europe and the Near East, these dances, like so many other wild beings, are in danger of extinction. I believe it is not by accident that they have sought shelter and sanctuary at Findhorn and in many other centres and circles around the globe. As we seek to learn them to understand them, and above all to dance them with joy and celebration, we are helping to keep them alive, and with them, a world of healing wisdom which is our inheritance from the dancing ancestors of the human family.

Laura Shannon 2004