



## Mélange - quelle surprise, c'est magnifique!

In March of this year Hamilton hosted the Indigo Festival – A festival of cultures – where diverse ethnic groups participate in a week long exploration of culture, language and performance. *Dance Folkus* was asked by the Hamilton Alliance Française society to represent them with a bracket of French dances at the final cultural event.

Although we have danced for Alliance Française events previously, we decided that we needed a better turnout from the members of Alliance Française if we were to be truly representative. So we embarked down a path of inviting non-dancing members of Alliance Française to join us in simple performance choreography. I chose four dances – *Avant-deux de Travers*, *Le Maître de la Maison*, *An Dro Retournée*, and a *Bourrée*. A local trio (*Les Trois Amis*) was to provide the live music for the performance and we needed to select dances that fitted with their repertoire as everyone was busy and rehearsal time minimal. Another bright idea was had, and the concept of having a singing group as well was mooted for *Le Maître de la Maison* and *An Dro Retournée*. The challenge here was who in Alliance Française could sing in tune and in French, and at dancing speed?

So did it all work? As it transpired not many members of Alliance Française wanted to dance with *Dance Folkus* on the designated rehearsal nights. I put five nights aside from 8.00–9.00pm; and in the end we had 2 additional dancers only – however that sufficed for the purposes of the choreography and they acquitted themselves very well – alas only one 'gentilhomme' (and he my partner Alec - so not sure if that counts - but we are members of Alliance Française!)



*Les Trois Amis* sounded great – a lovely combination of button accordion, harp and flute – their music gave us the right 'lift'. Our 4 singers *Les Cigalles* (their choice of name meaning the cicadas!) sang tunefully and



rhythmically through their two songs. Three were very experienced choristers, whilst one was bravely making her choral début. Costume-wise we all wore our own modern combinations of 'bleu-blanc-rouge' – the French national colours of blue, white and red. This worked well as we wanted to convey a contemporary feel to our performance and were not trying to be representative of any particular region of France.

So, what began as an experiment to see if we could better represent the French culture through integrating quite fragmented pieces of music, dance and song, was successful. Some things we would do more of next time; as due to circumstances

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beyond the choreographer's control we had no rehearsals where all performers were present, only two with musicians and dancers together; and just one with the singers. C'est la vie!!

It was fun to bring together and well received by the audience. We now have a 'performance piece' for future events with Alliance Française. For the experienced *Dance Folkus* performers it was a good change to extend the *Dance Folkus* performance repertoire to include musicians and singers as well as choreography; and was truly an example of an organic process.

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photos: Ron Smith

