

Joan Campbell - Transcript of the highlights of the interview
(The following article is transcript literally from the interview)

Campbell : 1954, it was a boyfriend who was working for the Hong Kong Shanghai Bank, and he met Carol Bateman who was looking for somebody to join her school. She was a Russian dancer down from Shanghai, and she taught Greek dancing and Russian ballet. She started the school that I have in the Helena May 1948. She heard about the Royal Academy of Dance and she thought this is what Hong Kong needed it. And so she offered me a two-year contract, so I came here in October-1954.

Campbell: The Scottish Society and what is known as a Highlanders now, they held classes on every Monday evening, and when I first came here, they had the Union Church at the Kennedy Road. I'm not sure, I cannot remember who they were, there're a lady and a gentleman who gave the instructions for you to do and I would say there're about 40 or more people that came to St. Andrews in Kennedy Road, and I think we don't even going to eat when suddenly me and my husband were told " You look after that set and you look after that set." haha, we were helping out. To-day I still go on the Monday evening to the Cricket Club. No no no, it's very mixed, from all different countries. It was a social evening, people who like to dance went up there. Some people went because it was an exercise, some people went because a friend was going, all different reasons for going. Of course there were quite a number of Scottish people there. Yes, there were, not that many but certainly quite a few, mostly European, they came from German, Belgium etc...Scottish dancing you have partner and you normally got four sets, and when you start the Scottish dance, two people in the head of the group which is near to the music, they do whatever the sequence is, and they end at the bottom, and the second group repeat, and the third group repeat, and the fourth group...Usually you walk it through before the music and everybody knows the steps whether they're doing a setting step or a progressive step. it's a little bit like square dancing in America (there's a caller giving instructions) , but anybody who has got a little bit rhythm can do it, if you haven't got any rhythm, then it's a little bit difficult. I would say we must have been 40 to 50 people and always seem to be very crowded. We definitely doing western folk dancing in HKU and there were lots of students that were interested in folk dancing. I cannot remember which year it was that the ISTD were interesting in coming to Hong Kong. Pearl Chan brought the examiner out and I provided her with the students for examination. And those people that actually took their exam there. And they're still teaching voluntarily (It's not their professional job) for the western national dance. Some take it more seriously than the others, but the group originally was at the HKU and then came to my studio to learn and did the examinations. Some take it more seriously than the others, but the group originally was at the HKU and then came to my studio to learn and did the examinations. They are still there encouraging people to do western folk dance. I think it was a social evening, it was something to do. In those days there's very little to do, we didn't have many cinemas and certainly we didn't have live performances and I think one or two people were enthusiastic and got a group together and said " Well, let's do some folk dancing." and so we did. And as I said, when the ISTD started, it grew and grew and in 1964 we started the School Dance Festival.

Campbell: She was brought up under the ISTD regulation and their dance theme. She knew that I was doing (western folk dancing) and she was also doing at St. Mary School in Kowloon. So when the opportunity came, we thought that we could have exams. She thought " Well, let's try." and so we did and we're still having the exam today. She was brought up under the ISTD regulation and their dance theme. She knew that I was doing (western folk dancing) and she was also doing at St. Mary School in Kowloon. So when the opportunity came, we thought that we could have exams. She thought " Well, let's try." and so we did and we're still having the exam today. A lot of them were PE teachers, therefore, at school, that gave them extra credit. Gradually, they have increased their knowledge and they now choreograph their own dances for the festivals and things. To begin with, yes. Now, no, because I think it's grown is goes by word of mouth, so I teach you and you teach you and you go on, and so it has grown so much, and everybody now who does PE, they all do folk dancing. It's often in schools all the time. It was started in 1964 as I said to encourage people. We only had two days then, we have five weeks this year. Sometimes we're seeing 30, 35 schools in a day, it's really grown.

Campbell: The person in charge of the PE session of the schools was Angus Campbell. I think Angus was an athletic person and he enjoys Scottish dancing of course because he's a Scottish. During talks that we had, we said it would be nice to get people together and his department then said

about how they could offer it to schools, and so it started at a very limited two-day project. He thinks that more people should learn, more people should have the opportunity, music is happiness. There was a very well-known boys school here, and wow! Could they dance! They always did just a dance for boys, I think it was a Polish dance, they sit on the chairs, roll around and jump on the chairs, and they always rock the house down. They were amazing and they had an amazing teacher, he could always give us something very spectacular to do. People came to watch and they thought "Oh, it is quite interesting quite good." and so the next year there're more.

Campbell: The whole idea of the ballet group was that all the school should get together and give their students an opportunity to dance on the stage together, and that's why we started. When I came, it was very difficult for me to talk with all the teachers because I come out of this school, The whole idea of the ballet group was that all the school should get together and give their students an opportunity to dance on the stage together, and that's why we started. When I came, it was very difficult for me to talk with all the teachers because I come out of this school, it wasn't really the right thing to do to be with other teachers. But once we started the exams in 1956, there were three - two other teachers and myself, one was Paddy Cook, and the other one was Angela, she was working for Swires. And between us, we put in a 120 students. I think this year there was something like 40,000, that's great because it means they went out and they enjoy ballet and they want to go on and they became teachers and spread their wings and got their own students. But it all started in the Helena May.

Campbell: To begin with, Carol Bateman looked after that. And the Helena May in those days had a stage so we could give little performances on the stage. Then people like Rotary Club had balls, they would invite us to go and take students to dance as their entertainment. We would also visit the hospital if there was a fair going on, we might do dance there. There wasn't that much to do but we tried to generate and we've always giving one school show every year, it started on the Helena May stage.