

# Breathless in Berthoud Border Morris Dancers

One of the oldest dances known to humankind is recreated each week by a local dance team called Breathless in Berthoud Border Morris Dancers. William Shakespeare refers to Morris dance in both "All's Well That Ends Well" and "Henry V." The history of Morris dance may date back to a time when Stonehenge was still brand new.

The word "Morris" might come from the word "Moorish," meaning boggy land, but the roots of the word may never be known. It is known as a peasant dance, usually performed in the winter. The men wore black faces, to obscure their identity and danced as a way to obtain Christmas money.

Robin and Anne Smith, as well as Jane Ellarby are performers in Breathless in Berthoud. A very different path has led each dancer to this particular form, but they all find Morris dance plays a special and vital part of their life.

Surveyor  
Columnist



**Heidi  
Kerr-Schlaefer**

Jane Ellarby hails from England, where the true origins of Morris dance will always remain shrouded in the mist covering the ancient ruins dotting the small island. Ellarby has been dancing all her life. As a child she learned English Country dancing in Physical Education at school. As an adult, she began to Border Morris dance; a form of dancing historically closed to women participants. Ellarby moved to the United States in 1981, and she brought along her love of dance.

If it weren't for Morris dancing, Robin and Anne Smith wouldn't have met. They are now married and have a five-year-old daughter named MariAnna. "MariAnna is proof that the fertility part of the Morris dancing works," laughed Robin. As many dances developed during pagan times, Morris dance may have played a part in fertility rites. "The ancient tradition is you don't wear a Morrisman's hat unless you want to be pregnant within the year," added Ellarby.

Anne, originally from Minnesota, has been dancing nearly twenty years. She saw a men's Morris dance team perform at a renaissance festival and was immediately drawn to the form. At the time she had been dancing international dance for six years, but she soon joined a women's Morris dance team. Since then, Anne has danced on many different teams, including ten years for the Belles of the North in Minnesota. "It hasn't

always been Cotswold [Border] Morris dancing. There are different variations of Morris dancing," explained Anne.

Robin's course to becoming a Morris dancer is a little different. "I came in through the beer side," said Robin who is from Maine but has lived in Colorado since 1979. "I was brewing with this guy who was doing Morris dance. A lot of Morris dancers are beer snobs and Colorado is a perfect place for Morris dancing because we have such good home brew and all the different kinds of microbrews."

Perhaps not surprisingly, a gathering of Morris dancers is called an Ale. Different teams come together to dance, socialize and drink beer. The dancers wear black with coats covered in brightly colored rags. The dances are also light and bright and the dancers often carry short sticks; the sticks are struck against the other team member's sticks as part of the dance. The accordion has become the traditional musical instrument of Morris dance, but the team will dance to any instrument if the musician knows the appropriate songs.

"I love to dance. The more I dance the happier I am," stated Ellarby. All three team members find camaraderie a strong draw to Morris dancing. "There's a different energy than couple dancing or those kinds of dances. You don't have to be a couple to do this dance. You can feel like you are there of your own merit," added Anne. She and Robin are the only married couple on the Breathless in Berthoud team, which consists of thirteen members, including the musicians.

"Its great exercise and then you get to drink beer," laughed Robin, which may be the perfect way to sum up the attraction and fun of Morris dancing.

Breathless in Berthoud performs at festivals and various venues around the state. Most recently the team performed at the Fort Collins Irish Festival. "We'll dance anywhere they let us," laughed Ellarby. This weekend the team is hosting an Ale in celebration of their fifth year anniversary and there will be several public performances. On Saturday, Aug. 30 they perform from 11 a.m. to 12 at the Larimer County Farmer's Market and from 2 to 4 p.m. on the stage outside Coopersmith's Brew Pub in Old Town Fort



Photos courtesy of Fort Collins Irish Festival

The Breathless in Berthoud dancers recently performed at the Fort Collins Irish Festival.

Collins.

The following day the team performs from 12 to 1:30 p.m. at the Flanders Park Pavilion in Longmont and in the afternoon you'll find them in and around Oskar Blues, located in Lyons.

Breathless in Berthoud can be booked for weddings and parties. They practice every Thursday night at the Barn Owl, located above Jones Plumbing.

Several team members teach a children's Morris dance class, the Tommyknockers, on the first Saturday of each month from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. at the Barn Owl.

For a performance schedule and to see various videos, as well as footage of the team from the Longs Peak Scottish/Irish Highland Festival as shown on the "Tonight Show," visit [www.breathlessbordermorris.org](http://www.breathlessbordermorris.org). If you'd like more information on the children's class or if you'd like to get involved, call 970-532-4465.



The colorful Border Morris dancers are easy to spot in a parade.