

“Highland Dancing During COVID-19” by Trisha Bacon, West Region Representative
on the ScotDance USA Board of Directors

Highland dancing is first and foremost a competitive sport. Highland dancers train year-round for a competitive season that runs from January to late fall with many of the most prestigious championships occurring throughout the summer. For highland dancers in California, Arizona, Nevada, and Hawaii, the Western United States Regional Championship at the USS Scottish Fest serves as the qualifying event for the United States Inter-Regional Championship (the national championship for highland dancing) that is held annually in July. West region premier dancers are disappointed to have missed these major events for two consecutive years.

ScotDance USA (the United States’ affiliate organization to the Royal Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing or RSOBHD) has worked diligently during the COVID-19 pandemic to keep dancers and professional members actively engaged and participating in highland dancing. Throughout the past fourteen months, ScotDance USA has embraced the Zoom platform and offered many online sessions for both dancers and teachers including introductory ballet and musical theater, motivating dancers during a pandemic, and an expert choreography panel question and answer session. The ScotDance USA Professional Development Committee also hosted a very popular series of interviews featuring former world champions and their teachers including one with the West Region’s own Emma Schiff and Linda Armstrong. Dancers have also had the opportunity to participate in many pre-recorded dance events including a ScotDance USA choreography video and videos for virtual highland games across the country.

Highland dancing instruction has also looked very different during the pandemic with many teachers moving their classes to online platforms in order to comply with local and state health and safety regulations. As classes have been able to resume in-person, teachers and dancers have grown accustomed to providing and receiving corrections while maintaining physical distancing and wearing masks.

ScotDance USA recently received approval from the RSOBHD to re-open competitions in the United States including a multi-day event in Florida this summer. Highland dancers of all ages and categories are thrilled to have the opportunity to get back up on the boards in events ranging from traditional highland and national dances to choreography and a jig and hornpipe challenge. ScotDance USA remains concerned about the health and well being of its dancers and teachers as competitions return and has formed a “Competitions Forward” task force to develop safety protocols for organizers to follow. ScotDance USA is committed to taking measured steps to ensure a safe and steady return to competition. As events begin to resume across the country, West Region highland dancers eagerly await the opportunity to once again compete at the USS Scottish Fest next May.