

Event Review

Tai Chi Caledonia and the Taijiquan & Qigong Federation for Europe's joint 20th Anniversary Celebrations



Double Fan form

Franziska Ruescher



Chen Sword form

Gianfranco Pace



Gordon and Tina Faulkner



Yang swordform

Faye Li Yip



The performers



Yijinjing

Gillian Walshe and Nicola Day



Chen handforms

Margherita Padalino and Nabil Ranne

2015 saw the celebration of the 20th year of Tai Chi Caledonia. This year Caledonia also hosted the Taijiquan & Qigong Federation for Europe. This was to be my fourth visit to Tai Chi Caledonia and the second one where I took friends with me. I remember my first time at Tai Chi Caledonia. I knew nobody. This time was like coming home to friends and family.

I always think that Tai Chi Caledonia begins well before the start date in July and this year that was even more the

case. As early as December people were emailing, chatting on Facebook and generally getting excited about the event. Some friends had messaged me before Christmas to ask if I was going and to make sure that we had our spot booked. We knew it was going to be great – some of the best teachers were rumoured to be invited – and when the list was published I felt like a kid in a sweet shop; so many great teachers, so little time.

The first thing that looked different

this year was the layout. There were more marquees and tents in case of rain. The other main difference was the number of people. After getting settled into our Chalets it was off down the local for an early dinner (and early night) so that we could recover from the 10 hours in the car and be ready for the week. The following morning we had an introduction session to the week and met some of the weekend teachers. The weekend was made up of short taster sessions with several running at the same time. I had to study the

programme so that I didn't miss out on my favourite teachers!

The biggest difference this year was on the Saturday evening gala. The evening commenced with a procession through the Stirling Campus accompanied by a bagpipe band. The early evening sunshine, the still water on the loch and people gathered with a common interest made this a brilliant start.

The gala was a mixture of tai chi,

qigong, push hands and Scottish themed music and dance. There were marvellous demonstrations from teachers from all over Europe. This was all brought together by Ronnie and his team. I am not sure how they managed to pull it off, but they did. The concept of the evening was to provide an overview of the various aspects of tai chi and other Chinese internal arts that are taught and practised across Europe. The performers began with a variety of warm-up exercises and progressed, over the course of the evening, through

to hands forms, push hands, weapons, and fighting applications. All key styles of tai chi were represented; Chen, Yang, Wu, Sun and Cheng Man-Ching by a range of high-quality performers from the varying European countries including Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Holland and, of course, the UK. I don't think it would be fair of me to say which I enjoyed the most about the evening but I can say that if you were there and heard a crash from backstage, I can tell you that it was down to the exuberance of the



The Scottish storyteller



Tomasz Nowakowski



British Health Qigong group



Wu lineage warm-ups

Mark Langweiler & Nicole Lomax



Scottish chanteuse



Steffi Sachsenmaier

performers.

We were lucky enough to have some fantastic lectures/talks by some of the teachers during the weekend. One talk was by Dan Docherty. He investigated the origins of tai chi and what has been lost over the years and what is now being rediscovered. He used the phrase “known knowns, unknown knowns and unknown unknowns” to illustrate his thoughts. His new book “The Complete Tai Chi Tutor” goes deeper into this topic. The other was by Cornelia Gruber. Cornelia spoke about problems when working with groups. You as an instructor are left alone with your problems which come up besides teaching the movements, the non-tai chi-related ones. There was a discussion about how this effects the way we teach. For instance, one lady had a longstanding student who passed away and it had a big effect on the whole group. Another had a disruptive student who kept turning up late and annoying the whole class. There was also discussion of how the classes were run.



Scottish Highland dancer

The highlight for me was the lecture by Professor Li Deyin which was held during the week. We all met in the lecture theatre at around 7.15 p.m. and sat down for what was going to be quite a long session. Tary Yip acted as interpreter for the talk which was about the Li family lineage. I was particularly interested in this as I had been to the 100th anniversary celebrations of Li Tian Ji in March 2015. Unfortunately we ran out of time and the talk ended at 10.30 p.m. with some way still to go. However, there was an opportunity for a question and answer session later on in the week.



Professor Li Deyin and Tary Yip

The other really interesting talk during the week was on Scottish weapons. A guest speaker from the castle was invited and gave a first person account of local battles. This required a little bit of audience participation – a response of “aye” was occasionally necessary. I think the audience was impressed when Ronnie wore the chain mail. I am uncertain as to whether it is possible to do tai chi wearing it, maybe a question to be answered in the future.



Push Hands demo

Barry McGinlay & Emma Lee

After the weekend the numbers dropped down and we settled into our smaller working groups. I had chosen to work with Faye Yip and Franziska Rüscher. Faye taught the Seated 12 Pieces of Brocade Qigong. This seated set is done on the floor (or on a very low seat). I had experienced this set before but wanted a more in-depth look at it and Faye certainly gave us that. I might add that it is also much harder than it sounds. Franziska taught a Qigong and Healing session. These sessions used elements from Wudan Hui Chun Qigong. We also did some partner work and Five Elements Qigong. I had worked with Franziska at last year's event and this helped put everything I learnt last year into focus.



The week rounded off with a visit to the local Chinese restaurant for a banquet. My husband managed to make the journey in time to join us (he had just cycled from Deal in Kent on his hybrid mountain bike) so that, for me at least, made it all the better.

I am looking forward to next year's Tai Chi Caledonia – it would not feel right if I missed out.

