

OIREACHTAS FIGURE TEAMS

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PARTICIPATION

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to educate Teelin School dancers regarding the decision to commit to a Southern Region Oireachtas Figure Team.

Competing at the regional championship level of Irish dance is both a privilege and a responsibility. Preparing any figure team to compete at an Oireachtas requires a significant commitment on behalf of the teachers, each dancer on the team, and his/her family.

For general information about an Oireachtas, please read the Teelin document entitled "Everything You Need to Know About an Oireachtas" available from the Feis Information section of the Teelin School website (www.teelin.com).

LOGISTICS

The Southern Region Oireachtas is an annual multi-day event usually held the first weekend in December. This event rotates locations throughout the region, and has been held in Atlanta, GA; Orlando, FL; Dallas, TX; and Washington, DC, to name a few.

Oireachtas competitions begin around 8am each morning and run late each evening (well past normal flight times). Therefore, dancers must attend the event from late afternoon on the day before the competition until the morning after the figure competition.

On site practices for Teelin Figure Teams will usually be held on the evening before and the day of the competition. These practices will most likely be scheduled last minute based on practice area availability, teacher availability, and competition schedules. For this reason, the team dancer should not be committed to any sightseeing trips or visits from friends/relatives until after the competition is over. Some practices will be scheduled without teacher supervision, but all team members are still expected to attend.

Please note that last minute practice scheduling and mandatory attendance applies even if the event is local with daily commutes possible.

Travel arrangements and accommodations for the Oireachtas are the responsibility of each individual participant. Venue, hotel and travel information will be made available on the event website, a link to which is available from the Teelin School website. Advanced planning is required as hotel reservations usually open in February or March, and are likely to fill to capacity by summer.

COSTUMES

All female dancers on a Teelin School Figure Team must have a properly fitted Teelin School Dress. (Note: Not the Alternate School Dress, the Teelin School Dress.) It is the responsibility of each individual dancer to acquire this dress, and to make any approved alterations necessary for team uniformity. "Dress checks" will be scheduled in classes several times in the fall to ensure that teams are outfitted appropriately.

The estimated timeframe for having a new Teelin School Dress made is approximately two months. All team dancers should be outfitted in time to compete in the fall feiseanna in

preparation for the Oireachtas. **IMPORTANT:** Purchasing a School Dress does NOT guarantee a position on a Figure Team.

All male dancers on a Teelin School Figure Team must wear the appropriate school costume and Teelin Vest, and will likewise be checked in the fall to ensure team uniformity.

DANCER DEDICATION

In order for a dancer to be considered for this opportunity, he or she must be willing to dedicate significant time and effort to the team's objectives. Dancers (and their parents) should carefully consider how to balance a commitment to an Oireachtas figure team with all other time commitments, namely academics, other sports or extra-curricular activities, and performance company commitments.

A team is more than the sum of each dancer's individual talent, and teams must have time to practice together. Proper technique and ceilis will be taught during the spring and summer, and teams will be finalized in the fall. Teams will practice at least once per week until the Oireachtas. Dancers are expected to have shoes on and be ready to start dancing at the scheduled start time of each practice session, and to stay for the entire practice session. Most of these practices will be held at the Teelin studio in Columbia, but some practices may be scheduled at an alternate location.

Although the Oireachtas is a regional championship, Novice and Prizewinner level dancers with good soft shoe technique and a consistently high work ethic may be considered for figure team participation. The rigorous training required for figure teams will also significantly improve a dancer's technique. Additionally, participation in a figure team offers potential future championship soloists an opportunity to experience the Oireachtas before their solo debut.

Dancers are expected to be responsible team members by working together, complimenting each other, and constructively correcting each other. The ability to give and accept constructive criticism from a peer teammate is an essential part of a strong team.

Teams are judged in competition based on their ability to perform the dance as perfectly as possible. Individual technique and group coordination are both equally important. Individual technique includes things such as crossed/turned out feet, straight legs, LOTS of "lift", and consistently snapping the back leg all the way up to hit the bum EVERY time. Group coordination includes straight lines, even arms, and synchronized turns. If a dancer is instructed to work on specific skills such as crossing their feet further, pointing their toes more tightly, etc, it is expected that this will be practiced at home. Dancers may be replaced if adequate improvement is not seen in a reasonable amount of time. ALL team dancers should be practicing their 123's and 7's daily.

TEAM INVITATIONS

Teelin Figure Teams are formed by invitation. However, an invitation does not guarantee a position on a team. Although each invited dancer is a very talented dancer, team dancing has different considerations than solo dancing, including some beyond a dancer's control, such as age and height. Teams must be viewed as a whole, not just the talent of individual dancers involved.

Oireachtas figure team competitions include 4-Hand Ceili, 8-Hand Ceili, Figure Choreography (team of 12-16 dancers) and Dance Drama (team of 8-20 dancers, any age). Ceili and Choreography competitions are divided into the following age groups: Under 10, Under 12, Under 15, 15&Over, and Adult. A dancer may be placed on a team in the next

highest age group, as long as at least 25% of that team is within the correct age bracket. (Exception: Adult teams must consist only of dancers who compete in the Adult category. If an adult dancer competes in the &Over solo competitions he/she would also enter an &Over ceili competition category.)

Oireachtas registration must be completed by the TCRG, and the deadline is generally the end of September. A summary of registration fees will be sent to each dancer, and must then be paid to Teelin School. The fees for team dancers are typically \$12 per dancer per competition group, plus a mandatory \$50 event fee per family. (Check the syllabus to confirm the fee structure each year.) Please note that these registration fees are in addition to the tuition fees due Teelin in preparation for the Oireachtas.

The Oireachtas is a high quality regional championship, and Teelin will only send teams that have the potential to place at this prestigious competition. As December approaches, performance is a factor. Because of the time required to polish a team, and the expense incurred by the individual families to attend the Oireachtas, teams not performing at a competitive level will be cut. (Note: It is important to be aware of this possibility, particularly when booking travel plans.)

This strict standard supports Teelin's desire that the Oireachtas be a positive experience for each dancer. No dancer wants to compete at this event with feelings of "not belonging" amidst the stiff competition. Only dancers who have the potential to meet this challenge are invited, and only teams that are ready to face this challenge participate. Because of this, there is a great deal of self-confidence and pride in each and every one of our Teelin School team dancers!

SUMMARY

Sending dancers to compete at the regional championships is a big decision. Teelin instructors spend a lot of time preparing the teams, and dancers work hard to step up to this challenge. Educating dancers (and their parents) by explaining the factors involved with this commitment helps to ensure that teams will be supported appropriately.

Competing at an Oireachtas with a Teelin Figure Team is a unique opportunity to participate in an internationally sanctioned competition representing the Teelin School of Irish Dance. After considering the factors listed in this document, dancers from Teelin School who may be interested in this opportunity should talk to their instructor, who will then further discuss the progress in the dancer's training.

