

Dancing on the Queen Mary 2



The Queen Mary 2 is currently the largest passenger liner afloat, and is about 1/3 Km long, and the lower deck near the water line houses a theatre, a casino, and a planetarium and the largest ballroom afloat. The passenger cabins extend another 10 decks above these. The ship is a floating home to over 2,500 passengers and nearly 1300 crew. In February and March this year (2012) she performed a 21 day circumnavigation of Australia, from Sydney via Brisbane, and Cairns to Bali, and back via Fremantle, Adelaide and Melbourne, to Sydney.

I was one of six dancers who frequent June and Kay's social dances at Top Ryde in Sydney to be invited to be "Gentlemen Dance Hosts" for this memorable voyage. In company with three other lads from Melbourne and one from USA, for highly subsidised fares, the ten of us were given the job of entertaining the 60 unaccompanied ladies on board, and did we have a ball!



the Dance Hosts in action
photo: courtesy of June Coombs and Josephine Miller

The ship maintains a very formal British social system, with all the crew for example greeting us with "Good morning sir" as we passed them on the way to breakfast each morning. Our main job was at the regular evening dances, which usually lasted from 7.45pm to midnight every night. We were housed in pairs in cheap internal crew cabins at the opposite end of the

ship to the Ballroom, so forgetting to take something from the cabin involved a long trek. Sometimes we were in tuxedo and bow tie for the formal balls, other times semiformal (tux and ordinary tie), and sometimes "elegant casual" (jacket and tie). We all were given Cunard "Gentleman Dance Host" lapel pins printed with our first name, which made introductions very easy. We were also given strict instructions to avoid entering guests' cabins, inviting guests into our cabins, and engaging in shipboard romances.

Besides dancing, we also hosted a regular 11am solos coffee morning, and organised solos trips when we were in a port.

Half of the guests were Australian, so New Vogue was popular in the evenings, causing some initial consternation amongst non-Australians who had rather diminished floor space when New Vogue was being danced. We rapidly came to an agreement and inaugurated special New Vogue sessions.

Three live bands took turns at providing music for the dance evenings, typically doing 90 minutes sets interspersed with recorded dance music. Often we just danced Slow Rhythms to Ballroom music, and simple Merengues to Latin music. Only a minority of the ladies could follow the leads of the figures of the different dances, and those ladies were eagerly sought by us gentlemen for light relief. In general, all the ladies, even the non-dancing ones who only watched, seemed very appreciative of our presence, and said that their evenings would have been really boring without us. But one lady touched my heart: after a dance for which I had to really cajole her to get up and just do a simple Slow Rhythm. On returning to her seat: she said that it was the first dance she had done for 20 years since her husband died, and it was wonderful.

Don Herbison-Evans, 15 March 2012