

Learning Scottish Country Dancing

First we learn skip change of step –
Hop-step-close-step, hop-step-close-step.
Turn your feet out, point your toes –
Soon you'll know just how it goes.
Don't forget to make a "T" –
Passing feet we must not see!
Slowly now we walk it through,
Then to music we must do.

Next it's pas de basque we learn,
Used to set and two hand turn.
We watch the teacher and we quake –
Much more practice this will take.
Third position with your feet,
Try it out to get the beat,
One-two-three and one-two –three –
Two beats are not enough, you see.
Now a jeté with your toe,
Not too high and not too low.
The class has got it all just so,
Now we are all set to go.

Strathspey next – it's much more slow;
With grace and elegance we must go.
Again we must turn out our feet,
Point our toes, keep with the beat.
Slow and graceful is the word –
Do not bounce – it looks absurd.
It looks so easy when it's done
By those who learned when they were one!
But we will practice every week
Until our steps are smooth and sleek.

Now we've practiced with our feet,
Arms and heads must take front seat.
Arms are firm and never limp.
Stand up straight – don't be a wimp.
Turning corners or eight hands round –
Floppy arms won't get you round.
Look at your partner, and don't forget
The other people in your set.
Soon we'll be ready for a chance
To do our stepping in a dance.

Basic figures we must try
To do in dances by and by.
Reels of three and set and cast –
These are taught us very fast.
Rights and lefts and then pousette
Are ones we never should forget.
Circles, wheels and figures of eight –
Will we ever get them straight?

Allemande and reel of four –
You mean to tell me there are more?

We've learned some dances – first a reel.
We've walked it through to get the feel.
The music starts, we curtsy and bow.
We have to rely on our memories now.
The first couple dances, the second one too.
Next it's our turn – now what do we do?
We look at each other, our faces aghast –
We can't remember – do we set, turn or cast?
Someone reminds us and off we go –
Trying to remember to point our toe,
To turn our feet out, and hold up our arms,
And we finish the dance with no more alarms.

Each week we learn more as the season advances
And soon we have learned quite a number of dances.
The an announcement is made at the hall –
At the end of the season there will be a ball!
When we hear this, we all give a hand
Because at the ball we will dance to a band!
A ball is a social, and part of the reason
We learn all these dances from season to season.
We look at the programme – could we go to the dance
If we practice the dances for weeks in advance?

Now at the ball we can show what we've learned,
The steps and the figures, the sets and the turns.
Our teacher is proud – we remember her teaching.
We do all the dances without any preaching.
We stand in straight lines, we phrase and we smile
And try to remember the steps all the while.
We point our toes, turn out our feet,
Our deportment is good and others we greet,
But, most of all, we show our enjoyment,
Not look as though this is the lowest employment.

The season is over. Next year we'll be back
To learn more and more of the dances we lack.
There are workshops to go to and many more balls.
The dancing has hooked us, the music it calls.
All over the world Scottish dancing is done.
Wherever you go, you will find that it's fun.
New Zealand or Scotland, Vancouver or Maine,
The people are friendly, the dancing's the same.

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