

THE WHISTLE 1972-73



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OUR DANCES NO. 74: The highland schottische

Couple-dances are sometimes looked down on by your true-blue country-dancer (though, oddly enough, not by highland dancers). And sometimes, indeed, they are of little traditional interest or choreographic worth. The highland schottische is, however, an exception. It is in quite a different category from, say, the Gay Gordons, being considerably older, and having a definite Scottish character—the Gay Gordons is a 20th-century novelty dance, and the steps in it could occur in a dance originating anywhere from Russia to the U.S.A. (the "picture-frame" handhold used being particularly popular in German folk-dances of the Rheinländer type, in American versions of the Varsovienne, and in some styles of Hopak kolom in the Ukraine). The highland schottische has a very definite place in the Scottish traditional repertoire. Some ten or fifteen years ago it was quite common to find in Canada elderly people who had emigrated from the West Highlands and whose repertoire consisted of precisely two dances: the foursome reel and the highland schottische. These they would cheerfully dance several times each in the course of a ceilidh.

Sometime after the polka had become popular in Western Europe, a slower version of the dance arose, known under various names, but most often as the "schottisch". This word is the German for "Scottish"; the dance may or may not have originated in Germany; it did not originate in Scotland. The name, in fact, is no evidence for the dance's origin; in the early nineteenth century a fad seemed to arise for giving dances "foreign" names, but "Swedish dances" did not come from Sweden, nor "Circassian circle" from Circassia, nor "Sicilian circle" from Sicily and so on. The second commonest name for the dance was "Rheinländer", which was used in Germany and Norway (and, of course, does not prove that the dance originated in the Rhineland). The French called the dance "écossaise", which is the French for "Scottish". However, they also used the word "écossaise" for an entirely different kind of dance, more correctly called ecossoise; so anyone seeing a reference to an "écossaise" when reading about dancing needs to look out for possible confusion.

Schottische music, being slowed-down polka, is in quadruple rhythm (four beats to the bar) and played at about

forty bars per minute. Thus it has the same rhythm and tempo as the strathspey, or at least, the same as the strathspey when used for highland dancing or traditional-style country-dancing: modern-style country-dancing uses a much slower strathspey. It is easy enough to tell, say, a German or a Swedish schottische from a strathspey; although the rhythm and tempo are the same, the melodic characteristics are quite different. But it is quite hard to draw the line between the Scottish schottische and the strathspey.

The schottische or Rheinländer as a dance goes to a fairly well-defined pattern. It is an eight-bar dance, the first four bars consisting of a characteristic figure, the second half consisting of turning in ballroom hold using step-hops. A very common step-pattern for the first half is two common schottisches followed by four step-hops. The highland schottische is, however, rather different from the general run of continental schottisches: the whole of the first four bars is taken up by the characteristically Scottish fling-type step, and it is the second half that consists of the common schottische plus step-hops.

There are a number of different ways of dancing the highland schottische; we describe what is probably the commonest.

The dancers take ordinary ball-room hold and stand with the man's back to the centre of the dance-floor.

- Bars 1-4 They dance two highland schottische steps, the man starting with his left foot (and therefore hopping on his right foot) and his partner vice versa
- Bars 5-6 They dance one common schottische step
- Bars 7-8 They turn clockwise with four step-hops, progressing in the direction in which the man's left shoulder was originally pointing.

One of the commonest variations is as follows. Instead of taking ball-room hold, the man may put his right arm round his partner's waist and she puts her left arm round his waist, with the free hands raised in the air, for bars 1 and 2. They reverse this hold for bars 3 and 4, and use ball-room hold for the rest of the dance.

The dancers may face one another with hands on hips, both starting with the left foot (as described for the man above) and dance as described for four bars. Then they link right elbows and turn clockwise with step-hops for two bars, and link left elbows and turn anti-clockwise with step-hops for the remaining two bars.

A version has been found in Sidbury, in south-west England, in which the highland schottische step has degenerated into four taps with the left foot followed by four taps with the right foot. After the turns there is an eight-bar promenade; thus this version of the dance is 24 bars long.

BOOK REVIEW *Rantin' pipe and tremblin' string*, by George S. Emmerson

This book is clearly a labour of love; Professor Emmerson says that it has been "nurtured over the years", and we can well believe him. He also says "to serve the needs of the layman as well as the scholar judicious compromise is necessary". However, the compromise is one-sided; the book has plenty to offer the amateur of dance-music, but much less for the musicologist.

The author has, understandably enough, not found much about early dance-music, but he fills out his first chapter with an evocative passage about Saint Columba who, when he reached Iona "doubtless picked out the scattered, froth-rimmed rocks, topped in green, and slender strands of the Hebrides", with references to illustrations of old-testament dancing in Anglo-Saxon psalters, with an imaginative description of the way in which a song-dance might have been performed to the ballad "Binnorie", and—getting nearer the point—with a mention of the fifteenth-century poem *Cockelbie's sow* which mentions many dances by name.

The book begins to get into its stride in chapter 4 with an account of the first substantial collection of Scottish dance-tunes, Henry Playford's *Original Scotch tunes (full of the highland humours)* of 1700. We are given a complete list of the titles of the tunes in this collection, though none of the tunes is reproduced among the book's musical examples.

After a brief mention of early manuscripts, Professor Emmerson turns to the famous fiddler-composers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, men whose repertoire is the very back-bone of Scottish dance-music, and gives us excellent short accounts of Robert Mackintosh, William Marshall, and the Gows. He is particularly interested in the charges of plagiarism levelled against the Gows and provides us with a complete list of disputed tunes. This chapter is the highlight of the book, whose other strong point is the inclusion of several interesting lists—the ones we mentioned and lists in the appendix of the contents of the Holmain MS, two MSS by David Young and—particularly useful—the lesser-known Gillespie MS. By comparison the later chapters, in which the music is analysed, are disappointing; this is what I had in mind when I wrote that the book had little to offer to the musicologist.

There are, in fact, many details in these chapters that a knowledgeable musicologist would quarrel with, including confusion between two different types of tune called hornpipe (it is the newer quadruple-rhythm hornpipe that accompanies treepling steps, not the older triple-rhythm one), complete omission of any reference to quicksteps, classification of *Petronella* and *Highland laddie* as Scotch measures, a nonsensical reference to heavy stress falling "furtively between the third and fourth beats" in a rant, the mysterious

statement that "most so-called reels are more precisely rants" and a tendency to class all tunes in 6/8 time as jigs.

Thus, while this book does not rank as a work of serious scholarship, it does deserve a place on the shelves of anyone who wants to know more about Scottish dance-musicians of the past two centuries than can be found in the musical chapter of a book on Scottish dance or the dance-chapter of a book on Scottish music.

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BOOK REVIEW *Hebridean dances* (\$3.00 from The Caber Feidh School of Dancing, 33 Gallows Hill, WD4 8PG, U.K.)

These are the famous Hebridean solo step dances, taught by Ewen McLaughlan of South Uist between 1855 and 1885, and passed on through various teachers in South Uist until Jack McConachie noted them on a visit to South Uist and started teaching them at his strathspey school of dancing.

The dances are

Over the water
Hielan' laddie
Tulloch gorm
Blue bonnets
The first of August

The first four have an interesting attractive self-consistent not-quite-highland character all their own and are most enjoyable once the dancer has mastered the rather tricky Hebridean-type shuffles (not terribly well described in the book—try to see them danced by someone who knows the style). The first of August is a tapped hornpipe, somewhere between Scottish and Irish in style. (In fitting the steps to the music, note that the time-signature should be 2/4, not 4/4).

The book contains a sixth dance, also Hebridean and also collected and taught by Jack McConachie, but not coming from Ewen McLaughlan. Jack called it "The Flowers of Edinburgh" though no one is quite sure of what its real name is: most probably it is another "Hielan' laddie".

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CORRESPONDENCE. From Harry C. Ways

Sorry to see The Thistle end. We would invite your contributors to send items to The Newsreel of the Scottish Country Dance Society of Washington D.C. for possible publication. [Presumably send items to Mr. Ways. His address is 5902 Dalecarlia Place N.W., Washington 20016, U.S.A.]

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: : : HISTORICAL NOTES : : :

John Knox on dancing

1. (Extracts from the works of John Knox, volume ii)

(About the queen)

In presence of her counsel she kept herself grave... but how soon that ever her French tillockis, fiddlers, and others of that band, got the house alone, there might be seen skipping not very comely for honest women. Her common talk was in secret she saw nothing in Scotland but gravity, which repugned altogether to her nature, for she was brought up in joysitie; so termed she her dancing and other things thereto belonging.

(About princes)

...in fiddling and flinging they are more exercised than in reading or hearing of God's most blessed word; and fiddlers and flatterers...are more precious in their eyes than men of wisdom and gravity.

(About dancing)

...albeit in sculpture I found no praise of it, and in profane writers that it is termed the gesture rather of those that are mad and in frenzy than of sober men, yet do I not utterly damn it [provided] that the principal vocation of those that use that exercise be not neglected for the pleasure of dancing.

(About partners)

In dancing of the Purpose (so term they that dance in which man and woman talketh secretly—wise men would judge such fashions more like to the bordel than to the comeliness of honest women) in this dance the queen chose Chatelett and Chatelett took the queen.

2. Extract from a letter from Randolph to Sir William Cecil, dated 30/xii/1562.

Mr Knox is so hard with us that we have laid aside much of our dancing.

When dancing was dancing

An old Deeside man: "To go over twenty couples in 'The merry lads of Ayr' without stop made one feel very comfortable". [Quoted in the Aberdeen weekly free press, 3/ix/1881.]

American enthusiasm

(From *The Yankees of Connecticut*, by W. Storrs Lee, describing a wedding in New London in 1769).

"Ninety-two gentlemen and ladies attended, and danced ninety-two jigs, fifty-two contra-dances, forty-five minuets, and seventeen hornpipes".

? ? ? ? YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED ? ? ? ? :

Q. I have seen an article on Scottish country dancing which seems to be well thought of, because it has been reprinted at least three times, which starts off by saying "In eighteenth century Scotland, country dancing constituted the main form of social dancing in the cities and at court in the lowland region". I don't see how this could be true: surely the Hanoverian court was firmly settled in England at the time, and the Jacobite court was in exile?

A. Yes: the remark about dancing at court is entirely mistaken. Not only that, but it was not until the end of the eighteenth century that country-dancing aroused any great enthusiasm in Scotland. The famous quotations from Major Topham reveal what a poor showing country-dances made as late as 1776—and this was in Edinburgh: in smaller or more northerly towns they would have been even less popular.

Q. What Scottish country-dances would have been danced by (i) Mary Queen of Scots, (ii) Bonny Prince Charlie, (iii) Queen Victoria?

A. (i) None: the country-dance had not reached Scotland in her time.

(ii) Probably none. The only Scottish dance that we know for certain that he danced is not a country-dance but the three-some reel (during his wanderings after Culloden).

(iii) It is hard to say. She mentioned once in her Journal "we danced one country dance" but without naming it (Sept. 12, 1842). The only country-dance she mentioned by name is La Tempête (Sept. 24, 1875) but she didn't say whether she personally danced it. The chances are that she danced the standard favourite dances of the Victorian era: Petronella, Broun's reel, Merry Lads of Ayr, Triumph, Guaracha, Tempête, etc.

Q. Why are there so many more "aristocratic" Scottish dances than English ones? I am thinking of the Duke of Perth, the Earl of Home, the Marquis of Huntly's strathspey and a dozen others. English dances seem to be called "Picking up sticks", "Steamboat", "Nancy's fancy" and by similar plebeian names. One would have expected Scotland, with its clan system, to be less aristocrat-ridden than England.

A. One part of the answer is that the clan system applied only to the highlands (where the country-dance

scarcely penetrated) not to the big towns or the southern countryside. Neither Glasgow nor Edinburgh is a clan seat. Another part is that there are probably more aristocratically-titled English dances that you think.

The country-dance started as a quite literally rustic dance in England in the sixteenth century. It gradually made its way upwards in society and spread to other countries. Throughout the eighteenth century it was danced by fashionable society in England; in the nineteenth century it died out and only a few village remnants were left. It so happens that the big English dance society (the EFDSS) have concentrated entirely on the very early and very late dances, and so if you judge by their repertoire (as you will inevitably do unless you have done some historical research of your own) you will get an unbalanced picture of the proportion of English dances that are aristocratic. By contrast, the country-dance did not reach Scotland until the eighteenth century, so there is no early repertoire of rustic Scottish country dances. But a number of the eighteenth-century aristocratic Scottish dances have been published by the RSCDS, and so are reasonably well-known. When we come to the nineteenth century, the dances did not die out in Scotland to the same extent as in England; but nevertheless there are a fair number of plebeian titles: The merry dancers, The nut, Fight about the fireside, and so on: not too different from England.

When we come to the twentieth century there is again not too much difference—both English and Scottish composers are vying for the patronage of the Royal family. "Princess Margaret's fancy" can be set against "The Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh".

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Please note our new address is
4242 W. King Edward Avenue,
Vancouver 8, B.C.

From Bob Donald and S. R. Clowes, 30 Wicks Crescent,
Formby, Liverpool,
England.

This letter is to tell you of a new project in Scottish Dancing: a twice-yearly publication to be called "SCOTTISH DANCE ARCHIVES". For an annual subscription of probably 35p, the subscriber will receive 20 new dances each year. The dances will be published in the form of sheets suitable for loose leaf binding.

At this stage we are trying to find out how many established devisors of dances have unpublished dances that they would consider having published in this way. Publishing in the "SCOTTISH DANCE ARCHIVES" will cost the devisor nothing. Once the system is under way, the "ARCHIVES" will be open to any devisor anywhere in the world, but before announcing "ARCHIVES" to potential subscribers we must be able to send out the first issue of 10 dances, and we ask for your support in this.

So that you will know what you are being asked to support, we now explain the policy and how it will be run. We believe that there is a need for the many new dances now being created to have an outlet. Dances submitted to the "ARCHIVES" will be examined by the editors to select the best; every dance published will have been danced by experienced dancers and their views will be taken into account in the selection. It is the intention of the editors that the published dances should be both easily danced by anyone with any experience of Scottish Dancing, and yet have a freshness that will make them different and enjoyable. A small proportion may be slightly more specialised (some may be dances specially suitable for childrens classes) but will still conform to the above criteria. It is the aim of the editors that the cost to subscribers should be kept to a minimum; any profit would go to promote and benefit Scottish Dancing.

It is unfortunately not possible for the editors to arrange that individual copyright be assigned to the devisor of each dance. Instead copyright will be claimed for "SCOTTISH DANCE ARCHIVES" and devisors will be given permission in writing to republish their own dances on their own behalf, should they so wish. As well as being sent to subscribers, individual back numbers will be sold. If and when such sales of any individual dance exceeds a set number (not yet decided) a royalty would be paid to the devisor.

We hope you will find yourself in sympathy with our scheme and support us. An early reply would be appreciated as we hope to start "ARCHIVES" this dancing season.

-- ADVERTISEMENTS --

J.T. McHARDY CO. LTD., 538 Seymour Street,
Vancouver 2. Tele: 681-6616. Pipe-band
supplies, highland dress, dancing shoes,
Scottish books and records, RSCDS books,
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Efficient mail-order service.

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The square dance magazine that is different.
\$2.50 for 12 issues, from Ralph Page,
117 Washington Street, Keene, N.H. USA 03431.
Each issue brings you interesting articles on
all phases of dancing: squares, contras, folk-
dance, folk-song, folk-lore. Traditional
recipes too, for hungry dancers.

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THE THISTLE

New address: 4242 W. King Edward, Vancouver 8, B.C.

Back numbers: 2-9, 11, 13-24 25¢; 25-34, 36-39, 42-44,
46 to date 35¢. The rest are out-of-print, but Xerox
copies available on request at 10¢ per exposure. Other
publications: Schiehallion 10¢, Inverness Reel 10¢,
Inverness gathering 5¢, Argyll broadswords 20¢.
Sixteen Country Dances (1945-1967) by Hugh Thurston 60¢.

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