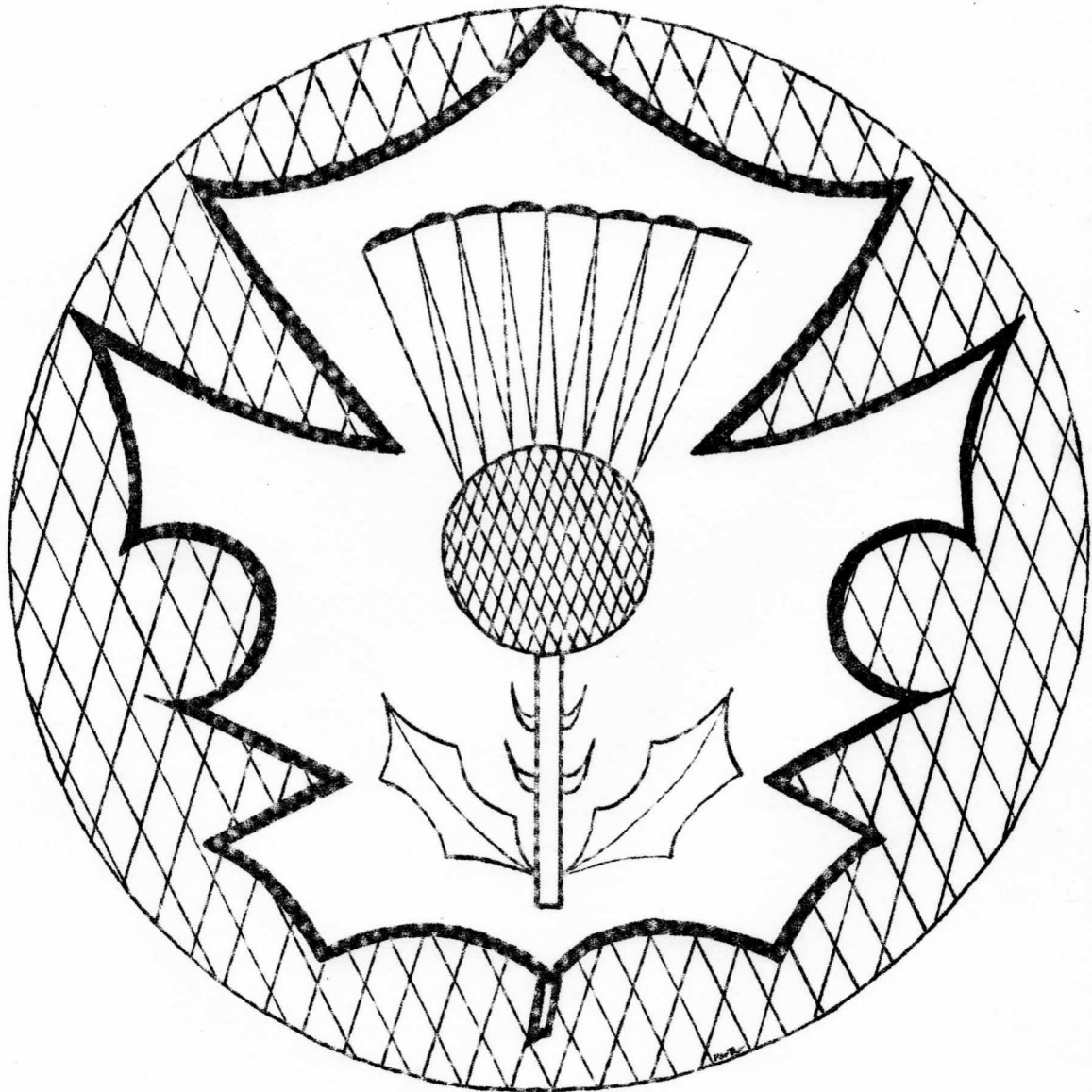


the thistle



a magazine of scottish country
dancing & allied subjects

Issued by the Thistle Club.

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Editorial Address: 3515 Fraser, Vancouver 10, B.C. Canada.

NO. 28.

May, 1966.

EDITORIAL.

With this issue we come to the end of one more year - the Thistle's fifth - and dancing prepares to change to its summer form. The annual week-end of Scottish dancing and the Victoria day holiday always seem to mark the break; and we feel that summer dancing is well under way when the open-air sessions in Stanley Park are in progress.

We wish all our readers a pleasant summer, and look forward to the re-union at the start of the next season.

OUR DANCES, NO. 31 : CIRCASSIAN CIRCLE.

To-day we know "Circassian circle" as the name of one dance, but originally it was the name of a whole type of dance, namely dances in the couple-facing-couple-in-fours-around-the-room formation.

To see the dance in perspective, we should recall that all through the eighteenth century and a few years more - in fact from before 1700 until well after 1800 - country dances were all in longwise formation. Then, in 1822 quite a number of new formations, ranging from very slight variants on the longwise formation to rather extravagant novelties, were described in "The modern dancing master" by G.M.S. Chivers. The slightest variant was perhaps the *écossoise* : here the only change was that the first man started the dance on the women's side and the first woman on the men's side (like "My love she's but a lassie yet"). The most extravagant novelty was the "Chivonian circle", invented by Chivers himself, which consisted of the four-couple sets of *La Tempête* arranged around the room like the two-trio sets of *Dashing White Sergeant*. These new formations tended to have rather exotic names, such as "Mescalanzas", "Spanish Dances", or "Swedish dances". These were merely names, of course, and in particular, the Circassian circle has nothing whatever to do with Circassia.

Two Circassian circles from Chivers' book are as follows.

La Belle Sergent: ladies' chain, set to and turn partners, half poussette and turn partner under arm.

La Daphne: right and left, set to and turn partner, ladies' chain, half poussette and turn partner under arm.

Some of the new formations died out as soon as the novelty wore off, but in the case of the Circassian circle one dance survived which took over the name of the formation. For a number of years, in fact, it seemed to be the general rule that each dance-manual would describe one dance in this formation, under the name "Circassian circle", not always with the same figures, but always something like the two examples above or the dance we know today as Circassian circle. Eventually, however, (probably about 1860) it settled down to the sequence of figures familiar to us, danced to the hornpipe tune familiar to us. (I cannot think why anybody ever calls this tune a reel - it is as typical a hornpipe as you would ever find).

Because country-dancing died out in England about 1825, Circassian circle has been danced much more in Scotland than in England, but it did survive in the countryside there (though not in the city ballroom). It also survived in the U.S.A.,

and at some time round about 1840 changed its name to Sicilian circle. Just as in Scotland, just one dance of the type survived in any one community. One of the commonest Sicilian circles goes as follows: advance and retire, hands-round, ladies' chain, right-and-left, advance and retire, advance and pass through.

As if to make things more complicated, the English found another, quite different, dance (dancers in one big ring) which they call "Circassian circle part I" and dance to the tune of "The Irish washerwoman". The true Circassian circle they sometimes call "Circassian circle part II", at other times they use the American name.

[N.B. The statement in the Scottish Country Dance book no. 1 that Circassian circle is to be found in "Companion to the ballroom", 1827, is not correct : it did not appear in Scottish books until later].

OUR DANCES, NO. 32 : JOHN McALPIN (Strathspey).

By Hugh Foss (from the Galloway Album).

Tune : John McAlpin (traditional)

- 1 - 2 1st couple advance (one step) and give right hands as if to cross, then retire (one step).
- 3 - 4 They cross over, giving left hands.
- 5 - 6 Taking right hands, they lead down a place (2nd move up) and
- 7 - 8 Turn by the left hand nearly once round.
- 9 - 16 They turn corners and end on own sides in 2nd place.
- 17 - 18 The three women take hands and set.
- 19 - 20 The women advance (two steps) while the three men take hands and set.
- 21 - 24 The women retire (two steps) and set, while the men advance and retire.
- 25 - 28 The three couples cross over, giving right hands, form a circle and go half round to the left.
- 29 - 32 They cross over again, giving left hands, form a circle and go half round to the right.

The ideas in this dance came from fencing. But it is not a "fencing lilt". The origin is only of historical interest and does not affect the manner of dancing.

Bars 1-4 represent a one-two, where a fencer feints on one side of his opponent's blade and disengages to make the real attack on the other side. Bars 5-8 represent one-two-deceive (get a fencer to explain this). When one fencer retires his opponent usually advances. This inspired bars 17-24. Sometimes fencers rush up so close to each other that they have to be separated by the referee. This is known as a corps-à-corps. Hence bars 25-32.

The tune was chosen first. Then the fencing ideas were poured into the mould.

RENEWALS.

If you have started your Thistle subscription at the beginning of the season (September or October) this will be the last issue. It might be a good idea to renew now, while you think of it [send \$1.25 to The Thistle 3515 Fraser, Vancouver 10] - last year a number of people missed the first one or two issues through late renewals, and we are able to fill the gaps only while supplies last.

COMING EVENTS.

Nova Scotia Summer dance camp. July 9-16. Scottish, square, folk, ball-room and contra dancing for all ages at all levels. Amherst, Nova Scotia. Further information from Mrs. Margaret Ellis, Box 260, Port Hawkesbury, N.S.
Cleveland R.S.C.D.S. Weekend. May 27-29. Classes; banquet and ball with Stan Hamilton's orchestra. Further information from Mrs. C. Easton, 18501 Forestwood Ave., Cleveland, Ohio, 44135, U.S.A.

AND, OF COURSE:-

Our own Vancouver Scottish dance weekend. May 21-23. Scottish country dancing, highland dancing, dances from Mrs. MacNab's collections. Further information from Mrs. Harvey Barnes, 2888 Highbury, Vancouver 8.

LOCAL NEWS.

Mrs. Thomas Bingham has been made an honorary member of the Vancouver Branch of the Canadian Dance Teachers' Association. She has been a member of the branch since its formation and was for many years Chairman of the Scottish Country Dance division.

Two of our editors, Hugh and Nina Thurston, visited Kamloops for a workshop week-end, which seems to have become a regular annual affair, each one more enjoyable than the last.

Mrs. Bingham's dance in aid of the "Save the children fund" this year marked the first public appearance of a new country-dance orchestra, whose music was greatly appreciated by the dancers.

While the audience for the World's Curling Championships were taking their places on the first night they were entertained by an arena-full of highland and country dancers, with dances ranging from the Dashing White Sergeant to the Argyll Broadwords.

BOOK REVIEW.

NEW SCOTTISH COUNTRY DANCES IN TRADITIONAL FORM. John Drewry, 1965.

Here are twenty new dances, some easy, some not so easy, all pleasant and attractive. Two two-couple dances, "Netherby Hall" and "Little Ross Light" are particularly welcome: it seems to be more difficult to write a good simple dance than a good complicated dance, and in these two Mr. Drewry has succeeded admirably.

In spite of the title of the book not all the dances are, strictly speaking, in traditional form: one is in a square formation and three or four are in longwise sets of exactly four couples in which, after one round, the couples end in the order 2 3 4 1. But, although this last formation is not strictly traditional, it is becoming familiar through such modern dances as "Rob Roy", "Inverness gathering" and "Holyrood house".

The explanations are clear, with all necessary diagrams; all music not readily available elsewhere is included (three tunes were specially composed for this collection by Winifred M. Carnie); the binding is ingenious, with a plastic spine which holds the pages effectively, but allows individual pages to be removed and replaced with ease. Typists will be amused by the clever typed thistles that decorate the title page. Copies of the book can be obtained from the author, at the Department of Biological Chemistry, University of Aberdeen, Marischal College, Aberdeen, Scotland, at a price equivalent to 90¢.

[Since the above paragraphs were written, Netherby Hall has become a firm favourite in our group].

BOOK REVIEW.

FIVE TRADITIONAL SCOTTISH COUNTRY DANCES FOR 1965, R.S.C.D.S., price 3/6d.
(= 50¢.)

This year the R.S.C.D.S. book contains five dances instead of the usual twelve. In spite of the title, the dances are not traditional in the strict sense (i.e. collected from people still dancing them) but historical (i.e. resurrected from old books and manuscripts). West's hornpipe and Mrs. Garthland's strathspey (the latter danced to and named after a very well-known tune) come from the Ladies Pocket Book; Haymaking and The Fyket (which those present at Miss Milligan's last visit will remember her teaching) come from the Blantyre MS, from which we have already had such favourites as The New Rigged Ship and Lennox Love to Blantyre.

The most interesting of these dances is "The Sow's tail". It is taken from Walsh's Caledonian Country Dances, published just before 1750. The original title, as given there, is "Swine's tale to Georgia". The dance, as given in the R.S.C.D.S. book is notable for containing the figure "half figure of eight with two couples", a figure which was quite unknown to dancers until a year or so ago, when Hugh Foss, who had thought it up for himself, put it in some of his new dances. It is a good figure and was eagerly seized on by at least three other composers. It is therefore more than a little surprising to see it attributed to an old dance.

The original directions for "Swine's tale to Georgia" as given in Caledonian Country Dances are:

First cu. cross over and hands all four round with the 3d cu. and cast up —

Then 1st and 2d cu. hands round and Back to Back and turn ::

First Cu. cross over and half figure with the 2d Cu. and turn —

2d. Cu. cross over and half figure with the 1st Cu. and turn ::

First Cu. Jigg it and cast up and Jigg it and cast off —

Then Right and Left with the 2d Cu. quite round and turn your partner ::

[The signs — and :: break the dance into eight-bar phrases. Cu. was the standard abbreviation for "couple"].

The phrase "first couple half figure with second couple" is a common and standard phrase in old books and manuscripts, and it indicates simply that the first couple dance a figure-of-eight round the second couple, who stand still. Indeed, in order to fit the "figure of eight with two couples" into the dance, the R.S.C.D.S. have had to alter the dance very considerably, as the reader can see for himself by comparing the version in the R.S.C.D.S. book with the original version. Specifically, they have (i) cut out the hands-round by the first and second couples, (ii) displaced the back-to-back-and-turn to come after the figures-of-eight, (iii) cut out the fifth phrase completely, and (iv) cut out the final turn.

Here is a reconstruction (by Bob Campbell, of Oakville) of "Swine's tale to Georgia" that does not make any unnecessary alterations - it merely translates the old instructions into modern language.

1 - 4 First couple cross over and cast off two places. Second and third couples step up.

5 - 8 First and third couples dance four hands round (three steps). Then first couple cast up to second place while third couple, with nearer hands still joined, lead down the middle to own place.

- 9 - 12 First and second couples dance four hands round. First couple finish in the middle facing each other, second couple back in the side lines.
- 13 - 16 First couple dance back-to-back (2 steps) then dance a half-turn with right hands to finish on own sides in second place.
- 17 - 24 First couple cross over, cast up round second couple (who step down) dance a half figure of eight round the second couple then turn with both hands to finish on own sides in top place.
- 25 - 32 Second couple cross over, cast up round first couple (who step down) dance a half figure of eight round the first couple, then turn with both hands to finish on own sides in top place.
- 33 - 40 First couple set and cast up, set and cast off.
- 41 - 44 first and second couples right and left (one step per side).
- 45 - 48 First couple turn once round with both hands to finish on own sides in second place.

[Because the original description did not say whether turns were right-hand or both hands, Mr. Campbell made an arbitrary choice].

PETRONELLA.
(Triolet).

I've searched around
And turn to you.
Though girls abound
I've searched around
And find I've found
None else will do.
I've searched around
And turn to you.

Hugh R. Foss.

NORTHERN JUNKET.

The square-dance magazine that is different. \$2.50 for 12 issues, from Ralph Page, 117 Washington St., Keene, N.H., U.S.A.

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.

GRAMOPHONE RECORDS.

Twelve-inch long-playing records are easily found in Canada, but few shops over here stock the easy-to-carry seven-inch records. A library of favourite dances can be built up with seven-inchers with much less duplication than the larger records entail, and therefore appreciably more cheaply. You can order seven-inch records by post from many firms in Scotland (or England) if you know what is available. Here is a list. Comments are by the Record Reviewer of "The Reel" and are reprinted here with his permission and that of the Editor. Comments in square brackets are our own.

.... ctd.

[The following general remarks appeared after a review of some records by the four bands mentioned below].

What is it in a band that makes people dance? What is behind the negative criticism that a performance is not "dancy"? What is lift? Your reviewer finds it difficult to define; to paraphrase Barrie's definition of "charm" : if you have it, it doesn't matter what else you have, and if you haven't, you've had it! But whatever it is, Jim McLeod and Andrew Rankine's bands have it, and Jimmy Blair and the Park Film Studio Players don't, or at least not enough of it. Have you danced with music that seemed to be down, down, down on the beat of the bar till you wanted to go through the floor? And again with music that lifted you up, up, up on the off-beat of the bar till you forgot about your poor tired feet? This may be the lesson that McLeod and Rankine learned, or always knew, or just had inside them. The Park Film trio has a preponderance of rhythm instruments, and these just must give the lift; the fiddler, out-numbered two to one, has enough to do playing the tunes (which he does very well). If the bass had given us the down-beat, the guitar the up-beat, and the engineer a little more volume, this might have been very different. Jimmy Blair is much better : he would seem to have much more experience and confidence, yet his arrangements are rather hum-drum. If he could add lift to the excellent choice of titles, his records could become the standard by which all others are judged. As it is, we must admire most their usefulness and their pretty covers, and not their excellence.

Jimmy Shand (Parlophone)

- 45R 4247 Leith country dance; marches
45R 4332 Earl of Errol's reel; Foursome reel and Reel of Tulloch. The first record available in the favourite form of four strathspey steps followed by a half Reel of Tulloch. [Fits "Schiehallion", Argyll broadswords, and Fraser of Lovat].
GEP 8602 Gay Gordons; Dashing white sergeant; waltzes
GEP 8618 Angus reel; The punch-bowl; waltzes.
Why do Scottish dance-bands, Shand's especially, so often carve other rhythms into waltz shape when so many good waltz tunes exist?
GEP 8641 Ca' the ewes; eightsome reel.
These full-length sides were recorded during dancing and fill the bill very well.
MSP 6235 Dashing white sergeant; Mrs. Hepburn Belches.
MSP 6225 Marches; The New Scotland Strathspey.
GEP 8535 The white cockade; Madge Wildfire's strathspey; Lord Rosslyn's fancy; Monymusk.

Bobbie McLeod (Philips)

- BBE 12023 The eightsome ree; The Duke of Perth.
The eightsome reel is complete and excellent; the Duke of Perth will serve a five-couple set if each couple dances twice and slips to the bottom.

Jack Sinclair (Beltona)

- SEPM 96 Aberdeen polka; La Russe; Lassie; Lamb Skinnet.

Lindsay Ross (Parlophone)

- GEP 8906 Earl of Errol's reel; Foursome reel and reel of Tulloch; The Montgomeries' rant; Lochiel's rant.

Jim McLeod (Parlophone) A good band in Shand style.

45R 4267 Gay Gordons; Waltz country dance.

Another Gay Gordons and yet another waltz country dance!

45R 4442 Waltz country dance; La Russe.

The "La Russe" is fine to hear, but too short for the whole dance.

45R 4613 Just as I was in the morning; polka.

45R 4786 Back o' Benachie; Waltz.

45R 4692 The Glasgow highlanders; The Isle of Skye.

Jim McLeod makes you dance : his band, and Ian Powrie's, must be two of the most assured-sounding bands in the business : they impress simply with their absence of amateurishness.

Angus Fitchet (Beltona)

SEP 40 Regimental marches.

One of the best bands on record, for listening and dancing alike. Although not sold primarily for dancing, these six items are in strict tempo, and could be used as such. Each is complete with starting and finishing chords, and is separate from its neighbours on the disc. "Blue Bonnets" and "Hielan' laddie" can well be used for the solo dances of those names, and suffice for six steps each. The other tunes are "The Campbells are coming", "Cock o' the north", "Black bear", and "Pibroch of Donald dhu".

Andrew Rankine (Parlophone)

45R 4248 Dunoon barn dance; highland waltz.

Comparison with Shand is inevitable, especially as the combination of instruments seems to be the same. The balance of choice is for Rankine on grounds of musical quality alone, while other factors leave little to choose.

45R 4298 Leith country dance; Elwyn's fairy glen.

[This recording of "Elwyn's fairy glen" is Mrs. MacNab's own choice for "McLaine's hogmanay"].

45R 4353 Circassian circle; ?

45R 4661 Angus MacLeod; Highland wedding.

45R 4744 MacLeod of Mull; Peggie's wedding.

45R 4722 Meg Merrilees; Boston two-step.

Adam Rennie (Parlophone)

MSP 6231 Rakes of Glasgow; La Tempête.

Tim Wright

Parlophone 7EG 8247 The gentle shepherd; Ca' the ewes; Duke of Perth; Caledonian rant.

Tim Wright has done these before on ten-inch 78 r.p.m. records, and they are some of his best of recent years.

H.M.V.

EPD 001 The sandal; Two and two.

EPD 002 New park; The rakish highlandman.

EPD 003 None so pretty; Lochiel's rant.

EPD 004 Admiral Nelson; St. Andrew's night.

EPD 005 The eightsome reel; Petronella.

EPD 006 The alewife and her barrel; Just as I was in the morning.

This set is the Society's issue of most of book 19 (plus two others).

All are reasonably well played, and cover the full dance, but Tim Wright disappoints with his rendering of 6/8 tunes. [EPD 005 seems to have much more life than the others]

Ian Powrie (Parlophone)

- 45R 4386 The Letham ladies strathspey; Gay Gordons.
Powrie plays the hoppiest polka-like strathspey you have ever heard.
45R 4615 Cock a bendie; waltz.
45R 4659 John McGill; Caledonian country dance.
45R 4443 Speed the plough; Gaelic waltz.

Powrie's must be one of the most assured-sounding bands in the business. His strathspeys, however, played for the taste of Perthshire dancers, are much too hoppity for general consumption; and he does not give enough of each dance.

Jim Cameron (Beltona)

- 45 BL 2632 Waltz country dance; La Russe.
Cameron's trumpet is much less prominent than previously, which makes this much more acceptable than before, unless you are a Cameron fan. La Russe is full-length.
SEP 33 Cauld kail; Green grow the rashes.
SEP 34 Keppoch's rant; Perthshire highlanders.
SEP 35 Miss Mary Douglas; Red House.
SEP 9 The Angus reel; Strathglass house; Gay Gordons; Campbell's frolic
45BL 2492 Scottish reform; Strip the willow.
[The "Strip the willow" is a selection of 6/8 quicksteps].
45BL 2495 Hamilton house; Dundee reel.
[The "Dundee reel" is played as a 32-bar tune].
45BL 2494 Isle of Skye; Waltz country dance.

Fred Hanna (Beltona)

- IEP 55 Reels; jigs.
An Irish band gives us a very useful selection of Scottish music for dancing. The tunes are mostly unconnected with known dances. Chords are included.

Chalmers Wood

- SEG 7873 Strip the willow; Dashing white sergeant; Glasgow highlanders; Petronella.
A re-issue of some rather old 78s. Not recommended.
[The "Strip the Willow" is in triple rhythm, and contains that fine tune - "I have a wife of my ain"].

Park Film Studio Players (Scottish records)

- 4520 EP Captain McBride's hornpipe; Quiet and snug.
4521 EP Miss Bennet's jig; Village reel.
4522 EP Miss Burn's reel; Up in the air.
These players (fiddle, guitar, and double-bass) offer six Book 20 dances, unfortunately adding faint (undermodulated) recording to the rather small effect of the combination. The musicianship of these three is manifest, yet the records are rather unexciting; the will to make us dance is there (and so is Miss Milligan's direction of the recording) and yet they fail.
4519 EP Miss Mary Douglas; Lady Auckland's reel.
3310 2 The MacPhersons of Edinburgh; Lady Stewart MacPherson's reel.

The record list will be continued in our next issue.