



# The THISTLE

A MAGAZINE OF SCOTTISH COUNTRY DANCING AND ALLIED SUBJECTS.

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President: Dr. Norman MacKenzie, C.M.G., M.M. & BAR, Q.C., LL.D.  
Editorial address: 3515 Fraser, Vancouver 10, B.C., Canada.

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## EDITORIAL

We wish to take this opportunity to wish all our readers a very happy and prosperous New Year.

From the results that we have seen at some of the local groups, these parties, and the annual ball, we are sure that a large number of people took to heart some of the New Year resolutions we proposed last year. We sincerely hope that we shall see the same improvements in the quality of dancing this coming year. We would like to repeat three of the resolutions that we suggested last year as a reminder to those who were subscribers last year and hope that some of the new members will take them to heart.

1. To pay attention to the instructor, with no chattering or interrupting during a lesson.
2. To practice at home any of the steps of which we are not sure.
3. A firm resolve to learn the pattern of at least one dance per month.

## OUR DANCES, NO. 10: The Port of Vancouver

This dance, devised by Evelyn Harvie, breaks new ground in our series: it is a local dance in the full sense of the word, and the figures are intended to evoke various aspects of the city and its surrounding hills and waters. The music, which is a strathspey, was composed by Murray Shoolbraid, and mimeographed copies are available free on request. The dance is for four couples in a longwise set.

**The Ocean** — to be smooth and flowing.

- 1 — 4 The first couple lead down to fourth place, the woman crossing to the men's side and the man to the women's side. Meanwhile the other couples dance up to the top and down again, following the first couple but not crossing over. The fourth couple ends in first place, the third in second, and the second in third.
- 5 — 8 The four dancers on each side dance half a reel of four. (This brings all the dancers back to their original places except the first couple, who are still on the "wrong" sides.)
- 9 — 16 Repeat the movements of bars 1 — 8. (This brings all dancers back to original places.)

**Trees** — to be graceful and swaying.

- 1 — 2 The women, with arms outstretched and hands touching, set to the men. The men set back without raising their arms.
- 3 — 4 Advance and retire.
- 5 — 6 As 1 — 2 but the men, not the women, raise their arms.
- 7 — 8 All turn partners once round, ending as follows:  
The first three men facing down, the fourth across, the first woman across, the others up.
- 9 — 10 The first woman and fourth man each cross over, the other three women dance up one place, the other three men down one place.
- 11 — 12 All continue this movement one more stage. This brings the four women into the four top places in the set, and the four men into the four bottom places.
- 13 — 16 The four women dance a right-and-left while the men do likewise.

**The Lions** — (Vancouver's famous twin peaks)

- 1 — 8 The women dance hands-across and back, with the joined hands held high; the men likewise.
- 9 — 12 The bottom couple lead up the middle to second place, while the dancers standing in second and third places move down. (This movement represents an aeroplane flying between the peaks.)

## OUR DANCES, (continued)

13 - 16 The second and third men (now in second place) and the second and third women (now in ~~third~~ <sup>FIRST</sup> place) change places with a strathspey poussette.

**Bridges** - The gateway to the Pacific and the Orient.

- 1 - 4 The second and third men turn each other by the right hand and finish with arms raised to form a bridge. Meanwhile the other two men do the same.
- 5 - 12 The second and third women lead down two places, under the bridge, and cast up two places. Meanwhile the other pair of women dance up outside the first pair, under the other bridge, and, casting off round the bridge piers, lead down to third place.
- 13 - 16 The second and third men turn each other with left hands, while the other two men do the same. On the last bar the first and third women turn into places beside their partners to form a circle.

## The Sun.

- 1 - 2 All dance towards the centre to form a small circle.
- 3 - 6 Join crossed hands and turn the circle once round clockwise.
- 7 - 8 Turn about, dance away from the centre, face in and join hands to form a large circle.
- 9 - 16 Turn the circle once round clockwise.
- 17 - 20 Set first to partners, then to corners.
- 21 - 22 The men dance in to the centre.
- 23 - 24 The men dance toward their partners. On the last bar the men and women stretch out their arms and take each others' hands, the women making a deep courtesy and the men bowing their heads.

(This dance is much easier than it might seem at first glance and makes a very effective display piece - Ed.)

## LOCAL NEWS

The following extract is from The Oban Times:

### Vancouver Scot Honoured - Expert on Highland Dancing

Guest of honour at a dazzling ceremony held recently in Vancouver by the British Columbia Highland Dancers' Association was Mrs. A. MacNab, more widely known as Miss M. Isdale, a leading teacher of Highland dancing in Canada.

Mary Isdale has contributed much to Scottish culture by her work in Highland dancing and piping. She was founder of the Vancouver Ladies' Pipe Band and has taught dancing for over 50 years. She has produced innumerable top-flight dancers and many of the present-day teachers.

She has published the choreography of many of her own original Scottish dances and is an accepted authority in Canada, the U.S.A. and Scotland. Her recent successes, working with Brig. A. G. L. McLean of Edinburgh, in the Military Tattoo of 1958 and again in 1961, have been widely acclaimed.

Mary Isdale was born at Govan, and is the widow of Allan MacNab, late of Cairndow, Argyllshire.

The honour ceremony was led by the Vancouver Ladies' Pipe Band, followed by Miss Isdale and her son, Gordon. Their "Honour Guard" was made up of dancers.

They were followed by the West Vancouver May Queen and the massed pipe bands - Seaforth, Kiwanis and Optimist, followed by the B.C. Highland Dancers who performed the MacLaine of Lochbuie dance.

## INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL

The Kent International Festival of Dance and Song will be held on 1st, 2nd and 3rd, June, 1963 in Maidstone. "If a Canadian party happens to be coming to Europe at that time," the organizers say, "it would be quite something if they would join us. We'd fix accommodation, of course, among the local societies."

Scottish activities will include informal and competitive country dancing, highland dancing, songs, music, piping and games. There will also be square dancing. There will be a street procession in "National Dress" on the first day, and the Festival will close with a grand Farewell Ball.

Further details and entry forms can be obtained from the organizing secretary, Mr. L. R. Leavett Brown, Eastcote, The Hill, Charing, Kent, England.

## HISTORICAL NOTES

There are some interesting comments on dancing at the turn of the century in the current issue of the Clan Chattan Association Journal. They are by Colonel Ritchie, of Acharacle, who learnt his highland dancing from the famous Scott Skinner. He also learned ballroom dancing, which in those days in the North of Scotland comprised reels (foursome and Tulloch), waltz, quadrilles, Lancers, Highland, Schottische and Petronella. He saw the eightsome reel for the first time in 1899, and comments "Until near the end of the between-the-wars period we went all the way round in the circle, not just out and back as now, and linked arms instead of holding hands".

On style he says "Custom has changed a good deal. Nowadays arms do not take part in ballroom dancing. It seems strange to look along lines of men dancing in the Reel of Tulloch with their arms hanging loosely and no hands in the air. And the girls who . . . hopped vigorously without turning round now seem to be standing still doing steps that scarcely show".

Lady Mary Douglas (1773-98) was the daughter of the fourth Earl of Selkirk and the sister of Lord Daer, the first member of the peerage whom Burns ever met socially.

Burns borrowed from her a copy of Orpheus Caledonicus and sent her a recent composition of his own as "a small but sincere mark of that profound respect with which I have to be, My  
ly, Your Ladyship's very humble serv<sup>t</sup>, Rob<sup>t</sup> Burns."

## FOURSOME

I smile at Matilda and bow,  
The skirl of the pipes is beginning.  
The moment I've longed for is now  
Terpsichore's laurels for winning.

The skirl of the pipes is beginning  
To fire me to brilliant endeavour  
Terpsichore's laurels for winning,  
And oh, what a thing to be clever!

To fire me to brilliant endeavour  
I've read and I've trained and I've practised  
And oh, what a thing to be clever!  
Now, Muse, I'll do what thou enactest.

I've read and I've trained and I've practised.  
I must be the best here. I spurn doubt.  
Now, Muse, I'll do what thou enactest  
And keep my knees properly turned out.

I must be the best here. I spurn doubt.  
I have such incredibly nice toes  
And keep my knees properly turned out.  
My legs look so well in their diced hose.

I have such incredibly nice toes.  
In fling steps I really have put work.  
My legs look so well in their diced hose  
And Janet's been praising my footwork.

In fling steps I really have put work  
Observed and adored by each maiden  
And Janet's been praising my footwork.  
The tune changes. There's the strathspey done.

Observed and adored by each maiden  
I'm stared at from every sector.  
The tune changes. There's the strathspey done.  
Why! Janet is dancing with Hector.

I'm stared at from every sector  
With pity or scorn? Now I wonder  
Why Janet is dancing with Hector.  
It isn't as if I had shunned her

With pity or scorn? Now I wonder  
What step is the next in my order –  
It isn't as if I had shunned her.  
It can't be because I have bored her.

What step is the next in my order?  
The balance, or high cuts, or heather?  
It can't be because I have bored her:  
We've had such good dances together.

The balance, or high cuts, or heather?  
Don't say that my talk's become boresome.  
We've had such good dances together.  
She said she would sit out the foursome.

Don't say that my talk's become boresome –  
From the fifth up in front to the second –  
She said she would sit out the foursome;  
She went with the first man who beckoned.

From the fifth up in front to the second –  
Then pawn to Queen's fourth – no that's rubbish –  
She went with the first man who beckoned.  
Alas, my assurance was cubbish.

Then pawn to Queen's fourth – no that's rubbish.  
I knew she was not to be trusted.  
Alas, my assurance was cubbish.  
Oh blast! My right shoelace is busted.

I knew she was not to be trusted  
Since I have said nothing to rankle.  
Oh blast! My right shoelace is busted  
And now I have twisted my ankle.

Since I have said nothing to rankle  
My heart once again is a rover.  
And, now I have twisted my ankle,  
Thank goodness this nonsense is over.

My heart once again is a rover.  
The moment I've longed for is now.  
Thank goodness this nonsense is over.  
I smile at Matilda and bow.

Hugh Foss.

## SO YOU WANT TO BE AN M.C.?

(Reprinted from *The Reel*, by permission)

The West Hampsmith Highlanders is a newly formed Scottish society, and they have asked you to take charge of their opening dance? The standard of dancing will be uneven, you say? Very uneven – from complete novices to members of the Royal Scot –? Man, have you not troubles enough already? But draw in your chair.

Now your first worry will be the programme. For this sort of evening it's a good thing to have your programme prepared in advance; but an even better thing to leave it a bit elastic, so that you can adapt it if you find the standard of dancing is either a little higher or a little lower than you expected.

The ideal programme – of whatever standard – must be varied and balanced: varied in the shapes of the dances and the choice of rhythms; balanced by having a strenuous dance followed by a restful one, a difficult one followed by an easy one.

The shapes to choose from are: long dances, square, couple, and circle or round-the-room dances, where two, three or four people face an equal number. Varying rhythm is more important than varying shape. It would be a bad mistake to give two strathspeys following one another; less serious to give two square dances.

Generally – though not always – it is wise to begin the programme with one or two “throw away” dances, i.e. simple couple or less popular longways dances, while the company is gathering and thawing itself out and the band is playing itself in. Then the time is ripe for a group of – say, three – popular dances, with little pause between. Two of these should be fast dances, and one can with advantage be progressive round the room. This group should set the mood for the evening.

As the hour advances toward the interval, so may the difficulty of the dances, but they must always be within the ability of at least a fair proportion of the gathering. (If there is a small group of experts, put in one really difficult dance for them. They will enjoy doing it – especially if they think they are being admired – and others will enjoy watching it.)

Immediately before the interval the dance selected should be a well-known and stimulating one, so that the first part of the evening will finish on a note of exhilaration. The second half of the programme should begin with a popular dance; those chosen for the later part of the evening should not tax the brain too much.

Now, so far I've been talking of the things you do beforehand. Here are a few things to think about during the momentous evening.

First, don't let the dances – particularly those like Circassian Circle, where everyone is dancing all the time – go on too long, so that the company is in a state of collapse.

Secondly, use your own judgment in giving encores. If a dance like *La Russe* gets a full encore – even when it has been asked for vociferously – you will probably see the dancers tiring before it is over.

Thirdly, decide, according to the ability of the dancers, when it is enough to announce a dance; when you should remind them how to do it; and when it would be wise to have a set showing it once.

Fourthly, look as if you are enjoying the dance, whoever isn't.

Finally, be aware of the band. Bands vary enormously in quality and temperament; but they all play this kind of music because they like it. The M.C. should contribute, so far as he can, to their enjoyment; by seeing they get plenty of warning of the next dance; by making sure that they are properly looked after and “refreshed”; and by making every allowance for the fact that most band leaders know in their inmost hearts that they could do the job better than the M.C.

Now a word about after the event. It is a great help for future occasions if, before retiring to a well-earned rest, you jot down your impressions of the evening – which ideas were good ones and which weren't, and what would be an improvement next time.

You see, acting as an M.C. is a serious business. Some one and a half centuries ago, a certain Mr. Wilson said: “Persons should be very careful in taking upon themselves the office of Master of the Ceremonies, unless properly and fully qualified for that office, as they take upon themselves very great responsibility.”

Very great responsibility – but don't lose heart; dancers intend to enjoy themselves, and it takes a lot to stop them.

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Among 100 dancers, ten knew neither “The Nut” nor “Meg Merrilees”. Seventy-five knew “The Nut”. Eighty-three knew “Meg Merrilees”.

How many knew both?