



The THISTLE

A MAGAZINE OF SCOTTISH COUNTRY DANCING AND ALLIED SUBJECTS.

Issued by the West Point Grey Scottish Country Dance Club of B.C.
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EDITORIAL

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St. Patrick's Day is nearly upon us, and this is a good time to remind ourselves of the tradition of Irish dancing which, if not so widespread as Scottish Country Dancing, has at least as proud a heritage behind it. The Scots, who, as we all know, were originally Irish, may perhaps have brought over their love of dancing and passed it on to the barbarians they conquered. Certainly there is a resemblance between Irish and Scots dancing that even the Sassunach can notice. Even if it was the other way around, and the noble art travelled over to Ireland with the Scots missionary whose day we are remembering, it doesn't matter too much now. The main thing is that both nations dance, and take pride in their dancing traditions. So let us have Rory O'More and a Four-hand Reel on the 17th, and reflect that the honouring of national cultures is a salutary occupation that does every country good.

OUR DANCES, Lady Mary Douglas

This dance comes from Thomas Wilson's book "A Companion to the Ballroom", 1816.

The old terminology is unfamiliar to us, who use modern dance-terms. Because of this, and occasionally because of undue brevity or even definite mistakes, it is sometimes difficult to decipher the old descriptions. Wilson, however, gives us no trouble; we simply look up the successive figures in his book "The Complete System of English Country Dancing", where they are explained in full, with diagrams. Moreover, Wilson is a careful and accurate writer.

"Lady Mary Douglas" consists of the following six figures, each of which takes just eight bars: -

Hey on your own sides: The three men reel together, while the three women reel together. The reels are, of course, symmetrical, i.e. right-shoulder for the men and left-shoulder for the women.

Chain figure of six: As we dance it.

Lead down the middle and up again and lead through the top couple: Wilson's down the middle and up is always very short - two bars down and two bars up. It may be done in two ways; the dancers could take nearer hands and use the "chassé" step or take both hands and use the "side-step". The "lead through" simply consists of a four-bar cast-off-one-on-own-sides. At this point the second couple moves up. Wilson probably did not use the term "cast off" because his casting-off was done with a special "cast off step", whereas the present figure would be done with the chassé step.

Whole figure round the bottom couple: "Whole figure" means what we call "figure-of-eight" and this particular one is like the figure of eight in "Corn Rigs".

Turn corners: The leading dancers turn their first corners with both hands, dance round each other, turn second corners with both hands, and dance back to their own sides. That is, it is something like the second figure of "General Stuart's Reel" but with two-hand instead of one-hand turns.

Whole figure contrary corners: The leading dancers (who are, of course, in second place in the set) cross over, cast off one, dance up to the top, cross over, and cast off one. If you follow this out you will find that each dancer has described a figure-of-eight round two diagonally opposite corners.

This reconstruction is somewhat different from the pre-war reconstruction in book 10, which must have been made without the benefit of the Complete System. Here a question arises: do we just notice that there is a difference, or is it worth while trying out the original and correct version? Usually one finds it is not. Most "original and correct" versions do not suit today's speeds, steps and style - and unless the original is superior it is pedantic to insist on it. Our aim is to have some enjoyable dancing, not to illustrate history. But "Lady

Mary Douglas" is, I think, an exception to this general rule. The original dance has been tried by several dance-clubs, some of whom have and some of whom have not previously tried the version in Book 10, and has always gone down well. Here it is for anyone else who would like to try it.

In case anyone is wondering why the name of the dance was changed in the later editions of the Scottish Country Dance books to "Miss Mary Douglas", I am afraid I cannot say for certain. I have heard it said that someone tried to trace a Lady Mary Douglas in 1816 and found that there was none. However, the tune (to which the name attaches) is older than the dance, and appears also in one of Gow's collections as "Lady Mary Douglas".

CORRESPONDENCE

From Dr. T.M. Flett, Wallasey.

Your third "Thistle" has just arrived, with the article on "The Dashing White Sergeant". Have you an exact transcription of "La Danse Florence" from Anderson? I don't think that one can be certain that the figures are those of "The Dashing White Sergeant", because the set-and-reel figure of "La Danse Florence" is:

Each gentleman set and turn partner on right hand (four bars of music), then set and turn partner on left hand (four bars of music), and reel three with left hand partner and the lady opposite, which brings each in their own place.

(Dr. Flett then gives a diagram showing what would happen if the "lady opposite" were a lady in the opposite trio - rather as in "The Highland Reel" of Book 13.)

Going back to "Thistle" No. 1, your article on "The Duke of Perth" brought various points to mind. Did you know that "Keep the Country, Bonnie Lassie" is in Boag, 1797, with the same figures as "The Duke of Perth" except that 17 - 32 is "lead outsides" rather than reels? I am pretty sure that Boulogne had access to Boag, and that this explains his alternative title. I found a dance called "Keep the Country" up in Ettrick (done circa 1890-95) which had almost certainly the same figures as Duke of Perth except possibly for the last eight bars.

MUSIC FOR DANCING

Music so frequently regarded as a secondary consideration and an unavoidable necessity is in fact of primary importance in all forms of dancing and in none more so than Scottish Country Dancing.

The enemy of good dancing is Speed which is the cause of incorrect skip change as dancers lilt instead of skipping off the floor and the two beat pas de basque in the reel. The Strathspey turns into "Jig Jig Jig Hop" instead of the graceful flowing movement it should be.

The wrong type of music is also to blame as so many recent tunes set to recent dances are Barn Dances, not Strathspeys, which give the wrong character and spoil a lovely dance. Also we find Irish Hornpipes played for Strathspeys which are jolly tunes but once again jumpy and not Scottish. It may be fun to dance a Reel to Russian music and it can be done, but it isn't right and hasn't the right feeling. In my opinion Music and Dance should be wedded, Scottish Music with Scottish Dances. Not only should the music be Scottish but the correct Scottish tunes should be played.

I found in a recently published book of dances one where music given was Monymusk. To a dancer the tune Monymusk should say "Turn right hand and cast off one, Turn left hand with four steps, etc.!!" which is Monymusk. I do not think that the tune of a dance should be used for other than its own dance, then dancers would remember formations of a dance from its own particular music; once more Music and Dance wedded.

Many well known bands in this country are now playing a slower tempo which I am sure will improve the standard of dancing.

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BORSCHT BALLET (Source Unknown)

One night happens I'm hangink around Moscovit's Delicatessan witt loose ends when friend is handing me free ticket to da ballet. I'm knowing nattink from ballet, but I'm in de mood and de price is right. So gradually I'm arrivink de theatre, up is goink de cointin. Onto de stage is comink out, mincing on tippy toes, gradually a goil, dressed 40 younger den sprink in neddink but a semple blue crepe de Cheney. In de programme iss sayink de goil's name iss Danseussey. Her foist name is Premier. In back each laidy looks like she's carryink a New Englandt boiled dinner. She's runnink here, she's runnink dere. She's afraidt some-dink? Iss sayink to mineself, wotts smekink de goil noivous, when suddenly comes joampink from da stage a fella. He's wearing noddink but a stale leopard. De fella's name is Adagio. Soddenly de goil Danseussey is seeink Adagio so he's hidink behind noddink. Adagio iss lokink. In de exact middle off de stage she's stankink yet, and Adagio, de dope, ain't seeink her. Soddenly he's seeink! So he makes gradually a terrifik jump at her. He vunts! She's joampink away. She dunt vunt! So he's ronnik witt joampink witt grabbink. He vunts! She's ronnik witt dodgink wot she dunt vunk. He vunts! She dunt vunt! Cy iss dis a bissnez. So he stoots chasink de goil at eight forty-five, I'm leaving at tan twenty-five, so I'm not knowink how made out

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COMING EVENTS

Vancouver Night School S.C.D. classes hold their final party in the King Edward High School gymnasium (Oak & 12th) on Wednesday, 28th March at 7:30 p.m. Along with general dancing, there will be floor show entertainment. \$1.00 including cafeteria supper. Visitors and non-dancers are warmly invited.

THE CAMP - Our third annual camp will be held at Camp Alexandra, Crescent Beach, B.C., on the coast near the U.S. border.

The camp will run from 8:00 p.m. on Friday, May 18th to dinner-time on Monday, May 21st. There will be a "get-together" on Friday evening, a formal dance on Saturday evening, and a party on Sunday evening; Sunday morning will be free, and the rest of the time there will be dancing-classes. The inclusive charge is \$16 (or \$5.50 per day). Miss Agnes Wilson, 3818 West 11th Avenue, Vancouver, B.C., can supply application forms.

LOCAL NEWS

The University's Bums' Night celebrations went with an even bigger swing this year than last. Professor Daniells proposed "The Immortal Memory" in a sensible yet amusing speech; Al Cox was in good voice and gave a particularly fine rendering of "I have a wife of my ain"; and the dance floor remained fairly well crowded from the end of supper until midnight.

The Fidalgo Folk-dancers of Anacortes gave sixteen guests from Vancouver a thoroughly enjoyable weekend. For a hall-ful of over 60 dancers, many of whom have never seen Scottish country dancing, let alone danced it, to pick up two country dances (one a strathspey) with good rhythm and phrasing, and never once needing the music to be stopped or a set to be untangled, is remarkable.

ONE - TWO - THREE - HOP

Your story of the one who fell
Flat for a Scottish dancing belle
Could have a third and different end,
Which shows how dancing has its trend.
For this young man, I'd have you know,
Was no mere clumsy so-and-so,
For he'd been taught when but a lad
By Grandpa, and by Mum and Dad.

And in their day, poor ignorant lassie,
They travelled lightly with a chassé.
There was but a lilt, there was no hop;
No wonder then that he blew his top
When urged by her to do his prep
And learn to do skip-change-of-step.
Why should he change for a naughty Hannah
He danced in the traditional manner!

Footnote for the historically minded: Before the beginning of the Country Dance revival in 1923, the chasse was taught in all districts of Scotland except parts of the Southwest as the "correct" quick travelling step for use in Country Dances. The use of the skip-change-of-step (more accurately, the skip-change-of-step with a slower 'swing-through' on the hop and with no 'hold') as a Country Dance step was largely confined to parts of Lanarkshire, Ayrshire, Dumfriesshire and Wigtownshire, though the step was widely used elsewhere in Reels. The chasse is of the same general 'step, close, step' form as the skip-change-of-step, but has a lilt, and no hop, i.e. as one foot is brought past the other to make the first 'step' of the 'step, close, step', there is a lilt on the stationary foot, made by flexing the instep so that the heel is momentarily raised and then lowered again, whilst the ball of the foot remains on the ground. The use of the chasse as a Country Dance step (and also as a Reel step) can be traced back to at least 1818, for the step is clearly described in a Scottish manuscript of this date in the National Library of Scotland (MS. 3860; see Dr. Thurston's Scotland's Dances)

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