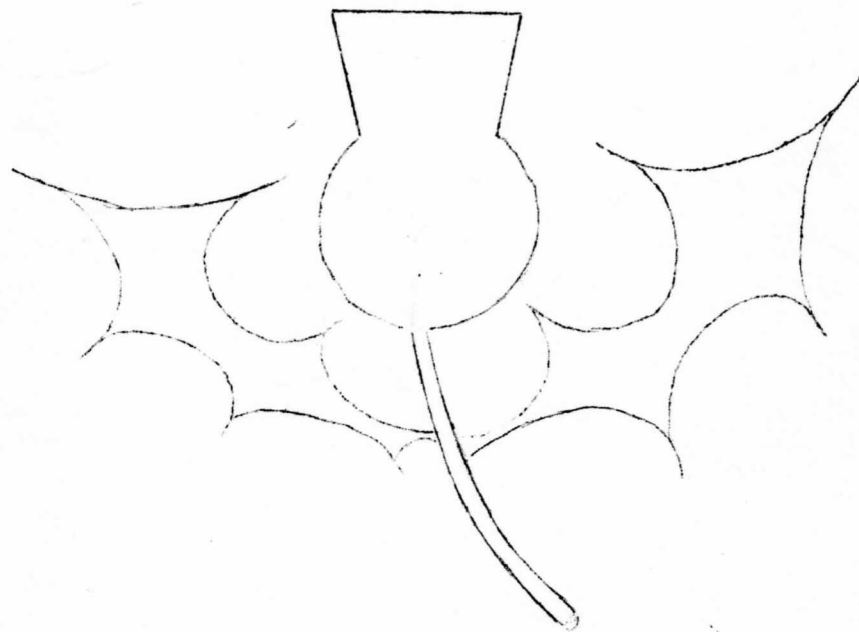


THE THISTLE



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

We have a good deal of interesting material to set before you; we shall therefore have a very short Editorial this month and take up only enough space to wish our readers a happy holiday season.

OUR DANCES, No. 21, Petronella.

Petronella must be the Scottish country dance par excellence. Miss Milligan has said many times that when she was collecting dances to start the Scottish Country Dance Society's books (about 1920) the one dance which everybody said they knew was Petronella. It is of the "standard" type which we discussed in number 19: thirty-two bars, the first sixteen being a figure characteristic of the dance (here the "cutting the diamond" figure) and the rest being down-the-middle-and-up-and-poussette.

In the early days, "Petronella" was not so much the name of a dance as the name of (i) a dance-figure (the cutting-the-diamond figure) and (ii) a tune - the distinctive tune which we all know under this name. The first description of the dance in print was in 1827, in a pocket-sized book called "The ballroom, or the Juvenile pupils' assistant", published in Glasgow by J.P. Boulogne. The name he used was not "Petronella" but "Petronelle"; and besides the country-dance there was a Quadrille of this name and a "Hungarian waltz" (probably neither truly Hungarian nor a true waltz). All three dances contained the "diamond" figure, and in fact this was the only thing they had in common. Presumably they also went to the same tune (which is why we said that the so-called "Hungarian waltz" was not a true waltz) but as the book does not give tunes, we cannot be sure of this.

Boulogne separated English country dances from Scottish ones, and included Petronelle among the English ones. However, at about this date country dances as a whole were dying out in England, and Petronella is not traditionally known as an English dance. It is known in Ireland (being included in a manuscript collection of dances made by Kate Hughes of Dundalk in 1867). It is very well known in New England, being among the half-dozen best-known contra-dances there. Their version of the dance differs somewhat from ours, the setting coming before the turning in the diamond, and the poussette being replaced by a right-and-left. The style also is different, and in particular the Yankees used any balance steps they liked for setting: some boasted that they never used the same balance twice in the course of a dance (and in a New England contra the lines stretch the length of the hall - they are not divided into short sets like ours).

The tune may be somewhat older than the dance. It first appeared in print in a collection entitled "The cries of Edinburgh, to which are added Petronella and a favorite new medley composed and arranged by Nathaniel Gow and performed at his annual ball on Tuesday, 14th March, 1820". The title is a little ambiguous and has caused some Scottish country dancers to think that the tune was composed by Gow. However, a glance inside the book shows that it was only the medley that Gow composed. In any case, Gow's own compositions have a strong Scottish flavour about them that Petronella has not.

The tune was later used for a Hebridean solo step-dance, "Patronella". This version of the name, together with "Pat'nella" is the commonest in New England. Other forms of the name that we have found are "Patronello", "Patter Nelly" and "Pattren Nell".

So much for about a hundred years of the history of the dance. When the Scottish Country Dance Society adopted it they replaced the traditional poussette (which, during this period, was a two-step or polka round in ball-room hold) by their own four-square pas-de-basque poussette, and published the dance with "the Persian dance" as an alternate tune. About ten years ago a new form of opening figure developed (supposedly among certain Scottish regiments) in which both couples took part, the second couple also joining in the down-the-middle-and-up and forming an arch for the first couple to duck under. This caused a lively controversy between those who liked the new version and those who resisted the innovation. (It has never been common around Vancouver).

LOCAL NEWS.

One of the most enjoyable events of the past month was the annual ball in Kamloops. Eighteen dancers from Vancouver travelled the two-hundred odd miles and found it a journey well worth while. Firstly, the dancers in Kamloops were really hospitable. Secondly, the band (the Teuchters, of course) were right on form - any slight falling-off in "lift" and vivacity that we detected at our own ball in Vancouver had been overcome. Thirdly, the setting (the Stockmen's hotel) was ideal, and the buffet supper was magnificent. And fourthly, there was a good programme, which got away to a lively start with an eightsome reel, and never looked back. There always seems to be one dance in a programme which just has to be encored - this time it was "Rosslyn castle". At the end a group of dancers from Vancouver gave a hastily-improvised exhibition of "Angus McLeod" which was much appreciated, especially by the group from Kelowna, who said that they had "never seen anything like it".

The programme contained modern ballroom dances as well as Scottish dances. The Kamloops group were a little apologetic about this, but they need not have been: the programme was an unqualified success. And, after all, it has been the general rule throughout history for country-dances to take their place alongside whatever other dances were current - minuets (in early days), reels, quadrilles, couple dances (i.e. waltz, polka, Varsouviana etc.) - and it is only in modern times, with the rise of Societies, Certificates, Booklets and so on, that country-dancers have become sufficiently single-minded eager beavers to want 100% country-dance programmes.

Another major event was C. Stewart Smith's workshop. He taught reel steps to men (a pity that only three came along) and Isobel Cramb's "Blue bonnets" to the girls (not to be confused with the traditional Hebridean dance of the same name collected by Jack McConachie a few years ago, nor, of course, with the country dance "Blue bonnets"). To country dancers he taught the Rhuallan jig (we hope we've spelt that correctly) - a real tour de force on his part, for it is a fast-moving moderately-complicated dance, and he was teaching it to a beginners' class. It went over very well - much better than "Tir nan og" and "Miss Janet Laing's strathspey" which he taught to the

intermediate/advanced class. However, this might be accounted for by the fact that in the two supposedly different classes, the same faces (and feet) seemed to be present.

NEWS FROM SCOTLAND.

Notes on St. Andrews Summer School, 1964 (first fortnight) by Hugh Foss.

The social side of Scottish Country dancing was emphasised by Miss Milligan this year. At dances one should not continually dance with the same partner, nor in the same set, nor even in the same part of the room (terrible things would happen to anyone doing this at the Summer School). Ball programmes should be of well-known or simple dances so that no-one needed to sit out.

Miss Milligan called also for a careful choice of alternate tunes. She often spent as much as a week searching for a suitable original. It was horrible to have a pastoral tune like that for the Gentle Shepherd alternating with a march like A Hundred Pipers.

We missed our Swiss friends of 1962 and 1963, but otherwise 'abroad' was well represented. Miss Milligan taught a new dance, A Trip to St. Andrews, devised by Jacques and Liliane Chamoin, regular trippers from Paris. Other dances taught by Miss Milligan were the two new MacNabs, McNichol of the Black Isle and Tir nan Og, Bob Campbell's From Scotia's Shores and selections from the 99 more.

Ideas could be picked up in discussions and conversations. Something could be learnt by 'stooging' in the certificate exams. Something (I am not sure what) could probably have been learnt from a skit acted in one of the Friday-evening Ceilidhs. A pupil trying to get three beats in a pas de basque was told to imagine he had a low wall to jump over. He caught his foot in it.

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.

HINTS FOR BETTER DANCING.

This month's hint is really a very obvious one : if you have any questions in class, ask the instructor.

The emphasis here is on the word instructor: don't ask anyone else. If you do, you may get a wrong answer. And, more important, both questioner and answerer will be missing the instructor's next directions. There is one more point - the class's queries tell the instructor what kind of things the class finds hard to understand, they help give him an idea of the class's

general standard, they tell him how easy or difficult his instructions are to follow; perhaps they warn him that he has made a slip or that he has used an unfamiliar technical term without first explaining it. Let us not deprive him of this information.

QUESTIONS ANSWERED.

We have wondered why we get so little correspondence asking questions about the dances. Inquiry seems to show that there are two reasons, (a) it is not always easy to put a question in writing, (b) a written question with names attached makes the writer appear ignorant. Point (b) is easily taken care of: we are always willing to omit the name of the questioner if asked. To take care of point (a) we will answer a few questions that have been asked orally in classes we have taken and on other occasions in the hope that they will break the ice.

Q. When a man casts off, should he start with the left foot or the right foot? And the same question of a woman casting up.

A. The right foot. The general rule in R.S.C.D.S.-style dancing is for the travelling-step to start on the right foot, and even when the travelling movement starts with a sharpish turn to the left, this rule holds. The left turn can in fact be done quite easily because of the hop with which a travelling step starts, which gives plenty of freedom for the body to turn.

Q. Should dancers hold right hands or nearer hands when going down the middle and up?

A. Right hands (exception: Lauderdale lads). A right hand lead has the advantage of keeping the dancers comfortably close together; with nearer hands they would either be forced apart, or would have a cramped arm-position, or both. The same applies wherever you are leading your partner; and when we started dancing some years ago a lead always meant a right hand lead, though we notice that nearer-hand leads are creeping in nowadays in some quarters. We are particularly sorry to see nearer-hand leads in parallel reels of three (the sort of reels that occur in Gates of Edinburgh or Maxwell's rant). By no means everybody takes hands at all in these reels; but if you do you will find that the right-hand hold, by bringing dancers closer together, gives a much better shape to the loops of the reels.

Q. Three dancers having gone down the middle in The Glasgow Highlanders, which way should they turn to come up?

A. It seems most natural for the women to turn inwards, towards the man; and for the man to turn towards his partner (that is, left-about). However, this is a point on which tradition does not lay down any particular musts or mustn'ts; nor, as far as we know, does the R.S.C.D.S. We have known individual teachers who make the three dancers (and the first man too) all turn right about, because it looked tidier, but to us it looked unnaturally tidy - more like drill than dancing.

Q. Which way should the centre dancer turn in the Dashing White Sergeant when finishing his reel?

A. This is a matter of taste. Whichever way comes naturally to you is correct for you.