



**THE**

**THISTLE**

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OUR DANCES NO. 61: Delvin Side

This dance is of interest more to those who study the present revival of Scottish country dancing than to those who study the dances themselves. In itself it is a fairly typical dance with no outstanding distinguishing points; the interesting thing about it is that it is the first dance in the R.S.C.D.S. books (it is no. 9 in book 2) to be reconstructed from old documents after having died out. It comes from William Campbell's 15th collection of country dances, which was published in London about 1800. The original description runs as follows:-

The first and second couples set and change sides  
back again  
lead down the middle and up again and allemande  
swing corners and lead out sides.

The title-page of the collection runs

Campbell's 15th collection of country dances and  
reels as danced at court, Carlton house, Bath  
and all public assemblies.

The dance is a good example of the mixture of two cultures. The figures are typically English; the tune typically Scottish. It is published by a Scot (if the name is anything to go by) in England (in fact there is no evidence that it was ever danced in Scotland before its revival in 1924).

Other dances from Campbell's various collections include

Tullochgorum	Light and airy
The ninety-second	Off she goes
Midlothian	Bob of Fettercairn
Miss Louisa Drummond's reel	Hamilton House

-0-0-0-0-

OUR DANCES NO. 62: The lady of the lake

This must have been a very common dance in the last century for its description is to be found in at least six books and one manuscript. It goes as follows:-

Bars 1 - 8 The first couple lead down the middle and up to  
second place  
9 - 16 The first and second couples, face to face, dance  
down the middle and up. (Thus the first couple  
dances down backwards and the second couple dances  
up backwards).  
17 - 24 Poussette.

The tune is in 6/8 time, and can be found in Kerr's third collection of merry melodies for the violin (p.25). [If you are restricted to records, "Teviot brig" is probably the best to use].

-- THE BACKGROUND -- (continued)

We have had a good look at nineteenth-century dances both high-brow and low-brow. These comprise only a part of the dances in the R.S.C.D.S. books; for the rest we shall have to go further back into the past. We shall find two rather important changes. The first is to be expected: we can have no dances analogous to the "collected in so-and-so type", for the obvious reason that when you go back further than a life-time you no longer have any oral sources of information -- you have to rely entirely on the written word.

The second, which is not, perhaps, to be expected, is that the sort of books in which dances are found are very different from the nineteenth-century manuals. For one thing, many of the books are periodicals -- you see titles like "24 fashionable country dances for 1788". For another thing, the dances were very ephemeral creations. The same tunes seemed to be used over and over again, and a publisher would fit together a sequence of figures of the right length to go with each tune almost without thinking. Very rarely did a figure-sequence become established well enough to appear in several books (Monymusk was one of the few that did) except in the all-too-many cases where a writer simply copied dances out of somebody else's book. When they did this, they often gave themselves away badly by using the exact words of the original. As a matter of fact, we owe some of the dances in our repertoire to this copying: Walsh was a rather unscrupulous copier of Playford's dances. Among the ones he copied were "Cold and Raw", "Red House", and "Dainty Davy", which he put in a book called 'The country dancing master'. (Playford's was called 'The dancing master'). Later, Walsh reprinted a lot of dances from his first book (which came out in 1718) in another, which he called 'Caledonian country dances'. By now he was beginning to make the dances seem Scottish (though the descriptions are word-for-word as Playford had them). One result of the rather free way in which dances were put together was that a really amazing number of dances were produced. About thirty firms altogether produced annual selections, each of which usually contained two dozen dances, and this went on throughout nearly all the eighteenth century and the first few years of the nineteenth. In addition, three or four firms published so-called "complete collections": Rutherford, for instance, published three of these, each containing 200 dances. It is no wonder that eventually this struck people as rather futile -- in particular it so struck a Mr. Thomas Wilson, a London dancing-master. (What has a London dancing-master to do with Scottish country dancing? Well, we have a couple of dozen dances invented by him in our repertoire, as you will see later). So he wrote a book (in 1811) called "The Analysis of Country Dancing". In it he listed and described all the traditional figures he could find (he found 109 of them), throwing in for good luck 33 new figures which he invented himself. He did this very well, giving the number of bars each figure takes, the steps used, and the starting and finishing position of each couple. The routes taken by the dancers were illustrated by diagrams, and seldom has a clearer or easier text-book of country dance figures appeared.

Now it is fairly obvious how to take it from here. Given a tune of a certain length, say 32 bars, one can fit in it figures of any length totalling up to 32 bars. E.g. one could have four 8-bar figures; or two 4-bar and three 8-bar figures, and so on. One has then only to choose the figures so that (i) the first figure starts with the couples in home places (i.e. one could start with "first and second couples, hands round", but not with "double triangles", for this needs the first couple in second place in the set), (ii) each figure starts where the previous one ends (e.g. if the first is "down the middle and up to second place" the second could not be "first couple cast off two", which needs the first couple in top place), and (iii) at the end first and second couples must have changed places (so that the progression works out). Obviously any sequence that obeys these rules will be perfectly danceable -- though some will be better than others. However, this way of putting it would seem to be too difficult for Wilson's readers; at any rate he didn't put it this way. He constructed an enormous set of tables, listing all possible ways of breaking down a dance into figures. E.g. a 16-bar dance could be 4+4+4+4, 4+4+8, 8+4+4, or 8+8. (You can imagine how many possibilities a 32-bar dance would have). For each of these breakdowns he listed all possible ways of fitting in figures to obey our three rules. The 8+8, for example has only two possibilities -- a figure leaving the first couple in first place, followed by one bringing them down to second; or one bringing them down to second, followed by one which they start and finish in second place. Having fixed on a valid sequence of this sort, the dance-composer would then look in a list of figures. E.g. if the first figure he wanted is a four-bar figure in which the first couple moves from first to second place, he would find a list of about half a dozen such figures including

Down the middle and up to second place  
Set and cast off one  
etc.

The result is clumsy but fool-proof : as near to a set of trigonometrical tables as a dancing-master has ever produced.

However, apparently the dancers didn't like the tables much, for five years later Wilson produced 'The Companion to the Ballroom', a collection of about 300 English, Scottish, Irish and Continental dance-tunes. He wrote in the preface that the dancers could make up their own dances using his tables, but for those who didn't want to, he listed three possible figure-sequences (easy, medium, and not-so-easy) for each tune.

In case you are wondering which of Mr. Wilson's dances we do, here is a list : some are from his book, others from periodicals for which he concocted the dances:-

Jenny's bawbee	✓ Dumbarton Drums	✓ The Caledonian rant
✓ Crief fair	✓ The Isle of Skye	Lord Rosslyn's fancy
✓ Maggie Lauder	✓ Lady Mary Douglas	The Golden Pheasant
✓ Todlen hame	I'll gang nae mair	My mother's coming in
Fidget	✓ Lord Hume's reel	Middling, thank you
✓ Donald Bane	✓ Lady Baird's reel	✓ Leith Country dance
✓ Lady Harriet Hope's reel	✓ Ca' the ewes to the knowes	
✓ Mrs. Wilson's hornpipe	✓ Woo'd and married and a'	
Waverly or Fergus MacIvor	✓ There's nae luck about the house	

[to be concluded]

\*\* SCOTTISH DANCE-MUSIC \*\*  
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Besides a fine repertoire of traditional dances, Scotland can also boast of a repertoire of traditional dance-tunes. In fact, the tunes far outnumber the dances. In a way, we know more about the early tunes than we do about the early dances, because it is much easier to write down a tune than a dance. The earliest known collections of tunes are, in fact, about a hundred years earlier than the earliest collections of dances. The Rowallan manuscript, in the Edinburgh University Library, dated about 1620, contains a number of Scottish tunes, and a printed collection appeared (published in England, it is true) shortly after 1650. This is Henry Playford's "A Collection of Original Scotch tunes (full of the highland humours) for the violin." A few years earlier his son John had included a few Scottish tunes in a collection of English country dances, the well-known "English dancing-master", for even at this early date the English country-dance repertoire was borrowing from Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

From about 1750 onwards, large numbers of collections appeared. One of the earliest is Robert Bremner's "Collection of Scots reels or country dances ... printed by R. Bremner in the Strand and sold in his music shop in Edinburgh", and one of the largest series of collections is the set of six "Collections" and three "Repositories" put out by the famous Gow family (Niel, Niel junior, and Nathaniel). The tradition continues right up to today with such collections as Kerr's "Merry Melodies" or "Caledonian collection", which form a very inexpensive source of much good music. And, of course, those readers who have the full-size R.S.C.D.S. books will find in them a large number of tunes, mostly reprinted from these older collections, and any pipers among our readers will find both old and new tunes in the regimental pipe manuals.

As all readers probably know, Scottish dance-tunes fall into various categories: reels, strathspeys, hornpipes, jigs and so on, and an article on the dance-music therefore falls fairly naturally into two parts: first a description of what all the tunes have in common, and secondly the various individual characteristics of the different types of tune.

Let us first, then, consider Scottish dance-music as a whole.

Unfortunately, the Thistle is a typed magazine, not a "talking book". I say "unfortunately" because music is essentially aural -- it is what is heard that matters, even though tunes can be written down and therefore, in a way, can be "seen". However, most readers of the Thistle will be familiar with a large number of Scottish dance tunes, and will probably either have gramophone recordings available or be able to play from written music.

Nearly all Scottish dance-tunes are divided into two strains; and it is very easy to hear the division, because each strain is repeated: the structure of these tunes is AABB. (The second B may be modified very slightly at the end in order to give a better finish to the tune. If we want to take account of this, we can say that the structure is AAB B\*).

If we turn to Kerr's modern dance-album, for example, we find a very typical selection of favourite traditional tunes on pages 4-5, namely

Cameron's got his wife again  
 Jenny dang the weaver\*  
 Highland whisky\*  
 Speed the plough  
 Jessie Smith  
 Rachael Rae\*  
 The Piper o' Dundee\*  
 Reel of Tulloch\*

and all except one of these has the structure AABB (or AABB\* -- we have marked these with a star.)

Of course, if a tune is cut to fit a particular dance, this structure might not show up. For example, a 24-bar country dance might go to a special tune of three 8-bar strains (structure ABA or ABC or ABB or AAB) or it might go to a normal tune modified. If the tune is normally played AABB and each strain is 8 bars long, it can be cut down to AAB or ABB. For instance, the 24-bar dance "The Nut" is given to two tunes of structures AAB. Alternatively, a tune may have to be lengthened to fit a dance: the R.S.C.D.S. have reconstructed "Willie with his tartan trews" as a 40-bar dance, and the tunes with it are given the structure ABABB. However the second tune, Drummond castle, is a very well-known one and can be found in a number of places (including volume 4 of Kerr's "Merry Melodies"), where it has the standard structure AABB.

The striking predominance of the standard structure is shown clearly by the R.S.C.D.S. book 1: this book gives a total of twenty tunes for its twelve dances, and (allowing for the fact that one dance is a 24-bar dance) all except three have the standard structure. These three are "The triumph", "Meg Merrilees" and the tune for Cumberland reel (which has a number of names, including "King of the Cannibal Islands"). The first and the last of these are of English origin; and even Meg Merrilees, in spite of its name, may be English, at any rate the dance is described as English in "The Ballroom", 1827, its earliest occurrence.

We should perhaps point out that all the remarks we have made so far apply equally well to Irish tunes. Indeed, there are four Irish tunes in R.S.C.D.S. book 1 (the tunes to Strip the willow and Rory O'More) and all four have the standard AABB structure.

The reader might like to look through R.S.C.D.S. book 2 and see for himself how the tunes there are constructed.

In a Scottish tune of standard structure, the strains A and B are of the same length, and this length is either four or eight bars. (Thus contrasting with some foreign styles: for example, one of the things that gives Hungarian music its flavour is the frequency of six-bar strains. Another, incidentally, is the common structure ABBA). To some extent, the difference between four-bar and eight-bar strains depends on how the music is written. In the Duke of Perth, as given in R.S.C.D.S. book 1, the strains are of four bars, but the tune is written in an unusual way: each bar contains enough music for two pas-de-basques or

two travelling-steps. In fact each bar of the music on the right-hand page corresponds to two "bars" of the instructions on the left-hand page. Making allowances for one or two cases (Eight men of Moidart is another) of non-standard writing of tunes, the general rule is that reels have four-bar strains, and other tunes (hornpipes, jigs, quicksteps, Scottish measures etc.) have eight-bar strains. (Strathspeys are, musically, included with the reels -- a strathspey is simply a slow reel, as we shall see when we turn to the different types of tune).

There is, as far as I know, only one exception among the hundreds of Scottish dance-tunes to the statement that all strains are of the same length, namely the Princess Royal (see Thistle no. 41).

The structure AABB is, in itself, nothing very unusual -- it is almost a "logical" structure for a tune, and many tunes beside dance tunes will have it, and many dance-tunes besides Scottish and Irish (I could quote several examples from Greece, Serbia, Sweden, etc. etc.). The remarkable thing about Scottish and Irish tunes is that such a high proportion of the tunes have it. But there is a detail of the structure which is unusual and which is almost confined to Scottish and Irish tunes -- in fact between half and quarter Scottish and Irish tunes have it; a noticeable smaller proportion of English, American and Welsh tunes have it; a very few tunes from Scandinavia and north-west Germany have it, and it seems to be completely absent elsewhere. It consists of certain internal repeats between strain A and strain B. To be precise, the last quarter of A is exactly the same as the last quarter of B. This can be heard (or seen in the written music) in Circassian circle, Flowers of Edinburgh, Drops of Brandy, Frolicksome Paddy, Garry Owen, The Earl of Lauderdale (these are all in R.S.C.D.S. book 1) and very many more.

This repetition tends to give the tune a tightly-knit internal organization. But a good many tunes are even more tightly-knit than this. As examples we will analyse two. First, "The mason's apron". Not only does it have the repetition we have just noticed, (i.e. A7-8 = B7-8) but also the second half of A starts like the first half (i.e. A1-2 = A5-6) and the same applies to B. Thus the structure AABB can be analysed more minutely into

axaz axaz bybz bybz

(each letter stands for two bars).

"The drunken piper" is equally tightly organized as

axa\*z axa\*z bx\*bz bx\*a\*z

(a and a\* differ by only one note: so do x and x\*).

Now let us turn to the individual types of tune. Most readers will know the names reel, strathspey, jig, hornpipe etc., but there are three warnings that should be given. First, that these types do not, between them, include all Scottish country-dance music. There are quite a number of tunes, including some very well-known ones, that do not fall into any one of these categories -- tunes like "The dashing white sergeant", "La Tempête", the tune for "The Cumberland reel", "Meg Merrilees", "The lass o' Patie's mill", "Goodnight and joy be with you", "Captain White", "Old Rosin the beau", "Off she goes", "Angus McLeod". Second, that one of the categories should be "march" (or "quickstep"). Marching is not dancing, true, but Scottish march-tunes share the

structure and rhythm of Scottish dance-tunes, and with the very slight change of speed to bring them into dance-tempo, make very effective dance-tunes. The third is that if you talk to a traditional fiddler or piper, read the labels of gramophone records of traditional fiddle or pipe-music, consult collections of music like Kerr's or Mozart Allan's, or look at any books (of music or dances) published before 1914, you will find many tunes labelled with their correct type. (A tune which does not fall into any one of these types is usually described by its time-signature: 2/4, 6/8 etc.). However, if you consult the books published by the R.S.C.D.S., or read the labels of records made by modern country-dance bands (such bands as those of Jimmy Shand, James Cameron, John Robertson, Jimmy Blair, Stan Hamilton, Peter White, Jimmy McLeod, Bobby McLeod etc.) you will find many tunes misnamed. For example, nearly all hornpipes are miscalled reels, (though I notice that in book 24 the R.S.C.D.S. has, for the first time, classed a dance as a hornpipe, so I am hopeful that we should have more accurate labelling in future). Thus, if a reader wants to get to know what, say, reels are like, it is no use for him to look at a selection of tunes labelled "reels" in R.S.C.D.S. books or listen to tunes labelled reels on country-dance records. If, however, he looks at reels in Kerr's Collection or listens to reels on pipe or fiddle records, he will be on the right track.

### Reels

A glance through a collection of reels, or a few minutes spent listening to them will make clear that their main characteristic is a fast even flow of notes. If the reel is written in  $\text{G}$  or C, as it usually is, it will be a fast even flow of quavers (eighth notes to our American and Canadian readers). In "Back of the change house" for example, only two notes out of sixty are not quavers.

It is true that one can find other tunes with a fine flow of quavers: some hornpipes, for instance or -- to go to quite a different kind of music -- the main theme of the last movement of Beethoven's seventh symphony. (Actually they are semi-quavers in this case, because Beethoven wrote this movement in 2/4 time). But only reels seem to carry this quaver rhythm through to the bitter end. If you look at the last bar of a reel, you will see that the quaver flow continues for about three-quarters of it. In a hornpipe, however, the last bar will consist of three crotchets. And Beethoven's last bar contains only one note. Now it is very natural for a tune to end with a satisfying "pom" or "pom-pom-pom". And because it is natural for a tune to do so, then the fact that reels do not do so is a characteristic that distinguishes them from other similar tunes.

Which are the favourite Scottish reels? This is a matter of personal opinion, but the following list probably contains most of the really popular ones.

Clean pease strae	Muilean dubh
The wind that shakes the barley*	Timour the tartar*
The fairy dance*	Glenburnie rant
The kilt is my delight	Speed the plough
Mrs. McLeod of Raasay*	Cabair feidh
Fife hunt	High road to Linton
Jenny Nettles	Kate Dalrymple
Loch Earn	Lord McDonald's reel



Mason's Apron*	Perth hunt
Rachael Rae	Reel of Tulloch
Roll her on the hill	Sir David Hunter-Blair
De'il among the tailors	Back of the change house

Those starred are equally well-known in Ireland, and no-one can say whether they were originally Scottish or Irish. (In Ireland, Timour the tartar, The fairy dance, and Mrs. McLeod of Raasay are called Peter Street, The fairy reel, and Miss McLeod). Lord McDonald's reel is also often played by Irish musicians, but they do regard it as Scottish.

### Strathspeys

Reels are played at about 60 bars per minute. Sometime in the eighteenth century a variant of the reel arose, played substantially slower. (Nowadays played at about 40 bars per minute). These were called Strathspey reels. Strathspey is a place-name, so presumably this form of reel originated there : we have no direct evidence for this, however. The name "Strathspey reel" soon became abbreviated to Strathspey.

As a by-product of the slower tempo, the rhythm becomes much more angular. That is, the rhythms dotted-quaver plus semi-quaver and semi-quaver plus dotted-quaver become common at the expense of quaver plus quaver. This is quite a normal tendency in music -- if you look through any largish body of music, from Macedonian folk-dances to Beethoven's Symphonies, you will find that on the whole dotted rhythm goes with slow tempo.

Of the two dotted rhythms, the second one, with the short note first, is rather rare in music as a whole. However, it is fairly common in strathspeys, and it gives the strathspey a very individual character. It is called a "Scotch snap".

However, it would be an oversimplification to say that strathspeys are full of dotted rhythm, and fast reels have none : the amount of dotted rhythm in a reel depends to some extent on the instrument it is written for, and bag-pipes seem to play more dotted rhythm than fiddles.

Theoretically, any reel could be slowed down and played as a strathspey, and any strathspey could be speeded up and played as an ordinary reel. In practice, any particular tune is usually traditionally either a strathspey or a fast reel, but not both. There are one or two exceptions however. In one case there is a change of name : one well-known tune is called "The drummer" when played as a reel and "The piper of Dundee" when played as a strathspey. Favourite strathspeys include:-

Banks of Clyde	Loudon's bonnie woods and braes
Braes of Mar	Lord Lynedoch
Braes of Tulliemet	Marquis of Huntley
Cameron's got his wife again	Miss Lyall
Daintie Davie	Rose among the heather
Haughs of Cromdale	Smith's a gallant fireman
Highland whiskey	Stirling castle (or Grey daylight)
Lad with the plaidie	Stumpie
Lady Mary Ramsay	Tullochgorum
Lady Anne Hope	

These are all traditional and "semi-anonymous". That is to say, even if it is known who composed them, no-one cares. In addition there are some very fine and quite distinctive strathspeys by Scott Skinner (which would probably be played more often if they were out of copy-right). They include The laird of Thrums, The Iron man, Kirrie Kebbuck, Forbes Morrison.

[to be concluded]

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