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TYPOLOGICAL-HISTORICAL APPROACH**

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## SCOTTISH DANCE: TOWARDS A TYPOLOGICAL-HISTORICAL APPROACH

SCOTTISH DANCE IS DEFINED BY THE INDIGENOUS FORMS AND THE uniquely Scottish elements applied to dances introduced from other countries. This survey identifies the major strains in Scottish dance and the paths of their evolution.

### *1. Weapon dances, ritualistic dances, and dramatic dances*

Warriors performed weapon dances to demonstrate their agility. A battle dance called *Bruichcath* in Gaelic involved two dancers, armed with dirk and targe, who went through the motions of combat with step-dancing interspersed<sup>1</sup>. The old Skye dancing song, *Builidh mi u an sa chean* ['I will break your head'], accompanied cudgel play<sup>2</sup>. Remnants of an older tradition survive in the modern versions of the *Dannsa a' Chlaidhimh* ['Sword Dance'] Gille Calum, danced over two crossed swords, and the Argyll Broadwords, performed by four dancers over a cross formed by four broadswords<sup>3</sup>.

In the seventeenth century, a craft guild of skimmers and glove-makers called the Perth Glovers performed a ritualistic hilt-and-point sword dance, associated with Scandinavia, at May and Yule celebrations<sup>4</sup>. Similar to the Morris dancers, also found in Scotland, they wore curious costumes with tuned bells. The men linked together in a circle holding the hilt of one sword and the point of a neighbour's sword. They danced to the music of the bells making various patterns with the swords. They often ended by locking the swords together around the neck of one of the dancers as a sacrificial victim, who is symbolically slain and then brought back to life<sup>5</sup>.

Another hilt-and-point sword dance, practiced until the late nineteenth century and revived in the twentieth century, is the Sword Dance of Papa Stour, an island in the Shetlands, which was a province of Norway until it was handed over to Scotland in 1472. As a type of Guisers' Play, the dance concerns a fight in which one or more heroes are hurt or slain. In the Christianised version, the play resembles the St. George Play in England. In the prologue, St. George and the six other champions of Christendom are individually introduced before the sword play commences<sup>6</sup>. Guisers would also appear in Shetland at a wedding party dressed in strange costumes with colourful ribbons. During the Bride's Reels, they would wave oat-straw brushes over the dancers' heads in the act of 'sweeping the bride' to drive away evil spirits<sup>7</sup>.

1. Cf. G.S. EMMERSON, *A Social History of Scottish Dance: Ane Celestial Receptioun*, Montreal, Quebec - London, Ontario, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1972, p. 187; J.F. FLETT - T.M. FLETT, *Traditional Step-Dancing in Scotland*, Edinburgh, Scottish Cultural Press, 1996, p. 23.
2. Cf. EMMERSON, *A Social History of Scottish Dance*, p. 8.
3. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 191.
4. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 23.
5. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 15.
6. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 15.
7. Cf. J.F. FLETT - T.M. FLETT, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964 [repr. 1985], p. 69; P. COOKE, *The Fiddle Tradition of the Shetland Isles*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 133.

A dance called the Lochaber Broadwords suggests that the Gille Calum may derive from a ritualistic dance. Two men dance around two crossed swords on the ground while six others point swords toward the dancers. Each man in the circle substitutes for a tired dancer until all eight men have danced. Then the two swords are quickly raised and seven men form a ring around the eighth man with their swords pointing at his throat<sup>8</sup>.

In a solo dance *Dannsaidh na Bìodaig* [Dirk Dance], the dancer flourishes and pantomimes with a dirk and throws it on the ground and dances over it<sup>9</sup>. In another type of Dirk Dance, two dancers get into a conflict with dirks, one is stabbed and falls wounded, and the other eventually revives him with whisky until both dance together again<sup>10</sup>.

A short step removed from these weapon dances is the widely-known death-and-resurrection dramatic dance *Cailleach an Dùdain* [The Old Woman or Carlin of the Mill Dust], performed to the tune of the same name played on pipes or fiddle or sung as *puirt-a-beul* [mouth music]<sup>11</sup>. In the version of the dance described in Alexander Carmichael's *Carmina Gadelica*, a man and a woman «gesticulate and attitudinise before one another, dancing round and round, in and out, crossing and recrossing, changing and exchanging places»<sup>12</sup>. The actions suggest simultaneously the manoeuvres of weapon play and the flirtations of a mating ritual. The man holds a *slachdan druidheachd* or *slachdan geasachadh* [druidic or magic wand). In the nineteenth century 'Punch and Judy' version, the dancers are an old man and an old woman who fight each other with their walking sticks. The man kills the woman with his wand (or his stick) and then, overcome by grief, resuscitates her limb by limb with his magic wand (or his hand) until she is restored to life when he touches her heart (or her hair). Such a dance may be a vestige of a fertility rite or a ritual performed at wakes. Adults performed the drama on St. Michael's Day, 29 September, and later children performed it on May Day<sup>13</sup>. The mill dust is the dark dust of a variety of oats that blackens the face when threshed, forming a disguise like the blackened or masked face of a Morris dancer<sup>14</sup>.

The dance shows the substitution of a magic wand or a stick for a sword, just as Morris dancers sometimes used sticks or handkerchiefs instead of swords. The handkerchief also served as a sword or a prop in a courting ritual dance known generically as the kissing dance. The dance was widely distributed and known by various names, such as Babbity Bowster ['Bob at the Bolster'], Bee Bo Bobbity, *Ruidhleadh nam Pòg* ['The Kissing Reel'], *Dannsaidh nam Pòg* ['The Kissing Dance'], or *Ruidhleadh Mór* ['The Big Reel']<sup>15</sup>. It was almost always performed as the last dance of the evening. One form of the dance, known as Joan Sanderson or the Cushion Dance, was popular in both court and country circles in England in the mid-seventeenth century, and other forms still survive up to the

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8. Cf. EMMERSON, *A Social History of Scottish Dance*, p. 192.

9. Cf. FLETT - FLETT, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, pp. 273-274; IDEM, *Traditional Step-Dancing in Scotland*, pp. 178-183.

10. Cf. EMMERSON, *A Social History of Scottish Dance*, p. 187; FLETT - FLETT, *Traditional Step-Dancing in Scotland*, p. 45.

11. Cf. EMMERSON, *A Social History of Scottish Dance*, pp. 232-233; J. MACINNES, *Dance in Gaelic Society*, in *The Companion Guide to Gaelic Scotland*, ed. D.S. Thomson, Glasgow, Gairm Publications, 1994, p. 58; FLETT - FLETT, *Traditional Step-Dancing in Scotland*, p. 46.

12. E. DWELLY, *The Illustrated Gaelic-English Dictionary*, Glasgow, Gairm Publications, 1988, p. 148.

13. Cf. MACINNES, *Dance in Gaelic Society*, p. 58.

14. Cf. EMMERSON, *A Social History of Scottish Dance*, p. 28.

15. Cf. FLETT - FLETT, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, p. 42.

present in school playground and party games<sup>16</sup>. A man chosen as leader of the dance pranced around the room, selected a lady, laid a cushion in front of her, and then both knelt on it to kiss. The lady followed the leader around the room and then selected another man with the cushion and they kissed. She then rejoined the leader as the second man selected another lady, and so on, until everyone had been selected<sup>17</sup>. The cushion or bolster may have symbolized the bridal bed, as the kissing dance was typically the last dance at a country wedding in the Highlands and Lowlands. For a Reel following the partner selection, the tune ‘Pease Strae’ was often used. In Northumberland, the dance was named after the song, which the dancers sang, and which claimed that pea straw made the best bed. Over time, the pillow was probably replaced by a pillow case, which was then replaced by the handkerchief commonly used in later times<sup>18</sup>.

In the Central and West Highlands and the Western Isles, the leader would twist a handkerchief into a rope, lay it on the floor like a sword, and do a few steps of the Gille Calum sword dance in a clockwise direction<sup>19</sup>. The words of the dance-song Gille Calum, about getting a sweetheart and a wife, apply more aptly to a kissing dance than to a combat dance. This tune may have originally been used for the kissing dance, to be replaced by The White Cockade when a white handkerchief replaced an actual sword<sup>20</sup>. A blue bonnet was sometimes substituted for the handkerchief. The solo sword dance *A’ Bhonaid Ghorm* [‘The Blue Bonnet’], performed over crossed sticks with a bonnet over their intersection, may have sometimes preceded the kissing dance. This could explain the dance also being known as The Bonnet Dance and The Bonny Lad<sup>21</sup>. In the Shetlands, sword dances were frequently performed at country weddings as a relic of ancient Norwegian customs<sup>22</sup>.

Outside of the Borders, after the partner selection, a ring figure was used to disperse the dancers. All joined hands in a ring around the last person selected, who kissed a person of the opposite sex and left the dance floor. The person kissed did the same until the ring was exhausted or reduced to three or four couples. This ritual was then followed by a Reel, generally with the selected partner, to finish the ball.<sup>23</sup>

In country districts, it was common to kiss one’s partner before and after every dance and not just during the kissing dance. A piper would play a special musical phrase or a fiddler would make a squeaking sound to indicate the kissing time<sup>24</sup>.

## 2. Social dances

Early social dances in Scotland were communal ring dances, traces of which have survived into modern times in the ring figure of the kissing dance, in the circling round and back in Scottish country dances, and in the ring made for singing Auld Lang Syne or *Oidhche Mhath Leibh* [‘Good Night’] at the end of a social event. As a pagan ritual, a ring was formed around an object of veneration, such as a sacred tree, a holy well, or a Beltane

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16. Cf. Ibidem, pp. 42, 44; IDEM, *Traditional Step-Dancing in Scotland*, p. 24.

17. Cf. Ibidem, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, p. 45.

18. Cf. Ibidem, pp. 43, 45, 47.

19. Cf. Ibidem, p. 42; MACINNES, *Dance in Gaelic Society*, p. 57.

20. Cf. FLETT - FLETT, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, p. 42; EMMERSON, *A Social History of Scottish Dance*, p. 190.

21. Cf. MACINNES, *Dance in Gaelic Society*, p. 56; FLETT - FLETT, *Traditional Step-Dancing in Scotland*, p. 25.

22. Cf. COOKE, *The Fiddle Tradition of the Shetland Isles*, p. 5.

23. Cf. FLETT - FLETT, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, p. 43.

24. Cf. Ibidem, p. 45.

fire<sup>25</sup>. Circling trees figures in the familiar children's games 'Ring around a rosie' and 'Here we go round the mulberry bush' as well as in the dancing around a maypole. A communal dance-song, referred to as a carol, or a ballad, accompanied the dance, perhaps reinforced by tabor and pipe<sup>26</sup>. Those in the ring remained stationary while a leader chanted the narrative line of a song, and then all danced round while responding in unison with the chorus<sup>27</sup>. The vocal solo and response form may derive from the communal work song. Some of the historical ballads from the Scottish Border hills and the north-east have this dance-form structure, such as the ballad Binnorie, which weaver Norman Kennedy has used as a waulking song in modern times<sup>28</sup>. The Gaelic-speaking areas also had ring dances of this type, such as *An Dannsa Mór* ['The Great Dance'] known on the Isles of Skye and Eigg<sup>29</sup>.

Out of the forms of weapon dances and communal ring dances emerged the uniquely Scottish social dance called the Reel. The dance consists of a travelling figure alternating with setting steps danced on the spot. The dancers can vary the setting steps, but the travelling figure is the same throughout the dance. The number of dancers, their formations, and the type of travelling figure vary according to the type of Reel and how the dance form evolved. Reels were danced in every district of Scotland and in all classes of society. There were particularly popular in crofting regions where the compact travelling figures and setting steps were suited to the small dancing-space available in a croft house<sup>30</sup>.

The original Reel in the extreme West Highlands and the Western Isles is a dance for two couples referred to as the old West Highland circular Reel<sup>31</sup>. The two couples face each other with the woman at her partner's right. She passes in front of him to start the travelling figure in a circle, followed by her partner at a quarter of the circumference of the circle behind her. After one circling, they finish in a line with the women at the rim of the circle and the men within the circle facing their partners. They all dance their setting steps, and then the women start the travelling figure in the circle again, followed by their partners. After circling, they again line up to do their setting steps. Each travelling and setting figure takes eight bars of music, so a typical 32-bar tune allows for the four figures 'travel, set, travel, set'. The Reel was usually danced to one or more strathspey tunes followed by one or more reels<sup>32</sup>. The strathspey rhythm is characterised by dotted, lengthened notes and flagged, shortened notes in distinctive patterns, such as 'short, long, long, short' and 'long, short, short, long'. The rhythm originated in the Gaelic-speaking parts of Strath Spey and Aberdeenshire c. 1700<sup>33</sup>.

Returning to the inline position for setting may be a later addition to the dance. Remaining in the circle to set would have been more convenient in an old-fashioned black house where the dancers could simply circle the fire in the centre of the floor<sup>34</sup>. The *Ruidhleadh*

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25. Cf. EMMERSON, *A Social History of Scottish Dance*, p. 32.

26. Cf. G.S. EMMERSON, *Rantin' Pipe & Tremblin' String: A History of Scottish Dance Music*, London, Ontario, J.M. Dent, 1971, p. 3.

27. Cf. Ibidem, *A Social History of Scottish Dance*, p. 32.

28. Cf. Ibidem, *Rantin' Pipe & Trembling String*, pp. 2, 4.

29. Cf. MACINNES, *Dance in Gaelic Society*, p. 58; EMMERSON, *A Social History of Scottish Dance*, p. 227.

30. Cf. FLETT - FLETT, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, p. 2.

31. Cf. Ibidem, p. 157.

32. Cf. Ibidem, p. 136.

33. Cf. J.G. GIBSON, *Traditional Gaelic Bagpiping, 1745-1945*, Montreal - Kingston, NMS Publishing Limited, Edinburgh and McGill Queen's University Press, 1998, p. 138.

*Mór* from Skye used a circle figure to accommodate a wedding crowd. The dancers formed a ring, travelled clockwise in the circle, stopped and danced their reel setting steps, and then danced around in the circle again. This unsophisticated dance could be of great antiquity, perhaps descended from a medieval ring dance, in which the ring of linked hands was broken while the dancers performed steps on the spot. It could then be the progenitor of the circular Reel<sup>35</sup>.

When the immigrants from the West Highlands and Western Isles settled in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia in the years 1784-1820, they took with them *Ruidhleadh Cheathrar* ['Foursome Reel'], also known as *Ruidhleadh Beag* ['The Small Reel'], and the eight-handed Reel *Ruidhleadh Mór*. The Foursome Reel is similar to the old West Highland circular Reel described, the setting steps performed with the dancers in a straight line or in a square formation. In one form, the dancers swing each other instead of setting, and the travelling figure is performed by the diagonal pairs changing places<sup>36</sup>. In the eight-handed Reel, partners start facing each other in one large circle around the room. They set to and swing each other and, facing in the original direction, move on to the next person and do the same, and so on around the circle<sup>37</sup>. Known as 'the wild eight', the dance was so boisterous in the mid-nineteenth century that it led the priests to put a temporary ban on social dancing, and in some parish districts the priests even went so far as to collect and destroy all the fiddles<sup>38</sup>.

In the Eastern Highlands and the Lowlands, the earliest form of the Reel was for three people, and the travelling figure consisted of a 'reel of three' pattern in the form of a figure 8. This Threesome Reel was the major form of Reel practiced from about 1710-1776, after which the Foursome Reel gained greater popularity. The Foursome Reel had a 'reel of four' with the same figure 8 travelling figure except with an extra loop added. The figure 8 form was absent in the Western Isles until the Foursome Reel was introduced there in the late nineteenth century<sup>39</sup>.

The 'reel of three' figure is the same as the English figure 'hey' for three people. By about 1590, the word 'hey' was used in England and France to mean a dance or dance figure in which the dancers wound in and out among each other<sup>40</sup>. It is possible that a dance imported from France to both Scotland and England around 1500, such as *Haye d'Allemagne* [known as 'alman haye'], was the original source from which the Threesome Reel in Scotland and the Hey in England descended. Such an importation would most likely be a court dance that evolved into the Threesome Reel among the upper classes in the Lowlands and Eastern Highlands during the sixteenth century and then spread slowly into the more accessible parts of the Highlands. While the Hey in England developed into longwise progressive Country Dances with many couples, in Scotland it seemed to have been limited to the compact form of the Threesome or Foursome Reel<sup>41</sup>.

The dance called *Ruidhleadh Thulachain* ['The Reel of Tulloch'] was probably developed around 1800 as a 'Society' dance for the upper classes at the Breadalbane Balls. It featured

34. Cf. FLETT - FLETT, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, p. 159.

35. Cf. J.F. FLETT - T.M. FLETT, *The History of the Scottish Reel as a Dance-Form: 1*, «Scottish Studies», xvi, 1972, pp. 91-119, at p. 111.

36. Cf. *Ibidem*, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, p. 270.

37. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 154.

38. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 271.

39. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 157.

40. Cf. *Ibidem*, *The History of the Scottish Reel as a Dance-Form: 1*, p. 112.

41. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 113.

in the piping and dancing competitions organized by the Highland Society of Edinburgh, where it was first performed in 1829 and at three other subsequent competitions<sup>42</sup>. The distinctive feature of the dance was the use of swinging with linked arms to replace a part of the usual setting<sup>43</sup>. The dance was a hybrid that used three kinds of travelling figures, the ‘reel of four’ of the Foursome Reel and the circling and swinging seen in the West Highland circular Reels. Over the years, the dance was simplified to swinging and setting and was used as a final reel sequence of a Foursome Reel, such that dancers would break into the Reel of Tulloch whenever its tune was played<sup>44</sup>.

Unique to the Reels among social dances was the characteristic use of the arms in a manner similar to a modern Highland dancer except less curved and balletic. While setting or reeling, the men raised one or both arms or placed them akimbo. In the swinging of the Reel of Tulloch, they raised the free arm, and often the ladies did also. When setting or reeling, the ladies had their arms akimbo or holding their skirts at the side. Both men and ladies snapped their fingers to the beat of the music. The men would ‘heuch’ (give quick yelps of excitement), and in some districts so did the ladies<sup>45</sup>.

Among the social dances known in the West Highlands and the Western Isles are pantomimic or dramatic dances that have affinities with the circular Reel. In *Ruidhleadh nan Coileach Dubha* [‘The Reel of the Black Cocks’] from Barra, one couple goes down on one knee while the other couple sets to them, then couples reverse roles, and finally both couples dance around in a ring. The actions mime the dance-song: «*Ruidhleadh nan coileach dubha ‘s dannsaidh na tunnagan*» [«Reeled the black cocks and danced the ducks»], where the kneeling dancers are the ducks and the setting dancers are the black cocks<sup>46</sup>. A dance by the same name known in South Uist and Cape Breton involves repetition of the figures ‘change places, set, and swing’, which mimics the manoeuvres and circling of cocks before mating or a cockfight<sup>47</sup>. In *Turraban nan Tunnagan* [‘Waddling of the Ducks’], dancers move around in a hunkered position imitating ducks. In *Cath nan Coileach* [‘The Combat of the Cocks’] from Barra, two couples join crossed hands to form a cross and keep the hand-holds throughout the figures of setting and swinging for two couples. The accompanying pipe jig *Bochd Liath nan Gobhar* [‘The Shaggy Grey Buck’] alternately speeds up and slows down every 32 bars, adding pacing and frenzy to the swinging<sup>48</sup>. In *Dannsa nan Boc* [‘Dance of the Bucks’], a dance associated with a harvest celebration, three men reel, leap, bound, and bleat like goats and alternately jump over each other<sup>49</sup>.

The Auld Reels recorded in the Shetlands feature no setting steps and continuous reeling by three or four couples, where a couple reels as a unit, either side by side or the woman preceding the man. The Auld Reel tunes are related to Norwegian tunes for the Halling, a dance in which couples loosely circle around the room and the male partner performs feats of athleticism. After the introduction of true Reels in the early 1700s, the circling of a

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42. Cf. Ibidem, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, p. 134.

43. Cf. Ibidem, p. 135.

44. Cf. J.F. FLETT - T.M. FLETT, *The History of the Scottish Reel as a Dance-Form: II*, «Scottish Studies», xvii, 1973, pp. 91-107, at p. 94.

45. Cf. Ibidem, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, p. 137.

46. Cf. Ibidem, *The History of the Scottish Reel as a Dance-Form: I*, p. 109; IDEM, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, p. 170.

47. Cf. Ibidem, p. 167.

48. Cf. Ibidem, *The History of the Scottish Reel as a Dance-Form: I*, p. 109.

49. Cf. EMMERSON, *A Social History of Scottish Dance*, p. 226.

Halling type dance may have given way to the reeling figure to make more interesting and structured use of the space. The existence of a couple dance may have led to the doubling of the participants in a Threesome Reel to create the Sixsome Reel, which became the most popular type of Shetland Reel and replaced the Auld Reel<sup>50</sup>. Three couples alternate reeling as a unit with stepping in lines facing each other, men in one line, women in another, sometimes couples holding hands up high. With many people reeling in compact croft houses, the small, quick steps of reels suited the dancing better than strathspey steps. Strathspey tempos were never accepted in Shetland, although they were in Orkney, where the Sixsome and Eightsome Reels had the same format as the Shetland Reels<sup>51</sup>.

The Axum Reel in Orkney features two 'reels of four' in a cloverleaf formation. The strathspey part includes alternate setting and reeling, while the reel part is devoted to continuous reeling, as in the Auld Reels in Shetland. Both types of Reels were once the closing dance at weddings<sup>52</sup>. A type of Sixsome Reel was also known on the mainland of Scotland, according to references to a 'shemit' reel for a bridal pair and their retinue, although whether couples reeled as a unit is not known<sup>53</sup>.

The Threesome Reel also influenced the English Country Dances brought into Scotland after 1700 when a more tolerant attitude toward social dancing emerged. These longwise progressive types of dances were named after their tunes, and a particular set of standard figures was performed to a particular tune<sup>54</sup>. From 1730 onwards, most of what came to be known as Scottish Country Dances were set to Scottish tunes. The first unique Scottish contribution to the figures was the figure 'set to and turn corners', which appeared in 1720. This figure was then combined with the 'reel of three' to become the popular sequence 'set to and turn corners and reels of three with corners', which was used in over 40% of the Country Dances performed in Scotland before 1775. The sequence is effectively the setting and reeling sequence of a Threesome Reel performed simultaneously by two lines of three, where the setting is broken up by the turning<sup>55</sup>. In addition to this contribution to the figures, the formations of Pousette and Allemande were done in a manner unique to Scotland<sup>56</sup>.

The travelling and setting steps used for Reels were also applied to the Country Dances, except for the virtuoso setting steps from solo dances that expert dancers might use in Reels<sup>57</sup>. The rhythmic pattern of the strathspey and reel tempo travelling steps was basically the same, 'step, close, step, hop', where the 'close' is bringing the trailing foot up next to the leading foot. The knees are kept bent out, and the heels do not touch the ground<sup>58</sup>. Variations in tempo, foot positions, and leg swing-through on the 'hop' led to different names for the step, while the underlying pattern remained the same. This stepping pattern is the basis for any step or dance historically referred to as a 'schottische'

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50. Cf. FLETT - FLETT, *The History of the Scottish Reel as a Dance-Form: II*, p. 102; COOKE, *The Fiddle Tradition of the Shetland Isles*, p. 55.
51. Cf. FLETT - FLETT, *The History of the Scottish Reel as a Dance-Form: II*, pp. 97-98, 100-101.
52. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 103.
53. Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 99-100.
54. Cf. *Ibidem*, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, p. 230.
55. Cf. J.F. FLETT - T.M. FLETT, *The Scottish Country Dance: Its Origins and Development: II*, «Scottish Studies», XI, 1967, pp. 125-147, at p. 137.
56. Cf. J.C. MILLIGAN, *Won't You Join the Dance?*, Edinburgh, Royal Scottish Country Dance Society, 1985, p. 2.
57. Cf. FLETT - FLETT, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, p. 75.
58. Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 91, 93-94, 104-105.

(German for ‘Scottish’). A Nordic Polka called the Schottische, consisting of strathspey travelling steps followed by Polka steps (turning ‘step, hop, step, hop, step, hop, step hop’) was introduced to Scotland about 1849. In c. 1855, the Highland Schottische was introduced, a combination of the Schottische and an old Reel setting step, and became very popular<sup>59</sup>.

Francis Peacock, a dancing-master in Aberdeen who taught in the period 1750-1800 and learned steps from college students from the Highlands and Western Isles, called the travelling step by the Gaelic name *Cèum-siubhail* [‘gliding step’]. He collected a number of Reel steps with Gaelic names<sup>60</sup>. The use of the schottische step in a sideways movement was called the Common Schottische, as it was the most common strathspey setting step for Country Dances. The less frequently used Highland Schottische step includes four hopping steps before the sideways schottische, where the working leg points to the side, closes vertically to the back of the leg, points again to the side, and closes vertically to the front of the leg, in a variation of a measure of a Highland Fling solo dance. The Highland Schottische step was also used in Reels along with Highland Fling steps and other steps that used combinations of the four parts of the schottische step, such as ‘step, hop, step, hop’, ‘step, step, step, hop’, ‘step, step, close, hop’, and ‘hop, hop, hop, hop’. These could be danced on the spot with different foot or leg positions to vary the patterns<sup>61</sup>.

An early basic quick tempo setting step for Reels had the pattern ‘spring, step, close’, followed by a slight pause or a gentle extension (*jeté*) forward at an angle by the free foot. The step was partially replaced by the similar pas de Basque step, which could also be applied to Country Dances and Quadrilles. The pas de Basque had a ‘step, close, step’ pattern (‘long, short, long’), where the close was a momentary transfer of weight from one foot to the other and the final step was followed by a pause or an extension of the free foot<sup>62</sup>. The pas de Basque was the normal quick tempo setting step in Country Dances. Various other quick tempo setting steps were used for Reels, many of which resemble solo dance steps familiar to modern Highland dancers, such as balance, backstep, shuffles, and highcuts<sup>63</sup>. The setting steps for social dances were not balletic, however, as in the mid-eighteenth century the standard footwear for men was their best outdoor shoes or boots or black patent leather dancing shoes, while the ladies wore lightweight shoes with a heel an inch or so high. Only professional Highland dancers wore light Highland dance pumps before 1914<sup>64</sup>.

Initially, Country Dance in Scotland was limited to the upper classes, performed at assemblies in the larger towns and in the country houses of the landed gentry<sup>65</sup>. Ladies’ fashion among these classes from 1710-1780 was the four-foot wide hoop skirt, flat in front and back, which tended to limit the tempo of the dances. The strathspey tunes emerging in 1740 were not significantly slower than the reels, which were slow enough to be sung if they had words to them<sup>66</sup>. When fashions became less elaborate after 1775, and

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59. Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 5-6.

60. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 95.

61. Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 98-104.

62. Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 110-119.

63. Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 110-131.

64. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 76.

65. Cf. J.F. FLETT - T.M. FLETT, *The Scottish Country Dance: Its Origins and Development: 1*, «Scottish Studies», xi, 1967, pp. 1-11, at p. 2.

66. Cf. *Ibidem*, *The Scottish Country Dance: Its Origins and Development: 1*, p. 141.

when larger houses with larger rooms became more common, the tempo of the dances increased, but strathspeys stood out as somewhat slower than reels. The increased tempo made the Country Dances more acceptable to ordinary people in Scotland, and they became popular among all classes of society in the Lowlands and adjacent parts of the Highlands. They reached the remoter areas much less rapidly and achieved acceptance in the West Highlands and Western Isles only around 1880, where they were still considered modern, ‘English’ dances<sup>67</sup>.

The spreading of the dances was primarily by oral transmission through professional dancing-masters, who increased their influence to served all classes of society since at least by 1770. Taking dancing lessons had become a necessary part of a polite education, as good manners and ballroom etiquette were also taught<sup>68</sup>. Dancing-masters gained large fortunes in the cities. Itinerant country dancing-masters were kept busy offering classes and finishing balls for students in the smaller towns and villages. Like the celebrated violinist J. Scott Skinner, dancing-masters were often fiddlers who carried a small violin, called a ‘kit’, which they could play while dancing to demonstrate the steps<sup>69</sup>.

The national character in Scotland had little influence on the square dances called Quadrilles introduced from Paris in 1816, or on the round-the-room Couple Dances, such as the Waltz and Polka, which became popular after 1844<sup>70</sup>. When the Saratoga, Caledonian, and Plain Lancer Quadrilles were imported to Cape Breton from France by way of Boston c. 1890, they had already been vulgarised. The jig timing of the first figure came from the Irish in New England, and the reel timing of subsequent figures came from American popular taste, albeit influenced by the immigrant Scottish population<sup>71</sup>. Jig timing had previously been known to step-dancers only associated with specific solo dances. The Square Set was popular because many of its figures, such as the swinging, resembled the ‘wild eight’. For the first fifty or sixty years, it contained no step-dancing setting steps. Then steps from Scotch Fours (circular Reels) and solo routines were incorporated into the dancing. Travelling as well as setting steps were used to mark the rhythm of the music with the feet, and it was typical to step-dance throughout a square set<sup>72</sup>. Jigs and traditional Scottish reels accompanied the dancing, played on the fiddle or the bagpipe<sup>73</sup>. The highlight of the reel figure in the Inverness County set came when the men and women of all the sets faced each other in long lines to show off their setting steps before reforming into their square sets. By the mid-twentieth century, the full repertoire of Quadrilles had been reduced to a single type of set in each district<sup>74</sup>. The names and figures of the sets varied by location and were not identified with particular tunes<sup>75</sup>. Dozens of tunes would be played for an evening dance without being repeated.

The practice of beating out the rhythm of the music with the feet in social dances was not an aberration of Cape Breton but also found in the ‘treepling’ done to Reels and Country

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67. Cf. Ibidem, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, p. 231.

68. Cf. Ibidem, p. 27.

69. Cf. Ibidem, pp. 20, 24, 28; EMMERSON, *A Social History of Scottish Dance*, p. 114.

70. Cf. FLETT - FLETT, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, pp. 4-5.

71. Cf. GIBSON, *Traditional Gaelic Bagpiping*, pp. 256-257.

72. Cf. FLETT - FLETT, *Traditional Step-Dancing in Scotland*, p. 191.

73. Cf. GIBSON, *Traditional Gaelic Bagpiping*, p. 257.

74. Cf. FLETT - FLETT, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, p. 274.

75. Cf. M.J. MACDONALD - B. MATHESON - D. MILLIGAN - D. ROACH, *No Less, No More, Just Four on the Floor: A Guide to Teaching Traditional Cape Breton Square Sets for Public Schools*, Halifax, Dance Nova Scotia, 1992, p. 3.

Dances in Scotland. Evidence from informants in East Lothian, Roxburghshire, and West Berwickshire indicates that the custom went back at least to 1860 and was quite prevalent among country people in the period before that. A feature of the 'treble' and 'flatter' steps is a double beat made by a shuffle forward and back on the ball of the foot, which strikes the ground once each way. Other steps include beating with the ball or heel of the foot. In general, the feet are kept close to the ground, moving as little as possible, using only gentle rocking motions to mark the beat<sup>76</sup>. A similar 'treble' step and style of footwork found in Cape Breton quick tempo setting steps suggests that this type of step-dancing was extant in Scotland at least before 1790, when step-dance teacher John Kennedy emigrated from Canna to Cape Breton<sup>77</sup>. Evidence from informants in Lewis, Assynt, and Tiree indicates that step-dancing was extant in Scotland c. 1860 and piping for such dancing was extant in the 1880s<sup>78</sup>. In the 1990s, people from Dunkeld, Lewis, Larbert, and Fife had memories of step-dancing in their youth or stories of relatives who were step-dancers<sup>79</sup>.

In the larger Lowland towns in Scotland, Square Dances and round-the-room Couple Dances became more popular than the Reels and Country Dances in the period 1870-1900. With the introduction of jazz after World War I, only the Couple Dances and their modern successors remained popular in the ballroom repertoire. In the country districts, Reels and Country Dances retained their appeal until the start of World War I in 1914, although some of the older dances had already disappeared by then. The new generation who took over village dances after the end of the war in 1918 adopted the new Couple Dances, but the old Reels, Country Dances, and Square Dances did not completely fall into disuse<sup>80</sup>.

In casual settings, people still enjoyed what are now termed ceilidh dances. These are simple, lively group dances, such as the Eightsome Reel and Strip the Willow, and Couple Dances with Schottische, Polka, or Waltz elements, such as the Highland Schottische, the Canadian Barn Dance, Gay Gordons, and St. Bernard's Waltz<sup>81</sup>.

Alarmed by the perceived loss of traditional dancing, Mrs. Stewart of Fasnacloich and Jean C. Milligan, a lecturer in physical education at Jordanhill Teacher Training College in Glasgow, formed the Scottish Country Dance Society in 1923<sup>82</sup>. Their goals were to practice and preserve Country Dance, to collect old books and pictures illustrative of Scottish Dances, and to publish periodically descriptions of Country Dances with diagrams and music. They first collected Country Dances from those who remembered them in a form keeping with their national characteristics<sup>83</sup>. The practice of the dances had become adulterated with other forms. «Down the middle and up» had become a walk, and instead of a pousette, the couples did a "two-step waltz" round each other<sup>84</sup>. They next studied manuscripts to collect older dances and to reconcile the different instructions found for figures and dances into standard forms. The goal was not to revive the Reels or

76. Cf. FLETT - FLETT, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, pp. 260-265.

77. Cf. Ibidem, pp. 282-284; IIDEM, *Traditional Step-Dancing in Scotland*, pp. 187, 190-191; EMMERSON, *A Social History of Scottish Dance*, p. 158; A. MACGILLIVRAY, *A Cape Breton Ceilidh*, Sydney, Nova Scotia, Sea Cape Music Limited, 1988, p. 24.

78. Cf. GIBSON, *Traditional Gaelic Bagpiping*, p. 172.

79. Cf. M. MOORE, *Scottish Step Dancing*, Scottish Arts Council, 1995, p. 8 <<http://www.nzdances.co.nz/styles/scottish/scottishstepdancing.html>>.

80. Cf. FLETT - FLETT, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, p. 6.

81. Cf. EMMERSON, *A Social History of Scottish Dance*, p. 284; FLETT - FLETT, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, p. 6.

82. EMMERSON, *A Social History of Scottish Dance*, p. 297.

83. Cf. MILLIGAN, *Won't You Join the Dance?*, p. 1.

84. EMMERSON, *A Social History of Scottish Dance*, p. 284.

the rural adaptations of Country Dance but to re-create the Country Dance of the eighteenth-century assembly room. The tempo of the strathspeys was therefore chosen to be the slower, more legato pace of the days of elegant hoopskirts rather than the faster tempos of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The tempo of the reel was kept quick and lively, however<sup>85</sup>. The forms of figures and steps were standardised, and a teacher-training and certification system was founded to provide some guarantee that the dances would be taught uniformly throughout the world at the many branches of the Society that were established<sup>86</sup>. King George VI bestowed the title of Royal on the Society in 1951, shortly before his death in 1952, and Queen Elizabeth, a dancer herself, has been its patron<sup>87</sup>. The standardisation of steps and existing figures has not prevented the development of new figures and the combining of figures into new dances. The publication of dances and the practice of them in dance branches has stimulated the innovation of new figures and dances and the tunes to accompany them<sup>88</sup>.

### 3. *Solo step-dancing*

Eighteenth-century dancing-masters taught solo dances and Reel setting steps as well as figures to social dances<sup>89</sup>. As many as forty different setting steps for Reels were devised<sup>90</sup>. The step and leg positions were taught explicitly or implicitly using the system of five positions defined by the French dancing-master Rameau in 1725<sup>91</sup>. The prominent dancing masters studied in Paris, Edinburgh, or London from French ballet dancers and others trained in the French Academy, some of whom were also principal dancers or choreographers for the stage. As a result, dancing-masters introduced fashionable new dances and composed solo step dances for their students or the stage influenced by the classical principles<sup>92</sup>. A solo dance with choreographed steps, typically to a specific tune, was referred to variously as a High Dance, Hornpipe, or Pas Seul<sup>93</sup>. Although the traditional hornpipe is considered a type of tapping step-dance, the term was used more broadly to include any kind of step-dance<sup>94</sup>.

A relatively few number of step-dances became widely known by being taught by itinerant dancing-masters<sup>95</sup>. No one could claim authentic versions of popular step-dances because they all showed regional differences and modifications made by each dancing-master. The general character of a dance was retained, however, such as the tap-dance style used for the solo dance Flowers of Edinburgh<sup>96</sup>.

Solo step-dances were performed at finishing balls in the towns and cities and at house parties in the Highlands and Hebrides and among the immigrants in Cape Breton<sup>97</sup>. Highland dance was taught to all young Scottish soldiers, and each regiment evolved its

85. Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 292-293.

86. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 298.

87. Cf. MILLIGAN, *Won't You Join the Dance?*, p. 4.

88. Cf. EMMERSON, *A Social History of Scottish Dance*, p. 299.

89. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 144.

90. Cf. FLETT - FLETT, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, p. 22.

91. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 76.

92. Cf. EMMERSON, *A Social History of Scottish Dance*, pp. 113-115, 160, 163; FLETT - FLETT, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, p. 7; *IDEM*, *Traditional Step-Dancing in Scotland*, pp. 5-7.

93. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 4.

94. Cf. EMMERSON, *A Social History of Scottish Dance*, p. 157.

95. Cf. FLETT - FLETT, *Traditional Step-Dancing in Scotland*, p. 7.

96. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 10.

97. Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 1, 190.

own style and form of display dance. Other public dancing exhibitions began in 1783 when pipers performed Reels as a dance interlude between judging at a piping competition in Edinburgh. This event was in reaction to the first piping competition in Falkirk in 1781, which was sponsored by the Highland Society of London. The dancing became a part of the piping competitions sponsored by the newly formed Highland Society of Edinburgh, which continued annually until 1826 and thereafter triennially until 1844<sup>98</sup>. Dance competition was introduced in 1795, when not all the dancers were also competing pipers. The dancers were all male and were judged on their travelling and setting steps in the Reels<sup>99</sup>. In 1813, a mysterious Strathspey Twosome, a couple dance for two couples, was introduced to the competitions, but few competitors participated in it. In 1829, the Reel of Tulloch was introduced. In 1832, the Sword Dance, Gille Calum, was the first solo dance in the competitions and became a popular favourite<sup>100</sup>.

Reels and the Sword Dance also figured in the competitions of the first of what could be called our modern Highland Games put on by the Strathfillan Society in Perthshire in 1819. The Braemar Games, started by the Braemar Highland Society in 1832, also featured Reels and the Sword Dance<sup>101</sup>. In 1841, the Inverness Northern Meeting Games added the Highland Fling to the competitions<sup>102</sup>.

The term ‘Highland fling’ has at times referred to a Reel generally, a type of step, or a solo dance that incorporates that step. The origins of the solo dance are obscure. It may have been devised by George Jenkins, a teacher of Scottish dancing in London, who in 1794 composed the tune ‘The Marquis of Huntly’s Highland Fling’ to which the dance was performed in its early days. No evidence shows that the dance originated in the Highlands, so it may have been composed by a dancing-master in the Lowlands or in London. It seems to be a compilation of some of the strathspey setting steps used in a Reel. Every teacher had his own version of the dance, and some sixty different steps for the dance have been collected<sup>103</sup>. A common story is that the dance was performed on one spot as a warrior’s victory dance on his targe (a round shield with a spike in the centre). However, Reel setting on the spot is typical, and certain army versions of the dance include steps of lateral travel<sup>104</sup>.

By 1853, the Braemar Games had included the solo dance *Seann Triubhas* [‘Old Trousers’] in the dance competition. Also known as Shan Trews, the dance can be traced back to 1790, when it was not regarded as a Highland dance. After the 1745 Jacobite uprising, the Gaelic poet Duncan Ban MacIntyre wrote the song *Seann Triubhas Uilleim* [‘Willie’s Old Trousers’], subtitled *Oran do ‘n Bhriogais* [‘Song to the Breeches’], to the fiddle tune ‘Deil Stick the Minister’. The tune dates back at least to 1690 and had words insulting to ministers. The dance may have been composed to this tune originally. Duncan was a Highlander who fought for the Government and supported William, the Duke of Cumberland, who defeated the Jacobites at the Battle of Culloden in 1746. The song protested the law banning Highland dress, as it did not distinguish rebel Highlanders from loyalists such as Duncan himself. The tune became called by the name of the latest song set to it, and the dance to the tune became known by the same name, or by the more

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98. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 32.

99. Cf. EMMERSON, *A Social History of Scottish Dance*, p. 243.

100. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 245.

101. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 247.

102. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 247; FLETT - FLETT, *Traditional Step-Dancing in Scotland*, pp. 5, 32.

103. Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 29-32.

104. Cf. EMMERSON, *A Social History of Scottish Dance*, p. 183.

familiar *Seann Triubhas Uillichan*. For the competitions, the tune was changed to one more accommodating to the pipes, where the usual tune has been ‘Whistle o’er the Lave o’t’. The change of tune and instrument may have altered the style and tempo of the dance<sup>105</sup>.

The association of the dance with the tune to the Gaelic song *Seann Triubhas Uilleim* may have given rise to the interpretation of the kicking movements in the dance as kicking off trousers in celebration of the end of the act of proscription against Highland dress. However, the step most identified with this manoeuvre was composed by D. G. MacLennan with no such intention in mind. He was a prominent Highland dancer in the early twentieth century and a leading teacher in Edinburgh<sup>106</sup>. His older brother William MacLennan was a piper and celebrated dancer who studied ballet and introduced balletic features into the competition Highland dances<sup>107</sup>. His innovations for the *Seann Triubhas* included high cutting, side cutting, double beats back and front, and entrechat. The elegance in the modern form of the dance has largely suppressed the comic undertones that came out in earlier times when it was danced with much more acting<sup>108</sup>. William MacLennan also changed the style of performing the Highland Fling. Before 1890, a foot was pointed to the side or front with a bent knee. MacLennan introduced the more strenuous balletic pointing of the toe with a fully extended leg with straight knee<sup>109</sup>.

Other solo dances were introduced into dance competitions at Highland Games in the late nineteenth century. At the Luss Games in Dumbartonshire in 1893, the Sailor’s Hornpipe and the Irish Jig were included although they have no connection with the Highlands. Unrelated to a true Irish jig, the Scottish Irish Jig is a pantomime done in the costume and burlesque style of the music hall stage. The Sailor’s Hornpipe is also a pantomime in costume that mimics a sailor’s activities. It derives from the Edinburgh stage in the early nineteenth century. Dancing-masters were teaching it by 1848, and it became very popular in their repertoire along with the Irish Jig. Both these dances were also popular in the north of England where they were taught with other character dances and fancy dances<sup>110</sup>.

Although both boys and girls were taught solo dances, exhibition dancing at Highland Games competitions was long considered best performed by men. Juvenile contests in the Highland Fling for boys began at the Luss Games in 1893, and girls were allowed to participate in 1908<sup>111</sup>. In the United States, the Highland Games sponsored by the Caledonian Club of San Francisco had 40 girls and boys dancing the Highland Fling on the stage in 1884<sup>112</sup>. Young girl competitors adopted the male military dress and started increasing in numbers until they came to dominate the contests prior to World War II<sup>113</sup>. In 1952, the Aboyne Games sponsored a more feminine costume for girls based on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Highland dress for women as seen in portraits of Flora MacDonald. Ladies’ step-dances danced in the Aboyne dress, such as Flora MacDonald’s Fancy, the Scottish Lilt, and the Village Maid, were introduced as exhibition

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105. Cf. FLETT - FLETT, *Traditional Step-Dancing in Scotland*, pp. 35-38.

106. Cf. *Ibidem*, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, p. 7

107. Cf. EMMERSON, *A Social History of Scottish Dance*, p. 251.

108. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 185.

109. Cf. FLETT - FLETT, *Traditional Step-Dancing in Scotland*, pp. 120, 123-124.

110. Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 38-39.

111. Cf. EMMERSON, *A Social History of Scottish Dance*, p. 250.

112. Cf. E.A. DONALDSON, *The Scottish Highland Games in America*, Gretna, Louisiana, Pelican Publishing Company, 1986, p. 141.

113. Cf. EMMERSON, *A Social History of Scottish Dance*, p. 253.

dances and then as competition dances to the Games<sup>114</sup>. These ladies' dances, also called 'national dances', later came to be danced also by men in kilts making appropriate hand movements where ladies would hold their skirts<sup>115</sup>. As performed by ladies in a soft balletic style, this form of step-dancing has gained popularity and encouraged new compositions, which have added greatly to the repertoire of dances originally revived and pioneered by the late Mrs. Isobel Cramb of Aberdeen in the 1950s.

Competitive Highland dances like the Sword Dance, the Highland Fling, and *Seann Triubhas* once had many different versions and steps, but they have become diminished to a small group of standard versions and sets of steps for various reasons. The great reduction in Highland dancing teachers after World War I led to a reduction of versions of dances in use. Jazz and modern Couple Dances pushed Reels out of the ballroom, so teachers no longer had to teach Highland Fling steps. Highland dance teaching was left to specialists who taught nothing else. Dancers travelled to more competitions and emulated the steps of the successful competitors<sup>116</sup>. Standardisation became complete in 1955 with the publication of *Highland Dancing*, the textbook of the Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing. Although standards made it easier to judge competitions, it led to dancers and teachers neglecting other steps and other solo dances<sup>117</sup>.

Solo dances collected in the Hebrides and in the Highlands in the 1950s were danced in a different style from the Highland Games dances. In contrast to the silent, soft shoes, wide leg movements, and defined arm movements of competition dances, the collected dances were performed in hard shoes, with close leg movements, and with informal arm movements, if any at all. Some of the dances with fast heel and toe beats, such as Aberdonian Lassie and Scotch Jig, are a mix of Highland and Cape Breton step-dance styles<sup>118</sup>.

Cape Breton solo dances collected in 1957 are related to the solo dances that were collected in Scotland in the same time period. They both appear to draw from a common collection of dance movements that came to be danced higher on the toes in Scotland and low to the ground in Cape Breton. In the Cape Breton dance style, the feet are kept nearly parallel, without the turnout found in Highland dance. The body is held upright, the arms hang loosely by the sides, and the imperceptible shifts of weight between feet create almost no vertical movement of the body<sup>119</sup>. The low form of dancing was most likely the earlier style, after which the shuffles and beats were extended into kicks, rockings, sheddings, shakes, balances, and other forms found in Highland dancing<sup>120</sup>. The Cape Breton solo dances recorded could be traced back through dancers of Highland or Hebridean descent, having been learned in Scotland and perpetuated in Cape Breton through families and dancing masters<sup>121</sup>. The old Cape Breton solo dances were taught as fixed sequences of steps, where each dance was choreographed to a specific tune or set of tunes to match the rhythm and notes of the music. The dancer had to know the tunes and needed them played at a certain tempo. The music was definitely slower than that heard in

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114. Cf. DONALDSON, *The Scottish Highland Games in America*, p. 142.

115. Cf. EMMERSON, *A Social History of Scottish Dance*, p. 253.

116. Cf. FLETT - FLETT, *Traditional Step-Dancing in Scotland*, pp. 33-34.

117. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 28.

118. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 194; *IDEM*, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, pp. 272-273.

119. Cf. *Ibidem*, *Traditional Step-Dancing in Scotland*, pp. 194-195.

120. Cf. EMMERSON, *A Social History of Scottish Dance*, p. 157.

121. Cf. FLETT - FLETT, *Traditional Step-Dancing in Scotland*, pp. 188, 190; *IDEM*, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, p. 271.

Cape Breton today. Even the step-dancing to the strathspeys was much slower. If the music was too fast, the dancer could not get all the steps in<sup>122</sup>. The old tempos were about 44 bars per minute for strathspeys and 52 bars per minute for reels<sup>123</sup>. The dancing was like singing a song, where the dancer knows every verse and dances the steps in order<sup>124</sup>. The music for solo dances was usually played on the violin, but many step-dancers learned to dance by the cainntaireachd, the old people singing [‘jigging’] the words of the tune. Gaelic dance-songs (puirt-a-beul) were used for solo dances as well as for the game dances brought from Scotland to Cape Breton<sup>125</sup>. Simon Fraser claimed in 1815 that all the dancers in Uist used to sing their own music<sup>126</sup>. The singing had to be slow enough to fit all the words in as well as all the dance steps, and thus it served as a moderating influence on the tempo.

The solo dances collected in Cape Breton had names well known in Scotland: the Fling, Flowers of Edinburgh [*Dannsa nan Flurs*], the Swords, *Seann Triubhas*, Jacky Tar, and *Tullochgorm*, among others<sup>127</sup>. Yet the dances were done in hard-soled shoes in step-dance style, except for the Fling, for which soft shoes were worn, and the Swords (Gille Calum), which was done with the pas de Basque step used in the Highlands<sup>128</sup>. In the setting steps, each step of eight bars had a different variation at first and then the same set of movements ending the step on the last few bars. The repetition gave a pattern and continuity to the dance. In the older form, a step was danced one way only and did not repeat starting with the other foot as is typical of Highland, Hebridean, and modern Cape Breton dance steps<sup>129</sup>. The solo dances were not simply a series of setting steps, either. Following the pattern of the old West Highland circular Reel, the setting steps alternated repeatedly with a travelling figure called a ‘Reel’. During the first half of the music, the dancer danced around in a circle clockwise, often using six chassé steps followed by two bars of stepping. During the second half of the music, the dancer would do eight bars of a setting step. Sometimes the second part was doubled to give sixteen bars for stepping. Then the dancer repeated the Reel. This dancing around in a circle also occurs in some Scottish solo dances, such as in the first step of the First of August and of most versions of *Seann Triubhas*<sup>130</sup>.

Each of the Cape Breton solo dances was originally taught with twelve steps, yet dancers devised more and took pride in having the most number of steps<sup>131</sup>. A Mrs. MacEachern, the granddaughter of Alexander Gillis, a dancing-master from Scotland, claimed that Flowers of Edinburgh had some thirty steps to it<sup>132</sup>. Her brother, ‘Big’ John Alex Gillis, took about eight or ten minutes to do the dance<sup>133</sup>. He had a total repertoire of two hundred steps<sup>134</sup>. Hughie Dougald MacIsaac claimed that his 85-year-old grandmother

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122. Cf. MACGILLIVRAY, *A Cape Breton Ceilidh*, pp. 80, 152.

123. Cf. FLETT - FLETT, *Traditional Step-Dancing in Scotland*, p. 188.

124. Cf. MACGILLIVRAY, *A Cape Breton Ceilidh*, p. 61.

125. Cf. FLETT - FLETT, *Traditional Step-Dancing in Scotland*, p. 188; MACGILLIVRAY, *A Cape Breton Ceilidh*, p. 152.

126. Cf. Capt. S. FRASER (ed), *The Airs and Melodies Peculiar to the Highlands of Scotland and the Isles [1816]*, repr. Sydney, Nova Scotia, Paul S. Cranford, 1982, p. 104, note 69.

127. Cf. FLETT - FLETT, *Traditional Step-Dancing in Scotland*, pp. 187, 192.

128. Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 190-192.

129. Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 191, 201-11; MACGILLIVRAY, *A Cape Breton Ceilidh*, p. 61.

130. Cf. FLETT - FLETT, *Traditional Step-Dancing in Scotland*, p. 191.

131. Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 189, 191.

132. Cf. MACGILLIVRAY, *A Cape Breton Ceilidh*, p. 53.

133. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 152.

danced Flowers of Edinburgh for around half an hour and won the prize as best dancer at a picnic<sup>135</sup>.

Competitions in Cape Breton solo dances never developed formal judging standards such as those for Highland dancing<sup>136</sup>. Men would informally compete for who had the most steps. Sometimes they would use a tree stump a foot across and 18 inches high. The two men danced around it, as in the Reel part of a solo dance, and then each in turn danced as many steps as possible on the stump. The one who danced the most steps won<sup>137</sup>.

Other tests of skill were also associated with step-dancing. To prove how light there were on their feet, dancers would dance on a table without spilling a glass of water or whisky<sup>138</sup>. A trick also known in the Hebrides was *Smáladh na Coinnle* [The Smoothing of the Candle']. In one version, the best dancers tried to flick off the wicks of three candles placed on the floor without extinguishing the candles. In another version, a dancer snuffs out a candle by clicking his heels together rhythmically at a specific point in the middle or at the end of the dance<sup>139</sup>.

Soon after the square sets were introduced to Cape Breton in 1890 and replaced the Scotch Fours in popularity, the step-dancing classes closed down, as the steps were no longer needed for social dancing<sup>140</sup>. The stepping was kept alive in families, but the number of people who knew the solo dances declined gradually between the two World Wars and rapidly after the second. Solo step-dancing lost its form: choreography to a specific tune, repetition of closing steps, and alternation of Reel and stepping. Steps were assembled together extemporaneously to whatever tunes were played, typically fast strathspeys and reels on the violin, in a form of continuous stepping<sup>141</sup>.

The introduction of step-dance steps from the solo dances and Scotch Fours into the square sets in the 1950s and the revival of fiddling and step-dancing in the early 1970s stimulated the need for teaching step-dancing again<sup>142</sup>. However, the solo dance routines with prescribed steps for dancing out a particular tune have all but vanished<sup>143</sup>. The teaching focuses on developing a repertoire of all-purpose strathspey and reel steps that can be applied as appropriate to any tune that is played. These steps consist of very short sequences of movement more or less standardized that are joined together to match the music. As such, they more closely resemble the types of setting steps formerly done in the four-handed Reels (Scotch Fours) from which the old solo dances had originally evolved<sup>144</sup>.

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134. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 66.

135. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 104.

136. Cf. FLETT - FLETT, *Traditional Step-Dancing in Scotland*, p. 188.

137. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 191.

138. Cf. MACGILLIVRAY, *A Cape Breton Ceilidh*, p. 153; FLETT - FLETT, *Traditional Step-Dancing in Scotland*, p. 192.

139. Cf. *Ibidem*.

140. Cf. *Ibidem*, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, p. 274.

141. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 188.

142. Cf. MACGILLIVRAY, *A Cape Breton Ceilidh*, p. 25; FLETT - FLETT, *Traditional Step-Dancing in Scotland*, pp. 191-192.

143. Cf. MACGILLIVRAY, *A Cape Breton Ceilidh*, p. 25.

144. Cf. FLETT - FLETT, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, p. 272.

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