

# COUNTRY DANCE AND SONG

20

March

1990



# Country Dance and Song

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Cover: Lotus Dickey, Champion Fiddler of the Martin County Fair, Loogootee, Indiana, sometime in the early 1960's. Others pictured from left to right: celebrity judge Sleepy Martin and runners-up Herman Grigsby and Ed Jones. Photo courtesy of Jarvis Crays of the Loogootee Opera House.

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*Lotus Dickey tunes up for a folk festival in Indiana in 1985*



# Lotus Dickey on His Music

My father and mother both sang old ballads and traditional songs, very many more than I learned of them. My folks always sang. My father would, from little up, take us on his knee and sing to us. He could read music somewhat, and taught us timing and taught us to read the rudiments of music, although I never was a fluent reader. He generally sang bass but he could lead any part.

When work was done we'd gather around the fireside, especially on winter nights when we had more time, and somebody would start singing. Maybe my oldest sister would go to the parlor organ and everybody would join in. We weren't compelled to but just wanted to, just liked to. It was a way of life, that's the only way I can put it.

When my brother was sixteen, my dad got him a fiddle. I was eight then and I started picking it up. Two or three years later we got an old guitar. Little by little I grew into the music. Always had an ear for harmony and melody.

As time went on I'd perform at gatherings—for showers, socials where neighbors would get together. After I was out of high school, when I was twenty, my brother-in-law and myself and a few neighbor boys performed a few times at our local theater, the Strand Theater at Paoli, as a side act after the show. We called our stringband the Skillet Lickers. Once in a while we'd go to places, homes where they'd roll back the rug and have a dance.

In later years I have played for the Fox Hunters Association dances, the Orange County 4-H Fair, the Indiana State Fair, and several fiddler's contests in Indiana and Kentucky.

I have had a flair for poetry all my life, and studied it in school some. Liked Tennyson and Byron and Longfellow and a lot of those. I wrote a little poetry myself. And then having some musical ability I begin to make up some tunes of my own, starting about April of 1934 I believe, some fifty years ago. And from then on as the spirit moved me, when an idea hit me I'd work with it. Sometimes entirely by memory, sometimes by jotting down a few syllables if I had an old envelope and a pencil with me.

And as the years went by I had sung around with friends and they thought I had some pretty good stuff. I ventured down to Nashville, Tennessee, in 1969 and sold one song to Dot Records, "God Made the Woman for the Man." The singer was

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*Quentin Lotus Dickey (1912-1989) played old-time Southern fiddle and composed over 100 folksongs, sharing his music freely with his friends in Indiana and throughout the folk music community. He first came to Pinewoods in 1981.*

eighteen-year-old named Ronny Shaw, who had won a rodeo singing contest sponsored by Loretta Lynn. The release did very little, some \$50 in royalties.

I really don't know that I had any goal when I started, composing was sort of an obsession. But now I have hopes of getting my songs out to the public in general, a little wider scope.

I guess we all have our talents or gifts that we fall back on as a means of uplift, probably. And I find that music seems to tide me through some difficult times. It lifts me up when I'm down, gives me hope when there is no hope. I don't know, I can't hardly put it in words.

Poetry is a means of making a sentiment more vivid. And poetry together with music maybe is set apart a little more. But I never considered myself outstanding at all. I have picked up my own versions on the fiddle and guitar, but anybody can sing better than I can. I'm not a skilled singer, not a cultivated voice as you would say. I simply put my own emphasis on whatever I am trying to perform, in my own way, from the heart. It's the only way I know how to do.

And if there is any value in the songs I've produced on my own, then I say it's a gift from God. And if it's not a gift it's of no real value anyway. If my songs are not gifts from God they couldn't be too worthwhile. Although I don't think my foolish songs are too worthwhile to humanity, they might brighten up the day once in a while.

Excerpted from an interview with Dillon Bustin  
Paoli, Indiana. March 4, 1984

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## Notes to the Songs:

"The Handiwork of God" and "Darlin' I Do": When singer Jan Henshaw and I met several of Lotus's children on "Dickey Mountain" to sort through his possessions and personal papers, we found a cassette of six new songs he had recorded at home last May, just before his health began to fail. We almost missed these songs because he had not transcribed them to paper, as was his usual habit. I have chosen two to print here, a meditation on the divine source of natural beauty and a rollicking love song. Both display in different ways the familiar Dickey style—a rhyme scheme so ambitious that syntax is sacrificed in a playful effusion of language, and an ingenious melodic and harmonic structure well suited to the mood. I like these last songs from the heart of Lotus Dickey especially because they may remind us that age is no impediment to passion. (Note: In "Handiwork" Lotus sang the chorus twice, after the first and fourth verses only.)

Song transcriptions by Grey Larsen.

# The Handiwork of God

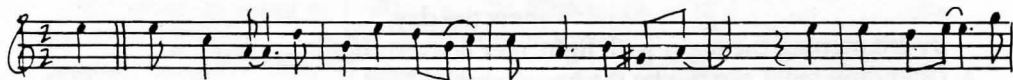
## by Lotus Dickey

*Slowly*

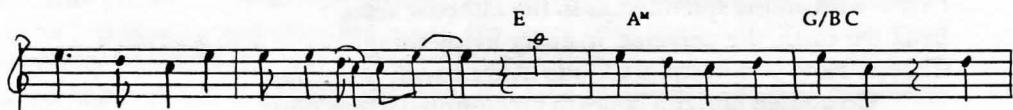
Words and Music by Lotus Dickey

© 1989 Lotus Dickey Music

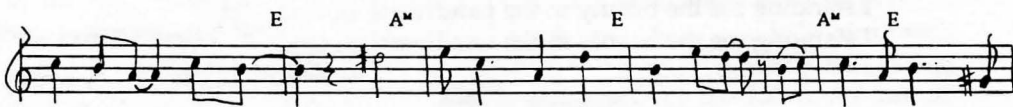
A<sup>m</sup> E A<sup>m</sup> E A G/B C



I stan-ding see the sun go slowly -- sink-ing in the west,-- I stan-ding see the



world peace-ful-ly sink-ing in to rest;----The song of birds I'm hear-ing no



long-er on--the breeze,--Sweet zey-pher waft-ing soft a-loft now--stills a-midst--the

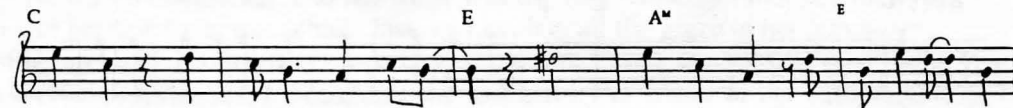
A<sup>m</sup> Chorus G



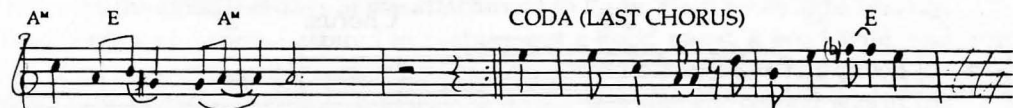
trees.-----How pic-tur-esque! Clouds fringed with rosey hue,----- On



gol-den hor-i-zon---be-neath green---tinted azure---blue--The sweet-est flowers of



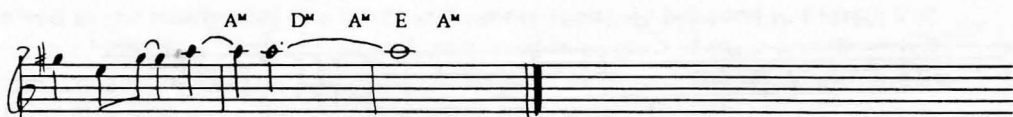
mor-ning grow slee-py, heads a-nod,-----I----- stan-ding see the beauty in- the



han-di-work of --- God. -----

CODA (LAST CHORUS)

I----- stan-ding see the beauty in-



the han-di-work of --- God.-----



2. I standing see the daylights fading fair afar of night,  
I standing see the way night's laden with the starry light;  
The moon with its more radiant soft and silvery glow,  
Illuminates till looming shapes with ghostly shadows show.
  3. I standing see the dawning of another day at hand  
I standing see the morning coming over once again;  
The sun's return in glory heralds anew the day,  
By frightening the night with light, o'er heavens holding sway.
  4. I standing see it can but be the handiwork of God,  
The heavens and the earth and sea lie measured by his rod;  
I view with all the splendor, as in the rainbow seen,  
In all the earth, the universe, in every living thing.
- Chorus: How picturesque! Clouds fringed with rosey hue,  
On golden horizon beneath green-tinted azure blue;  
The sweetest flowers of morning grow sleepy, heads anod,  
I standing see the beauty in the handiwork of God,  
I standing see the beauty in the handiwork of God!

© 1989 by Lotus Dickey Music

## Darlin' I Do

by Lotus Dickey

*Slowly*

Words and Music by Lotus Dickey  
© 1989 Lotus Dickey Music

A<sup>m</sup>                      Ab<sup>m</sup>                      A<sup>m</sup>

Let's go walk a-bout, let's go talk a-bout you;----- Got-ta let you know

B      G                      C              C<sup>7</sup>      F                      F<sup>m</sup>6                      C

all I bet-cha know's--- true;---- Who I'm sad without, who I'm mad about too;

A<sup>m</sup>                      G                      Chorus:                      A<sup>m</sup>

Sure-----ly you know---- who.----- Dar-lin' I love you,-----

C                      G

True as Hea-ven a-----bove;----- Could it be you feel as I----- do,-----

Care to share of your----- love?----- Al-ways this -----fee-lin'-----

That's thril-lin' me through;----- Darlin' I ----love you,----- Dar-lin' I-- do.---

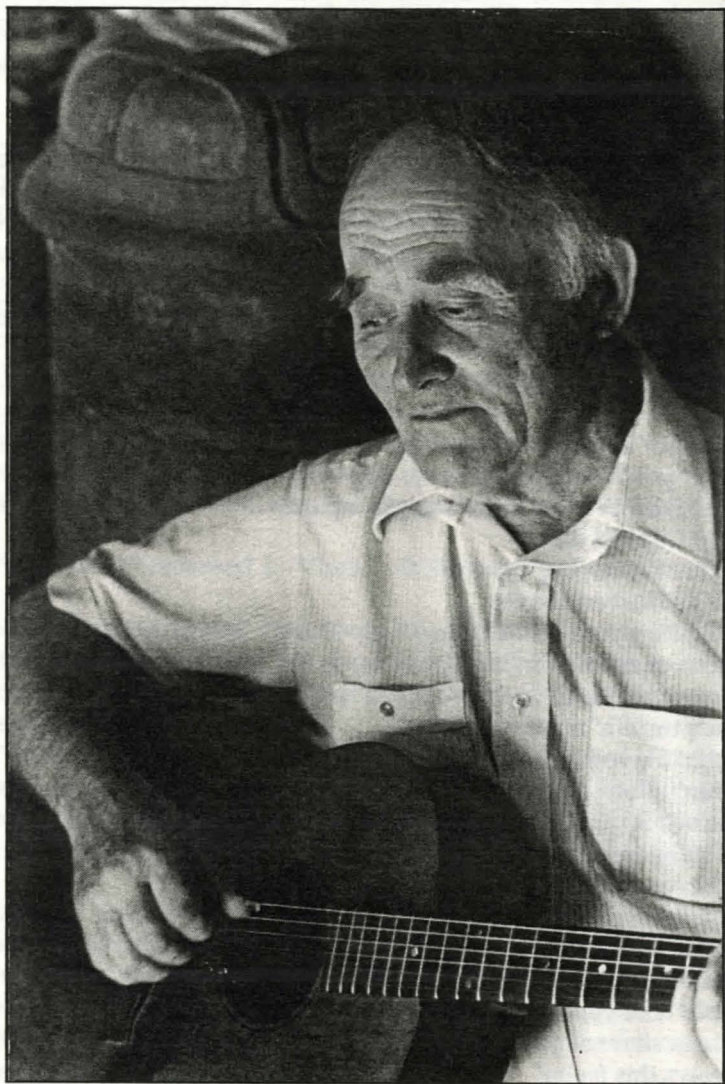
----- Dar-lin' I-- do.----- Darlin' I---- love you,----- Dar-lin' I----- do.-----

2. Now I'm hopin' somehow to open your heart;  
 Pray forever you'll stay, you'll never depart;  
 My heart's slain, Oh why are we stayin' apart?  
 Deep, deep Cupid's dart.

Chorus: Darlin' I love you,  
 True as Heaven above;  
 Could it be you feel as I do,  
 Care to share of your love?  
 Always this feelin'  
 That's thrillin' me through;  
 Darlin' I love you,  
 Darlin' I do.

3. You're the one for me, you're the wonderfully dear;  
 Now my blues are gone when I'm with you along here;  
 Stay and never go, stay forever so near,  
 You, just you, can cheer.

Chorus: Darlin' I love you,  
 True as Heaven above;  
 Could it be you feel as I do,  
 Care to share of your love?  
 Always this feelin'  
 That's thrillin' me through;  
 Darlin' I love you,  
 Darlin' I do!  
 Darlin' I love you,  
 Darlin' I do!



Lotus Dickey at home, April of 1985. Portrait by David B. Sutton.



# The Virtues of Lotus Dickey “Sitting at the Feet of Lotus”

By Dillon Bustin

When I think of Lotus Dickey's songwriting I am reminded of the logo of the John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, North Carolina. For readers of this journal it is a familiar symbol: a hill farmer and his horses breaking new ground, silhouetted above the words, "I sing behind the plow." For John Campbell, Olive Dame Campbell, and other reformers in the rural settlement school movement, the logo presented an ideal image of the past and future. It asserted a past when everyday work and everyday art were one and the same, when self-reliant labor was the basis of sustenance and virtue. And it promised a future when these values would be restored through regenerative educational and economic programs.

These projections of the good life were necessary because by the turn of the twentieth century, when John Campbell began work for the Russell Stage Foundation that would lead to the creation of the school at Brasstown, it seemed that the poor folk of the Upland South had fallen on hard times. As the reformers perceived the situation, the invasive effect of the petroleum, coal, timber, stone, and shipping industries, as well as the seductive effects of commercial entertainment, had reduced the mountain people to a dispirited and disadvantaged lot, estranged from their land and their traditional culture. Only in the older generation and remote recesses of the mountains could the social workers discern vestiges of a wholesome and well-integrated way of life. These tantalizing remnants also drew folk song enthusiasts to the region, including, early on, Cecil Sharp and Maud Karpeles.

As a young music and dance enthusiast myself I first visited Brasstown in 1972. The school's logo and its message were certainly an inspiration to me and my friends as we dropped out of college and went back to the land. From 1974 until 1977 I rented a few derelict farms in Orange County, Indiana, trying my hand at subsistence husbandry and all the while collecting fiddle tunes, ballads, hymns, and square dance

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*Dillon Bustin, long-time member of CDSS, studied folklore at Indiana University, and is Director of Folklife and Ethnic Arts for the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities.*

calls from old-timers in the region. I soon realized that I could make a more reliable living by performing the results of my research than I could by rescuing eggs, milk, and vegetables from the varmints in the barn and root cellar. Before long I was producing festivals, exhibits, and curricula for historical societies, museums, and schools. Ironically this work led me back to Indiana University and its Folklore Institute.

My years of rural simplicity and poverty left me intangibly enriched—I did collect a surprising amount of archaic folklore, and I did learn much about contemporary society. The most difficult lesson for me to accept was that my neighbors were quite comfortable with modern life. Most of the lore they shared with me was "memory culture" from their youthful years before the Second World War. Without exception they mourned the passing of the small family farm, local entertainment, and hand crafts. For this reason they might belong to a fiddler's association, a steam threshers reunion, or a quilting club. And for this reason, also, they were pleasantly surprised that a young newcomer to that county would want to hear about old-fashioned ways of doing things.

But the prevalent attitude toward modernization seemed to be "If you can't beat it, join it," and my neighbors seemed content to live in trailers or concrete-block houses, drive long distances to factory jobs in Louisville or Bloomington, enjoy Hollywood movies, pop radio, and television, and go into great debt to buy oversized machinery, pesticides, and fertilizer in order to continue farming on weekends.

Though I may have been naive, at the time I was quietly disillusioned. There were exceptions to this rule, but they were eccentric and reclusive individuals, societal misfits who were a bit of an embarrassment to their relatives. A few other partial exceptions were, I came to realize, more the result of involuntary poverty than a radical cultural conservatism.

I heard rumors of a fiddler named Lotus who lived on a high ridge at the end of Grease Gravy Road, right where the gravel gave out to a dirt logging trail into the Hoosier National Forest. This Lotus, I was assured, could work harder by day and play longer at night than any three men. He lived in the "unimproved" one-room log house where he was raised, dug his own ginseng and yellowroot for herbal remedies, plowed his garden with a single horse, used no synthetic chemicals, and stored his potatoes under the bed in his sleeping loft through the winter. Moreover, he composed a variety of songs which were reputed to be "different" but "not half bad." I assumed that my new Orange County friends, having gotten an idea of what I was looking for, were describing a will-o'-the-wisp just to tease me. Although I located his home and called on him there several times in hopes of introducing myself, he was always off working and I eventually moved back to Bloomington without making his acquaintance.

At the Folklore Institute I studied how the fascination with folk culture had arisen with the primitivism and nationalism of the Romantic Era. I began to see how the countercultural folk revival of my own generation was similar to earlier social reform movements in which intentional communities were based on a preindustrial ideal. In those years of the mid- to late-1970s, some of the folklore faculty were disavowing

their discipline's origins in the ethnology of European peasants. To the contrary, they were leading their students to research projects in the Gary-Calumet region southeast of Chicago, the most heavily industrialized, commercialized, polluted area in the Midwest. Such projects, along with conferences with titles like "Is There a Folk in the City?" were attempts to bring the discipline into the modern world.

Nevertheless, when it was time for me to do my student fieldwork I headed not northwards to the big city but south again to the rural hills. My reading had given me many new questions about the modernization of the countryside, and I wished to document how people valued the past and responded creatively or with passive resignation to changing conditions. I began work on a series of ethnographic films, and it was while shooting the second of these, *Water From Another Time*, in June of 1981 that I finally met Lotus Dickey. He agreed to participate in the film project, and as I got to know him I was amazed at his songwriting talents, which I regret to this day were not adequately portrayed in the finished documentary. Another folklore graduate student, Nancy Cassell (now McEntire), who was working as folklorist-in-residence for the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, also interviewed Lotus and was similarly impressed with his prodigious memory, his storehouse of traditional folksongs and dance tunes, and his original musical accomplishments under unlikely circumstances.

When the film crew had completed shooting his segment of the footage, Lotus took me aside and explained that he was retired from his work with the laborers' union, his eight children were grown and gone from home, and his time was his own. All his life he had yearned to travel and perform his songs, so if I had any suggestions he was ready to live up to his nickname of "Available Jones." Over the Fourth of July weekend myself and another musician, Linda Handelsman (now Emery) accompanied him at the annual Battleground Fiddlers Gathering in the northern part of the state. Later that month we accompanied him again when he was invited by Nancy Cassell to perform a concert at Spring Mill State Park closer to home. A week later he was a last-minute replacement as a fiddler for American Dance and Music Week at Pinewoods Camp in Plymouth, Massachusetts.

These three engagements launched a late-life career for Lotus not only as a performer on the folk festival and dance camp circuit, but also as a rustic celebrity for journalists and an inexhaustible informant for folklorists. Over the next several years Linda and I, Nancy at times, other folklore students including Paul Tyler and John Beale, and full-time musicians like Terri Klassen, Pete Sutherland, Karen Billings, Bob Lucas, and Jan Henshaw were kept busy following Lotus to public schools and state parks. Beyond Indiana he was sponsored by the Country Dance and Song Society at Pinewoods; the American Folklife Center and Folksong Society of Greater Washington, DC; the National Folk Festival; the Festival of American Fiddle Tunes at Port Townsend in the state of Washington; and dozens of other clubs, camps, and concert series from Los Angeles to Baltimore. Professional touring musicians like members of Metamora and John McCutcheon began to perform and record his songs and fiddle tunes. Two artist fellowships from the Indiana Arts Commission allowed



him to record his own albums of traditional and original music, *The Pride of Glencoe* in 1985 and *The Very First Time* in 1987.

Beginning with the phase of his initial "discovery" in 1981 and continuing until the last month of his life in 1989, Lotus was profiled innumerable times by newspaper and magazine feature writers and radio and television producers. Although I frequently cringed at the simplistic and superficial image of a hillbilly balladeer promoted by these media treatments, I had to admit that Lotus enjoyed the publicity and took the prejudices of the reporters in stride. He was also interviewed repeatedly by folklore graduate students and ethnomusicologists from the university, notably by David Brose, Kathleen Mundell, and Professor George List for the Archives of Traditional Music. He became quite adept at making guest appearances in undergraduate folklore and folk music classes.

Perhaps because I was often troubled by the way journalists would use Lotus as proof of cultural clichés, I was sensitive to the possibility that we academics-to-be could interpret Lotus for our own limited purposes. Training in a discipline reluctantly trying to leave behind its origins in romantic pastoralism, an entire cadre of students encountered Lotus Dickey with a mixture of delight and relief. After searching for new definitions of "folk" and "lore" in urbane, mechanized, or institutionalized settings, it was a pleasure to be introduced to a man in a remote rural neighborhood, devoted to the forty-acre farm where he was raised, and replete with pre-industrial skills, talents, beliefs, and texts. A first visit—featuring a tour of his single-pen log house, horse-cultivated garden, and steep woods; accompanied by a witty and eloquent discourse of local legends, family stories, plant lore, home remedies, and weather signs; culminating in a session of archaic fiddle tunes, camp meeting hymns and other folk songs—could be an exhilarating experience and a vindication of suspect theories. More than one fellow fieldworker mentioned to me that Lotus Dickey was too good to be true. Rarely, it seemed, did such a fruitful imagination spring from such played-out soil, but even one precious elder was evidence of the vitality of the indigenous oral culture, now all but lost in the everyday lives of the younger generations.

My own conclusion is that there can be no doubt Lotus Dickey was a star informant, rivaling the most impressive reports of the pioneering folklorists of fifty or one hundred years ago. But as a pristine tradition bearer he was indeed too good to be true. It would have been easy enough for a folklorist to conduct a few item-centered interviews and depart with an image of the deeply conservative, untutored, rustic bard intact. But Lotus was much more complex, and much more interesting, than that. I remember discussing early on with Paul Tyler which one of our circle would undertake what would have to be a massive dissertation on Lotus. So far none of us has volunteered, not so much because of the complexity as because the close personal friendships that Lotus inspired with each of us precluded a willingness to subject him to that type of intellectual analysis.

Perhaps it is this compassionate empathy he had with the young idealistic scholars and musicians from the college town, as well as the sources of his own creativity, that needs to be explained. Although I was reluctant to write the book on Lotus, beginning

with *Water From Another Time* I did collaborate with him on an ongoing biographical repertoire study. Almost immediately four puzzling facts began to present themselves to challenge his status as an exemplar of Upland South traditional culture.

First, he is a relative newcomer; his father, Marion Dickey, left his job in an industrial mill in Muncie and moved his wife Sarah and family to Orange County in 1912, leading several other families from the Muncie area in a trek away from factory work and back to subsistence farming. Secondly, the choice of their new family farm was a poor one, betraying an ignorance of hill country settlement wisdom. The Lick Creek Valley in Orange County, Indiana, had been claimed one hundred years before by black Quakers from Orange County, North Carolina, moving north of the Ohio River in protest of slavery. During the pioneer era the Quakers were soon followed by the black servants and farm hands they had left behind in North Carolina. These free blacks took up small homesteads in the steep hills south of the river valley. This community, called Little Africa, dissipated under the harsh racism of the Jim Crow decades in the late nineteenth century. The plots of land then tended to change hands frequently among poor white families who also worked as hired help for more affluent farmers in the valley below.

It was one of these tracts that Lotus's parents bought, but the house purchased with the property was not the original one built by the pioneering black Quakers whom they admired. That house, nestled against a shoulder of the hillside near a spring, had long since burned down. The replacement house had been built in the 1890s on an exposed ridge top near the road, lacking weatherboarding or a proper cellar, chimney, or well—all signs of a late, temporary effort on eroded, marginal ground. After twenty more years of cultivation the high fields were exhausted and abandoned. Courthouse tax and deed records show that the property had been declining precipitously in value, last purchased in 1906 for \$125. Yet Lotus's parents as outsiders paid the unusually high price of \$300 and set out to raise their five children on the unpromising land. Lotus's father was 50 years old; this was his second family and according to Lotus he struggled valiantly to build new outbuildings, fences and windbreaks, improve the soil and market cash crops of strawberries, watermelons, tomatoes and beans.

The third anomaly in Lotus's upbringing was the way both of his parents stressed the importance of book learning, refined social graces, and thoughtful religious instruction at home. These values often placed them at odds with their neighboring Hoosiers, some of whom they described in Old Testament terminology as "brutish." Lotus's father gave his children music lessons and passed many an evening reading aloud the novels of Dickens and Victor Hugo, and the poetry of Burns, Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Longfellow. His older brother Cyprian formed a string ensemble with other young people from Muncie and the county seat of Paoli, surely the first time the strains of Haydn and Mozart were played in Orange County. One of his sisters, Audrey, left home after high school to attend business college in the Louisville area, and married a banker there. Lotus himself enjoyed his studies and excelled in high school. His mother, who had been a schoolteacher, especially urged him to go to college and follow a career, to work in an office like Audrey. But he chose to remain on

the farm, and being the youngest, stayed home to help care for his parents until he was past thirty, when he married and started a family of his own.

Fourthly, as a musician Lotus grew up to be interested in the past but also highly creative. Unlike his brother Cyprian, Lotus had an ear for old-time fiddle music and sought out older fiddlers in the neighborhood, like Alec Moon, whose family had emigrated from Eastern Kentucky, and Deck Ainsworth, who had been born in the Ozark Mountains. In a sense he made his own youthful collection of southern fiddle tunes, and also listened carefully to the handed-down songs his mother and father sang. But the songs that he began to compose from the age of 22 owed as much to literary art and the popular music of his own lifetime as to the old songs he received from his parents.

Asking Lotus to probe his memories about his father, I learned that his father had been active in socialist political parties in his younger years, organizing labor in the steel mills of Northern Ohio and Indiana and working on the presidential campaigns of Eugene Debs. He subscribed to *Harper's Weekly* and the socialist journals *Appeal to Reason* and the *E. Haldemann Julius Weekly*, one of whose regular contributors was the muckraking Upton Sinclair. Nostalgic for his own boyhood on an Ohio farm, and disillusioned with the hopes of reform after Debs was imprisoned, he wished to find an isolated parcel of countryside where he could spare his children the dehumanizing effects of industrial capitalism, and live out his life in self-reliance and independent study. When his last child was born, while he was planning the move to the hills, the elder Mr. Dickey was reading the *Bhagavad-Gita* and translations of other Sanskrit Vedas. He named his son Lotus as a symbol of the purity and innocence he hoped they would all find as they transcended the squalor of the factory town.

With these insights I came to the startling revelation that Marion Dickey had instigated his own back-to-the-land movement as a refugee from the Progressive Era, and that he had transmitted all of his romanticism and idealism to his youngest son. Through unrelenting hard work he was able to give his children a wholesome and happy home, but the poor choice of ground doomed his descendants to lives of hardship. During Lotus's lifetime much of the land in the fertile valley bottoms was strategically acquired by an Amish community which still flourishes, making an abundant living from the good ground without modern technology. But in the twentieth-century economy the rough hill farms became ever less able to support a family, especially without a community of like-minded families to swap labor.

Lotus wished to make a living by farming; he also dreamed of a career in the music business and of further schooling. He tried to be true to his father's belief in the virtue of honest labor, and his decision to stay on the homeplace was a conscious agreement with his father's populist and pacifist ideals. But during the Great Depression he had to go to work in a local factory that mass-produced harvest baskets. During the 1940s he worked in a munitions plant near Louisville, and in the 1950s in a wood mill in Paoli, manufacturing television cabinets. In the 1960s, as a member of the laborer's union, he helped pour the foundations of the new high-rise dormitories and classroom buildings at Indiana University in Bloomington. So, as he once explained to me with an uncharacteristic trace of sarcasm in his voice, he had worked in agriculture, in the

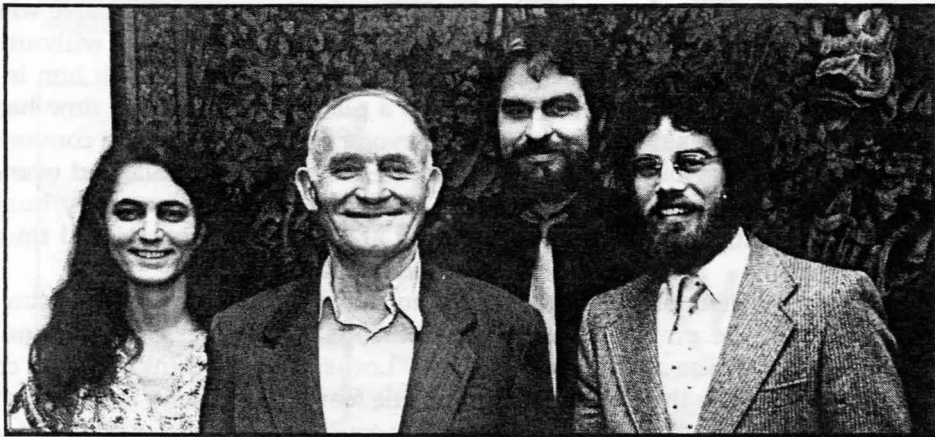


entertainment industry, and in higher education after all, but only in the lowliest of capacities. Twice during the 1960s he hitchhiked to Nashville, Tennessee, in hopes of selling his songs to producers. He did succeed in placing two songs with a music publisher; the returns were tantalizing but minimal.

I never heard Lotus Dickey complain, not even of the blood cancer that began to sap his strength as he entered his 70s. During the week of his recent funeral his sister Audrey and several of his eight children assured me that the years of notoriety since the release of *Water From Another Time* were the most fulfilling of his life. I'm glad they feel that way, but I know that Lotus had an equanimity of mind that helped him to find enjoyment in every moment. He often expressed his sense of gratitude to his God and his ancestors. Yet it was his individual forbearance and creativity that enhanced his inner life even in the most difficult and lonely of circumstances.

The astounding number and variety of Lotus's songs are a testament to his mental and emotional resources. This lesson, difficult as it is to express in words, was his gift to me and, I believe I can say, to his many younger friends: "Make your choices, take your chances, embrace the interplay of freewill and fate. It may seem implausible that at the end of Grease Gravy Road you will find an impoverished poet named for a mystical Hindu symbol. It is no more implausible that within yourself you may feel yearnings that echo from all humankind throughout the ages, yearnings that justify your curiosity about the wide world even as they affirm the value of your own time and place. Knowing this truth, it is not necessary to search for a more pristine or authentic way of life."

Once I did arrive at his house to find Lotus singing to the birds as he plowed his garden. Not the naive and natural folk artist of the Brasstown silhouette but, like me, a child of counterculture—scarred by history, charmed by fantasy, resolute in the design of his own experience.



After a performance and advance premiere of *Water From Another Time* in the Whitehall Pavillion of the Library of Congress, March 11, 1982. Left to Right: Linda Handelsman Emery, Lotus Dickey, Dillon Bustin, and film producer Richard Kane. American Folklife Center photo by Carl Fleischhauer.

# Lotus Dickey: An Appreciation

On November 23rd, Thanksgiving Day 1989, at about 11:00 pm, beloved singer, songwriter, fiddler and friend, Lotus Dickey, passed away at Orange County Hospital in Paoli, Indiana. With him were his children, grandchildren, and a few close friends.

He had a fairly benign type of leukemia that was discovered when he was in an auto wreck about five years ago. The doctors then said he had had it for awhile and it may never bother him, but then again . . .

It was obvious to us for the last couple of years that his spark was flickering somewhat, not uncommon for someone his age. Maybe he saw it earlier but in any case he was still playing some tunes with visitors up to a week before he died. Also I spoke with a man at the hospital who had grown up with Lotus who said, "Lotus could give any two men all they could handle when it came to hard work," so this illness never slowed him down until recently.

Anyone who ever met Lotus could see he was also virtually unstoppable when it came to music. He could play and sing for a week straight it seemed without rest. The music nourished him and made him stronger. Spending time with him in this way was like leaving the planet and going to a place of grace where time had no meaning—Lotus always making sure that everyone present was feeling comfortable and needed and every bit his equal. He respected everyone and allowed everyone the opportunity to respect themselves and everyone else. He was truly humble, generous to a fault, loving, wise and thankful above all for these special times of music and sharing.

One time at Pinewoods we were walking to dinner in the evening; the sun was coming through the pines and we were delirious with tunes, friends, and the delicious smell of pine and I said to him, "Lotus, do you think Heaven could possibly be better than this?" He said with a little fear of blasphemy in his voice and a big smile, "No . . . not hardly. . . . What do you say?" I hope it is, for no one is more deserving of it than he.

Lotus raised eight children of his own by himself in a 12' by 12' log house without modern conveniences. He was also partial to strays, and it's unclear just how many others he had a hand in raising.

I have heard stories of life in that cabin—Lotus waking children in the middle of the night to sing his newest song or keeping them up with his practicing for a fiddle contest. He had his own built-in audience back then.

I thank God and Dillon Bustin for bringing Lotus to me and the rest of us. In Lotus I ended my search for a true patriarch without feet of clay. Someone who could absorb everything you could give and more and return it tenfold without trying.

Lotus was 77 years old when he died. He is survived by 8 children, 40 grandchildren, 13 great-grandchildren, his sister Audrey and brother Cyprian.

His brother, also a fiddler and an inspiration to Lotus in his life, could not come to the funeral because of ill health. (He was in the room across the hall from Lotus in the hospital.) But all of these others and many more friends old and new were there.

We sang Lotus's songs, and songs that were dear to him. We eulogized, told tales on him and laughed and cried. Someone played a tune on his fiddle at the cemetery, a tune learned from Lotus. We sang hard, as hard as we could. We sang him into the ground. It would take this sad occasion to ever say that about Lotus Dickey, my true friend and partner.

Bob Lucas

Bloomington, Indiana

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*Cassette albums by Lotus are available through Grey Larsen, 8920 South Shore Drive, Unionville, IN 47468*

# Guidelines for Performing Traditional Social Dance

by Richard Powers

As dance enthusiasts, we occasionally have opportunities to exhibit our favorite dances for an audience, whether an informal demonstration or a professional staging. We soon find, however, that the dances which give us so much pleasure appear to be less interesting to a spectator. Unlike ballet and modern dance, social dances are by nature more enjoyable to the participants than to an audience.

Performing reverses our focus from the interpersonal realm of social dance to an external projection for observers. The danger is that such an extreme change may alter the original form and spirit of our dances, and still not satisfy the expectations of an audience. The solution is to use performance practices that will make our dancing more appealing to an audience, without destroying the essential character of the dances. This article will suggest ways of balancing the opposing dynamics of social and exhibition dance while keeping the best qualities of both. We will also look at methods to ensure that one's presentation style is precise, convincing and entertaining.

The related areas of costuming, makeup, lighting and sound will be omitted so that performance practices can be covered in greater detail.

Readers of this journal represent a wide variety of dance traditions, from morris to swing, but all will encounter similar problems when attempting to present their dances to an audience. Rather than wading through a sea of generalities in an attempt to cover all possible dance forms, it will be more helpful to focus on the details of one selected genre. Specifically, this article will examine the staging of traditional social dance. . . quadrilles and contras, waltzes and polkas, rags and tangos. Examples and quotations will be drawn primarily

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*Richard Powers, right, in a dance recreation from the Civil War period by the Flying Cloud Academy*

from the emerging field of vintage dance. Adherents of other dance forms will find that most of these guidelines apply to their own specialty, with any exceptions being self-evident.

Most CDSS members participate in social, as opposed to theatrical, dance. Therefore, before proceeding to the guidelines, two inherent difficulties in staging social dance must be addressed.

In past generations, an aim of a social assembly or ball was to give the greatest pleasure to others, while attracting the least attention to oneself. Dance masters once suggested that "on entering an assembly-room, all thought of self should be forgotten. The petty ambition of endeavoring to create a sensation either by dress, loud talking or unusual behavior, is to be condemned."<sup>1</sup> In terms of dancing style, ballgoers were advised to "dance with modesty, neither affect to make a parade of your knowledge; refrain from great leaps and ridiculous jumps, which would attract the attention of all toward you."<sup>2</sup> A century ago, the ideal dancer was almost invisible.

Even though we have more boisterous fun with our dances today, they have nonetheless evolved from this spirit of selflessness, and succeeding dance traditions have usually retained some degree of the original modesty. The obvious problem in staging these dances is that humble, understated dancing tends to bore audiences, who have come to prefer broad theatrical movements and virtuoso footwork.

The second problem is that today's audiences usually expect precise uniformity onstage, whether in a chorus line or in the *corps de ballet*. An accurate re-creation of a social dance, on the other hand, should attempt to portray the diverse styles of average citizens who are more interested in dancing with each other than performing for observers. An authentic staging of a traditional social dance would therefore display a wide variety of individual styles and abilities. Unfortunately, the audience is likely to misperceive such authentic dissimilitude as amateurish or inept.

There are no "correct" solutions to these problems. One choreographer may choose to recreate an understated dance event, inhabited by individuals of varying ages, sizes and accomplishments, while another may prefer a broad theatrical interpretation, performed with uniform precision by well-trained professionals. Choosing a balance between authenticity and audience expectations is an individual decision.

### *The Guidelines*

**1. When performing a dance onstage, project your personality a little more than you think is necessary.** This is required to bridge the distance between yourself and your audience. Everyday gestures tend to look dull and lifeless onstage. The degree of projection varies with this distance... from very little in film closeups, to a great deal in an opera hall. In the latter case, project your eyes, expressions and gestures to the last row of the balcony. Some say that it is there that you will find your most devoted fans, who have spent their last cent to see you dance. (The patrons in the front row may have already fallen asleep!)

Weak gestures are lost on a large stage, but operatic broadness usually appears silly and artificial in an intimate performing space. When rehearsing, visualize the size of the intended stage and practice with that scale in mind.

**2. Control your legs and feet much more than you think is necessary.** In addition to projecting your personality onstage, you must achieve a greater technical control of your footwork. Casual performance usually looks much sloppier than it feels. The discouraging truth of this maxim is made evident when watching a videotape of yourself dancing. (A typical response is that one appears more gangly and out of control, compared to the way the movement feels.) Strive for a powerful, precise placement of every step and leg gesture.

It is possible to interpret this advice too literally, resulting in an unwanted machismo boldness when a choreography calls for delicacy and grace. You must add extra power, precision and control only to the degree needed to replace that which is lost in the distance between yourself and your audience.

The most effective technique for strengthening dance gestures is Focused Placement: When you make a gesture, it looks much better if you *place* it in position and hold it there, if only for a split second, rather than throwing it toward its position. Our limbs are controlled by opposing sets of muscles. To kick a leg to the side casually, for example, one may only use the muscles required to raise the leg, without using the opposing adductors. This usually causes the kick to overshoot and wobble a bit. But in placing the leg precisely into the air, you tense the opposing muscles as you kick, and then "freeze" your leg in the extended position for a moment. When first trying this, it feels as if you are charging your entire leg with isometric tension, down to your toes. With

time and practice, you will be able to differentiate between tension and relaxed control.

**3. Appear to dance with ease.** Dance master Thomas Hillgrove wrote, "Here let it be noted as a fundamental rule that, although strength of position is desirable, an easy gracefulness must not be sacrificed."<sup>3</sup> The aesthetic ideal of relaxed dancing was carried even further in this century, by Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, Fred Astaire, English stage cloggers and others.

This apparent conflict of ideals can be resolved without compromising either ease or control. The key is to prevent muscular tension (generated in controlling gestures) from adding any visible tenseness or stiffness to your movements.

Rigidity appears first in the face, neck, shoulders and hands, so keep these areas especially fluid and flexible. Move your head easily about your shoulders, not locked forward. Make sure that your shoulders stay low and relaxed. Visualize that you are separating your body at the midsection, maintaining precise placements and powerful gestures of your legs while keeping your upper body and face completely relaxed, yet animated, showing no evidence of effort. This important combination creates the illusion that you were born with the gift of dance perfection, which comes to you naturally and easily. We are all familiar with the result: "They make it look so easy!"

The method for achieving control with ease is simply continued practice. This training develops controlled articulation as an unconscious habit, allowing muscle memory to take over the many fine points of execution, so that you can relax and visibly enjoy yourself while maintaining careful technique. "The perfection of art is to conceal art."<sup>4</sup>

**4. Take special care to commence dance phrases clearly, and conclude them with decision.** In most cases, you will want to execute the first step of a passage with the full thrust of the phrase, not starting meekly then catching up. At the end of a movement, you will often want to strike a stable concluding stance before continuing to the next phrase. The purpose of this clarity is to make a choreography easier for your audience to perceive. A simple square dance can appear to be aimless wandering if each dance phrase melds sloppily into the next. Too much snap may lend an unwanted military air, but clarity with ease will create the best effect.

Always stand with your weight a bit forward, over the balls of your feet, ready to step out at any instant. If you have the bad habit of standing back on your heels, then you must shift your weight forward just before you step, adding unnecessary lurches and delaying your movements.

Clear starts and stops are also important in couple dances. One is usually reluctant to step out boldly while holding a partner in one's arms. Practice will let you trust that your partner will step as strongly as you will.

The very last step of a phrase in mid-sequence tends to be especially weak. At

this moment, the mind is trying to remember the next step, abandoning the gesture in progress. As a result, precision can suddenly disappear. Make an extra effort to complete each internal phrase of a sequence.

Your choreography may require you to land on a specific spot after a dance passage. If you miss this mark, it is best to stay where you have landed, with a confident stance. A quick position readjustment appears to be a glaring bobble to your audience, and is far more obvious than remaining in the wrong place. If your misplacement is serious enough to require readjustment, continue to stand for a moment after the cadence, then take a clearly intentional step to place, as if it were a part of the choreography.

**5. Make every motion with self-directed conviction, leading decisively with your head and especially with your eyes as you step out.** You must give the impression that each movement is your idea, not the director's. The effect is that you are creating each dance phrase spontaneously.

In order to appreciate the importance of this suggestion, watch amateur dance groups, perhaps at a local dance festival or on public access television. You will notice that many of the dancers have a vacant gaze throughout the performance, giving the appearance that they are only doing what a choreographer has instructed them to do. Their eyes often roll up into their heads as they try to remember routines. Then watch a professional troupe, and you will recognize a dramatic difference in their expressions. There is a fire or gleam that is missing in many amateur groups. They appear more spontaneous because their faces reflect changing intents that match every movement. As a result, each dancer looks more autonomous, confident and inspired. The total effect can be exhilarating when it seems that each dancer is doing exactly what they want to do, not what they were told to do.

Some specific advice about eye movements:

- Your eyes are especially important in conveying the thrust and intent of every moment. The audience will follow the direction of your eyes, which then makes your movements seem clearer and easier to follow. If you are taking the lead in a couple dance, clear eye directives also communicate your intent to your partner, thus helping to avoid misunderstandings.

- At all times *see* what or whom you are looking at. This will help you avoid the blank stare, so common to novices. Notice the details around yourself. . . the color of someone's eyes, a hairstyle or changing shadows. Relate to your partners by all means, looking at them, not straight through them. Catch the eyes of others that you interact with, and respond to them.

There are two reasons for this advice. The first is that the blank stare manifests self-consciousness, especially when one is aware of being watched. This vacant gaze (which is only made worse by smiling) may often be found among



background extras in low-budget films. They look like robots saying, "I am now on camera. . . I am posing and pretending to be conversing." The effect is decidedly artificial, and it's all in the eyes.

The second reason is simply that focused watchfulness makes you appear more intelligent than does a blank gaze, if that is important to you.

- One of the best ways to express personal conviction is to dance as musically as possible. Physically expand the musical dynamics with your eyes and entire body. Dancing is much more than footwork alone.

- Rarely look down at the floor or at your feet, except possibly to draw attention to a leg gesture for a moment. Within ensembles, it is also best not to watch your fellow dancers studiously while you are dancing. This usually gives the impression that you have forgotten the dance and are watching for the next step. Moments of intended interaction with partners or other dancers are obvious exceptions to this rule.

- Your eye directives may or may not include the audience in your sphere of awareness. You have a choice between performing directly to your audience, as in vaudeville for example, or relating primarily to your fellow performers, as in film. Both approaches are perfectly acceptable, and your audience will fall into an unconscious acceptance to either paradigm. However you should be clear about your choice and avoid mixing the two approaches. Once the audience has accepted one paradigm, it is unnecessarily disruptive to switch to the other.

- It is a mistake to think that the audience is too far away to see your eye movements, or that they are watching someone other than yourself. Facial expressions are clear to the last row of the balcony, and you should assume that at least one person is watching you closely at every moment, even if you are in the rear of the chorus.

Think of one person whom you wish to be admired by. Then imagine that he or she is in the audience following your every motion with rapt attention. When every dancer on stage performs with this image in mind, the effect is stunning!

**6. Memory aids.** The first five guidelines focus on the refinement and perfection of a stage presentation. However, when rehearsal time is limited, it is often difficult enough just to get through a performance without making mistakes. It seems futile to worry about nuances when a choreography is falling apart. The obvious solution for preventing memory lapses and disorientation is plenty of rehearsal. Here are some more specific pointers:

- Just before performing a dance, pause to recall any parts that you are prone to misstep. (Rehearsals and past performances will have made it painfully clear where the trouble spots are.) This last-minute reminder usually prevents a chronic error from recurring. Pigeonholing specific trouble spots also gives you a greater self confidence during the dance, while preventing an unfocused error anxiety from dulling your performance.

- Early rehearsals of group choreographies can allow all company members

to experience each of the dance roles. This will enable last-minute substitutions in case of illness or injury. (Very few amateur groups can afford the luxury of professional understudies.) However, a few weeks before a performance, you should finalize partners and places in order to allow the dancers to become familiar with their specific roles. Don't wait until the last moment to do this! It is easier to attend to finesse and detail after the choreography has been memorized.

- If you perform to live music, you have probably found that musicians can offer the most surprising tempos. To prepare yourself for this, use a variable-speed tape deck to rehearse each piece at fast and slow tempos. During the high-speed rehearsal, make sure that the dancers' expressions do not show evidence of being rushed. A greater challenge is to prevent any manifestation of boredom or exasperation during the low-speed rehearsal. Use each moment of extra time to fully articulate your movements.

The adrenalin rush of a performance distorts time perception, resulting in music that usually seems too slow. Errors arise from the unfamiliarity, and a performance often loses its "edge." Try a rehearsal of your entire performance with slower music to prepare yourself for the effect of performance adrenalin.

- If your dance director cannot stand close enough to the musicians to prompt them toward a correct tempo, assign a "go between" to stay by the conductor. He will constantly watch the director (who may be dancing) for prearranged correction signals, then relay the request to the musicians.

- Disorientation and memory lapses increase when performing in a setting that is very different from your rehearsal space. Make sure that each rehearsal clarifies where your audience will be. Always schedule a dress rehearsal, or at least a quick run-through, on the actual stage.

- There is a temptation to consider a dance sufficiently rehearsed when mistakes stop occurring during practice. However, the pressures of a performance will elicit a host of lapses that never happened in rehearsal, unless the piece is sufficiently over-rehearsed. Find time for extra drills, and encourage error-prone dancers to rehearse on their own time.

- If you make a mistake, don't show it on your face! Act as if you just executed an intended variation, or ignore the slip completely. Respond to accidents with self confidence. If your feet trip up, continue to carry your upper body with aplomb.

The ultimate test in keeping a calm face is in couple dances, when you are looking into your partner's eyes during the misstep. Even the most experienced dancers can lapse into an apologetic expression toward their partner, and the audience will notice it immediately.

- Some dancers enjoy the spontaneity and freshness of an under-rehearsed performance, especially when a friendly audience doesn't mind the resulting mistakes. The choice is yours. These guidelines will add liveliness, authenticity and flair to your performance even when errors abound.

7. A well designed dance will never hide its best features. Your choreographer is responsible for ensuring that the audience has the best view of each step and pattern. However, it is also the dancer's responsibility to be aware of what the audience can see.

A good performer can visualize the stage performance of every movement and formation, instinctively presenting the best profile or the clearest view of a gesture. The best performers plan patterns in advance, as they are dancing, so that in a certain number of measures they will have traveled to the best spot on the stage to show a step to its finest advantage, while striking the ideal profile and creating the most pleasing tableau with the other dancers.

A few specific pointers:

- While performing a featured role, avoid turning your back to your audience. If a quadrille or sequence places you in such a position, angle your body slightly to one side and turn your head to present a profile of your face rather than the back of your head. Consider staging squared dances on the diagonal (diamond rather than square).

- When forming a set dance, such as a quadrille or closed circle, those closest to the audience should open large spaces between themselves and nearby dancers. This is an attempt to form a window for the audience to see through, rather than a closed door. If you must step aside to open a view for the soloists, do so with a clear gesture that fits the music. Otherwise it may appear that you are correcting bad spacing.

- When exhibiting a couple dance, notice any passages that feature the woman (or man) in particular, and make sure that this person has the preferred stage position at that moment.

- Always be aware of spacing between couples onstage, constantly checking this with peripheral vision. If you are exhibiting a rotating dance, such as a waltz or polka, check the space behind you as well as in front, as you turn. Strive to keep both fore and aft spaces equal. If you do find that you have fallen behind, catch up gradually. If you speed up too rapidly, you will only create another gap behind you that other dancers must rush to fill. Close a gap in a line-of-direction dance by shortcutting the arc to lessen the distance to travel. If you attempt to catch up by dancing faster, both your style and your partner may suffer. Conversely, if you find yourself on the heels of the couple in front of you, travel in a wider circumference, to the outer edges of the stage.

- If you find yourself finishing a dance directly in front of the audience, beware of the great inclination to turn your back to the audience and head upstage toward your fellow dancers. It is preferable to lead your partner in a graceful sweep toward the audience first, and then proceed laterally across the stage.

- Between dances, don't avoid center stage, and never hug the back wall.

Period illustrations show dance hall or ballroom floors that are populated with clusters of amiable ballgoers enjoying conversation between the dances. Do your part in recreating these scenes.

**8. In both choreography and performance, strive to develop contrast and variety of execution.** As a specialist, you are aware of the subtle features that distinguish one of your dances of figures from another. But to the average viewer, one dance can look too similar to the next, and you may lose the interest of your audience unless you make a special effort to enhance the inherent contrast between and within your dances.

- Begin each dance with a different dynamic. Rather than simply standing in formation awaiting the music, dancers can be conversing in clusters before the introduction, dispersing to starting places just as the dance begins. A soloist can begin the next piece, gradually being joined by more performers. Then have the dancers charge onto an empty stage at full speed, or let a set of dancers approach from the aisle of the auditorium. Music can begin in darkness, gradually illuminating a ballroom scene, and can end with a frozen tableau. Varieties of introductions and conclusions are endless.

- In selecting the order of dances on a concert program, avoid placing similar dance forms next to each other. Intermix set dances with solos, couple dances with line formations. Furthermore, when choreographing a dance, look for opportunities to develop dynamics within the piece as well. Be especially aware of varieties of effort, such as strong versus tentative, or angular versus curvilinear. Among the elements to vary is the weight of one's step. Contrary to popular belief, not all dancing should aspire to weightlessness.

Do not let the quest for contrast, however, destroy the unique character of a dance. Novice choreographers often fall into the mistake of throwing every disparate technique they know into a piece, resulting in a choppy mess that is hard for an audience to follow. It is far more important to select just one appropriate motif for each dance, and develop it alone, so that the viewer comes to understand and appreciate the quality that differentiates this dance from the others in your performance.

- One of the most neglected elements of contrast is the inclusion of intentionally less interesting passages carefully placed between the more spectacular flourishes. . . to clear the palate, so to speak. Traditional social dances often "breathe," with simple choruses placed between the fancier figures. Many choreographers today make the mistake of eliminating a dance's quieter moments, thus destroying the original design of a piece, while ignoring one of the most authentic means of providing contrast.

**9. When re-creating the dances of a certain era or country, include distinctive postures and mannerisms.** Each genre has its own characteristic way of standing, moving, manipulating clothing, handling accessories (fans, gloves,



canes) and relating to others. These are just as much a part of your presentation as the dances themselves. Once you have developed this style, stay in character before, during and after each dance.

Even if your dances do not have the flavor of another era or country, you will want to maintain a continuity of character and poise while onstage. Maintain a continued awareness of posture and body carriage. When you are not actively dancing, you are still performing, and therefore must be aware of your appearance to the audience.

Here are some specific pointers:

- While waiting for the music to start, relate to your partner and companions in a lively, natural and authentic manner. Don't appear to be impatiently or anxiously awaiting the music. You might wish to stroll with your partner until the very instant of the first dance step. This looks more realistic and congenial than remaining glued to one spot.

- While advancing to a starting position, or departing from a dance, don't hurry. Rushing is the mark of a novice who fears that if they are not dancing, they must be terribly uninteresting to watch. Take your time. If you stay in character, the audience will take interest in your manner, your costume and the way you relate to others.

- If a choreography requires you to watch a solo dance while you are onstage, continue to stay in character, striking a pose that is distinctive to the era. Watch the action with interest. Don't ignore the dancers, as if you have seen them a hundred times in rehearsal. The audience will often follow your responses to the dancing and react similarly.

While watching inactively, you will want to avoid sudden snaps of the head, as this makes you look nervous and draws attention away from the featured dancers.

- The moment when dancers most often break from character is immediately after finishing a dance. Dramatic changes in character range from relief to exultation, or even embarrassed humility ("aw, shucks"). If you intend your stage character to express these emotions, fine. Otherwise, take special care to avoid breaking the spell that you have created.

- Unless you have a strong preference for a uniform chorus-line appearance onstage, I recommend allowing each individual to develop his or her own unique stage personality and style of movement. The dancers may wish to enlarge upon their own personalities, or invent fictitious personas from a wide range of possibilities: cultivated or homespun, mature or youthful, somber or playful, shy or flirtatious.

You may also choose to expand individual personalities into stage characters, identified by differences in social standing, deportment and costume. Some dance companies enjoy elaborating on character development, staging their dances within a scripted melodrama, as in musical theatre.

- Try to become the dancers of another era as completely as possible, taking true pleasure in the company of your partner and fellow dancers. Audiences love to feel that the dancers are having a great time, and can always tell the difference between false smiles and genuine delight. Find ways to enjoy yourself as spontaneously as dancers would have generations ago.

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It is unrealistic to ask yourself and your dancers to be aware of each of these suggestions, with all of their attendant details, at all times. Rather than hoping for immediate perfection, you may refine your presentation over a period of time, by addressing one guideline at a time in rehearsal.

I have found that the most effective way to bring extra life to a performance, without being overwhelmed with too many details, is to mentally review a three-point checklist before each dance begins:

- Recall any parts of the next dance that you are prone to misstep, to prevent a chronic error from recurring.
- Pause to recapture the unique character of the dance, which differentiates it from all others. Convey the essence of this style with your entire body and spirit, at every moment.
- Focus on the very first step or gesture of the dance, in order to execute it with conviction. Once you have started the dance with perfection, the rest will follow with greater ease and confidence.

Relax and enjoy the dance. The audience will recognize genuine pleasure and share your enjoyment.

## NOTES

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# Sword Dancing In Austria: The Sword Dance of the Dürrenberg Miners

by Stephen D. Corrsin

Authors in the field of English sword and morris dancing have often alluded to the existence of similar and possibly related dance styles on the European continent. The whole issue of international connections in this area is extraordinarily interesting to both folklorists and performers; yet, it has rarely been examined in any depth.<sup>1</sup> The following provocative comments come from Roy Dommett:

The Pan-European dance is the hilt and point sword form and a very suggestive correlation has been made with the distribution of early mining sites. However the earliest references are in Nuremberg, 1350 AD, and Dordrecht, Holland, 1392 AD, and subsequently in Medieval towns in that part of Europe that were developing an independence and a new culture. The earliest British references are Edinburgh, 1590, and Lathom, Lancs, 1638. The earliest records are where records were kept, so were the guilds adopting something already existing in the villages or did the villages come to adopt what was done in the towns?<sup>2</sup>

Dommett's words show a welcome attention to the social and economic realities of late-medieval/early-modern Europe (fourteenth to seventeenth centuries), the period which left the first detailed documentary and pictorial evidence for the history of these dance styles. Dommett's contextual approach can be far more fruitful than the "pagan survival" approach articulated by Cecil Sharp in his *The Sword-Dances of Northern England*.<sup>3</sup> Dancers as well as scholars can, certainly, speculate about "pagan" or prehistoric roots of sword or morris dances, but when little or no concrete evidence supports them, any such speculations must remain idle ones.

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For researchers interested in comparing British and continental traditions, the publication of a book on an Austrian sword dance, *Der Schwerttanz der Dürrenberger Bergknappen* (The Sword Dance of the Dürrenberg Miners), by Franz Kurz and Karl Zinnburg, in 1981 provides an outstanding example of a Central European tradition.<sup>4</sup>

The Dürrenberg dance comes from the vicinity of Hallein, a small city about ten miles from Salzburg, the main city of western Austria and the home for many years of the Salzburg music and drama festival. The economy of this mountainous area depended since medieval times on the "white gold" of its huge salt deposits and mines. Until our own day the mining communities of the Salzburg area remained poor and isolated, with a strong sense of local and group identity. Since World War II, the importance of salt mining has declined, and the area has opened up more and more to tourism. The village of Dürrenberg, for instance, is now "Bad Dürrenberg," indicating its status as a spa, and the salt mines themselves are about to close.

Kurz's and Zinnburg's book gathers and describes a wide range of materials on the Dürrenberg dance. Kurz, mayor of Hallein, and Zinnburg, a specialist in the history and folklore of the Salzburg area, have provided us with a superbly illustrated work that could serve as a basis for either a teaching manual or a research monograph, particularly if one had access to the surviving dancers, leaders, and musicians, as well as to films and to original written sources and pictures or artifacts, such as banners (many archival sources were destroyed in a 1900 fire). Kurz and Zinnburg have aptly subtitled their book "*Dokumentation*," and present historical material, excerpts from contemporary chronicles, an analysis of the social composition of the dancers, bibliographical information, music (a facsimile reproduction of a manuscript of the *Schwerttanzpolka*), and detailed descriptions with diagrams and photographs of the figures and scenes from the modern performance. The book is most valuable for its collection of source materials and descriptions and illustrations of the dance, though the authors' analysis of the dance's development is also interesting and useful.

The Dürrenberg sword dance, or miners' dance (*Knappentanz*), has been an object of research since the mid-nineteenth century; the first detailed description was published by J. Schiestl in 1865. While a number of other miners' sword dances have evidently disappeared from the Salzburg region, the Dürrenberg dance has survived. This may be due to its status in modern times as a great community event with approximately 100 participants, including 20 dancers (the number has varied between 14 and 24 in the dance's 400 recorded years), the foreman and flagbearers, a drummer, a 50 piece brass band, and a couple of dozen children dressed as dwarves carrying torches. Local people are adamant that only miners should perform the actual dance; Kurz and Zinnburg note that it is the last dance of its kind in the area which is still performed only by local miners rather than by folk dance groups or the like. Indeed, the terms that they use are indicative of the dance's and the dancers' social origins—besides *Schwerttanz* they refer to it as a *Knappentanz*, as well as a *Zunfttanz* (guild dance) and *Standestanz* (class dance, as in social class).

The first written reference to the dance appeared in 1586, when the miners did their sword dance for the archbishop of Salzburg. The reference indicates that it was already regarded as an old dance. Shortly thereafter, archbishop Wolf-Dietrich (archbishop in 1587-1612) confirmed that performing the dance was a privilege of the Dürrenberg miners. The authors mention extended breaks in the history of the dance; one followed the expulsion of the local Protestants in 1732. This affected a couple of hundred families, perhaps the majority of the community.<sup>5</sup>

The 1820-30s seem to have been crucial decades for the continued development of the Dürrenberg dance. The folklore revival in the German-speaking lands began earlier than in England, during the era of romanticism in the early nineteenth century, a time of great interest in the customs of the Volk (a term which is much more evocative and full of shades of meaning than the English cognate, "folk"). It is unclear whether the standard distinction between a revival and a continuous tradition is useful in this case. It appears that there has been a pattern of breaks and revivals over the centuries. Of course, it may simply be that the historical records are quite incomplete.

Kurz and Zinnburg note three main periods in the dance's development: the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; the nineteenth century; and the twentieth. They outline changes in the performance, in so far as the surviving records allow. Before the nineteenth century, the dance was evidently done most often for church or noble patrons (or at least, these were the occasions that were recorded). In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries it has normally been performed on the miners' holiday (*Knappenjahrstag*) of St. Rupert's day (September 24), which was first celebrated here in 1828, and at festivals and special community events. The most recent break was from the early 1960s to 1977; the latest revival was apparently linked to attempts to develop Hallein as a resort area during the town's 750th anniversary celebration. Kurz and Zinnburg express concern over the dance's future because of the decline of salt mining, the aging of the community, and the departure of young people for the cities.<sup>6</sup>

The performance of the Dürrenberg sword dance lasts about forty-five minutes. Not continuous and flowing dancing, it is a mixture of moving figures and set scenes, with a round figure (*Rundtanz*) with directional changes as a repeated transition figure. The dance now has a dozen figures, including the introduction (marching on and call to attention) and conclusion. The authors state that most of the figures present an aspect of the miners' work; the description of each figure in the book has a discussion of its significance (*Bedeutung*), as well as its form (*Gestaltung*). The assumption appears to be that most of the figures and scenes were originally worked out with reference to mining. Kurz and Zinnburg emphasize that the dance and its individual figures have no connection to any simulated combat or "death and rebirth" magical symbolism.

When this book was published, the dance used 20 dancers, all local salt miners, men aged 30 to 60. The costumes appear to be late nineteenth-early twentieth century ceremonial miners' garb; long white pants and blouses, with a cap, an apron, and a single baldric. The foreman (the terms used for him are *Aufführer*, "presenter," or *Steiger*) wears a mostly black costume. His role is a very important one; he does not participate in the moving figures, but rather takes part in the set scenes. There are also three men



responsible for carrying the miners' banner. The dancers carry wooden swords about 80 centimeters in length. There is a question as to what the dancers originally carried; some authors have suggested miners' picks (*Häureise*). The dancers depicted on the miners' banner of 1750 are clearly carrying some sort of sword. Despite the presence of a huge brass band, the "miners' orchestra" (*Bergknappenkapelle*) whose long history is interwoven with that of the sword dance, the primary accompaniment for many of the figures and scenes is now, as it was 400 years ago, a single drum.<sup>7</sup>

The dance begins with two figures in which the dancers march on, are called to attention by the foreman, and step into formation. The foreman recites:

*Kaum ertönt das letzte Anstaltswort  
aus unseres Steigers Munde,  
so fährt jeder an seinen Ort,  
der Quer nach und der Runde!*

Hardly has the last word of preparation  
sounded from our foreman's mouth,  
when each goes to his place,  
for the crossing and the round!

The dancers then move from a single rank into four ranks, from there going into a weaving figure and then into a linked round figure, beginning counter-clockwise.

The scenes in figures 3-5 all feature two long lines with the sword across the set. In figure 3 (*Schlagen der Brücke*, "striking the bridge") and figure 4 (*Aufschlagen des Stollens*, "breaking open the tunnel," or "gallery") the foreman passes up and down the set, underneath the linked swords. In figure 5 (*Aufbrechen des Schurfes*, "forcing open the pit"), a ladder is laid along the swords, for the foreman to climb up and then down. In these, as in almost all scenes of the dance, he recites a few lines of verse which refer to the scene being presented (the authors do not clarify the origins of the verses). For example, in the figure *Aufschlagen des Stollens*, the foreman recites:

*Der Felsen ist durchbrochen,  
der Stollen ist aufgeschlagen,  
wir sind noch nicht am Ende  
wir können noch weutfahren!*

The slope is broken through,  
the tunnel is broken open,  
we aren't yet at the end,  
we can still go farther!

In figure 6 (*Errichtung des Kastens*) the dancers wind into a tight set, create a lock with their swords, and lift the foreman on it. Figure 7 (*Haldensturz*) is similar, except the lead dancer stands on the ground in the middle of the set and four of the dancers climb one-by-one onto the backs of the remaining fifteen (the foreman stands off to the side). Figure 8 (*Flechten und Überspringen*, "weaving and jumping over") is a complex move figure, with rounds, weaving, and the linked dancers passing over the swords; there is no set scene or verses accompanying this figure. Figure 9 (*Krone*, "crown") creates a tight set with the flagbearer in the middle. It is described as an expression of respect to the authorities and patrons (in past centuries, this could have included the archbishop, the Austrian crown, aristocrats and officials). Figure 10 (*Berg*, "mountain") is the climax of the dance, and represents greetings to all of the audience and guests. It follows the pattern of figure 6 (tight set, lock, foreman raised); the foreman is given the banner, and he recites the "miners' greeting" (*Knappengruss*):

*Heut' an unserem längst erwünschten Freudentag, schwingen wir unsere Fahne auf und rufen allen unseren Gönnern zu, den Bergmannsgruss: Glück auf! Glück auf! Glück auf!*

(Today on our long wished-for holiday, we flourish our banner and shout the miners' greeting to all our patrons: Good luck! Good luck! Good luck!)

The last two figures consist of a serpentine figure (*Schlängeltanz*), supposed to illustrate the emergence from the tunnels, and the concluding, twelfth figure, *Antreten zum Ausschichten* ("in place for going off shift"), in which the foreman calls the dancers to attention and marches them off. Although elements of the Dürrenberg sword dance might seem familiar to people accustomed to English sword dancing (the round and serpentine figures in particular) much of the dance would be alien. The dance is considerably more elaborate than its English counterparts, and there is no hint of the death-resurrection theme so basic to English sword dancing. Rather the set scenes tie to miners' experiences.

I would like to conclude by returning to the question of international connections raised in the citation from Roy Dommett at the start of this article.<sup>8</sup> Students of the development of sword and morris dancing need to examine in depth possible connections between British and continental forms, especially from the German-speaking lands and the Low Countries. They should also pay close attention to the social and economic milieu of late-medieval/early-modern Northern and Central Europe; we can be sure that these dances, continental and British alike, did not develop in a socioeconomic vacuum. What ties, if any, existed between the craft guilds and mining communities in the German-speaking lands and Northern Britain? Was there a significant transfer of men and materials? It seems unlikely. The German push in the fourteenth-seventeenth centuries was not to Britain but eastwards, into present-day Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Romania; if German guilds were responsible for spreading sword dancing, these lands, in which German colonies and towns existed up until the mass population transfers following World War II, are where we should seek connections. In Britain, German influences were weaker than French, or even Spanish or Italian, in the fourteenth through the seventeenth centuries. It seems possible, however, that there were connections through the Low Countries.

Dommett alludes to the problem that, for the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries, town guilds in Central Europe provide much of the evidence on sword dancing; but, he asks, was this a reflection of the actual state of affairs, or a result of the fact that the urban populations were more literate, better organized, and more likely to keep detailed written records than rural or mining communities? The notion of a widespread mining connection is, as Dommett notes, "very suggestive," but it is difficult to imagine (for instance) connections between Austrian salt miners and British coal miners, and the idea of urban, guild origins for these complex and highly organized dance styles is very attractive. Of course, researchers will have to deal with the eternal argument between supporters of the idea of cultural diffusion and

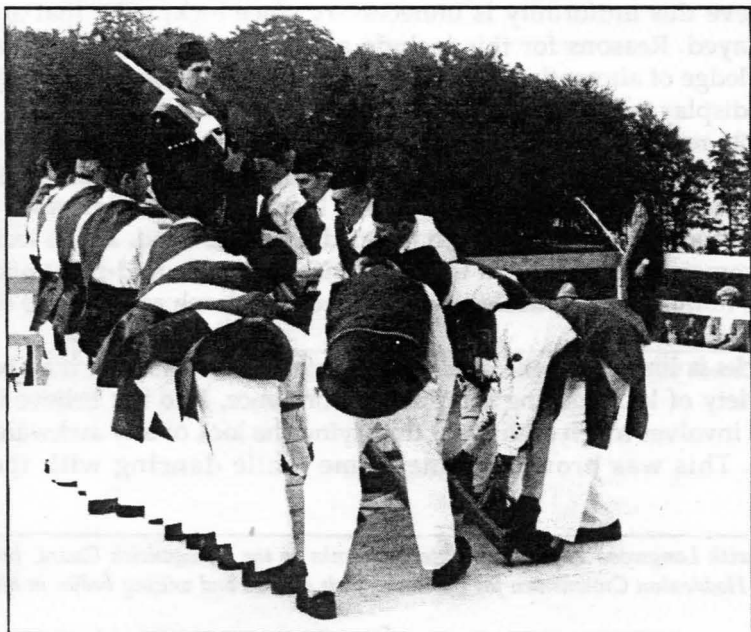
proponents of independent development of cultural and social forms. Still, this seems more productive than the arguments among dance researchers of the 1930s, over "Teutonic" and "Celtic" dance styles, or for that matter, attempts to trace modern dance forms and styles to prehistoric, "pagan" roots.<sup>9</sup>

I would like to close by suggesting that the English-speaking historical folk dance community should look more beyond our own linguistic shores, into continental Europe, for connections to the dance styles that developed in Britain. At the least, dance researchers should gain greater familiarity with research being done in those lands. Kurz's and Zinnburg's work, as well as older studies in German, would be a fine place to start.

## NOTES

1. I began researching German works on sword dancing after 1988 English Week at Pinewoods Camp, as a result of Professor Anthony G. Barrand's lectures of the origin and history of morris and related dance styles. I would like to take the opportunity to thank Allison Thompson and the editor and anonymous reviewers of this journal for their many helpful comments on earlier drafts of this essay, Patricia Woodard for her help in contacting Professor Karl Zinnburg, and Helena Bastarova of the Princeton University Library for bringing *Der Schwerttanz der Dürrenberger Bergknappen* to my attention.
2. *Roy Dommett's Morris Notes*, ed. Anthony G. Barrand, 2nd ed. (N.p.: CDSS, 1986), vol. 1, pt. 1, p. 3.
3. See Sharp's introduction to *The Sword-Dances of Northern England* (Wakefield, Eng.: EP Publishing, 1977; reprint of 1912-13 edition). Violet Alford, *Sword Dance and Drama* (London: Merlin, 1962), attempts with limited success to combine the "pagan survival" approach with a socioeconomic one (with emphasis on mining). On pp. 123-24, she mentions the "Dürrenberg" (sic) dance.
4. Salzburg, Austria: Verlag der Salzburger Druckerei, 1981. It is available at the Library of Congress, Harvard, Princeton, and the New York Public Library, and probably at other North American libraries.
5. This raises interesting questions that the book hardly touches on: had the Protestant families in this historically Catholic area become the performers of the dance by the early eighteenth century, in spite of the archbishops' traditional patronage? Did the dance decline in this period because its main perpetuators were expelled, or because of the general turmoil of the counter-reformation? An important distinction between Britain and the European continent in the last three hundred years has been that, relatively speaking, British society and culture have suffered much less than the continent has from war and wholesale social turmoil.
6. In a letter to me of September 14, 1989, Professor Zinnburg emphasizes the importance of the fact that this dance is still performed by the original, local mining community. He states that the salt mines are finally closing, and that the dance cannot be performed in the future because of this. He notes the "Danger, that it will completely disappear, or that it will be taken over by a folk club." He also notes that no complete film of the Dürrenberg dance was made (letter of October 22, 1989).

7. An interesting part of the performance that I will not discuss is the use of fireworks to create specific lighting effects, green, white, or red, for each separate figure.
8. Once recent work that places English dancing in the international context is John Forrest, *Morris and Matachin: A Study in Comparative Choreography* (London: EFD&SS; Sheffield: Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language, University of Sheffield, 1984). Professor Barrand's classes on Flemish and Portuguese dances, at English Week at Pinewoods in 1988-89, should also add a new dimension to American views of European traditional dance styles.
9. Another interesting work by Zinnburg is *Salzburger Volksbräuche* (Salzburg Folk Customs, second edition; Salzburg: Verlag der Salzburger Druckerei, 1977), an encyclopedic compilation of local folklore. Although it devotes only 20 of over 500 pages to dances, besides several pages on the Dürrenberg sword dance, it covers two other well documented "guild" dances: that of the St.-Jakobi-Schützen-Corps (St. Jacob Defense Society), whose origins are traced back to the defense of Austria against Turkish invaders at the end of the fifteenth century; and the coopers' dance, a hoop dance which was evidently done in the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, and revived in the twentieth, "just like in the old times." The coopers had a strong guild in the Salzburg area; their chief task was the preparation of containers for the transportation of salt. The most comprehensive German studies from the 1930s are Kurt Meschke, *Schwerttanz und Schwerttanzspiel im germanischen Kulturkreis* (Sword Dance and Sword Dance Play in the German Cultural World; Leipzig and Berlin: B. G. Teubner, 1931), and Richard Wolfram, *Schwerttanz und Männerbund* (Sword Dance and Men's Groups; Kassel: Barenreiter, 1936-38). I plan to provide a general bibliographic survey of German sword dance publications in the future.



"Aufbrechen des Schurtes"  
(Note ladder). Photo  
supplied by Professor  
Zinnburg and Mayor  
Kurz.

# Review of Rapper and Longsword Locks

by Rhett Krause, M. D.

## *Introduction*

The lock of interwoven swords is an elementary part of the rapper and longsword dances. Also known as the "knot," its form is commonly recognized as part of the logos of both CDSS and EFDSS. Each display of the lock is a relative high point of the dance that generates applause, and the final display usually signifies the end of the dance.

Despite the large number of traditional dances and the much larger number of modern teams with their own dances, the lock has a virtual monotony of form. Its shape may almost always be predicted simply by knowing the number of swords employed, but I believe this uniformity is unnecessary since locks exist that are rarely or never displayed. Reasons for this include a reluctance to consider new forms, a lack of knowledge of alternatives, and the fact that new configurations may prove too unstable to display or too cumbersome to tie swiftly.

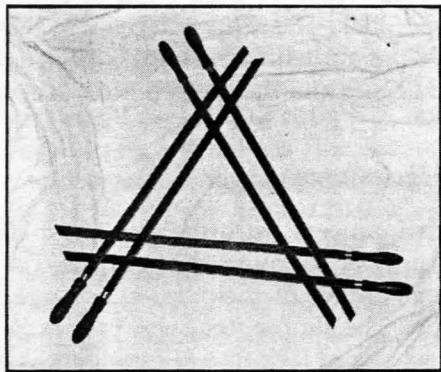
The following article reviews traditional locks, examines the nature of the lock, and systematically classifies all locks. The locks discussed are limited in three ways: 1. The locks must contain eight or fewer swords. 2. The lock must be stable, which I define as being able to maintain its shape when grasped with one hand. 3. The lock must have "radial symmetry," a shape that is symmetrical about its mid-point and may be divided into a number of identical pie-shaped wedges (such as a starfish or a snowflake).

The use of new locks is limited by the realities of performance. While it may be ideal to display a variety of locks during a rapper performance, I do not believe it adds to the dance if it involves much additional time tying the lock or any awkward weaving of swords. This was brought home to me while dancing with the

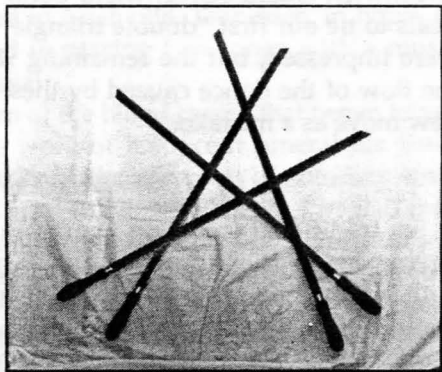
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*Dr. Rhett Krauss dances with Longwood Rapper and extends thanks to the Greenwich Guard, the Handsworth men, and the Hoddesdon Crownsmen for the use of their swords and willing bodies in his work.*

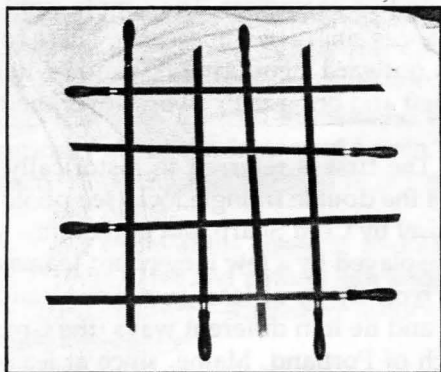




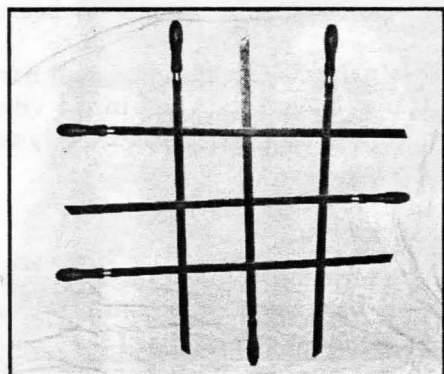
Number 1: The Kirkby-Malzeard lock also known as the double triangle lock.



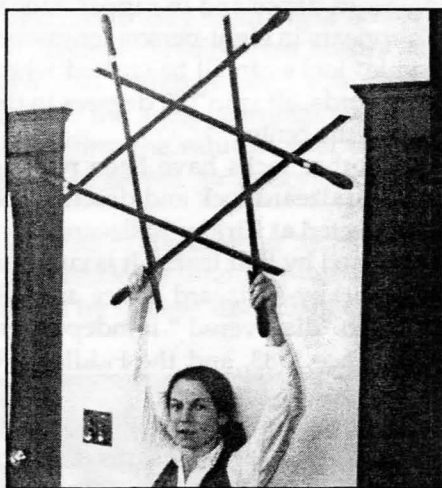
Number 4: The four sword lock



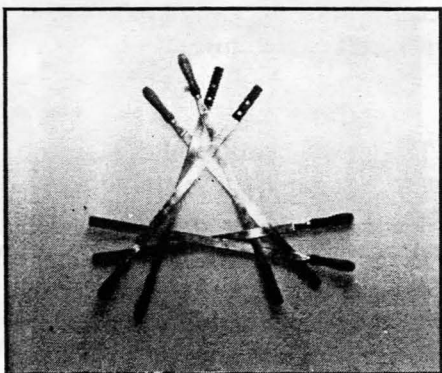
Number 2: The portcullis lock



Number 3: The 3 x 3 portcullis lock



Number 5: The common six-sword lock. Lock held by Sukey Agard of Orion



Number 6: The 6/5 lock

Greenwich Guard (Greenwich, Conn.) in 1983 when we used eight or twelve extra beats to tie our first "double triangle" rapper lock. The rapper dancers in the crowd were impressed, but the remaining 98% of the audience sensed the interruption in the flow of the dance caused by these extra beats and interpreted our "spectacular" new move as a mistake.

### *Historical Locks and Their Current Usage*

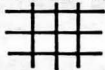
Six traditional locks are known to sword dancers, with the four most common having a similar construction and varying only in the number of swords. The speed with which they are made and the aesthetic appeal of their star shape make them popular to the virtual exclusion of all others. The simple five-sword lock (the CDSS logo) is the usual rapper lock. The simple six-sword lock (the EFDSS logo) is used in the six-person long sword dances and by rapper teams dancing with one character. The simple seven-sword lock is less common, appearing only in the Papa Stour longsword dance and in rapper dances with two characters. The simple eight-sword lock appears in eight-person longsword dances such as Handsworth. These so-called "simple" locks can all be created when an outward facing ring of dancers, linked by their swords, all spin 180 degrees to their left and bring their swords over their heads and into the center.


Two other locks have been recorded. The first is referred to historically as the Kirkby-Malzeard lock and descriptively as the double triangle lock (see photo #1). It was collected at Kirkby-Malzeard (Yorkshire) by Cecil Sharp, but at that time was no longer used by that team. It is currently displayed by a few longsword teams as part of the Kirkby-Malzeard dance and more recently by at least two American rapper sides who "discovered" it independently and tie it in different ways (the Greenwich Guard since 1983, and the Fiddler's Reach of Portland, Maine, since at least 1985). For no apparent reason, the double triangle lock is generally considered strictly a longsword lock. When Ivor Allsop, a leading authority on sword dancing, was asked why no English rapper teams displayed this lock, he replied, "Probably because no one ever thought of it."

The last lock, formed by eight swords, is named after the medieval barrier it resembles, the portcullis (see photo #2). It may have been used in the village of Riccall, Yorkshire, early in the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> This lock is not currently used by any team to my knowledge.

### *The Stability of the Lock*

The lock is held together by the pressure and friction between the swords at their crossing points. These stabilizing factors may vary with sword stiffness, surface, lubrication, the angle at which the swords cross, and the tightness of the lock. While the forces that hold the lock together may appear complex, no elaborate calculations are needed to predict the stability of a lock. Observation leads to one very simple rule of thumb: the stability of a lock sketched on paper can be predicted by knowing how many other swords each sword crosses.

With rapper swords, the minimum number of crosses for stability is four by each sword. Any fewer and the lock will fall apart. All known rapper locks have four crosses per sword, which requires a minimum of five swords. The simplest stable lock is the typical rapper lock with five swords and four crosses per sword, providing a simple physical explanation of why rapper sides have five dancers. The rigidity of longwords allows stable locks to be created with only three crosses per sword. The "3 x 3 portcullis"  (see photo #3) and the four sword lock

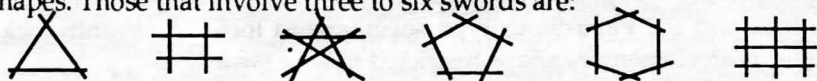
 (see photo #4) are therefore stable when tied with longwords, but not with rapper swords. The parallel swords and the right angle crosses of the portcullis locks make them unique. While they come close to defying the rule of thumb, all other locks fit in quite well.

### *Classification and Generation*



I classify locks in two ways, by swords and crosses of swords and by the lock's shape. The first approach uses a notating device based on the number of swords employed and the number of crosses per sword. For example, the Papa Stour lock has seven swords and four crosses per sword, notated as 7/4. Different locks may share the same notation. The common six-sword lock and the double triangle lock are both 6/4.





All traditional locks used in sword dancing have in common the use of four crosses per sword. Many other potential locks exist on paper, but are impossible to create without especially long flexible swords (locks in the classes 7/6, 8/6, 8/7, 9/4, 9/6, and 9/8). There seem to be no radially symmetric locks in the classes 7/5, 8/5, 9/5, 9/7, 10/5, and 10/7. In sword dancing, locks must have a relatively low number of swords and crosses per sword to be practical. The 6/5 class fits this criteria, and we could speculate whether there was a lock with six swords and five crosses per sword which is both aesthetically pleasing and easy to make.

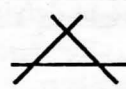

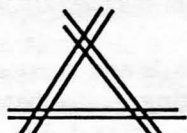
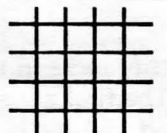
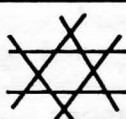
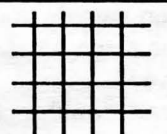
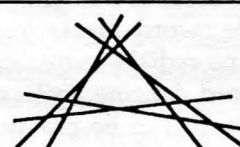
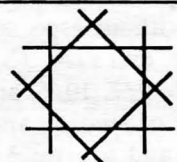
The second classification system superimposes elementary shapes. These elementary shapes are all radially symmetric and cannot be broken down into simpler shapes. Those that involve three to six swords are:



If we double these shapes, we may create more complex locks. The number of swords and crosses per sword classifies locks once they are already "invented"; an approach based on elementary shapes can "invent" all possible locks.

There are only three ways in which to superimpose the elementary shapes. They may be superimposed in the same orientation (two  shapes give us , the Kirkby-Malzeard lock, photo #1). Two shapes may be superimposed at 180

degree orientation to each other (two  shapes would give us , the common six-sword lock, photo #5). They may be superimposed at an angle between 0 degrees and 180 degrees (two  shapes give us , the Handsworth type eight-sword lock). This system is illustrated in the table below:

Orientation	Elementary Shape	
		
0°		
180°		
$0^\circ < X < 180^\circ$		

Four of the six locks traditionally known to sword dancing appear in this table; the other two are recognized as elementary shapes in themselves ( the simple five-sword lock and the Papa-Stour-type seven-sword lock). A seventh lock, the 3 x 3 portcullis, is an elementary shape restricted to long sword.

Of more interest, a new lock can be "invented" by the superimposition of two triangles at an angle between 0 degrees and 180 degrees (photo #6). This 6/5 lock is unknown in the history of sword dancing, but it can be made and broken quickly and easily with rapper swords, and it fits well within a dance. When this lock was "invented" on paper and shown to Tony Poile in the spring of 1986, his comment was, "Oh, that's easy," and within thirty seconds the Greenwich Guard was successfully tying it. The 6/5 lock was displayed as part of a performance by

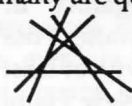
Longwood Rapper (Boston, Mass.) in the spring of 1988, its first appearance as far as I know.

### *Final Comment*

In recent years, rapper teams have created a wonderful variety of new figures, but this same creative energy seems to have ignored variations of locks (and variations on stepping). The variations on symmetrical locks are exciting variations. Any rapper team could consider the new 6/5 lock, as it is both attractive and extremely easy to make. The 6/4 double triangle lock is also pleasing to the eye, but it is very challenging to work into a dance. For longsword dancers, the "4 by 4 portcullis" is dramatic, but is time consuming to tie. However, I worked out one way with the aid of the Handsworth men in 1986 that does not involve any "weaving" of swords.

Those who wish to disregard my limitation of radial symmetry will find a Pandora's box of new possibilities, although many are quite homely. The best of these

nonsymmetrical locks include the 5/4 lock



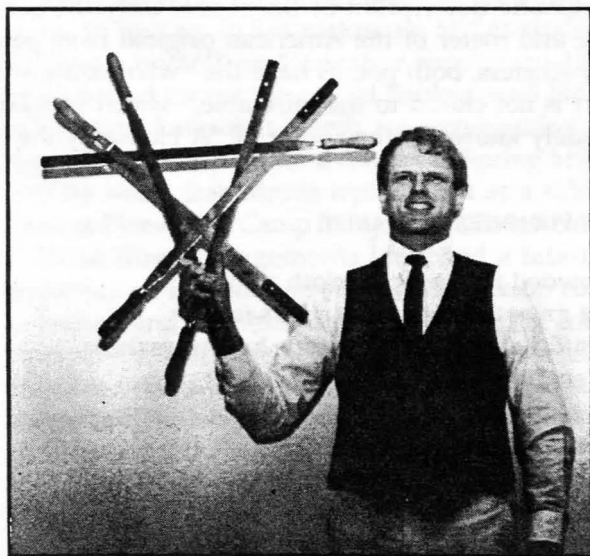
(photo #7), which is not a bad

rapper lock, and the 4/3 lock



(photo #4) for those eight-man longsword

teams willing to take the daring step of breaking into two rings of four to form their locks



*Number 7: The 5/4 lock. Lock held by Rhett Krause of Longwood Rapper.*

### **NOTE**

1. Stone, Trevor. *Rattle Up, My Boys*. Sale, Cheshire: Trevor Stone. 1980. pp. 34-35.



# "The Volunteer Organist," an American Poem in Sussex

by David E. E. Sloane

In *Country Dance and Song*, 19 (June 1989), Sean Goddard, in "Folk Songs from Sussex, England," offers "The Volunteer Organist" as a Sussex song sung by his father John Goddard. The song seems to have traveled to Sussex via English music hall recordings common early in the century and popular among local singers throughout the south of England (pp. 40, 46). As a supplement to Sean Goddard's note, it is worthwhile to mention the probable original source of the song in America. "The Volunteer Organist," in somewhat different version from the English, was the lead poem in Sam Walter Foss's *Back Country Poems*, published in Boston by Lee and Shepherd in 1892, with at least one reprinting in 1894 (pp. 12-14).

Foss (1858-1911) was a New Hampshire journalist whose popular sentimental poetry appeared in *Puck*, *Judge*, *Tid-bits*, numerous newspapers, and the *Yankee Blade*, which he edited during the period 1887-1894, when this poem first appeared. A comparison of the version in *CD&S*: 19 with the one reprinted here will show that the transatlantic version is considerably shorter, and all traces of folksy dialect have disappeared, along with the dramatic description of the event. Only the second quatrain and the general outline and meter of the American original have passed down in the Sussex version. Nonetheless, both poems have the "wholesome strong belief in his fellows, whose heart is not closed to the miserable," which was Foss's special cachet. Foss was most widely known as the author of "A House by the Side of the Road."<sup>1</sup>

## THE VOLUNTEER ORGANIST.

The gret big church wuz crowded full uv broadcloth an' uv silk,  
An' satins rich as cream thet grows on our ol' brindle's milk;  
Shined boots, biled shirts, stiff dickeys, an' stove-pipe hats were there,  
An' doods 'ith trouserloons so tight they couldn' kneel in prayer.

The elder in his poolpit high, said, as he slowly riz:  
'Our organist is kep' to hum, laid up 'ith roomatiz,  
An' as we hev no substitoot, as brother Moore ain't here,  
Will some 'un in the congeration be so kind 's to volunteer?"

---

David Sloane is editor of *CD&S* and a scholar of American Literature and humor.

An' then a red-nosed, drunken tramp, of low-toned, rowdy style,  
Give an interduct'ry hiccup, an' then staggered up the aisle;  
Then thro' the holy atmosphere there crep' a sense er sin,  
An' thro' thet air er sanctity the odor uv ol' gin.

Then Deacon Purin'ton he yelled, his teeth all sot on edge:  
"This man purfanes the house er God! W'y, this is sakerlege!"  
The tramp didn' hear a word he said, but slouched 'ith stumblin' feet,  
An' sprawled an' staggered up the steps, an' gained the organ seat.

He then went pawrin' thro' the keys, an' soon there riz a strain  
Thet seemed to jest bulge out the heart, an' 'lectrify the brain;  
An' then he slapped down on the thing 'ith hands an' head an' knees,—  
He slam-dashed his hull body down kerflop upon the keys.

The organ roared, the music flood went sweepin' high an' dry,  
It swelled into the rafters, an' bulged out into the sky.  
The ol' church shook an' staggered, an' seemed to reel an' sway,  
An' the elder shouted "Glory," an' I yelled out "Hooray!"

An' then he tried a tender strain thet melted in our ears,  
Thet brought up blessed memories an' drenched 'em down 'ith tears;  
An' we dreamed uv ol' time kitchens, 'ith Tabby on the mat,  
Uv home an' luv an' baby days, an' mother, an' all that!

An' then he struck a streak uv hope—a song from souls forgiven—  
Thet burst from prison-bars uv sin, an' stormed the gates uv heaven;  
The mornin' stars they sung together,—no soul wuz left alone,—  
We felt the universe wuz safe, an' God wuz on his throne!

An' then a wail uv deep despair an' darkness come again,  
An' long black crape hung on the doors uv all the homes uv men;  
No luv, no light, no joy, no hope, no songs uv glad delight,—  
An' then the tramp, he staggered down an' reeled into the night!

But we knew he'd tol' his story, though he never spoke a word,  
An' it wuz the saddest story thet our ears hed ever heard;  
He hed tol' his own life history, an' no eye wuz dry thet day,  
W'en the elder rose an' simply said: "My brethren, let us pray."

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## NOTE

1. *The National Cyclopedia of American Biography*, vol. 9 (New York: James T. White & Co., 1907) cites this comment from an article by Walter Blackburn Harte in the *New England Magazine*. See also the *Dictionary of American Biography*, 3:541-2, and Kunits and Haycraft, *American Authors, 1600-1900*, pp. 283-284.

# The Dance

## A Personal Adventure of the Author

by A. B. Longstreet

Some years ago I was called by business to one of the frontier countries, then but recently settled. It became necessary for me, while there, to enlist the services of Thomas Gibson, Esq., one of the magistrates of the county, who resided about a mile and a half from my lodgings; and to this circumstance was I indebted for my introduction to him. I had made the intended disposition of my business, and was on the eve of my departure for the city of my residence, when I was induced to remain a day longer by an invitation from the squire to attend a dance at his house on the following day. Having learned from my landlord that I would probably "be expected at the frolic" about the hour of 10 in the forenoon, I went over about an hour before the time.

The squire's dwelling consisted of but one room, which answered the threefold purpose of dining-room, bedroom, and kitchen. The house was constructed of logs, and the floor was of *puncheons*; a term which, in Georgia, means split logs, with their faces a little smoothed with the axe or hatchet. To gratify his daughters, Polly and Silvy, the old gentleman and his lady had consented to *camp out* for a day, and to surrender the habitation to the girls and their young friends.

When I reached there I found all things in readiness for the promised amusement. The girls, as the old gentleman informed me, had compelled the family to breakfast under the trees, for they had completely stripped the house of its furniture before the sun rose. They were already attired for the dance, in neat but plain habiliments of their own manufacture. "What!" says some weakly, sickly, delicate, useless, affected, "charming creature" of the city, "dressed for a ball at 9 in the morning!" Even so, my delectable Miss Octavia Matilda Juliana Claudia Ipecacuanha: and what have you to say against it? If people must dance is it not much more rational to employ the hour allotted to exercise in that amusement, than the hours sacred to repose and meditation? And which is entitled to the most credit; the young lady who rises with the dawn, and puts herself and whole house in order for a ball four hours before it begins, or the one who requires a fortnight to get herself dressed for it?

The squire and I employed the interval in conversation about the first settlement of the country, in the course of which I picked up some useful and much interesting information. We were at length interrupted, however, by the sound of a violin, which proceeded from a thick wood at my left. The performer soon after made his appearance, and proved to be no other than Billy Porter, a negro fellow of much harmless wit and humour, who was well known throughout the state. Poor Billy!

---

A. B. Longstreet (1790-1870) published *Georgia Scenes*, from which this sketch is taken, in 1835 to show overlooked manners and customs of his native Georgia.



"his harp is now hung upon the willow;" and I would not blush to offer a tear to his memory, for his name is associated with some of the happiest scenes of my life, and he sleeps with many a dear friend, who used to join me in provoking his wit and in laughing at his eccentricities; but I am leading my reader to the grave instead of the dance, which I promised. If, however, his memory reaches twelve years back, he will excuse this short tribute of respect to BILLY PORTER.

Billy, to give his own account to himself, "had been taking a turn with the brethren (the Bar); and, hearing the ladies wanted to see *pretty Billy*, had come to give them a benefit." The squire had not seen him before; and it is no disrespect to his understanding or politeness to say, that he found it impossible to give me his attention for half an hour after Billy arrived. I had nothing to do, therefore, while the young people were assembling, but to improve my knowledge of Billy's character, to the squire's amusement. I had been thus engaged about thirty minutes, when I saw several fine, bouncing, ruddy-cheeked girls descending a hill about the eighth of a mile off. They, too, were attired in manufactures of their own hands. The refinements of the present day in female dress had not even reached our republican *cities* at this time; and, of course, the *country girls* were wholly ignorant of them. They carried no more cloth upon their arms or straw upon their heads than was necessary to cover them. They used no artificial means of spreading their frock tails to an interesting extent from their ankles. They had no boards laced to their breasts, nor any corsets laced to their sides; consequently, they looked, for all the world, like human beings, and could be distinctly recognised as such at the distance of two hundred paces. Their movements were as free and active as nature would permit them to be. Let me not be understood as interposing the least objection to any lady in this land of liberty dressing just as she pleases. If she choose to lay her neck and shoulders bare, what right have I to look at them much less to find fault with them? If she choose to put three yard's of muslin in a frock sleeve, what right have I to ask why a little strip of it was not put in the body? If she like the pattern of a hoisted umbrella for a frock, and the shape of a cheese-cask for her body, what is all that to me? But to return.

The girls were met by Polly and Silvy Gibson at some distance from the house, who welcomed them—"with a kiss, of course"—oh, no; but with something much less equivocal: a hearty shake of the hand and smiling countenances, which had some meaning.

[*Note.*—The custom of kissing, as practiced in these days by the *amiables*, is borrowed from the French, and by them from Judas.]

The young ladies had generally collected before any of the young men appeared. It was not long, however, before a large number of both sexes were assembled, and they adjourned to the *ballroom*.

But for the snapping of a fiddle-string, the young people would have been engaged in the amusement of the day in less than three minutes from the time they entered the house. Here were no formal introductions to be given, no drawing for places or partners, no parade of managers, no ceremonies. It was perfectly understood that all were invited to *dance*, and that none were invited who were unworthy to be danced with; consequently, no gentleman hesitated to ask any lady

present to dance with him, and no lady refused to dance with a gentleman merely because she had not been made acquainted with him.

In a short time the string was repaired, and off went the party to a good old republican six reel. I had been thrown among *fashionables* so long that I had almost forgotten my native dance. But it revived rapidly as they wheeled through its mazes, and with it returned many long-forgotten, pleasing recollections. Not only did the reel return to me, but the very persons who used to figure in it with me, in the heyday of youth.

Here was my old sweetheart, Polly Jackson, identically personified in Polly Gibson; and here was Jim Johnson's, in Silvy; and Bill Martin's, in Nancy Ware. Polly Gibson had my old flame's very steps as well as her looks. "Ah!" said I, "squire, this puts me in mind of old times. I have not seen a six reel for five-and-twenty years. It recalls to mind many a happy hour, and many a jovial friend who used to enliven it with me. Your Polly looks so much like my old sweetheart, Polly Jackson, that, were I young again, I certainly should fall in love with her."

"That was the name of her mother," said the squire.

"Where did you marry her?" inquired I.

"In Wilkes," said he; "she was the daughter of old Nathan Jackson, of that county."

"It isn't possible!" returned I. "Then it is the very girl of whom I am speaking. Where is she?"

"She's out," said the squire, "preparing dinner for the young people; but she'll be in towards the close of the day. But come along, and I'll make you acquainted with her at once, if you'll promise not to run away with her, for I tell you what it is, she's the likeliest *gal* in all these parts yet."

"Well," said I, "I'll promise not to run away with her, but you must not let her know who I am. I wish to make myself known to her; and, for fear of the worst, you shall witness the introduction. But don't get jealous, squire, if she seems a little too glad to see me; for, I assure you, we had a strong notion of each other when we were young."

"No danger," replied the squire; "she hadn't seen *me* then, or she never could have loved such a hard favoured man as you are."

In the meantime the dance went on, and I employed myself in selecting from the party the best examples of the dancers of my day and Mrs. Gibson's for her entertainment. In this I had not the least difficulty; for the dancers before me and those of my day were in all respects identical.

Jim Johnson kept up the double shuffle from the beginning to the end of the reel: and here was Jim over again in Sammy Tant. Bill Martin always set to his partner with the same step; and a very curious step it was. He brought his right foot close behind his left, and with it performed precisely the motion of the thumb in cracking that insect which Burns has immortalized; then moved his right back, threw his weight upon it, brought his left behind it, and *cracked* with that as before; and so on alternately. Just so did Bill Kemp, to a nail. Bob Simons danced for all the world like a "*Suple Jack*" (or, as we commonly call it, a "*Suple Sawney*"), when the string is



pulled with varied force, at intervals of seconds: and so did *Jake Slack*. Davy Moore went like a suit of clothes upon a clothing line on a windy day: and here was his antitype in Ned Clark. Rhoda Noble swam through the reel like a cork on wavy waters; always giving two or three pretty little perchbite *diddles* as she rose from a coupee: Nancy Ware was her very self. Becky Lewis made a business of dancing; she disposed of her part as quick as possible, stopped dead short as soon as she got through, and looked as sober as a judge all the time; even so did Chloe Dawson. I used to tell Polly Jackson, that Becky's countenance, when she closed a dance always seemed to say, "Now, if you want any more dancing, you may do it yourself."

The dance grew merrier as it progressed; the younger people became more easy in each other's company, and often enlivened the scene with most humorous remarks. Occasionally some sharp cuts passed between the boys, such as would have produced half a dozen duels at a city ball; but here they were taken as they were meant, in good humour. Jim Johnson being a little tardy in meeting his partner at a turn of the reel, "I ax pardon, Miss Chloe," said he, "Jake Slack went to make a crossshop just now, and tied his legs in a hard knot, and I stop'd to help him untie them." A little after, Jake hung his toe in a crack of the floor, and nearly fell; "Ding my buttons," said he, "if I didn't know I should stumble over Jim Johnson's foot at last; Jim, draw your foot up to your own end of the reel." (Jim was at the other end of the reel, and had, in truth, a prodigious foot.)

Towards the middle of the day, many of the neighbouring farmers dropped in, and joined the squire and myself in talking of old times. At length dinner was announced. It consisted of plain *fare*, but there was a profusion of it. Rough planks, supported by stakes driven in the ground, served for a table; at which the old and young of both sexes seated themselves at the same time. I soon recognised Mrs. Gibson from all the matrons present. Thirty years had wrought great changes in her appearance, but they had left some of her features entirely unimpaired. Her eye beamed with all its youthful fire; and, to my astonishment, her mouth was still beautified with a full set of teeth, unblemished by time. The rose on her cheek had rather freshened than faded, and her smile was the very same that first subdued my heart; but her fine form was wholly lost, and, with it, all the grace of her movements. Pleasing but melancholy reflections occupied my mind as I gazed on her dispensing her cheerful hospitalities. I thought of the sad history of many of her companions and mine, who used to carry light hearts through the merry dance. I compared my after life with the cloudless days of my attachment to Polly. Then I was light hearted, gay, contented, and happy. I aspired to nothing but a good name, a good wife, and an easy competence. The first and last were mine already; and Polly had given me too many little tokens of her favour to leave a doubt now that the second was at my command. But I was foolishly told that my talents were too high an order to be employed in the drudgeries of a farm, and I more foolishly believed it. I forsook the pleasures which I had tried and proved, and went in pursuit of those imaginary joys which seemed to encircle the seat of Fame. From that moment to the present, my life had been little else than one unbroken scene of disaster, disappointment, vexation, and toil. And now, when I was too old to enjoy the pleasures which I had discarded,

I found that my aim was absolutely hopeless; and that my pursuits had only served to unfit me for the humbler walks of life, and to exclude me from the higher. The gloom of these reflections was, however, lightened in a measure by the promises of the coming hour, when I was to live over again with Mrs. Gibson some of the happiest moments of my life.

After a hasty repast the young people returned to their amusement, followed by myself, with several of the elders of the company. An hour had scarcely elapsed before Mrs. Gibson entered, accompanied by a goodly number of matrons of her own age. This accession to the company produced its usual effects. It raised the tone of conversation a full octave, and gave it a triple time movement; added new life to the wit and limbs of the young folks, and set the old men to cracking jokes.

At length the time arrived for me to surprise and delight Mrs. Gibson. The young people insisted upon the old folks taking a reel; and this was just what I had been waiting for; for, after many plans for making the discovery, I had finally concluded upon that which I thought would make *her* joy general among the company: and that was, to announce myself, just before leading her to the dance, in a voice audible to most of the assembly. I therefore readily assented to the proposition of the young folks, as did two others of my age, and we made to the ladies for our partners. I, of course, offered my hand to Mrs. Gibson.

"Come," said I, "Mrs. Gibson, let us see if we can't out-dance these young people."

"Dear me, sir," said she, "I haven't danced a step these twenty years."

"Neither have I; but I've resolved to try once more, if you will join me, just for old time's sake."

"I really cannot think of dancing," said she.

"Well," continued I, (raising my voice to a pretty high pitch, on purpose to be heard, while my countenance kindled with exultation at the astonishment and delight which I was about to produce), "you surely will dance with an old friend and sweetheart, who used to dance with you when a girl!"

At this disclosure her features assumed a vast variety of expressions; but none of them responded precisely to my expectation: indeed, some of them were of such an equivocal and alarming character, that I deemed it advisable not to prolong her suspense. I therefore proceeded:

"Have you forgot your old sweetheart, Abram Baldwin?"

"What!" said she, looking more astonished and confused than ever. "Abram Baldwin! Abram Baldwin! I don't think I ever heard the name before."

"Do you remember Jim Johnson?" said I.

"Oh, yes," said she, "mighty well," her countenance brightening with a smile.

"And Bill Martin?"

"Yes, perfectly well; why, *who* are you?"

Here we were interrupted by one of the gentlemen, who had led his partner to the floor, with, "Come, stranger, we're getting mighty tired o' standing. It won't do for old people that's going to dance to take up much time in standing; they'll lose all their *spryness*. Don't stand begging Polly Gibson, she never dances; but take my Sal there, next to her, she'll run a reel with you, to old Nick's house and back *again*."

No alternative was left me, and therefore I offered my hand to Mrs. Sally—I didn't know who.

"Well," thought I, as I moved to my place, "the squire is pretty secure from jealousy; but Polly will soon remember me when she sees my steps in the reel. I will dance precisely as I used to in my youth, if it tire me to death." There was one step that was almost exclusively my own, for few of the dancers of my day could perform it at all, and none with the grace and ease that I did. "She'll remember Abram Baldwin," thought I, "as soon as she sees the *double cross-hop*." It was performed by rising and crossing the legs twice or thrice before lighting, and I used to carry it to the third cross with considerable ease. It was a step solely adapted to setting or balancing, as all will perceive; but I thought the occasion would justify a little perversion of it, and therefore resolved to lead off with it, that Polly might be at once relieved from suspense. Just, however, as I reached my place, Mrs. Gibson's youngest son, a boy about eight years old, ran in and cried out, "Mammy, old Boler's jump'd upon the planks, and dragg'd off a great hunk o' meat as big as your head, and broke a dish and two plates all to darn smashes!" Away went Mrs. Gibson, and off went the music. Still I hoped that matters would be adjusted in time for Polly to return and see the double cross-hop; and I felt the mortification which my delay in getting a partner had occasioned somewhat solaced by the reflection that it had thrown me at the foot of the reel.

The first and second couples had nearly completed their performances, and Polly had not returned. I began to grow uneasy, and to interpose as many delays as I could without attracting notice.

The six reel is closed by the foot couple balancing at the head of the set, then in the middle, then at the foot, again in the middle, meeting at the head, and leading down.

My partner and I had commenced balancing at the head, and Polly had not returned. I balanced until my partner forced me on. I now deemed it advisable to give myself up wholly to the double cross-hop; so that, if Polly should return in time to see any step, it should be this, though I was already nearly exhausted. Accordingly, I made the attempt to introduce it in the turns of the reel; but the first experiment convinced me of three things at once: 1st. That I could not have used the step in this way in my best days; 2d. That my strength would not more than support it in its proper place for the remainder of the reel; and, 3d. If I tried it again in this way, I should knock my brains out against the puncheons; for my partner, who seemed determined to confirm her husband's report of her, evinced no disposition to wait upon experiments; but, fetching me a jerk while I was up and my legs crossed, had wellnigh sent me head foremost to Old Nick's house, sure enough.

We met in the middle, my back to the door, and from the silence that prevailed in the yard, I flattered myself that Polly might be even now catching the first glimpse of the favourite step, when I heard her voice at some distance from the house: "Get you gone! G-e-e-e-t you gone! G-e-e-e-e-t you gone!" Matters out doors were now clearly explained. There had been a struggle to get the meat from Boler; Boler had triumphed, and retreated to the woods with his booty, and Mrs. Gibson was heaping

indignities upon him in the last resort.

The three "*Get-you-gones*" met me precisely at the three closing balances; and the last brought my moral energies to a perfect level with my physical.

Mrs. Gibson returned, however, in a few minutes after, in a good humour; for she possessed a lovely disposition, which even marriage could not spoil. As soon as I could collect breath enough for regular conversation (for, to speak in my native dialect, I was "*mortal tired*"), I took a seat by her, resolved not to quit the house without making myself know to her, if possible.

"How much," said I, "your Polly looks and dances like you used to, at her age."

"I've told my old man so a hundred times," said she. "Why, who upon earth are you!"

"Did you ever see two persons dance more alike than Jim Johnson and Sammy Tant?"

"Never. Why, who can you be!"

"You remember Becky Lewis?"

"Yes!"

"Well, look at Chloe Dawson, and you'll see her over again."

"Well, law me! Now I know I must have seen you somewhere; but, to save my life, I can't tell where. Where did your father live?"

"He died when I was small."

"And where did you use to see me?"

"At your father's, and old Mr. Dawson's, and at Mrs. Barnes's, and at Squire Noble's, and many other places."

"Well, goodness me! it's mighty strange I can't call you to mind."

I now began to get petulant, and thought it best to leave her.

The dance wound up with the old merry jig, and the company dispersed.

The next day I set out for my residence. I had been at home rather more than two months, when I received the following letter from Squire Gibson: "Dear Sir: I send you the money collected on the notes you left with me. Since you left here, Polly has been thinking about old times, and she says, to save her life, she can't recollect you."

BALDWIN.

