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Cover: Lawton Howard, Ocracoke Dancer.

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Old Time Square Dancing on Ocracoke Island, North Carolina: Notes from Interviews with Ocracoke Island Dancers, September 13-15, 1992

by Bob Dalsemer

Introduction

Ocracoke Island is located 30 miles off North Carolina's mainland and is accessible only by ferry. The island is well known to summer vacationers as part of The Outer Banks. The town of Ocracoke has less than a thousand permanent residents and its K-12 public school is one of the smallest in the state. Ocracoke is more than 600 miles from my home in the mountains of western North Carolina—about the same distance from us as Washington, D.C. or Toledo, Ohio. In September 1992, I was invited by the Ocracoke, North Carolina Arts-in-the-School Program to do a three day residency aimed at researching local square dance traditions and leading some dancing based on that research in both school and community venues: a challenging assignment given the limited time! However, an important discovery of this visit was to find a long tradition of the “big circle” square dance style. Finding it on Ocracoke extends the range of this form well outside the Appalachian Mountains and suggests a variety of possibilities regarding dance origin and migration.

Bob Dalsemer is president of CDSS, caller, musician and folk music and dance historian and researcher. He is currently director of the John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, North Carolina.

It had been quite a few years since regular square dances were held on Ocracoke, but I was able to interview six longtime residents who had all been active dancers at various times from the 1920's through the 1960's. With the information I gathered from these interviews and my knowledge of traditional square and circle dances of Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, western North Carolina and East Tennessee, I was able to present several sessions of old time square dancing to students at Ocracoke School and lead a community street dance with live music by a local band.

Although I was able to spend only a few days on Ocracoke, I found some interesting information. This was one of the few traditional dance communities I have ever visited that has relied periodically on recorded music. There are probably two reasons: 1) this small, isolated island has had relatively few musicians to draw on, particularly in the off-season and 2) the principle venues for dancing were either at school or, particularly during the summer months, at local inns that had juke boxes. Since music was often recorded and recordings of square dance music were limited, most of these dancers remembered dancing mainly to two tunes: "Under The Double Eagle" and "Down Yonder" (these have also been popular square dance and clogging tunes in western North Carolina since the 1940's). When local country bands provided live music for square dances, they played mainly these tunes.

The "square dance" performed on Ocracoke is actually a circle dance for any number of couples, similar to dancing associated with the southern Appalachian region. Like dances from the Appalachian region, the Ocracoke square dance has three main parts: an introduction with everyone dancing together in a big circle, a middle section in which it is customary to divide into sub-sets of two couples to dance figures of the caller's choice and then an ending section which brings all the dancers back into the big circle for some sort of grand finale.

Notes From the Interviews

Lawton and Philip Howard

Lawton Howard, then 80, was the oldest dancer I interviewed. He began dancing as a very young man in the late 1920's, left the island when he was 16 to find work and spent many years working in the Philadelphia area, returning summers to visit. He returned as a fulltime resident when he retired. His son, Philip, remembered dancing on the island in the summers beginning in the 1950's. When Lawton retired, Philip also returned to Ocracoke and runs a successful craft shop: The Village Craftsman on Howard Street, one of the most picturesque residential streets on the island.

Lawton remembered the music for dances in the 1920's as being mainly fiddle and triangle ("it chimed beautiful!"). Tunes he remembered were "Comin' Round the Mountain", "Arkansas Traveler", "Under the Double Eagle", "Mississippi Sawyer", "Leather Britches", and "Bully of the Town". The dance began with "join hands and circle round." Lawton explained that this meant circle right, which I thought meant that the opening circle was to the right. However he also indicated that when the music started the dancers would spontaneously begin to circle left and when the caller gave the call "join hands and circle right" the circle would then go to the right all the way around. He described an introduction in the big circle of couples (circle, swing and promenade) followed by the caller leading off to the couple on his right and dancing a two couple figure, swinging opposites, swinging partners and moving on to the next. Each couple would then follow up as the caller reached the second couple to their right and dance all the way around the circle until all were back to place. Philip added that when the circle got big enough, a second couple across the circle from the caller would also lead out at the same time. Lawton remembered the following figures in no particular order:

1. "Halfway Round and Halfway Back". For two couples: circle left and right.
2. "Star". For two couples. Like the others we interviewed he remembered joining right and left hands across with someone of the opposite sex.
3. "Left and Right Through". I was not able to determine exactly what this was. Originally I thought it to be some sort of grand chain or grand right and left. Lawton and Philip could not seem to remember it clearly, but both thought that the lead couple began like a grand right and left by pulling by with the right hand and then the others would join in as they were reached by the lead couple. If this is accurate it would be a unique variation of the grand right and left in which you meet people of both sexes going around the circle and each couple ending with a swing as they meet partners the second time in original positions. My other informants were not able to clarify this.
4. "Shoo Fly". Lawton was not sure how this went, but it was for the large circle of couples at the end.
5. "Virginia Reel". Lawton mentioned this and I wasn't sure if he meant something he saw in Maryland or Pennsylvania when he lived there or if he was referring to the ending figures of the Ocracoke dance.

Other characteristics of the very old time dance style that Lawton remembered included "everybody clapping rhythm at the same time" and that the dancers "shuffled their feet" which he demonstrated as a kind of subtle two-step or double step. This seems to have been very common in many early square dance styles (Texas, Maryland's Eastern Shore, and perhaps the forerunner of modern clogging in western North Carolina). Callers did not use rhyming patter much. No children were allowed at dances. Philip remembers "dive for the oyster, dig for the clam" as a two couple figure. And something called "the whip" which seemed to be like winding up the circle and unwinding it.

Philip also showed me an unusual stylistic ornamentation which seemed

unique: in the transition from opposite swing to partner swing, the man leaves the opposite lady on his left by ending the swing facing away from the other couple, raising the opposite lady's right hand with his left, and himself ducking through the arch of their joined hands and doing half a left face turn to face the other two. This makes a very neat transition and in most cases leaves the active couple in the center when they swing their partners.

Lanie Wynn

Lanie Wynn came to the island as a child in the 1940's with her family. She remembered dancing at the Spanish Casino in the early 1940's and at the Island Inn in the 1950's, usually to records (squares) and the juke box (rounds). Tunes for square dancing were "Under the Double Eagle" and "Down Yonder". Dancers had to stand and wait while the record was changed or the needle put back to the beginning. If there were more than 8 to 12 couples, they counted off odd and even couples before starting and all the odd couples began dancing the figure at the same time with the next even couple to the right, rather than wait for the lead couple to come around.

She remembered two 2 couple figures: "Dive for the Pearl", and "The Star" as well as these ending figures: march up the middle by couples, separate, men left, women right, lead up again with the lead couple making an arch, others going through and making arches to create a tunnel. Or march up the middle and back away from partner into lines and do the following with partners: elbow swings (right and left), do-si-do, etc., as in the Virginia Reel. She often danced as caller Larry Williams' partner and he liked to improvise a lot at the end.

Other big circle figures included "men drop back (one, two, or more women etc.) and swing", wind up the circle, grapevine twist (my term for leader leading whole line though a series of arches), individual dancers show off by dancing a few fancy steps in the middle.

Callers did very little verbal calling—they tended to lead by dancing and always danced in the set.

She first saw modern club-style square dancing in the 1970's when a group came to the island from Virginia. She remarked that they looked "very professional."

Ellen Marie Cloud

Ellen Marie Cloud started square dancing in the 1950's when she was about 12 years old. She danced in the "Rec" Hall at school during bad weather recesses as well as summers and weekends. She remembered dancing mainly to records of "Under the Double Eagle" and "Down Yonder", but occasionally to live country music. She remembered dancing at the following locations: School "Rec" Hall, (what is now the) Variety Store, Trade Winds Parking Lot, Berkeley Center, Casino, Wahab Village, Captain Bill's and the coffee shop of the Island Inn.

The beginning of the dance went: "Halfway round, halfway back", (circle left and back to the right), swing partner, promenade once around to place, swing partner again.

Then, either lead couple (caller and his partner) would go out to the couple on their right to dance a two couple figure and the others would follow up as a free couple became available to their right or the caller would number the couples as #1's and #2's and all the #1's would start out at the same time.

Two couple figures: one of the following figures would be danced all the way around (until the lead couple returned to their place), then all would swing partners and another figure might be danced (before the grand march, etc.) depending on the whim of caller or number of couples on the floor.

Two couple figures:

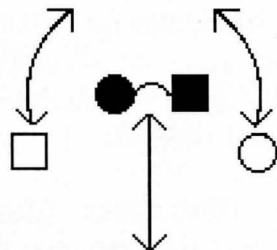
1. "Four Hands Around and Half Way Back". Circle left and right, swing opposite, swing partner, on to the next.

2. "The Star". She, too, remembered giving right hands to someone of the opposite sex. Right and left hands across, swing opposite, swing partner, on to the next.

3. "Birdie in the Cage". Four hands around and halfway back, birdie in the cage (#1 or lead lady in middle, others circle left (and right?), swing opposite, four hands around and halfway back with the same couple, other birdie in, circle left (and right?), swing partners, on to the next.

4. "Ocean Wave". Lead couple separate (lead man to his left and lead woman to her right) and dance in a circular track a short way around the other couple and back up to place while the other couple promenade forward and back between them. Swing opposite and partner. She did not remember the figure being repeated with the couples exchanging roles (see Louise O'Neal's version).

5. "Dig for the Oyster, Dive for the Clam". Couples maintain hands joined in a circle throughout this figure. Lead couple under other's arch, back out. Then reverse roles. Then lead couple under and go all the way through, turning away from each other, making an arch and pulling other couple through.



6. Ending big circle figure: "London Bridge". Call: "Line up for the March": couples dance up the center, then separate, gents left, ladies right, lead couple make a stationary two handed arch at the bottom of the hall, others go through and arch. Lead couple promenade through the tunnel followed by the others.

She remembers an elbow swing variation of the "right and left through all the way around" but couldn't remember how it went.

Louise O'Neal

Louise O'Neal began square dancing in the mid 1950's. She remembers dancing at the "Rec" Hall on weekends and at the Variety Store. Her late husband, Isaac D. "Ikey" O'Neal was a caller. Of all interviewed, she had the most detailed memory of the figures.

The dance started with a circle of couples, circling to the left and back to the right ("halfway back"). Dancers then swing partners, promenade once around (promenade in crossed hand hold, left arms over right arms!), swing partners again and "hold places". If there was a small number of couples the lead couple (caller and partner) started out to the right. If there was a larger number of couples, they would count off 1, 2, 1, 2 etc. and the #1's would lead out to the #2 couple on their right.

The figures for two couples ("sets") were as follows:

1. "Four Hands Around" (circle left)...halfway back (circle right)...swing your opposite...swing your partner...on to the next.
2. "The Star". (This was the first complete description I got of this interesting variation of a common traditional figure.) The lead (or #1) lady crosses in front of her partner (he can help her to cross by giving a gentle reminder with their joined hands). Then the star is formed by joining right hands across with your opposite of the opposite sex (rather than in the more common version where you join right hands with someone of the same sex). This also sets up a very nice transition into the swing with opposites whereby the top two dancers make an arch and the gent underneath pulls his opposite to him under the arch to get to the swing. Then the other gent who has made the arch, pulls his opposite toward him and they also swing.
3. "Dig for the Oyster and Dive for the Clam". (Note that the words "dig" and "dive" may be the reverse of what some of us have heard elsewhere—but these water folk should be the experts as opposed to us mountaineers!) The two couples join hands throughout the figure. This is the same as Ellen

Marie Cloud's version.

4. "Ocean Wave". In promenade position, lead couple split the other couple and back up to place or turn around (without changing sides) with hands still joined crossed in front, dance back to place while the other couple dance individually around the lead couple (as in the diagram above), turn around and dance back to place. Then repeat the figure reversing roles. (This is different from Ellen Marie's description, but Mrs. O'Neal was very sure this was correct.) Swing opposite...swing partner...on to the next.

5. "Birdie in the Cage". Lead lady step to the middle, other three circle around to the left and "halfway back" (to the right)...swing opposite...swing partner...on to the next. Note that the Ocracoke version of this common traditional figure is unique in that the lead man never goes into the center ("bird hop out, crow hop in") as in most other sources.

According to Mrs. O'Neal "that was all of the sets", by which I assume she meant the figures for two couples. After completing one or more of these all the way around, everyone would swing partners and promenade. Some ending figures of the caller's choice would follow including perhaps some of these:

1. "London Bridge". Same as Ellen Marie Cloud's version above.

2. "Right and Left". Essentially a grand right and left or grand chain starting right hand to partner ("all the men go one way, all the ladies the other").

3. Ladies circle right (in the middle), gents circle left (on the outside), ladies duck under gents' arms and circle in a "basket" to the left and "halfway back"...swing corner...(or gents drop back one, two or more ladies and swing and then repeat at caller's whim until back to original partners)...swing partners.

Lawrence Ballance

Now retired, Lawrence Ballance worked for 23 years on dredges for the Army Corps of Engineers all over the East Coast. He remembers dancing on "the point" in the 1930's (he explained to me the difference between "Pointers, Creekers and Trenters" referring to Islanders from different parts of the island). He mentioned "Soldiers' Joy" as a dance tune in addition to "Under the Double Eagle" and "Down Yonder". Men often danced barefoot while women wore spike heels so you often heard cries of "Get the hell off my feet." They danced all night long in some dance halls in the summer. People came over from the mainland to dance. Sometimes they had dance contests to determine the best couple. He remembers winning one such contest with a partner from Manteo, North Carolina. They won a box of cigars and she wanted her share of the winnings!

He started calling when he was 18 to 20 years old but has not danced in many years. He was able to remember some of the calls, but found it difficult to describe how they were danced. Here are some calls he gave me in no particular order:

"Honor your partners, ladies (or lady's) left (does he mean "the lady on your left"?). . . . hands all around."

"Swing your opposite partner."

"Fall in line for the march."

"Join your partner's right hand, right and left through." I could not establish whether this was a conventional grand chain or grand right and left or the kind of cumulative mixed chain that the Howards described.

"Shoo fly in the middle and hands around all." This apparently meant that a dancer or several dancers would be encouraged (or pushed) into the middle of the big circle to dance a few fancy steps while the others circled around. It was often an opportunity for the caller to tease a dancer of his choice!

Conclusions and Questions

Perhaps the most significant conclusion I can draw from my short visit to Ocracoke is that we can no longer characterize the “big circle” style of square dancing as Appalachian when it has proven to have existed on this remote seacoast island since at least the 1920’s. It seems to me that this information requires us to refer to the “big circle” style as “southeastern.” It also brings a few questions to mind. Why has this big circle format not been observed (to my knowledge) in a traditional setting outside the Southeast? Can it be that Ocracoke’s geographical isolation, like that of the Appalachians, put it on a separate track? Why does the ending of the dance so resemble the “grand march” which we usually associate with the beginning of a nineteenth century ball? Is the circle style, like other styles of four couple square dancing, derived from nineteenth century quadrilles and cotillions or, as Cecil Sharp theorized, is it based on an even earlier country dance style brought over to North America by rural English and Scots-Irish settlers? Could it be a unique synthesis of both?

Thanks to Merle Creech Davis, the Ocracoke Arts Committee, Ocracoke School, Hanne Nielsen Dalsemer and, of course, my informants for making the visit possible and the information available.

“Bobbin’ Around”: An After-bob

by Berkley L. Moore

As a follow-up to Rhett Krause’s article on the use of American entertainer William Florence’s tune “Bobbin’ Around” as the basis for an English morris tune in *CD&S* 24: 14-29 (June 1994), the late George Pullen Jackson pointed out that Florence’s tune also provided the basis for a religious revival song. In his *Spiritual Folk Songs of Early America*, Jackson’s #233 is a song entitled “My Bible Leads to Glory,” which he asserted was an adaptation of “Bobbin’ Around.” An examination of the song verifies this statement. Jackson found the song in *The Revivalist*, published in Troy, New York, in 1868. Jackson noted that a close variant of both words and music of “My Bible Leads to Glory” can be found in Ethel Park Richardson’s *American Mountain Songs*, a 1927 collection of songs taken from the oral tradition of the Appalachians.

Ten Cents A Dance: The Taxi-Dance Hall, Jazz Dance, and the Folk Dance Movement

by Allison Thompson

The Taxi-Dance Hall

Picture a dark, smoky room on the second floor of a ramshackle building. The high windows are boarded up and the stifling air is redolent of cheap whisky, stale perfume and other, less attractive, odors. At one end, a piano-player and saxophonist pound out a few bars of "Walkin' My Baby Back Home." Couples perambulate across the floor, watched apathetically by the crowd of single men, hands in pockets, who line the walls. The music stops, each man rushes towards his chosen partner, the girl puts his ticket in the top of her rolled up stocking, and the dancing begins again. At two in the morning when the hall closes, the girls walk wearily down the stairs, some in couples, some alone to meet the men waiting at the door. The sign on the building may say "Dancing Academy," but the cops and the social workers know that this is really a "taxi-dance hall."

The taxi-dance hall was a phenomenon that flourished in most major cities in the U.S. from as early as 1913 until roughly the repeal of Prohibition in 1933. It originated partly as a response to a new determination of public officials to close houses of prostitution, but it continued and spread because it fulfilled a legitimate social need of the rapidly swelling urban population—especially that of single men. Taxi-dance halls were condemned

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on their own account (as corruptors of youth, and as centers for prostitution or the drug trade) and because of the “jazz dancing” performed there as well as in other public and private venues. Social reformers—including leaders of the nascent folk dance movement—sought, varyingly, to abolish taxi-dance halls, to clean them up or to provide healthful alternatives to them. This article provides a brief view of the taxi-dance hall and the jazz dancing performed at it, and touches briefly upon some responses of what might be loosely called the folk dance movement to both.

The first few decades of the twentieth century saw an enormous increase in the population—particularly of men—in cities, both from foreign immigration and from a transfer of jobs from agriculture to industry. The population of the city of Chicago, for example, grew from 1.7 million in 1900 to 3.4 million in 1930, and other cities of the period experienced similar growth. The public dance hall, along with other forms of mass entertainment such as professional baseball, motion picture houses, automobiles and radios, flourished to satisfy the social needs of this influx of workers.

Public dance halls could range from being clean, reputable spaces run by proprietors with a legitimate interest in dance to low dives with unsanitary facilities and the boarded-up windows that encouraged patrons to spend more on drink. Many such halls were centers for prostitution, drugs (principally cocaine and opium), gambling, the sale of alcohol to minors and other unsavory activities. Such perils were luridly described in treatises such as *From Dance Hall to White Slavery* (1912), which included the allegedly true tragedies of the factory girl, the wallflower, the young mother, the country girl and the Polish immigrant girl—all caused by dance halls. This book, written under the banner of the Juvenile Protection Association, concluded that in Chicago annually “5,000 girls [are] offered up as sacrificial victims to the Social Evil....the majority are *tragedies of the dance*.”¹

Paul Cressey, who also began his landmark study of the taxi-dance hall in 1925 under the auspices of the Juvenile Protection Association of Chicago, defined a series of public venues of varying social acceptability where dancing would be performed. These ranged (in rough order of social nicety) as follows: the municipal ballroom, the dancing academy, the social-service dance, the fraternal or “benevolent” dance, the “pseudo-club” dance,

the hotel dance, the dine-and-dance restaurant, the cabaret or "night club", the dance palace, the dance pavilion, the roadhouse, the rent party, the pleasure-boat dance and, finally, the taxi-dance hall.² He formally defined the taxi-dance hall as "a commercial public dance institution attracting only male patrons, which seeks to provide them an opportunity for social dancing by employing women dance partners, who are paid on a commission basis through the ticket-a-dance plan, and who are expected to dance with any patron who may select them for as few or as many dances as he is willing to purchase."³

The taxi-dance hall originated in San Francisco, where, as early as 1913, the Police Commission had separated the saloon from dancing by prohibiting the sale of liquor wherever dances were held. "Closed" dance halls immediately sprang up and multiplied.⁴ The phrase "closed dance hall" or "taxi-dance hall" was used to distinguish the "ticket-a-dance" type of establishment from the so-called "49 dance hall" [i.e. 1849] or the "49 camp," which was a heritage of San Francisco's notorious Barbary Coast: a saloon/whorehouse/gambling district of unparalleled viciousness. In the "49 dance halls," the dancing was free, and the "hostesses" secured their income not from dancing, but upon the amount of liquor which they could persuade the patrons to buy at the adjoining bar.⁵

By contrast, the taxi-dance hall, or "closed" dance hall as it was termed by social workers, was ostensibly a private club, "closed" to women patrons.⁶ Male patrons paid an admission fee that bought them a few dances, then paid for a strip of tickets at "ten cents a dance." There were always more men than girls. The extra men would line the walls (most dance halls did not provide seats, to encourage patrons to dance more; those that did charged the same ten cents a dance to sit out). When one dance ended, a man would rush to the girl of his choice, give her a ticket, half of which she put in the top of her rolled-down stocking where it formed a strange tumor by the end of the evening, half of which she gave to the ticket taker. Dances were short, usually less than two minutes, sometimes less than a minute. At the end of the evening, the girl would turn in her tickets for her pay: usually four to five cents a ticket. "Like the taxi-driver with his cab, she [was] for public hire and [was] paid in proportion to the time spent and the services rendered."⁷

Despite being advertised as a “lady instructress,” the taxi-dancer was anything but a dance teacher. The work was arduous. Cressey noted that: “The girl must have almost unlimited physical stamina to stand up indefinitely to the many forms of physical exercise which the patron may choose to consider dancing...Some couples gallop together over the floor, weaving their way in and around the slower dancers; others seek to attain aesthetic heights by a curious angular strut and a double shuffle or a stamp and a glide. Still others dance the ‘Charleston,’ and are granted unchallenged pre-emption of the center of the floor.”⁸ The exploitation of the girls’ hard work and the patrons’ heavy spending was criticized by the dance hall reformer, Maria Ward Lambin, (who was instrumental in the clean-up of San Francisco’s taxi-dance halls as well as achieving dance hall reform in New York City).

Patrons must spend two or three dollars for any reasonable number of dances, and it is not unusual for them to spend as much as five or six dollars in an evening. The girls are paid four cents a dance, or five if they are on duty both Saturday and Sunday nights. In order to make a fair living, say twenty dollars per week, a girl must dance 400 dances a week or about seventy dances an evening.⁹

Still, for many girls, it was better pay for a shorter time than a long stint on the factory floor, and besides, it was glamorous, fun and liberated—an attraction particularly for immigrant girls eager to break out of Old World constraints. Many of the girls who staffed the dance halls were young—fourteen to twenty. Patrons included the young, old, “bad boys of good blood,” raw country youths, suave young “businessmen,” newly arrived immigrants, and men with physical disabilities, many of whom, in Cressey’s analysis, found in the anonymity of the dance hall their only contact with women and with the American way of life.¹⁰

The dance hall—whether open or closed—was big business. In 1924, Lambin published a report prepared under the joint auspices of the Women’s City Club and the City Recreation Committee of New York. She calculated that in Manhattan alone, there were 238 licensed dance halls, aggregate total attendance

of 6.1 million people, and a total of \$3 million annually spent in cash on the activity—big numbers for the period.¹¹

In an effort to curb abuses, many municipalities licensed their dance halls of all types and/or began to run their own public dance halls. An annual inspection was usually required for a permit. A dance hall proprietor might request—or the city might require—the presence of a policeman or a lady supervisor.

In 1921, a survey was sent to 400 large U.S. and Canadian cities on the topic of dance hall legislation: 180 cities responded, and of these, 147 had some type of legislation.¹² The range of these ordinances went from the hours of business, the type of advertising permitted, and ventilation and safety requirements to the types of dancing and behavior permitted or prohibited. Frequent inspections were key: the social reformer Jane Addams, of Hull House in Chicago, noted in the winter of 1911 that the Juvenile Protection Association had made an inspection of 328 public dance halls for signs of drink and vice in connection with juveniles, and was continuing to so inspect regularly.¹³ Other municipalities established their own investigations with results both negative and, on occasion, positive. In Pittsburgh in 1925, for example, it was noted that while occasionally the clandestine courtships of the dance hall led to gruesome and sordid results, “it is easy to attribute pure malignity to an institution with which we have little acquaintance, but the impression of the baleful influence of the dance hall tends to pale with intimacy. At present the dance hall, despite its numerous and serious shortcomings, is serving a genuine social need.”¹⁴ Still, sterner steps were sometimes needed. In 1931, for example, the New York City Police Commissioner prohibited closed (taxi-dance) halls.¹⁵

The Evils of Jazz Dance

Irrespective of whether it was performed at a college hop, a private party or a taxi-dance hall, “jazz dancing” had many critics. Its close embrace, the swaying, dipping and slithering motions, the suggestive dance names and lyrics and the sensual music all made jazz dance shocking to conservatives. Remember that a popular, sentimental view of womanhood at the time was exemplified by Mary Pickford, “America’s Sweetheart,” as well as by characters such as John Buchan’s Lady Mary Hannay of 1915 (“she can’t scare and she can’t soil”) and

by the slim, boyish heroines of Edgar Rice Burroughs with their pure brows and a code of ethics straight from the playing fields of Eton. The thought of girls like these jazz dancing in public with strangers to whom they had not been properly introduced was horrifying. Many critics tried to turn back the tide. For example, in 1924, some U.S. and Canadian clergy declared that if anyone performed jazz dances, permitted his children to do so, or winked at them in the house, "he would commit a grave sin of disobedience" to the church.

We energetically reprove those dances which are lascivious, either in themselves—such as the "fox-trot," the "tango," the "shimmy," the "cheek-to-cheek," the "turkey-trot," the "camel-trot," the "one-step," "two-step," and others of the same kind, by whatever name they may be called—or in the manner in which they are executed—as is the case with the waltz, the polka, and other dances which are commonly danced to-day in a lascivious manner; we energetically reprove these dances as immediate, proximate occasions of sin, and we expressly forbid them throughout the entire diocese.¹⁶

The popular *Ladies Home Journal* also took a strong stand against jazz dance, with a series of articles describing their different deleterious effects.

The road to hell is too often paved with jazz steps. If a refined girl were alone with a man in a drawing-room and be offered the familiarities of the ultra dance, she would resent them as insults. But she accepts them without question on the dance floor.¹⁷

In response to the perceived wickedness of jazz dancing, many municipal dance halls hired off-duty policemen or lady supervisors to monitor the dance, or posted regulations, such as these from Chicago, which strictly prohibited the following:

- (a) Close Dancing. An open space must be maintained between two dancers, and the faces must not be held so as to touch each other.

- (b) Improper Position. The position or posture of dancers should be erect and respectable, and the position of the arms such as not to give the dancers a distorted position of the body.
- (c) Objectionable Dancing. All dancing must be void of freak, unnecessary or indecent movements of any part of the body, such as suggestive wiggling, frequent low dipping, extreme swaying.

Ragtime music or any other music with suggestive title or words, or with any form of improper dancing as mentioned above, is positively prohibited. All music must conform to the proper movement of the dance.¹⁸

Chaperones, dance hall inspectors and policemen were specifically instructed to break up couples who were dancing improperly. In Philadelphia, "the police class in censorship is told not to permit cheek-to-cheek dancing, abdominal contact, shimmy, toddle or the Washington Johnny, in which the legs are kept spread apart."¹⁹ Professional dance teachers provided further guidance:

Animal names for dances, such as cat step, camel walk, bunny hug, turkey trot, and so on, are disapproved as of degrading tendency. Rapid and jerky music is condemned, while a medium dance tempo, ranging from forty measures to the minute for the fox trot to forty-eight for the waltz, fifty-four for the two-step and sixty-six for the one-step is recommended. There are ten "Don'ts," which may be summarized: Don't permit vulgar jazz music; don't let young men hold their partners tightly; no touching of cheeks which is public love making; no neck holds; no shimmy or toddle; no steps very long or very short; no dancing from the waist up but rather from the waist down; suggestive movements barred; don't copy stage stuff; don't hesitate to ask offenders to leave the room.²⁰

The criticisms continued in popular circles as well as social work journals.

One successful proprietor of clean dance halls in Chicago was quoted as saying: "Many of the couples performing these dances should have a marriage license before stepping on the ballroom floor, and—if they had a marriage license there would be no excuse for committing such acts in public." He added that anyone who said that "youth of both sexes can mingle in close embrace"—with limbs intertwined and torso in contact—"without suffering harm lies." Add to this embrace the wriggling movement and the "sensual stimulation of the abominable jazz orchestra with its voodoo-born minors and its direct appeal to the sensory centers, and if you can believe that youth is the same after this experience as before, then God help your child."²¹

Some jazz dances were regarded as worse than others. In 1921, *The Survey* noted that the dance hall legislation of some cities prohibited certain dances by name, such as "'coast to coast,' 'bunny hug' and 'shimmy.'"²² In other cities, such as Cleveland, however, the county court ruled that the dance hall inspector or other police authorities had no power to forbid a certain dance by *name* (i.e., the tango), but could only stop such a dance when any vulgarity or indecency actually occurred.²³

Jazz music—with its wailing saxophones and syncopated beat—was criticized independently of the dancing performed to it. One critic, a music specialist who had claimed to have worked out scientifically the relation of music to human emotions from both the psychological and physiological standpoints, proffered the view that "jazz music amounts to a physical stimulus of a degrading kind; it acts exactly like a drug on specific nerve centers. It is no less direct in its effect on certain contacts of nerve centers that are witnessed on the dance floor."²⁴ Another critic wrote: "Those moaning saxophones and the rest of the instruments with their broken, jerky rhythm make a purely sensual appeal. They call out the low and rowdy instinct."²⁵

In addition to these criticisms of jazz music and dance, a racial component was occasionally expressed. Since the music had clearly African-American origins and since so often the musicians were African-Americans, there was a sense of distaste at the thought of "pure young white girls" writhing "night after night to the music of rapturous negroes, as years ago the girls of the pavement used to dance with their masters at the Sans Souci."²⁶

Despite all this criticism, occasionally writers—even dance hall inspectors and reformers—would speak more moderately about jazz dance. In 1913, the

Cleveland Dance Hall Inspector (where municipal dances were run very tightly), opined that:

While the present craze for dancing has brought with it certain dances which are extreme and freakish yet it has also brought certain others which are not only graceful, when danced properly, but also more stimulating and healthful as an exercise for minds and bodies wearied with the routine drudgery of office and shop.²⁷

Even Maria Ward Lambin acknowledged that not all dance halls were evil; modern dance styles and dance palaces satisfied a natural desire of youth to have fun and meet friends of the opposite sex.

Much objection has been raised to certain features of the dance-halls, such as the sensual dancing, drinking, the ease with which promiscuous acquaintances can be made. But in justice to the dance-hall, it must be noted that these are characteristics common to all classes of society. They can be no more easily observed in a large dance-hall than in upper-class homes and hotels, but they are present in both places. Since this is so, it would seem that the dance-hall is not in itself the cause, but rather an effect of conditions operating throughout our society.²⁸

Folk Dance And The Dance Hall Reform Movement

The move to regulate all dance halls and to close taxi-dances was closely linked to the other great social reform movements led by individuals such as Jane Addams of Hull House in Chicago (active 1889 to 1935); and a variety of women's clubs and civic organizations (such as the Juvenile Protection Association) founded to aid the working girl; the YWCA (national organization formed in 1906) and YMCA (founded 1844, but particularly active after the turn of the century); the Boy Scouts (founded in England in 1908 and reached the U.S. by 1910); and the Girl Scouts (founded in England in 1910 and reached the U.S. by 1912). These organizations sought to ameliorate the dreadful lives of industrial workers, such as those of the immigrant Chicago meat-packers described in Upton

Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906). Their collective goals were to improve the health and the working, social and moral lives of the urban poor.

This period was one in which many cities took responsibility to create public libraries—under the patronage of individuals such as Andrew Carnegie, who engaged in his philanthropic work after his retirement in 1901 until his death in 1919. They created public “play” spaces and functions, city parks, “settlement” houses, field houses or gymnasiums and they encouraged school buildings to be used to provide “literary club meetings, gymnastics, and athletics for the boys, and folk dancing for the girls.”²⁹ Social reformers managed to convince community leaders that it was time to recognize the urban population's need for play, as well as for education and clean living conditions. There was a related reformation in children's school curricula, with the addition of gym classes, music, art and home economics to the program.

A minor part of these reforms was what might be loosely called the Folk Dance Movement, a social work and artistic movement that promulgated the “Value of Play.” Thus, for example, Lambin noted that, “the dance hall is not a mere problem of regulation; it is a phase of the whole leisure-time problem—the task of creating institutions which shall give the mass of people opportunities for using their leisure creatively.”³⁰ She noted that in New York, one dance hall had discovered that the old-fashioned Paul Jones (a mixer) was popular. “During the marches and cotillion figures the patrons romp and play and really relax—for all too short a period. Several others halls, notably one in Philadelphia, have found that cotillion figures and ‘old-fashioned’ dances can be used exclusively with success.”³¹

With one important exception, those involved in the collection and dissemination of folk dances, including English dances, did not, so far as the writer knows, take an active role in combating the perils of the public dance hall and the evils of jazz dance. However, many social outreach institutions, such as the YWCA, eagerly promulgated their materials. In 1909 in England, for example, the Board of Education agreed to recognize Cecil Sharp's collection of folk dances as part of its course of physical exercises and organized play, while part of Sharp's emphasis on the standardization of dance movements and the training of “certificated” teachers was to satisfy the demand of organizations such as the Women's Institutes, the Workers' Educational Association, Girl Guides and Boy Scouts, which were clamoring for folk-songs and dances.³² Thus, in 1919 the

"object" of the English Folk Dance Society was amended: "to disseminate a knowledge of English Folk Dances, Folk Music and Singing Games, and to encourage the practice of them in their traditional forms,"³³—an educator's, not a collector's or a preservationist's statement.

One of the most vociferous and well-known opponents of jazz dance, and proponent of "old-time dancing", was Henry Ford, the automobile magnate. By mid-1925, his "missionary labors," as they were termed, included running dances for his workers and staff, first in the Engineering Laboratory of Ford Motor Works, and later in a specially-built dance hall. Contemporaries noted that Ford "was doing his bit toward driving jazz into the discard by reviving interest in the dances of our grand-daddies;" dances such as the Fisherman's Hornpipe, Speed the Plow, French Four, St. Patrick's Day in the Morning, Scotch Reel, Hull's Victory.³⁴ Ford teachers taught in physical education departments of 24 universities in many states, and his proselytizing was such that it was estimated that more than one million people were instructed by teams of Ford teachers who toured the country.³⁵ Ford's favorite dances and philosophy were put forth in 1926 in the dancing manual, *Good Morning*, written by his dancing master, Benjamin Lovett.³⁶

One of the most important leaders in the folk dance movement in America (including but not specifically limited to English materials) was Elizabeth Burchenal, founder and president of the American Folk Dance Society in 1916 and Chairman of the Folk-Dance Committee of the Play-ground Association of America. Burchenal also acted as Inspector of Girls' Athletics of the Public Schools Athletic League and the Board of Education of the City of New York as early as 1909.³⁷ Burchenal felt that folk dances were "the very essence of *social group play*...they provide happy relaxation, pleasant physical activity, forgetfulness of self and sociability."³⁸ She wished that they not be reserved as a form of exercise for children, and emphasized the opportunities which folk dancing offered as "Recreation for Adults, its possibilities as a Democratic Socializing Agent, and its value as a form of *real* 'Americanization.'"³⁹

In one article, Burchenal tackled the "commercialized public dance hall" and criticized it for its sensuality that corrupted young people until they were unfit for work or play. She felt that too much emphasis on recreation that isolated one boy and girl together was bad for social development, and that the dancing itself was "ugly" and "unmusical." As an alternative, she offered five types or

categories of dances that the American Folk Dance Society (not the progenitor of CDSS) believed met all of the requirements of uniting families and communities, cultivating an appreciation of beautiful rhythm and movement, and providing suitable exercise. She recommended a combination of both dance formations and individual dances: 1) the Virginia Reel—for six couples only; 2) Quadrilles—the “Old American type” or what we would call square dances; 3) the Circle, or Sicilian Circle, by which she meant simple quadrille figures in the circular formation; 4) the Waltz—the “true” waltz, not, as she emphasized, the shuffling two-step waltz popular at the time; and 5) the Polka—“one of the fundamental and universal dance steps.”⁴⁰

The success of the dance reform movement was mixed. It is doubtful that the proprietors of taxi-dance halls felt that the Sicilian Circle was a crowd-pleaser equal to the Charleston. Indeed, thirty years after the English Folk Dance Society was founded, Douglas Kennedy noted that the Playford country dance—the basic material of the English dance movement—was too complicated. “It needed more detailed instruction and careful practice than the ordinary person, especially the ordinary man, was prepared to stand.”⁴¹ On the other hand educators as well as the outreach groups certainly adopted some of the folk dance movement’s materials and principles; after all, many readers of this article probably had a folk dance “segment” in their middle and high school gym classes.

The repeal of Prohibition in 1933 began the decline of the taxi-dance hall. A brief study performed in 1954 stated that only six cities with populations in excess of 200,000 had them—New York City, Oakland, Newark, Miami and Detroit—and the numbers of halls in those cities had declined significantly from the late thirties: New York, for example, had only 10 taxi-dance halls in 1951-52 compared to 27 in 1930. The surveyor (who was also a part-time piano player in the halls) felt that part of the decline was due to the recent emphasis of police departments to fingerprint the taxi-dancers, as well as the managers; while part was due to the gradual return of the saloon, the cocktail lounge and the “B-girl.”⁴² Taxi-dance halls still existed as late as 1969—there were four in Los Angeles, double the number reported fifteen years earlier—but they served more a tourist and transient (such as servicemen) population than an immigrant and uprooted clientele, as had been observed in the Twenties and Thirties.⁴³ Over time, changing social patterns, Repeal, World War II and familiarity quelled the criticisms of taxi-dance halls as well as of jazz dance. New dances came into

vogue—some of these condemned as severely as their predecessors. The relationship between the folk dance pioneers and their organizations to the general social reform movements remains an area rich for exploration.

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Reviews

Ronald Hutton. *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year 1400-1700*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994; ix, 366 pp.

Performers and students of English morris and sword dances, mumming, and related customs have a great deal to say about the alleged history of these practices. For example, a popular explanation about their origins remains the idea that these are "pagan survivals" into modern times, or at least incorporate significant pre-Christian elements. In fact, there is little or no evidence to support this view. The explanation that they developed and thrived in early modern times is far more reasonable, as well as actually based on existing documentary and material evidence. Other historical misconceptions abound in the world of dance revivalists, false notions that only recently are being undermined thanks to serious historical scholarship by Roy Judge, Mike Heaney, Georgina Boyes, Theresa Buckland, and other scholars.

Ronald Hutton's *The Rise and Fall of Merry England* features the results of his scouring of the archives and libraries of England, during which he turned up a great deal of documentary material. His command of the material and the historical literature on this period is extraordinary.

Hutton lays out his plans with model clarity: "This book considers certain themes in the history of the ritual year in England during the late Middle Ages and the Tudor and Stuart periods.... Its concern is essentially with those annual festivals which were celebrated, regionally or nationally, with public rituals or customary pastimes. It includes those which were part of religion, those which were secular entertainments, and those which spanned the two spheres" (p. 1). The book begins with an examination of "The Ritual Year in England c. 1490-c. 1540," thus on the eve of the Protestant Reformation. This chapter and the next, "The Making of Merry England" (a term which appears to have been used first by an opponent of religious reform, in 1552) also cover the probable origins of many of the "rituals" (an elusive term which Hutton declines to define).

He shows the late medieval and early modern origins (fifteenth and

sixteenth centuries) of many of these “ancient rituals,” with morris dancing as a good example. Others, such as mummers’ plays, actually seem to be eighteenth and nineteenth century inventions, which later writers assumed to be “authentic relic[s] of prehistoric ritual” (p. 8), regardless of the evidence. Many of the customs and practices that Hutton examines are linked to the Christian religious year, including feast and fast days, saints’ days, processions, and the like. Among the secular practices are morris dances, which evidently moved from Royal Tudor courts to become more popular forms of entertainment. Of course, in such a period of intense religious belief, it is very difficult to draw any certain line between “religious” and “secular” events.

Hutton’s subsequent chapters take the reader through the “Reformation of Religion” and the “Reformation of Manners” in the sixteenth century, following King Henry VIII’s break with the papacy, the reformation of the English church under his son Edward, Queen Mary’s short-lived Catholic restoration, and then Elizabeth’s long reign during which Protestantism took firm hold. He then moves onto the Stuart period, with the “Battle for Merry England,” the “Puritan Revolution,” and finally the “Merry Equilibrium” at the end of the seventeenth century. His thorough examination reveals that the historical reality of these times is far more complex than the popular simple picture of merry “Cavaliers” versus grim Puritan “Roundheads.” The importance of local practices as well as national policies and trends is critical, as are the personal opinions and religious views of many different people of the time. The ways in which parishes and others raise money is also a significant factor in, for example, the rise and fall of church “ales” and other public fund raisers.

In his conclusions, Hutton states: “When I first planned the research project from which this book has derived...I expected to document...the way in which an immemorial folk festival culture, derived ultimately from pagan roots, encountered first an attack upon religious grounds, consequent upon the English Reformation, and then one upon secular grounds, resulting from the social changes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” (p. 260). He found that these assumptions did not, in fact, “fit the data,” and then turned to an economic explanation, involving issues such as wages and inflation, for the decline of a “lively popular festival culture based upon parish, guild, and

town" (p. 261). He saw that this too was inadequate, and concluded that the strongest model which is based upon the actual records is a primarily religious one: that is, a model which emphasizes the importance of religious belief and practice in the lives of English men and women from the late medieval period through the seventeenth century. This is part of a general movement in historiography, reacting against the more or less Marxist approaches which look to economic factors as the primary movers in social, cultural, and political change.

Those who look for material on morris dancing or related practices in *The Rise and Fall of Merry England* will find scattered references, which chiefly show their dependence on the contexts of local celebrations and holidays. (The dust jacket has a fine reproduction of the seventeenth century painting, "The Thames at Richmond, with the Old Royal Palace," showing men, and a woman, morris dancing by the river.) Nonetheless, this book is of great importance for understanding the time and place in which these performance styles and related customs developed.

Hutton is also the author of *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles: Their Nature and Legacy* (1991). In this comprehensive survey, he shows that little is certain on this topic, and convincingly debunks the idea of "pagan survivals" in modern times. (As opposed to what might be termed "pagan inventions and fanciful reconstructions," which have been common and fashionable for centuries.) Of particular interest is the concluding chapter, "Legacy of Shadows," on the "search for 'pagan survivals'" (p. 284); its scholarly (and pseudo-scholarly) practitioners; and the pretensions of contemporary paganism, or "wicca."

Hutton's work is not light reading, though the author displays a dry wit and a clear and energetic style, as well as erudition and command of the sources. His books are fascinating and convincing. Some may feel that this sort of serious historical research removes the romance from the revels and celebrations which they love. Others may find, on the contrary, that romance is best based on an intimate knowledge of the object of one's affections. Hutton enables his readers to achieve this.

Stephen D. Corrsin

Keith Chandler. *"Ribbons, Bells, and Squeaking Fiddles": The Social History of Morris Dancing in the English South Midlands, 1660-1900*. Enfield Lock, UK: Hisarlik Press, 1993; xii, 244 pp. Illus., maps, index. ISBN 1874312060.

Keith Chandler. *Morris Dancing in the English South Midlands, 1660-1900: A Chronological Gazetteer*. Enfield Lock, UK: Hisarlik Press, 1993; xii, 246 pp. Illus., map, index. ISBN 1874312079.

Until recently the twentieth century morris dancer who wished to learn about the history of the custom may have found this desire difficult to satisfy. Of the little material that is readily available, much dates to the early part of this century and is based more on wishful speculation than on documented fact. Unfortunately, much of the "oral tradition" of the morris revival is based on these sources. Meanwhile, careful research by the academic community has unearthed enough new evidence to build a more realistic picture of the morris as it evolved from the first known performance in England in 1466 to its "discovery" by folklorists of the early twentieth century; but for dancers unable or unwilling to invest the time and expense in following these developments in the academic journals, this information has been essentially unavailable.

The publication of this two-volume work, then, is a watershed event for both the researcher and the curious dancer, as Chandler presents a detailed picture of the "Cotswold" or South Midlands morris during its formative years, heyday, and decline. As indicated in the titles, the period under consideration begins with the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 to just before the urban revival after 1900 (though a brief sketch of the pre-1660 history is included). The temporal distribution of the data being what it is, however, the last century of this period receives the closest examination.

"The history of morris dancing," Chandler writes, "(as indeed that of any cultural expression) is the history of the people who maintained that tradition." And so, in *Ribbons, Bells, and Squeaking Fiddles*, he writes, not of fertility rites, of celebrating the changing of the seasons, or of any other romantic justification for the morris, but of the people who performed it, the occasions where it was performed, and the society that encompassed it.

The South Midlands morris was closely tied to the Whitsun Ales, and

Chandler accordingly describes these events in some detail. We learn of celebrations of up to a week's duration, staged by and for the agricultural laboring classes under the sponsorship, and subject to the approval, of the major and minor gentry. Surrounding the formal, dignified core of the Lord and Lady of the Ale—denizens of the lower class in a temporary role reversal—was a fringe filled with food, alcohol, sex, and the rough competition of "Champion barefist fighters, wrestlers, backsword players, shin-kickers, morris dancers, and the like..." Feast days of the local benefit societies, Whitsun week foot tours, and summer hay harvests, other contexts in which the morris occurred, are examined as well.

One hundred fifty-one locations are cited as having had a morris side during the relevant time period, and over seven hundred men and women who were active participants have been identified. For most of these participants, baptismal, burial, and censal records, as well as other sources, allow a brief biographical sketch: birth, death, and marriage dates; family connections; occupations. These data underlie the core of the book, which focuses on "the people who maintained that tradition." These are the farm laborers, small craftsmen, and, in some instances, paupers who were the morris men of the nineteenth century. (The few morris women are not neglected. Chandler cites the female side from Spelsbury, Oxfordshire, dismissed as a short-lived "joke" by Cecil Sharp. The side in fact seems to have performed, sometimes along with the Spelsbury men's side and sometimes on their own, for at least a decade.) Often they were related, as dance leaders sought to keep the extra income gained from dancing in the household by introducing successive generations of the family into the set. Intermarriage between dancing families was frequent. Financial rewards were not the only motivation for participating: dancers could also expect to receive food, alcohol, status within their peer group, time away from home, and personal satisfaction.

The *Chronological Gazetteer* supplements the first volume with a compendium of all known performances and participants in the South Midlands from 1660 to 1900. Novice dancers of the present revival, told of long-ago dancing in quaint English villages, receive an impression of anonymous dancers performing outside a context for mysterious reasons. Browsing the *Gazetteer* puts faces on these dancers and the dancers into a

context, while *Ribbons, Bells, and Squeaking Fiddles* ties the whole into a cohesive package. Handsome layout and multiple indices make both books a pleasure to read, and Chandler's clear writing is easily accessible to the lay reader. For anyone curious about who it was who danced the morris and why, these two books are indispensable.

Richard S. Holmes



A COUNTRY DANCE.

Chapter VII: "Country Dances"

By S. Baring Gould



Clisthenes, tyrant of Sicyon, says Herodotus, had a beautiful daughter whom he resolved to marry to the most accomplished of the Greeks. Accordingly all the eligible young men of Greece resorted to the court of Sicyon to offer for the hand of the lovely Agarista. Among these, the most distinguished was Hippoclides, and the king decided to take him as his son-in-law.

Clisthenes had already invited the guests to the nuptial feast, and had slaughtered one hundred oxen to the gods to obtain a blessing on the union, when Hippoclides offered to exhibit the crown and climax of his many accomplishments.

Taken from *Old Country Life* (London: Methuen & Co., 1895; 5th ed.), pp. 174-197.

He ordered a flute-player to play a dance tune, and when the musician obeyed, he (Hippoclidides) began to dance before the king and court and guests, and danced to his own supreme satisfaction.

After the first bout, and he had rested awhile and recovered breath, he ordered a table to be introduced, and he danced figures on it, and finally set his head on the table and gesticulated with his legs.

When the applause had ceased, Clisthenes said—as the young man had reverted to his feet and stood expectantly before him—“You have danced very well, but I don’t want a dancing son-in-law.”

How greatly we should like to know what Herodotus does not tell us, whether the tyrant of Sicyon was of a sour and puritanical mind, objecting to dancing on principle, or whether he objected to the peculiar kind of dance performed by Hippoclidides, notably that with his head on the table and his legs kicking in the air.

I do not think that such a thing existed at that period as puritanical objection to dancing, but I imagine that it was the sort of dance which offended Clisthenes. Lucian in one of his Dialogues introduces a philosopher who reproaches a friend for being addicted to dancing, whereupon the other replies that dancing was of Divine invention, for the goddess Rhaea first composed set dances about the infant Jupiter to hide him from the eyes of his father Saturn, who wanted to eat him. Moreover, Homer speaks with high respect of dancing, and declares that the grace and nimbleness of Merion in the dance distinguished him above the rest of the heroes in the contending hosts of Greeks and Trojans. He adds that in Greece statues were erected to the honour of the best dancers, so highly was the art held in repute, and that Hesiod places on one footing valour and dancing, when he says that “The gods have bestowed fortitude on some men, and on others a disposition for dancing!” Lastly, he puts the philosopher in mind that Socrates not only admired the saltatory exercise in others, but learned it himself when he was an old man.

On hearing this defence of dancing, the morose philosopher in Lucian’s Dialogue professes himself a convert, and requests his friend to take him to the next subscription ball.

Steele, in the *Spectator*, declared that “no one ever was a good dancer that had not a good understanding,” and that it is an art whereby

mechanically, so to speak, “a sense of good-breeding and virtue are insensibly implanted in minds not capable of receiving it so well in any other rules.”

I cannot help thinking that the dancing commended by the *Spectator*, learned in old age by Socrates, and that in which the Greeks won the honour of statues, was something far removed from that which incurred the displeasure of Clisthenes, and lost Hippoclides the hand of his beautiful mistress.

Here is a letter in the *Spectator*, given in Steele’s article. It purports to be from a father, Philipater: “I am a widower, with one daughter; she was by nature much inclined to be a romp, and I had no way of educating her, but commanding a young woman, whom I entertained to take care of her, to be very watchful in her care and attendance about her. I am a man of business and obliged to be much abroad. The neighbours have told me, that in my absence our maid has let in the spruce servants in the neighbourhood to junketings, while my girl play’d and romped even in the street. To tell you the plain truth, I caught her once, at eleven years old, at chuck-farthing, among the boys. This put me upon new thoughts about my child, and I determined to place her at a boarding-school. I took little notice of my girl from time to time, but saw her now and then in good health, out of harm’s way, and was satisfied. But by much importunity, I was lately prevailed with to go to one of their balls. I cannot express to you the anxiety my silly heart was in, when I saw my romp, now fifteen, taken out. I could not have suffered more, had my whole fortune been at stake. My girl came on with the most becoming modesty I had ever seen, and casting a respectful eye, as if she feared me more than all the audience, I gave a nod, which, I think, gave her all the spirit she assumed upon it, but she rose properly to that dignity of aspect. My romp, now the most graceful person of her sex, assumed a majesty which commanded the highest respect. You, Mr Spectator, will, better than I can tell you, imagine all the different beauties and changes of aspect in an accomplished young woman, setting forth all her beauties with a design to please no one so much as her father. My girl’s lover can never know half the satisfaction that I did in her that day. I could not possibly have imagined that so great improvement could have been wrought by an art that I always held in itself ridiculous and contemptible.

There is, I am convinced, no method like this, to give young women a sense of their own value and dignity; and I am sure there can be none so expeditious to communicate that value to others. For my part, my child has danced herself into my esteem, and I have as great an honour of her as ever I had for her mother, from whom she derived those latent good qualities which appeared in her countenance when she was dancing; for my girl showed in one quarter of an hour the innate principles of a modest virgin, a tender wife, and generous friend, a kind mother, and an indulgent mistress."

It is a curious fact that the beautiful and graceful dance, the dance as a fine art, is extinct among us. It has been expelled by the intrusive waltz. And if in the waltz any of that charm of modesty, grace of action, and dignity of posture can be found, which delighted our forefathers and made them esteem dancing, then let it be shown. It was not waltzing which made Merion to be esteemed among the heroes of the Trojan war; it was not waltzing certainly that Socrates acquired in his old age; and it most assuredly was not whilst she was waltzing that the correspondent of the *Spectator* admired in his daughter the modest virgin. It is possible that it was a sort of topsy-turvy waltz Hippocles performed, and which lost him the daughter of Clisthenes.

The dance is not properly the spinning around of two persons of opposite sex hugging each other, and imitating the motion of a teetotum. The dance is an assemblage of graceful movements and figures performed by a set number of persons. There is singular beauty in the dance proper. The eye is pleased by a display of graceful and changing outline, by bringing into play the muscles of well-moulded limbs. But where many performers take part the enchantment is increased, just as part-singing is more lovely than solo-singing; for to the satisfaction derived from the graceful attitude of one performer is added that of beautiful grouping. A single well-proportioned figure is a goodly sight; several well-proportioned figures in shifting groups, now in clusters, now swinging loose in wreaths, now falling into line or circles; whilst an individual, or a pair, focus the interest, is very beautiful. It is the change in a concert from chorus to solo; and when, whilst the single dance, projected into prominence, attracts the delighted eye, the rest of the dancers keep rhythmic motion, subdued, in simple change, the effect is exquisite. It is the accompaniment on a living instrument to a solo.

A correspondent of the *Times* recently gave us an account of the Japanese ballet, which illustrates what I insist on. He tells us that the Maikos or Japanese ballet-dancers are girls of from sixteen to eighteen years of age; they wear long fine silk dresses, natural flowers in their hair, and hold fans in their hands. Their dance is perfectly decorous, exquisitely graceful, and of marvellous artistic beauty. It partakes of the nature of the minuet and the gavotte; it makes no violent demands on lungs and muscles; its object is to give pleasure to the spectators through the exhibition of harmony of lines, elegance of posture, beauty of dress, grace with which the folds of the long drapery fall, the play of light, and change of arrangement of colour. It is a dance full of noble and stately beauty, and has nothing in common with our European ballet, with its extravagance and indelicacy, and—it must be added—inelegance. It is a play without words, and a feast of pure delight to the artistic eye.

Æsthetically, the dance is, or may be, one of the most beautiful creations of man, an art, and an art of no mean order. In it each man and woman has to sustain a part, is one of many, a member of a company, enchained to it by laws which all must obey. And yet each has in his part a certain scope for individual expansion, for the exercise of liberty. It is a figure of the world of men, in which each has a part to perform in relation to all the rest. If the performer uses his freedom to excess, the dancers in the social ball are thrown into disorder, and the beauty and unity of the performance is lost.

Now all this beauty is taken from us. The waltz has invaded our ball-rooms, and drives all other dances out of it. Next to the polka, the waltz is the rudest and most elementary of step and figure-dances; it has extirpated before it the lovely and intricate dances, highly artistic, and of elaborate organization, which were performed a century ago. How is it now in a ball? Even the quadrille and lancers, the sole remnants of an art beautiful to lookers-on, are sat out, or, after having been entered on the list, are omitted, and a waltz substituted for it. "*Valse, valse, toujours valse!*" A book on dances, published in 1821, speaks of the introduction of the waltz as a new thing, and of the rarity of finding persons at a ball who could dance it.

"The company at balls having no partners who are acquainted with waltzing or quadrilles, generally become spectators of each other in a

promenade round the rooms, so that the waltz or quadrille ball ends in country dances, sometimes not one of these dances being performed during the evening." That was a little over sixty years ago. Waltz and quadrille came in hand-in-hand, and displaced the old artistic and picturesque country dances, and then waltz prevailed, and kicked quadrille out at the door. The country dance is the old English dance—the dance of our forefathers—the dance which worked such wonders in the heart of the old father in Steele's paper in the *Spectator*.

The English have always been a dancing people, only during the Commonwealth did they kick their heels, dancing being unallowed; and at the beginning of this century dancing was discountenanced among the upper classed by the Evangelicals, and among villagers almost completely put down, or driven into low public-houses, by the Dissenters. In 1598 Hentzner describes the English as "excelling in dancing, and in the art of music;" and says that whilst a man might hope to become Lord Chancellor through dancing, without being bred to the law, like Sir Christopher Hatton, it was certainly worth while to endeavour to excel. According to Barnaby Rich, in 1581 the dances in vogue were measures—a grave and stately performance, like the minuet, galliards, jigs, brauls [sic], rounds, and hornpipes. In 1602 the Earl of Worcester writes to the Earl of Shrewsbury, "We are frolic here in Court, much dancing in the privy chamber of *country dances* before the Queen's Majesty, who is exceedingly pleased therewith." In the reign of James Ist, Waldon, sneering at Buckingham's kindred, observes that it is easier to put fine clothes on the back than to learn the French dances, and therefore that "none but country dances" must be used at Court. At Christmas, 1622-3, the Prince Charles "did lead the measures with the French ambassador's wife. The measures—braules, corrantoes, and galliards—being ended, the masquers with the ladies did dance two country dances."

In Pepys' *Diary* we read how he went to see the King dance in Whitehall. "By and by comes the King and Queen, the Duke (of York) and the Duchess, and all the great ones; and after seating themselves, the King takes out the Duchess of York; and the Duke, the Duchess of Buckingham; the Duke of Monmouth, my Lady Castlemaine; and so other lords and other ladies; and they danced the Brantle. After that the King led a lady a single

corranto; and then the rest of the lords, one after another, other ladies; very noble it was, and great pleasure to see. Then to country dances, the King leading the first, which he called for, which was, says he, '*Cuckolds all awry*,' the old dance of England. Of the ladies that danced, the Duke of Monmouth's mistress, and my Lady Castlemaine, and a daughter of Sir Harry de Vicke's, were the best. The manner was, when the King dances, all the ladies in the room, and the Queen herself, stand up; and indeed, he dances rarely, and much better than the Duke of York. Having staid here as long as I thought fit, to my infinite content, it being the greatest pleasure I could wish now to see at Court, I went home, leaving them dancing."

All old ballads are set to dance tunes, and derive their name from *ballet*. Where no instruments were to be had, the dancers sang the ballad, and so gave the time to their feet. The fact of ballad tunes being dance tunes has been the occasion of their preservation; for in *The Compleate Dancing Master*, a collection of dance tunes, the first edition of which was published in 1650, and which went through eighteen editions to 1728, a great number have been preserved as dance tunes, with the titles of the ballads sung to them. In the old country dances the number of performers was unlimited, but could not consist of less than six.

What is the origin of our title for certain dances—"Country Dances"? I venture to think it has nothing to do with the country, though I have Chappell's weighty opinion against me. The designation was properly given to all those counter-dances, *contre-dances*, which were performed by the gentlemen standing on one side, and the ladies on the other, in lines, in contra-distinction to all round and square dances. As a general rule, foreign dances are circular or square. In Brittany is La Boulangère, and among the Basques, La Tapageuse, which are set in lines; but with a few exceptions, most continental dances were differentiated from the general type of English dances by being square or round. There were, no doubt, among our peasantry dances in a ring about the May-pole, but this was exceptional. A writer at the beginning of this century says,—“An English country dance differs from any other known dance in form and construction, except *Ecossaise* and quadrille country dances, as most others composed of a number of persons are either round, octagon, circular, or angular. The pastoral dances on the stage approximate the nearest to English country

dances, being formed longways."

The song and the dance were closely associated; indeed, as already said, the word *ballet* is derived from "ballad, or *vice-versá*; and all our old dance tunes had appropriate words set to them.

Dargason, a country dance older than the Reformation, found its way into Wales, where it was set to Welsh words; the English ballad to which it was usually sung was—

"It was a maid of my country,
As she came by a hawthorn tree,
As full of flowers as might be seen,
She marvelled to see the tree so green.
At last she asked of this tree
How came this freshness unto thee?
And every branch so fair and clean?
I marvel that you grow so green."

Doubtless half the charm of a country dance consisted in the dancers singing the words of the familiar ballad as they went through the movements of the dance, the burden often occurring at a general joining of hands and united movement.

An English country dance was composed of the putting together of several figures, and it allowed of almost infinite variation, according to the number and arrangement of the figures introduced. Sir Roger de Coverley, which is not quite driven out, consists of seven figures. Some figures are quite elementary, as turning the partner, setting, leading down the middle. Others are more elaborate, as Turn Corners, and Swing Corners; some are called Short Figures, as requiring in their performance a whole strain of short measure, or half a strain of long measure. Long Figures, on the other hand, occupy a strain of eight bars in long measure—a strain being that part of an air which is terminated by a double bar, and usually consists in country dances of four, eight, or sixteen single bars. Country dance tunes usually consist of two strains, though they sometimes extend to three, four, or five, and of eight bars each.

The names and character of the old country dances are quite forgotten.

The following is a list of some of the dances given in *The Complete*

Country Dancing Master, published near the beginning of last century—

Whitehall.

Ackroyd's Pad.

Buttered Pease.

Bravo and Florimel.

Pope Joan.

Have at they coat, old woman.

The Battle of the Boyne.

The Gossip's Frolic.

The Intrigue.

Prince and Princess.

A Health to Betty.

Bobbing Joan.

The Whirligig.

Amarillis.

Sweet Kate.

Granny's Delight.

Essex Buildings.

Lord Byron's Maggot.

Ballamera.

The Dumps.

Rub her down with straw.

Moll Peatley.

Cheerily and Merrily.

In Waylet's *Collection of Country Dances*, published in 1749, we have these—

The Lass of Livingstone.

Highland Laddie.

Down the Burn, Davy.

Eltham Assembly.

Cephalus and Procris.

Joy go with her.

Duke of Monmouth's Jig.

Bonny Lass.

The Grasshopper.

The Pallet.

Jack Lattin.

Fiannelle's Maggot.

Buttered Pease.

The Star.

Some of these dances were simplicity itself, consisting of only a very few elementary figures. This is the description of *Sweet Kate*.

"Lead up all a double and back. That again. Set your right foot to your woman's, then your left, clasp your woman on her right hand, then on the left, wind your hands and hold up your finger, wind your hands again and hold up another finger of the other hand, then single; and all this again."

Bobbing Joan is no more than this. First couple dance between the second, who then take their places, dance down, hands and all round, first two men snap fingers and change places, first women do the same, these two changes to the last, and the rest follow.

The tune of *The Triumph* is still found in collections of dance music, but it is only here and there in country places that it can be performed. I saw some old villagers of sixty and seventy years of age dance it last Christmas,

but no young people knew anything about it. It is a slight, easy, but graceful dance—graceful when not danced by old gaffers and grannies.

Our English country dances were carried abroad, and became popular there. "The Italians," writes Horace Walpole from Florence in 1740, "are fond to a degree of our country dances: *Cold and Raw* they only know by the tune; *Blouzy-bella* is almost Italian, and *Buttered Peas* is *Pizzelli al buro*."

Indeed, as early as 1669, when the Grand Duke of Tuscany visited England, he was highly taken with the English dances, and probably on his

return to Florence introduced them there. Count Lorenzo Magalotti, who attended him on his visit, says that he and the duke attended dancing-schools, "frequented by unmarried and married ladies, who are instructed by the master, and practise with much gracefulness and agility various dances after the English fashion. Dancing is a very common and favourite amusement of the ladies in this country; every evening there are entertainments at different places in the city, at which many ladies and citizens' wives are present, they going to them alone, as they do to the rooms of the dancing-masters, at which there are frequently upwards of forty or fifty ladies. His Highness had an opportunity of seeing several dances in the English style, exceedingly well regulated, and executed in the smartest and genteelest manner by very young



ladies, whose beauty and gracefulness were shown off to perfection in this exercise." And again, "he went out to Highgate to see a children's ball, which, being conducted according to the English custom, afforded great pleasure to his Highness, both from the numbers, the manner, and the gracefulness of the dancers."

When our English country dances were carried abroad,—notably to Germany and France,—the tunes to which they were danced were carried with them, were there appropriated, and as these dances died out in their native home, and with them their proper melodies, the tunes have in several instances come back to us from the continent, as German or French airs.

Very probably one reason of the disapproval which country dancing has encountered arises from the fact that it allows no opportunities of conversation, and consequently of flirtation, as the partners stand opposite each other, and in the figures take part with other performers quite as much as with their own proper *vis-à-vis*. But then is a dance arranged simply to enable a young pair to clasp each other and whisper into each other's ears? Are art, beauty, pleasure to the spectators to be left out of count altogether? The wall-fruit are deserving of commiseration, for they now see nothing that can gratify the eye in a ball-room; the waltz has been like the Norwegian rat—it has driven the native out altogether, and the native dance and the native rat were the more beautiful of the two.

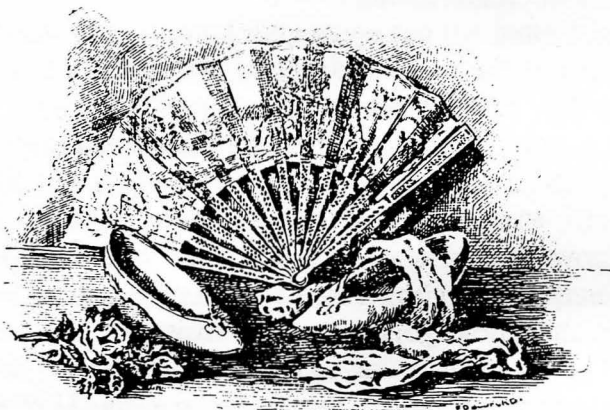
It is not often we get a graceful dance on the stage either. Country dancing is banished thence also; distorted antics that are without grace, and of scanty decency, have supplanted it.

It seems incredible that what was regarded as a necessary acquisition of every lady and gentleman sixty or seventy years ago should have gone, and gone utterly—so utterly that probably dancing-masters of the present day would not know how to teach the old country dances. In *The Complete System of Country Dancing*, by Thomas Wilson, published about 1821 (there is no date on the title-page), the author insists on this being the national dance of the English, of its being in constant practice, of its being a general favourite "in every city and town throughout the United Kingdom;" as constituting "the principal amusement with the greater part of the inhabitants of this country." Not only so, but the English country dance was carried to all the foreign European Courts, where it "was very popular, and became the

most favourite species of dancing;" and yet it is gone—gone utterly.

The minuet was, no doubt, a tedious and over-formal dance; it was only tolerable when those engaged wore hoops and powder and knee-breeches; but the English country dance is not stiff at all, and only so far formal as all complications of figures must be formal. It is at the same time infinitely elastic, for it allows for expansion or contraction by the addition or subtraction of figures. There are about a hundred figures in all, and these can be changed in place like the pieces of glass in a kaleidoscope.

Why, in this age of revivals, when we fill our rooms with Chippendale furniture and rococo mirrors and inlaid Florentine cabinets, and use the subdued colours of our grandmothers, when our books are printed in old type with head and tail pieces of two centuries ago, when the edges are left in the rough—why should we allow the waltz, the foreign waltz, to monopolize our ball-rooms to the exclusion of all beautiful figure-dancing, and let an old English art disappear completely without an attempt to recover it? It will be in these delightful, graceful, old national dances that our girls will, like the daughter of Philipater in the *Spectator*, dance themselves into our esteem, as it is pretty sure that in the approved fashion of waltzing they will dance themselves out of it.



In Memory of
TED SANNELLA
1928-1995

for the joy he brought us

