

Dances which had once been popular

Our teacher for the Workshop was Alasdair Brown, based in Glasgow, and north east musician Neil Galloway provided the music. In the first session Alasdair focused on teaching dances which had once been popular. On being given this remit, he said that he had spoken to Margo Priestly, some dancers in Birmingham, his parents in York and members of the York SCD club to find out which RSCDS dances had been popular in the past. He had also looked at the Strathspey Server to find out which dances did not appear in dance programmes listed from across the world.

After a warm up, Alasdair divided the class into three couple sets as far as possible and then quickly recapped *Maxwell's Rant* (32 bar reel) from Book 18. In the four couple sets the fourth couple joined in by dancing in tandem with the third couple in the reels. This was followed by the teaching of *Ladies of Dingwall* (48 bar reel x 8) from MMM2. The following points of technique were covered:

- 1) Skliffing of feet in down the middle and up
- 2) The couple in third place having to turn very quickly to finish on the side lines after the change and set progression in promenade hold.
- 3) The first couple starting the left hand turn from the side lines.

The dance was danced through twice in three couple sets then dancers were asked to swap sides and dance twice more from their partner's position in order to discover the subtle differences.

Cauld Kail (16 bar strathspey followed by 16 bar reel) from Book 9 was then taught. One awkward part in the dance was identified: the rights and lefts are executed in four bars therefore when the first woman finishes the rights and lefts with a polite turn at the end of the strathspey and then has to begin the reel by passing partner by the left to enter the figure of eight on the opposite side this can be a little awkward. The following points of technique were covered:

- 1) When dancing rights and lefts look at the person when giving hands and don't hold on too long.
- 2) Skliffing of feet.
- 3) Eyes looking across in the four hands across.

Cauld Kail was danced three times through in three couple sets then dancers changed sides and danced again to discover the subtle differences.

The final dance of the first session was *Lady Susan Stewart's Reel* (32 bar reel) from Book 5. Alasdair emphasised that in the first 8 bars of the dance the first woman should anticipate the cast and that the second couple should step in when stepping up on bars 7 and 8. After everyone had danced the dance three times through, Alasdair stated that some dancers "dance TO places" but they should be encouraged to "phrase to dance". The first session was concluded with a cool down followed by lunch.

The afternoon session began with a warm up followed by dancing *Tribute to the Borders* (32 bar jig) from RSCDS leaflet dance 31 in three couple sets.

Miss Mary Douglas (48 bar jig) from Book 10 was then taught. Alasdair emphasised building momentum in bars 25 to 32.

Glasgow Centenary Dance Book

Alasdair then moved on to teach three dances from the Glasgow Centenary Dance book. The first dance taught was *The Atheneum* (32 bar strathspey x 3) which Alasdair devised. The following points were emphasised:

- 1) In bars 8 to 16 when dancing the Rose progression, after the half turn with two hands the dancers should sweep out for the cast away.
- 2) In bars 24 to 25 dancers should flow out of the circle into the setting.

Jordanhill (32 bar reel x 8) was then taught. This dance was also devised by Alasdair. The Girandole progression was taught in two couple sets before moving into three couple sets to walk through the rest of the dance. Alasdair emphasised that the dancing couple should finish the first half reel on the side lines before entering the second half reel.

The last dance of the day was the easier *Centenary Jig* (32 bar jig x 8) devised by Anne Thorn. Anne explained each part of the dance as follows:

1-8 Depicts the “1” in 100.

9-16 Depicts the “00” in 100.

17-24 Depicts dancing across the four corners of the world.

25-32 Reminds us of the circle of friendship.

After dancers had walked through the dance, Alasdair emphasised that there should be equal sized turns in bars 9-16 with the second and third couples dancing for four bars and the first couple finishing the first turn in the middle of the dance in second place. When the first couple had danced once through Alasdair reminded dancers of the need to form a circle with “Ws” to support other dancers especially if the floor was slippery.

The afternoon session finished with a cool down followed by a vote of thanks to the teacher, musician and TAS committee for their contribution to making it an enjoyable but thought provoking day.

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