



Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust

NEWSLETTER SUMMER 1997

RETURNING TO OUR "ROOTS"

The first Annual General Meeting of the Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust will be held on Saturday, August 23, 1997 in the Lesser Hall of the Albert Hall, Stirling.

It will be a return to our roots for both the Board and many members - for without that first historic Scotland's Dances Conference held in the same hall in October 1994, the Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust might not have come into existence. The working party set up by the Scottish Arts Council after the Stirling Conference became the Trust which was Incorporated in November 1995.

AGMs, like anniversaries, seem like a good moment to review achievements and the Board of the STDT know that in less than two years we have, indeed, achieved a great deal.

We are, for instance, made daily aware that our task of researching, conserving, fostering and promoting ALL of Scotland's dance traditions, would have given Hercules pause for thought!

In a recent BBC radio interview Robbie Shepherd suggested that what the Trust had already revealed in our research programme was akin to lifting the lid of Pandora's box. The nuggets of information, the old dances that have already been filmed are surely only a hint of the treasures in store for us when we achieve a truly national research and archiving programme.

We are acutely aware that if our work of informing and encouraging traditional dance activity and the outcome of our researches is to find its way back into the community at large then someone has to teach the "teachers". Members of the Education and Research Committees of the Trust have been working in close co-operation with the Scottish Universities and colleges, most of which are now to include elements of Scottish dance in the curricula.

The Resource Centre Committee has been quietly getting on with the

job of assessing our real needs in terms of buildings and facilities. As our archive grows, and as our need to provide a central information point evolves - and the growing and evolving is going on faster than even we had forecast - so the need for storage and easy accessibility and communication becomes the more pressing.

It is probably quite normal for an organisation like ours to feel sometimes that we are "hoeing a row" unseen, and largely unappreciated. Indeed, we well know we have still a considerable way to go in making our intentions and our work known to everyone who loves this land and its real traditions. The Talks and Demonstration tour set up by our Events Committee allowed members of the Board to launch a dance awareness campaign - and the findings of those who took part in this were just as we had forecast - that we have SO much to do.

We are therefore gratified that the Scottish Arts Council (SAC) in its strategy for the next few years has singled out the Trust for special mention in the Traditional Dance field as an organisation worthy of

their continuing encouragement and support.

But the costs of what we must urgently achieve are huge - even our current undertakings far outstrip our original plans. We are earnestly seeking sponsorship and partnership funding from sources in addition to the SAC - so that we can earn Lottery funding.

The STDT Board looks to the members of the Trust to demonstrate your interest and your support by attending, if you possibly can, the Annual General Meeting, and the Board are particularly pleased that Joan Flett has accepted our invitation to be Guest Speaker at our first AGM luncheon.

The AGM programme is as follows:

- 10.30 am Arrivals and Coffee/Tea
- 11.00 am Business Meeting
- 12.30 pm Buffet Lunch followed by Guest Speaker, Joan Flett.
- 2.00 pm Dance for All: a chance for members to meet one another and try some of the lesser-known traditions.

We look forward to your company - and your participation!

THE ARBROATH SEAFEST

On Friday 15, Saturday 16 and Sunday 17 August, Arbroath is celebrating its maritime history, traditions and culture in its first SeaFest. Dance is to play an important role in the fun with the re-creation of a Fisher Wedding Parade.

In times past the fisherfolk would parade all the way out of town to the little kirk of St Vigeans to celebrate their marriages. As they went along they danced Lang Reels.

Lang Reels were a feature of fisher celebrations and Shemmet Reels an essential part of seeing the newly weds home to their new abode.

The organisers of the Arbroath SeaFest have involved the Trust in the planning of the dancing for the festivities and we urgently need help in re-creating a Lang Reel and a Shemmet Reel.

One reference we have found to a Lang Reel is in Peter F Anson's famous book of the 1940s entitled *Scots Fisherfolk*. In this he writes, "At Collieston, Aberdeenshire, the fisher weddings were marked by great hilarity. After a substantial banquet, all the guests made their way to the links at the end of Forvie Sands to the music of the fiddle. Here they dance the famous 'Lang Reel o' Collieston'. It was a long reel in every sense." Peter Anson then goes on to quote a report from a Banffshire Journal of the 1860s - "To see the lang reel danced on the greensward under the blue canopy of heaven on a sweet afternoon in summer, is a treat worth going many miles to enjoy. Not only would the eye enjoy a rare feast, but what with the sweet music of the violin, the merry song of the lark in mid-heaven right overhead, the ringing guffaws of the juvenile spectators, the clapping of hands, and the loud hoochs and whoops of the dancing fishermen, all commingling and co-mingled with the murmur of the billows breaking among the rocks, the ear would have a banquet of non-ordinary kind nor of every-day occurrence."

BUT WHAT WERE THEY DANCING? WHAT TUNES WERE BEING PLAYED? WHO LED THE DANCE? The dance researcher today itches to shake that information out of the writer no matter how bonny the greensward or the breaking billows!

If you know of anyone with a memory of the form the Lang Reels and the Shemmet Reels took in the fishing ports then please do contact us.

It would be good to depict as accurately as possible two forms of dance that used to be in common use.

"GIE IT A GUID DUNT" Freeland Barbour

I remember what must have been about my first performance in public as a dance musician. It was at a barn dance in Strathtay, in a building, not unlike a Dutch barn, with the wind whistling across the floor and the salt licks for the cattle along the wall behind the "bandstand".

The band was The Four Squares from Aberfeldy and they invited me to sit in with them for a dance or two. This custom of "sitting in" young musicians with an experienced band has long been common amongst dance musicians in Scotland and is a vital part of any dance musicians' apprenticeship, quite apart from being a great thrill for the young player concerned.

One of the accordionists in the band that night was the late Douglas MacDonald from Aberfeldy. Douglas held his Scottish music very dear and was a man for whom I came to have great respect. On that particular night, before we played, Douglas was giving me the benefit of his wisdom, and what with butterflies in my stomach and the general hullabaloo, I was finding it all ever so slightly overwhelming. However, after Douglas had finished, one of the other band members drew me aside and muttered, "Dinnae pay any attention, son - airse doon, heid up, and gie it a guid dunt."

That advice I suspect has been given out in many forms by many folk, but I never forgot it, and it's all there is to it. Sit down (optional, but you'll get a bit tired if you stand for four hours), head up and watch the dancers and don't be afraid to hit hard at the right point. All good dance music is about rhythm, drive and accents of melody and accompaniment to act as a trigger and enhancement to the feet and bodies of the dancers.

We in Scotland do seem to have particularly rhythmic music and dance. A people's music and dance seems to depend very much on their surroundings and I think it's very

important for anyone coming to Scottish dance music for the first time, to try and learn something of the country from which all this has sprung.

The Evolution of Dance Music

If we take a look at the evolution of Scottish music for dance it is difficult, for want of written records, to be definite about early times.

Solo dance traditions and the music that goes with them have developed alongside and intermingled with those of group dancing and music. We are on surer historical ground by the time we come to the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

This was the heyday of Scottish fiddle music - the time that gave us the musical legacy of William Marshall and Neil Gow and in Gow's case the beginnings of the Scottish dance band. He performed on fiddle accompanied by his brother Donald on the 'cello, and we know one thing for certain about his performance - he certainly gave it a good "dunt"! A fair bit has been written about the "driven bow" style of Gow's playing - although I sometimes wonder what his tone was like.

Marshall perhaps performed with more finesse although not necessarily with any less degree of attack. He declared he didn't write music for bunglers, and with Marshall particularly you find a traditional musician stretching boundaries through his own wide interests and technical accomplishments.

Probably the next big impact on our native music came from the Continent with the arrival of the fixed pitch free reed instruments, the concertina, flutinga, melodeon and later the accordion. The arrival of these instruments coincided with the introduction, also from the Continent, of a variety of mainly couple dances. These were assimilated into the Scottish tradition and were adapted to suit Scottish music to the point where they were perceived by Scots to be Scottish.

Accordions to the fore

The accordion in time became the dominant instrument partly because it was loud, partly because it allowed the player to provide both melody and accompaniment and because it was relatively versatile. The accordion could, therefore, be the "fulcrum" of a band round which the other instruments were grouped.

With the advent of sound recording, the discs by William Hannah, the Wyper Brothers and Jimmy Shand, had a huge effect on Scottish dance music culminating in the archetypal Scottish dance band of the fifties as personified by the Shand band of two accordions, fiddle, piano, bass and drums. With the possible exception of the fiddle, these instruments are tonally incisive and the poor fiddler has been struggling ever since in this particular Scottish music incarnation.

Scotland was Scottish dancing mad in the fifties, but as well as their Scottish dances the crowds were keen to try the ballroom and even the Latin American repertoire - and the bands had to be able to cope. It was the fiddler who, by and large, was the one to take up another instrument - the sax or clarinet maybe - to provide the right "colour" for the dance.

Many would contend that the dance music of Scotland was fairly stagnant from the mid-sixties till relatively recent times. Many people were still dancing Scottish dances but there was no forward impetus for the music.

A "Reel" Swing

In recent years, however, there has been an upsurge of interest in what has become known as ceilidh dancing in the cities and amongst the younger folk. This has undoubtedly led to a freshness and enthusiasm in both music and dance but also to a lack of subtlety and, in some quarters, a lack of appreciation of where it has all stemmed from.

The old-fashioned Scottish dance musicians accuse the new element of

lack of technical ability to play Scottish music in all its "dotted" glory, and the "new element" accuses the old brigade (some of whom are in fact quite young) of a lack of vitality and imagination. There's an element of truth on both sides. It seems to me that the new enthusiasts have a lot to offer and once the new dancers progress and start to appreciate the structure of the old dances and music, they will demand a more solid approach to tempo and the style of music for the dance.

There are one or two points that the would-be traditional dance musician should bear in mind when embarking on a career of playing for dancing. The first thing is to provide rhythmic music to suit the particular dance and the wishes of the dancers.

Choice of the right material is crucial. Liaison with the dancers is important and being able to watch them as you play will ensure that the music and dance come together.

The structure of each melody will, in part, dictate the rhythm and style in which you play it, so it doesn't necessarily work just to play a tune you happen to like, if that tune has phrasing that is not in tandem with the body movements of the dance. An on-the-beat steady rock-style rhythm seldom works for Scottish dance since it ignores the cadences and subtleties of the phrasing of the tune and that "swing" (technical term!) that older dancers get from the dotted rhythms of so much Scottish music.

Lastly, and most important of all, the musician must enjoy it and transmit that enjoyment and the vitality of the music to the dancers.

The late, great Ronnie Cooper from Shetland enjoyed his dance music as much as anyone I've ever met. When Ronnie and his buddies got going, the music (not the tempo) and the dancers "took off".

One particular night Ronnie was out with the band playing accordion. It had been a long night and he was feeling the pace. They were in the

middle of a waltz when his head went down and he fell fast asleep on top of the box. This resulted in some confusion in the band and on the dance floor. Another band member gave Ronnie a kick which woke him up. Momentarily confused he broke into his natural habitat which was the reel ... and in an instant the dancers and the musicians went with him!

What a musician! What dancers! (This article has been edited from the paper which Freeland Barbour gave at the Scottish Arts Council's Scottish Traditions of Dance Conference in Stirling in 1994. The sentiment is perhaps even more relevant today given the surge in popularity of Scottish dancing and the Trust is aware of a need to help musicians who want to play for dancing. What do you think?)

Scottish Dancing for All - Linlithgow **John D Carswell**

From my garden I have a good view across the Loch to the handsome ruin of Linlithgow Palace with its impressive stone walls but sadly no roof or facilities! However it has great atmosphere and a few years ago I was delighted to be involved in arranging several dances for our local Club in the Great Hall. The band looked marvellous sitting in the fireplace! but the Hall was not ideal being long and narrow and with nowhere to sit.

Then we heard that the Queen was coming and the gravel and poor grass of the Courtyard was to be replaced with paving. What an opportunity and how marvellous to have hundreds of people dancing round the central fountain! It was then only a short step to Linlithgow Festival Trust which is a registered charity and was set up to encourage the Arts and Tourism in Linlithgow. I offered my services and set up Scottish Dancing for All in a small way in 1980 and it has been getting a little bigger, and better I hope, every year since: on the first night last year 400 people turned up!

I know several towns that have popular weekly dances in the summer but I feel they are for the experts that know the programme in advance. I try

to do the impossible and cater for everyone and have a wide-ranging programme, from a simple children's polka to the latest five couple forty-eight bar jig and everything in between including ceilidh, country, reeling, Highland and round the room. I also try to keep it as Scottish as possible and not borrow too much from elsewhere. For example, I have not had Russian Ballet on the programme yet! The surface of the stone paving is improving but it is still very hard work dancing on it and dances like the Duke of Perth and waltzes are best kept for inside. All dances, except the Gay Gordons, are called or demonstrated in some way - not everyone speaks English or has danced before. Bands must obviously be able to play anything and get on with the MC.

People come from far and wide including a few from Scotland but we have now had visitors from most parts of the world including places like Nepal, Korea etc. I am also very pleased to have several groups of disabled folk coming to watch or join in.

At the end of August it is getting a bit cold and dark for dancing outside so we now use the large sports hall of the Low Port Centre. Dancing inside and outside really highlights the age differences: the older dancers prefer to be inside but the young people that come just love to be outside however dark, or hard the paving!

I try to include a short display or demonstration of dancing or music each evening.

I am grateful to have the support of The Linlithgow Festival Trust, Linlithgow Scottish Country Dance Club and an extremely generous donation of shortbread from Walkers.

I would like to thank The Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust for the opportunity to tell you about dancing in Linlithgow and wish it every success in the future. If you are looking for a Dance Centre I know just the place/palace!

(Note from the Editor: Perhaps other members would like to tell us about their dance activities and encourage others to join in. Please write to the Trust at 54 Blackfriars Street, Edinburgh EH1 1NE and we'll try to include as many as possible in the next issue.)



EVENTS

Dancing at Linlithgow Palace:

Wednesdays at 7.30pm, July 30, August 6, 13, 20, 27;

Linlithgow Palace Courtyard or Low Port Centre; Adults £3, Students £1.50, season ticket £10/£5; Under 12's free.

Tea and Walkers shortbread included.

Stirling University Summer Schools:

4-7 July - Scottish Country Dancing with Jessie Stuart; 8-11 July - Old Time Dancing with Jessie Stuart; with live music from Freeland Barbour and David Cunningham Jr.

27 July - 1 August - Highland Dancing with Gillin Anderson.

Summer School Programme and Short Courses with Credit: Music and Dance, including Highland, Old Time and Scottish Country Dancing.

Further details from Margery Stirling, Summer School Office, Airthrey Castle Annexe, University of Stirling, Scotland FK9 4LA. Telephone: +44 (0)1786 467951, Fax: +44 (0)1786 463398. E-mail: m.f.stirling@stirling.ac.uk

Dolmetsch Historical Dance Society:

29th Summer School 25 July to 1 August. The first refinement - social dance of the Regency period (1800 - 1830).

Classes and workshops for all levels of expertise plus lectures, concerts and informal dancing in the evenings.

Further information from D.H.D.S. Summer School Administrator, 17 Well Lane, Stock, Ingatestone, Essex, CM4 9LT.

Abroath SeaFest: 15-17 August

(see article on page 2) Further information is available from: Jeudi Hunter, Angus Council, Telephone: 01674-664011.

STDT AGM: Saturday 23 August - join us for our very first AGM at 10.30 for 11 am in the Albert Hall, Stirling. (see page 1 for further details)

STDT Country Dancing and Early Dancing Share-day: Saturday 6 September, with tutors Jackie Tully-Jackson and Johan MacLean; venue to be arranged.

All dancers are welcome, particularly Country Dancers and Early Dancers who would like to learn more about each other's tradition. To be sure of a place, please contact Jennifer Swanson on Telephone/Fax: 0131-558 8737 or write to the Trust at 54 Blackfriars Street, Edinburgh EH1 1NE.

Reading Clog and Step Dance Festival: Saturday 25 October, Maidenhead

A choice of 10 workshops includes Miss Gayton's Hornpipe (a dance collected by Tom and Joan Flett) taught by Lesley Gower and Cape Breton Step Dancing taught by Jo Harmer. An enjoyable day includes guest performances and evening barn dance. For more information contact: L Gowers, Tel. 0118-987 4510.

For details of **Highland Games competitions** throughout the summer, contact:

Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing, Director of Administration, Heritage House, 32 Grange Loan, EH9 2NR Telephone: 013168-3965 Fax: 0131 662-0404 and Scottish Official Highland Dancing Association, Pauline Knox, Secretary, 36 High Street, Dunbar EH42 1JH Telephone: 01368-863027.

For details of the **Royal Scottish Country Dancing Society Summer School** at St Andrews, contact Gill Parker, RSCDS, 12 Coates Crescent, Edinburgh EH3 Telephone: 0131 225-3854

Scottish Arts Council Dance in Education Conference, 18-19 November 1997. For further information contact Patricia Eckersley, Dance Officer, Scottish Arts Council, 12 Manor Place, Edinburgh EH3 7DD, Telephone: 0131-226 6051.

NOTICE BOARD

The copy date for the next newsletter is 29 August 1997 for publication at the end of September.

Please keep us informed of your news, views and activities. Write to the Trust at 54 Blackfriars Street, Edinburgh EH1 1NE. Telephone/Fax: +44 (0)131-558 8737.