



Devising Social Programmes to Keep your Musicians Happy

by Lydia Hedge

At a plenary session at the TAC Summer School this year (2012), the subject of dance programmes was discussed. I agreed to do an informal survey of musicians to try to find some good choices for programme devisers.

The main questions I asked were: *What dances would be good for openers? In other words, which dances have tunes that are not overly complex to have at the start of an evening program? Which would be good just before a break? And, alternatively, what dances would you suggest are NEVER put at the beginning of a programme? or at the end of a section, just before a break?*

I asked for lists of the dances they would recommend.

Andy Imbrie wrote a similar article for TACTalk some years ago. His more general article follows this one.

The most important point most musicians mentioned was how useful it is for the programme deviser to discuss his/her draft programme with the musician(s) who will be playing it. This gives the musician (who often is a dancer, even a SCD teacher) the opportunity to give advice, make recommendations, tell you about their favourite tunes.

The other points on which there was consensus were that devisers need to avoid dances with busy music (many notes) at the beginning of a programme – dancers also need something without too much complexity and mostly skip change. And, at the end of a set or a programme, a familiar dance (not a SET – to avoid people having to sit out) with uplifting music to finish off on a musical high.

a) Best dances to have at the start of a dance or after a break

As you would expect, this list contains mostly jigs without any pas de basque. One reel that surprised me was Maxwell's Rant. I am not a musician, so I didn't realise that the tune for that dance is quite straightforward to play. It would depend on the dancers, but I would not generally put a dance with cross-over reels at the start of a programme.

The dances most often listed in this group were *Hoop-er's Jig*, *Maxwell's Rant*, *Machine Without Horses*, *The Hollin Buss* and *Jubilee Jig*. Many others were offered. I have the list if anyone wants it.

b) Best dances to finish – either before a break or at the end of the programme

Again, no major surprises here – a rousing, rip-roaring reel with a circle, if possible!!

The musicians are warmed up by then, the programme has been building to a climax and the dancers are ready for something exciting.

The most popular dances listed here were: *The De'il Among the Tailors*, *The Reel of the Royal Scots*, *The Montgomeries' Rant* and *Cadgers in the Canongate*. Again, I have a long list of other suggestions.

Many thanks to the musicians who took the time to reply and help me with this information.



Dance Program Selection from the Musician's Point of View

By Andy Imbrie revised 8-10-2012

As both a dancer and a musician, it has been my experience that the type and order of dances on a program can make a significant difference in the overall enjoyment and excitement level of a dance evening. Of course there are many factors to be considered when planning a dance program, including program length, difficulty, variety of figures,

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Program Selection

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familiarity, and so on. I would suggest that the evening's music is no less important a consideration and that the music for each dance should play an important role in the selection and placement of dances on a program.

Based on this premise, what follows is a list of recommendations which program devisors may wish to consider when planning a dance evening. However, before providing these recommendations, a few definitions are required.

Most dances have a suggested or signature tune that goes with the dance. Many bands will use this tune for the first (and often last) rounds of the dance, and choose other similar tunes to play as alternates: this is called an "arrangement" for that dance. Most dances can be categorized by their signature tunes as follows: **"Driving Reels"**: musically exciting reels with lots of notes (e.g. Mrs. McLeod, De'il Amang the Tailors, Montgomerie's Rant)

"Quarter Note Reels": (e.g. Bratach Bana, Let's Have a Ceilidh, Peat Fire Flame, Irish Rover)

"Moderate Reels": neither driving nor quarter note reels (e.g. Corn Rigs, Red House)

"Strong Strathspeys": strong, driving strathspeys (e.g. Monymusk, John McAlpin, Sauchie Haugh, Dalkieth's Strathspey)

"Lyrical Strathspeys": song tune or slow air derived strathspeys (e.g. Miss Gibson, Sean Triubhas Willichan, Saint John River)

"Highland Strathspeys": Highland dance or Cape Breton style; not suitable for most SCD unless there are Highland steps (e.g. Glasgow Highlanders)

"Moderate Strathspeys": (e.g. Miss Milligan's Strathspey)

Jigs can also be divided into categories, but this is less important for the purposes of program planning.

So, armed with these definitions, the following are some suggested guidelines for considering music in program planning:

Most importantly, consult with your band on the program; ask your band leader to participate in the planning process.

- The breaks in your program should be organized so

that there are no more than 7 dances in a set (e.g. 10-14 dances: 2 sets, 1 break, 15-20 dances: 3 sets, 2 breaks). A typical 15 dance program would have 5 dances in each set (5-5-5); often an 18 dance program is organized 6-7-5 (but 6 in each set is also done).

- End each set with a "Driving Reel"; if possible, these should be your band's favorite show-stopping arrangements! Do not end sets with strathspeys. It is sometimes acceptable to end a set with a jig, but this is usually a musical letdown, and I would advise against it. In my opinion, the very last dance of the evening must be a driving, show-stopping reel.

- Start the first set with a jig (this is always easier for the musicians to warm up with and usually easier for the dancers as well).

- Start the second and third sets with a jig if possible. It is acceptable to start the second or third set with a reel, but usually not both. Do not start sets with a strathspey.

- The entire program should be balanced in terms of number of jigs, reels, and strathspeys; try to have 1/3 of the program for each. Do not have more jigs than reels on a program; however it is acceptable (even encouraged) to have more strathspeys than reels or jigs. For example, a typical 15 dance program might contain 5 reels, 4 jigs, and 6 strathspeys arranged as: J,S,J,S,R then J,S,R,S,R, then J,S,R,S,R.

- Do not place two dances of the same type (i.e. J, S, R) together unless separated by one of the breaks.

- Allow no more than one "Quarter Note Reel" on the program.

- Try to have one "Lyrical Strathspey" on the program, but no more than two.

- If there are uneven numbers of dances in each set, the last set should be shortest. Similarly if there are shorter dances on the program (e.g. 3x through or 4x through dances), they work best nearer the end of the evening. Similarly, long dances (i.e. 8X40 or 8X48) work best in the first set.

I hope this set of guidelines will prove useful to the dance program devisors. Of course, nothing is set in stone – but I have found by long experience that if these guidelines are followed, the musical experience of the evening is significantly enhanced.



What's in a tune?

By Ron Wallace

This article is a response to a query about signature (original) tune use by band leaders or class musicians. A signature tune is usually one

attached to a dance at birth that helps give a dance its identity. We all bring our own experiences forward when considering the use of these tunes. I was trained to use signature tunes whenever possible and for the most part that hasn't been a problem. A few reasons come to mind for not using the signature tunes: 1) not available, 2) not playable, 3) sounds bad, 4) some other tune is more popular in your community for a specific dance or 5) special event.

Let's address this from three different perspectives; that of bandleader, teacher, and dancer.

From a bandleader point of view there are so many - some say too many - dances that it is quite a challenge to keep up. This challenge, however, is enjoyed by many bandleaders worldwide. With the great stacks of tunes available and the number of sets a bandleader has already arranged, the likelihood of having something ready to go along with a new signature tune is very likely, thereby reducing the effort of producing completely new sets for every new dance. By using the signature tune, we have the opportunity to discover new music as well as to visit old friends. For some of us, those friends are very dear!

The roadmap a bandleader/music arranger chooses is their own. For a long period of time, eight times through dances often would have sets with the tunes arranged 1 2 3 4 2 3 4 1 or 11 22 33 11. Now, it is quite common for bands to end a set with tunes other than the signature tune arranged 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8. Sometimes the signature tune is not used at all. The popular roadmap that I would like to promote here is starting and ending with the signature tune. This requires a greater effort for the bandleader as the tune choices need to comfortably get you back to the

signature tune. A professional fiddler friend considers a set for a specific dance a journey starting at home, then, after various travels, returning home. That moment of returning to the signature tune is usually a moment of great comfort/joy to experienced dancers who have grown up in their Scottish Country Dance experience having that as the norm. If the journey brings you back home, it builds a stronger relationship between tune and dance. It is theme and reprise. It works, it is extremely satisfying.

From a teacher point of view, having the tune in mind when preparing to teach a dance allows for a deeper relationship between music and dance, but it does not necessarily have to be a signature tune. Old favorites can readily be drawn out of the hat, yet new tunes with new dances can heighten the experience of learning and teaching. Preparing social dance programs is the time when signature tune knowledge can make a big difference in constructing a well-balanced program in both variety of dances and music genre. Here is where you would consult your bandleader to help plan a program. Make sure you have an understanding of signature tune use. Most teachers have strong feelings about the use of signature tunes, as TACSound can attest.

As teacher and bandleader at home, our musicians play the signature tunes. When teaching away from home, I supply them to the musicians who want it and give other musicians cart blanche. Almost all musicians I have worked with prefer to use original tunes, often to see what's out there! This requires much more preparation on the part of the musicians. Without the original tunes, the classes can be equally successful from the dancer point of view. Usually they won't know, until taught, what the original tune is and the impact it might have. To be fair, it is best to plan one to two dances per hour of teaching and changes in the lesson plan should allow the musician to play the same music. A musician or class needn't know there has been a change in dance choice.

From a dancer point of view, familiar is good and new is exciting too! Using new tunes adds variety to the class and helps in creating

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an interest in the music for Scottish Country Dance. Being able to associate signature tunes with the dance helps the auditory memory feed the muscles. This is much the same as responding with the words to a song shortly after it starts. Imagine going to see your favorite Broadway musical with all new music. It might be brilliant, but a great part of what made the musical your favorite was the recognizable music!

Flowers of Edinburgh and Mairi's Wedding are recognized as the signature tunes to the dances with the same names because bands have played those signature tunes until we have acknowledged the association. Hearing just the opening few bars can easily lift the spirits and bring smiles of anticipation. Why not give modern dances the same opportunity!

When all is said and done, it is the music that lingers and helps hold the memory of the dance. When we recognize a tune, it sends pleasure signals throughout our bodies. When we anticipate the tune, then it is played, it intensifies the pleasure. But, when not played, it can leave one with great disappointment as though the dance is just not complete.

For those who do not associate tunes with specific dances, this is a non-issue. For those who do, it is quite an issue. Is there a reason to support new compositions? New dances? New recordings? Yes! Mix it up! Teachers and musicians - keep adding new material along with the chestnuts. See what's out there, but don't forget the hidden gems in the RSCDS collections!

From the Chair

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and I were overwhelmed by your kindness... what a dancing family is really about. Once again the holiday season is closely approaching. Pat and I have just returned from Scotland and would like to wish you and yours "Happy Holidays" and "All the Best" to you and your family in 2013.

Happy Dancing!



The Changing Face of Tutoring

By Geoffrey Selling

What has not changed in the RSCDS world is just how much fun Scottish country dancing is but just about everything is different and in many ways. These changes will affect who tutors, how they tutor and what the essential lessons are. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Back in "early days" when Scottish country dancing was getting a foothold in North America, a relatively small group of tutors did most of the teacher training. These almost venerated individuals (think of mainstays like John Middleton and June Shore!) were and are responsible for many of today's more experienced teachers. Each part of the continent had its elders who guided would-be teachers through the process. Many of these early tutors had been trained in Scotland themselves, and later presented candidates to their own tutors, who had now become examiners. Tutoring was a creative combination of passing on the routines and procedures that their own tutors had taught them (sometimes decades before) and throwing in all kinds of handy hints that their own teaching experience had garnered for them. There was no textbook. *Won't You Join the Dance*, *Miss Milligan's* handy booklet, can hardly be considered a text. It was more of a quick little pocket reference. There wasn't much of a syllabus and each tutor passed on what he or she thought were the salient elements of good Scottish dance instruction. There was considerable variability and this sometimes caused havoc for candidates during the exam when they'd been prepared one way, only to have an examiner who expected something else. The examination process itself was not standardized either in those days. Though many examiners believed that they all spoke in one voice, many of us who tutored knew that not to be the case. I remember having a candidate fail for

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