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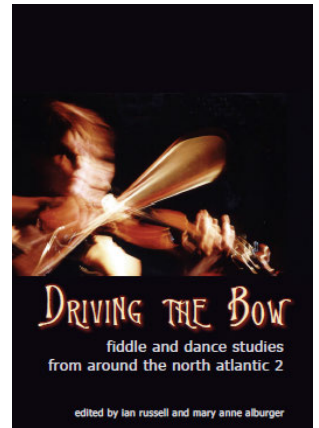
Driving the Bow

Fiddle and Dance Studies from around the North Atlantic 2

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About the author:

Catherine A. Shoupe is Professor of Anthropology at Saint Mary's College, a liberal arts college for women at Notre Dame, Indiana, USA. She has conducted long-term fieldwork in the county of Fife, Scotland, and surrounding regions. Her research and publications focus on the performance, social context, and aesthetics of traditional social dance and music in Lowland Scotland, and on Anglo-American traditions in architecture and crafts.

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The ‘problem’ with Scottish dance music: two paradigms

CATHERINE A. SHOUBE

Introduction

Traditional Scottish dance music is a socially and politically contested category in Scottish culture: it elicits reactions ranging from enthusiastic approbation to genial tolerance, apathetic indifference, chilly condescension, and outright hostility. While a full analysis of the conflicting attitudes towards Scottish dance music needs to consider historical, social, and political circumstances,¹ here I want to examine one cultural dynamic that enlightens the meaning of the controversy: that is, the competing aesthetics of instrumental music played for dancing as opposed to music played for listening. The opposite reactions of delight or disdain are informed by fundamental differences between these competing aesthetics. These in turn serve wider social and cultural debates that stem from the position of dance music as an icon of cultural identity, both at home and among the many diaspora communities of expatriate Scots around the world, a point to which I will return at the end of the article. Both claim Scottish identity, but differ in their aesthetics, their political, economic, and social base, and their place in an international or world music scene.

Traditional instrumental music in Scotland is primarily dance music – reels, jigs, strathspeys, hornpipes, waltzes, schottisches, marches, two-steps, polkas. This diverse tradition has developed in two distinct streams in the twentieth century: music played for dancing and music played for listening. Judgments about the worth of dance music are radically different when informed by the perspective of dance participants as compared with other constituencies such as audiences at clubs, festivals, or concerts, or listeners who purchase CDs or download music from the internet. Dancers and listeners hear music differently. Among dancers, Scottish dance music is mostly met with enthusiasm and approval. From the perspective of the non-dancing world, however, there are various problems associated with Scottish dance music that fuel the kind of negative reactions detailed above.

In this analysis, Scottish dance music constitutes a pragmatic ‘problem’ for musicians because the requirements of social dance place constraints on musical performance in significant ways.² As dancers often say, ‘the music tells you what to do’. If the music is not played in a way that enables the message to be properly and

reliably conveyed, dancers are unable to dance ‘to the music’ and become dissatisfied with the musicians. Musicians who choose to play music for dancing recognize the constraints within which they must work, but these constraints hinder their efforts to obtain a hearing for the music beyond a dance context. Playing music for listening requires quite different strategies to attract and maintain an audience, and when dance music is played in ways that satisfy listening audiences, bands more readily gain commercial success. Thus we have two worlds of music-making – for dancing and for listening – which rarely intersect.

Music for Dancing

Social dancing in Scotland is primarily partner dancing, and falls into two main categories: set dances and couple dances. Set dances are performed in ‘sets’ or groups of couples who perform a number of figures (series of steps and/or movements) in a given pattern.³ Country dances of seventeenth and eighteenth century origin usually take a ‘longways set’ formation, that is, parallel lines of dancers with women on one side and men on the other, partners facing one another to start. These dances are progressive in that the couple at the top of the set has moved down one position at the end of the figures, and starts dancing the figures again in ‘second’ position. Each couple takes a turn at being top couple through the normal progress of the dance. Scottish country dances have become standardized in four-couple sets.

(top of	O	O	O	O	women
the set)	X	X	X	X	men

In the nineteenth century, square sets were introduced as quadrilles became popular. Also comprised of four couples, each pair stands on the side of a square, facing inward to start, women to the man’s right. Again, a series of figures are danced, normally by each couple in succession, though the sequence of patterns may vary somewhat.

1				
2		4		
3				

Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century variations introduced other set patterns such as pairs, trios, and circles. These mimicked the around-the-room formation of the couple-based ballroom dances that gained popularity from this time, resulting in progressive sets for pairs or trios, and circle mixers. Both longways set country dances and other forms are danced in a variety of social contexts at the present time – at weddings and parties, and at specialized clubs and classes.

The second type, ballroom-style around-the-room couple dances, is derived from nineteenth- and early twentieth-century dances such as the waltz, polka, schottische, two-step, and foxtrot. These dances produced many variants, especially

in early twentieth century 'old-time' dancing. Most of these dances are 'sequence' dances, that is, a series of figures performed in synchrony by all the dancing couples, who move counterclockwise around the dance floor. This kind of dancing has remained popular among groups of enthusiasts up to the present and forms a distinct category of social dance alongside standard international ballroom dances such as the quickstep, foxtrot, modern waltz, and various Latin-American dances.⁴

In order to elucidate what I characterize as the 'problem' with Scottish dance music, I shall discuss four key features associated with playing music for either type of social dancing that dancers need as a foundation for the dance kinaesthetics, and that intimately link the aesthetics of the music with the needs of the dancers. I will then examine those same features in music played for listening, showing how differences in the aesthetics have developed in response to the needs of listeners as opposed to dancers.

Speed

In the twentieth century, the speed of Scottish country dance music has largely been determined by the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society (RSCDS). The Society, founded in 1923 and gaining the title Royal in 1951 in recognition of its contributions, has been a powerful force for the preservation and revival of country dances and the internationalization of the dance style.⁵ What began as a rescue effort in the face of a perceived encroachment by international popular dance styles in the early years of the century, grew into an enormously popular revival in the 1940s and 1950s in Scotland. At the same time, communities of expatriate Scots in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, the Middle East, India, and the United States took up Scottish country dancing with enthusiasm, creating an international movement that has spread to all parts of the globe. The International Summer School in St Andrews, Scotland, held annually during July and August, draws participants from Japan, the United States, and Europe as well as the Scottish diaspora, and today, Scottish dance bands are hired to play for dances all across the world.

The RSCDS encourages all musicians to adhere to its standards, and wields considerable control over bands who play for, or record, dances under the Society's auspices. Their standards also influence dancers' expectations, as they are taught in officially-sanctioned classes. The tempos set by the Scottish Country Dance Society in the 1920s were 116 bpm (beats per minute) for the quick-time, duple-meter reels (2/4) and jigs (6/8) and 84 bpm for the slower strathspeys in 4/4 meter.⁶ Today, the quick-time speed is somewhat slower, with reels or jigs played at 108 bpm, and strathspeys at a little more than half that speed.

The Society has always emphasized that music be played at a suitable tempo for the steps required in the dance: 'The music is the stimulus of the dance'.⁷ For dancers, the benefit of the slow speed is that it provides ample time to perform complicated steps. More emphasis in recent times on precise footwork in quick-time dance may help to explain the shift in speed. In addition, the manner of dancing

the strathspey has become slower over time, facilitating a graceful and elegant style with controlled, smooth stepping.⁸

Two kinds of steps are regularly used in Scottish country dances: setting steps, executed in place, and travelling steps, used to move the dancer through space. In quick-time country dances, the setting step is called the *pas de basque* and contains three steps per bar of music: leap (1), step (2), step (3), pause (4). Dancers are expected to dance on the balls of the feet, heels slightly raised off the floor. Feet are placed at a 45 degree angle, heels together. Normally the step is executed first to the right and then to the left:

leap onto R, step L in front of R instep, step back onto R, pause;
leap onto L, step R in front of L instep, step back onto L, pause.

The travelling step is called the skip-change step and contains four even steps performed with alternate feet starting: hop, step, close, step.

hop on L, step forward on R, close L behind R heel in 3rd position, step forward on R
swing L through and forward to start next sequence
hop on R, step forward on L, close R behind L heel in 3rd position, step forward on L
swing R through and forward to start sequence again

For the strathspey, both setting and travelling steps have a similar pattern, differing only in the direction of movement. The strathspey setting step moves side to side, feet kept at a 45 degree angle:

step R to right, close L to R, step R to right, hop on R while lifting L behind R calf;
step L to left, close R to L, step L to left, hop on L while lifting R behind L calf

The strathspey travelling step moves the dancer forward in a similar pattern:

step R forward, close L behind R heel, step R forward, hop on R and swing L forward;
step L forward, close R behind L heel, step L forward, hop on L and swing R forward

Similarly, Scottish couple dances that are based on ballroom steps such as waltzes, schottisches, and polkas require three or four steps per bar, depending on whether the meter is 3/4 or 2/4 or 4/4. Waltzes are danced in 3/4 time with an emphasis on the first step and beat, the second and third steps taking a secondary emphasis. The schottische steps are based on a 1-2-3-hop pattern, and the polka is much like the *pas de basque*, 1-2-3-pause.

Some variation in speed does occur depending on location and context. Tempos are faster in the Highlands in the north and west of Scotland than in the south and east or Lowlands, where RSCDS standards tend to prevail. Dances are faster, too, in university settings, where one might find quick-time country dances played at speeds up to 128–132 bpm. Jean Milligan also noted that children tend to

dance more quickly than adults.⁹ Conversely, for older dancers, the speed will be slowed down a fraction. Matching the speed of the music to the needs of dancers requires that close attention be paid by band members to the dancing. Sometimes this may become unconscious, but good dance bands know how to match their playing to dancers' specific requirements.

These tempo changes affect the style of dancing: the complicated stepping of RSCDS-style is simplified as the speed increases, a fact that the guardians of 'proper' style often find worrisome. When the music speeds up, dancers can not kinaesthetically match their steps to the music, and are forced to simplify to one or two steps per bar. Reels or jigs end up being walked in two steps rather than being danced in three or four steps, and a quick waltz becomes one step on the first beat of the bar only. Changes such as these shift the emphasis in dancing from steps to whole body movement, which parallels the stylistic distinctions between the formal RSCDS style of country dancing, for example, and the more casual ceilidh, or 'village hall', style of dancing sets.¹⁰ While stepping is primary in the RSCDS style, walking the figures and swinging a partner are the main features of the ceilidh and village hall styles where the music is usually played at faster speeds. Dancing to the music, then, is partly a function of speed.

Strict tempo

The second feature of Scottish dance music is that the speed and rhythm must be kept steady, with a rock-solid, consistent beat – what is usually referred to as 'strict tempo' playing. The critical point here is not so much the precise speed and rhythm itself, but that the band rigorously keeps to the established tempo, without variation. Such steadiness facilitates regular and consistent execution of the steps or movements, which is an important aspect of the dance kinaesthetic.

Instructions for country dance steps reiterate that the effect must be lively but also controlled, elegant, and graceful. In her classic manual, Jean Milligan instructs teachers on the skip-change step: 'Throughout, the step must be smooth'. For the strathspey travelling step, she emphasizes that even hops should be 'low and smooth', while about the strathspey setting or common schottische step, she warns: 'The actual length of the step should not be exaggerated, for although a definite movement is essential, it must look controlled and smooth'.¹¹

Smoothness is also an important feature of the ballroom-style dances known as 'Old Time' dances, which are performed in synchrony by couples moving in a counter-clockwise circle around the room. Steps danced close to the floor and the collective coordination of the dance figures give this kind of dancing even more visual smoothness than the country dance sets, as well as a lively, controlled gracefulness. Among dancers I work with on the east coast, where this kind of social dance is especially popular, dancers whose movements emphasize verticality rather than a smooth horizontal flow are criticized for 'loupin' like a flech' (jumping like a flea). It should be noted that regional and class differences in dance styles do

exist; some are more 'bouncy' than what I describe here, but these still require strict tempo music for good execution.¹²

Because dancers depend on musical cues to match their steps and movements to the music, strict tempo playing provides a solid foundation for dancers' actions. In jig time, for example, the setting step becomes slightly syncopated to match the rhythm of the music. In 6/8 time, the beats are marked **1 2 3 4 5 6** with steps danced on counts 1, 3, 4, and beat 6 taking the swing of the free foot being readied for the next step. Compared with the 2/4 or 4/4 reels where steps follow the meter as **1 2 3 4, 1 2 3 4**, jigs have more 'swing' and bounce than do the smoother reels. Kinaesthetically, dancers who feel these rhythms will prefer jigs for dances that have a lot of setting steps emphasizing vertical movements, and reels for dances that have more horizontally oriented travelling steps. The steady playing of a strict tempo dance band, moreover, influences the dancers' kinaesthetic experience of energy as bound flow.¹³ In both set dances and ballroom styles, this kind of flow both enhances the forward momentum in the dance figures and also defines the dance aesthetic. In country dancing, a dance that matches choreography and music that propels dancers through the figures is called a 'good going' dance.

Lift

As a musical concept, 'lift' is difficult for musicians to verbalize in a technical manner, but they readily identify playing that exhibits it. Lift gives music life and energy, but it is not a function of speed. Rather, it is a matter of articulation, of how notes are emphasized – what one very experienced player describes as 'playing the notes, and playing the spaces between the notes'. (Or, as Sting recently commented in a television programme about his recording of the music of sixteenth-century lutenist John Dowland, the music is in the silence.) But neither is it staccato technique; it is more a matter of colouring and modulating the length of the notes. For melody instruments, lift is achieved in various ways: on the fiddle, changes in the pressure of the bow and in the bowing direction create differences in the emphasis and length of notes, while such shifts are accomplished primarily by bellows changes on accordions. Another player describes lift as 'sunlight and shadow', as if the music has to reflect the patterns of darkness and light that is so typical of Scottish weather, where clouds roll past and sunshine and shadows are constantly in play.

However it is described by musicians, lift is perceived as essential for good dancing. 'Nae lift' is one of the worst charges that dancers can levy on a band. And a band with 'nae lift' makes dancing 'hard going'. Conversely, music played with lift infuses energy into dancers, who dance without fatigue or awareness of the passage of time. 'The night flew past' dancers will say. A band with lift makes for 'a guid night' at the dancing.

Dancing to the music, or experiencing the music as carrying one through the dance, represents the kind of symbiotic relationship between the two that is highly desirable. Lift helps the dancer feel the rhythm of the steps – this is one way that the music tells the dancer what to do. Recall the two kinds of steps used in reels and jigs

– the *pas de basque* setting step (leap, step, step) and the travelling, or skip change step (hop, step, close, step). These steps are counted out as ‘and 1 2 3’ with emphasis on 1 and 3. Musicians who play with lift give the proper emphasis to the beats, helping dancers keep in step and in rhythm to the music. Playing without colour, especially during the runs that are common in reels, eliminates the aural cue that lift provides for the dancers. Jigs are thus played with dotted rhythms that give variable weight to some notes: (1 2 3 4 5 6, *jig-gity-jog-gety*), which makes them ‘dancey’ or gives the music ‘swing’, another way of describing lift.

Lift also contributes to the ability of dancers to phrase their movements within the dance by clearly signalling the rhythm of the tune. Dancers, hearing the rhythm, know how to pace their steps, so that their movements match the bars allotted in the tune. Building on the emphasis on smoothness and control cited earlier, Milligan gives this advice on phrasing:

Good phrasing is the hallmark of a good dancer. If you listen carefully to the music and get into the spirit it expresses, you should phrase easily and naturally. Phrasing means fitting in, evenly, the steps to the music. Each formation has a definite phrase of music and the dancers must begin the formation on the very first bar of the phrase and divide it up carefully so that it takes to the very last beat to carry it out. [...] Always phrase so that every step is really danced.¹⁴

Knowing the phrasing of the music helps dancers dance ‘in time’ to the tune.

Moreover, a reciprocal exchange between dancers and musicians can be set into play. The dancers’ kinaesthetic responses to the lift of the music brings the musician into a relationship with the dance, and musicians say that they play better when they see that the dancers are dancing well. An often-repeated anecdote about the late Sir Jimmy Shand, one of the greatest exponents of Scottish dance music, relates his advice to ‘watch the best dancers in the room and play for them. They’ll keep you right’. Practised musicians attest to the wisdom of this advice. Accordionist Freeland Barbour recalls this advice, given to him as a youngster by an experienced musician: ‘Airse doon, heid up, and gie it a guid dunt’¹⁵ – that is, sit in your seat, watch the dancers, and give them the beat with lift.

Patterns of repetition

The fourth feature I want to discuss is structural: the patterns of repetition that match the musical phrases to the choreography of the dance. Traditional dance tunes are usually 16 bars in length, and contain two phrases of 8 bars each. Each phrase is repeated, giving a pattern of A A B B to provide 32 bars for a dance. Some country dances of other lengths (40, 48, 64 bars) require other combinations of repetitions, and in set dancing, as in couple dancing, it is important that the music ‘fit’ the dance.

Country dance sets normally contain four couples, each of whom dances the figures of the dance twice – or eight repetitions of the figures. To play the same tune

eight times is considered confusing to dancers, since the music lacks aural cues to signal to the dancers that a new top couple should begin dancing the figures. It is also regarded as tedious, lacking variety. One option is to play eight different tunes for the dance, but for a band that will be playing 22 to 24 dances in an evening, that requires an enormous repertoire, between 176 and 192 different tunes. Between the two extremes, one tune or eight, are two alternatives. The first, more common today, is to play four tunes for the dance, each repeated once, thereby giving each couple their 'own' tune to dance to. When a new tune is started, the next top couple knows it is their turn to start the figures. An older technique, popularized in the 1950s by Sir Jimmy Shand, and adopted nearly universally for three decades, was to play three tunes for the dance, starting and ending with the 'original' tune (that is, the tune associated with the dance as it was published in RSCDS instruction books, often sharing the same name), and adding two other tunes to make a set. This practice gives each couple a change of tune to begin their dancing as top couple, and the repetition of the first tune for the fourth couple makes a balanced unit overall: tune 1, tune 2, tune 3, tune 1. Starting a different tune for each couple provides the necessary aural cue to the pattern of the dance; ending with the original also signals that the set is approaching closure. For other kinds of dances – couple dances that are waltzes or polkas or two-steps done to marches – tunes are frequently played in sets of two or three, depending on the length of the tune. What is universal in Scottish dance music is the inclusion of more than one tune in a dance set, carefully selected to complement the original tune and provide a pleasing whole.

The association of tunes with dances is a long-standing practice whereby the music comes to stand for the dance. A band will sometimes play the first eight bars of a familiar tune as a substitute for a verbal announcement of the dance, and dancers quickly respond by taking up their positions on the dance floor. Moreover, the connection between particular musical phrases and specific figures in the dance in the dancers' experience, makes it possible for the music to 'tell the dancer what to do' on this level too. This semiotic operates at the experiential level in both set and couple dances. In set dances, the message is clearest when eight bar phrases and figures parallel, such as in the figures 'down the middle and up' or 'set to and turn corners'. A common parallel between music and figure in the around-the-room couple dances is the final four bar waltz or polka turn, which ends the sequence of figures and signals the start of a new repetition of the choreography.

These four aspects of music for dancing – slow speed, steady or regular tempo, lift, and patterns of repetition that fit music to dances – are key features in the aesthetic as it is applied by dancers. Now I shall examine how these features fare in the context of performing for listening.

Music for listening

For people who are listening, rather than dancing, to dance music, the aesthetic is different, not least because the kind of kinaesthetic connection that exists between the music and the dancer is lacking. It is the perception that dance music is tedious

to listen to that is the most telling criticism, and the strategies used to counter this perception create the alternative aesthetic.

In the first place, when dance tunes are played for a listening audience, reels and jigs will typically be speeded up. Likewise, waltzes, marches, and polkas played for listening are performed at quicker tempos than when played for social dancing. The slow tempo, so necessary for executing complicated steps, can signal either a lack of excitement in the music, or a lack of technical prowess on the part of the musicians, especially when tempo is both slow and steady. Playing music at a quicker speed conveys excitement and energy to the audience and flashy tunes that are technically simple but suggest virtuosity are selected. Dismissed as 'finger exercises' by musical purists, such tunes enjoy wide popularity among audiences who are not musicians. More complicated, musically sophisticated, and technically difficult tunes require a slower speed to be played well. When such tunes are played as fast as possible, dance musicians and dancers complain that 'there's nae music in it'. If notes are dropped, sacrificed for the sake of speed, the melodic line is compromised: dancers and dance musicians say that the tune is lost.

Playing music in shorter and more varied sets than a normal dance set also helps to maintain listener interest through novelty. When dance-band musicians play in a concert setting (at an Accordion and Fiddle Club, for example), they play more tunes in a set than they would for a dance, the sets are shorter overall, and they will play more sets. They may also unconsciously increase the tempo of their playing; conversely, bands that never play for dancing rarely play at dance speed. Problems can arise when musicians who are not accustomed to it attempt to play for dancing. Dancers may be frustrated by their incompetence, and the musicians may be equally frustrated by their inability to connect with the dancers as they do with their listening audiences.

Secondly, strict tempo playing can also lead to a perception of monotony. The unwaveringly steady tempo can give the music a kind of relentless quality, especially when one considers that a dance in reel or jig time will last for from four-and-a-half to four-and-three-quarters minutes, and a strathspey will be over eight minutes long. When dancing to the music, the time passes quickly because it is filled with active movement. But, for listeners, the steady beat can make the four or five, or worse eight, minutes seem interminable. And as far as I can tell, there is no intrinsic reward for the listener, whose kinaesthetic response is restricted to foot-tapping, and who may not know the tunes well enough to appreciate the skills of the players or to differentiate styles; rather, a perception of boredom is the common response. Other kinds of dance music are less problematic for listeners. Waltz tunes, for example, are often songs that people know and can hum or sing along to, thereby engaging with the music in another, active, manner. Polkas and marches, when played for social dancing, do not last as long as jig and reel sets, and so are also perceived as less tedious.

Performing bands have strategies to deal with these problems. One is to vary the speed of their playing, eschewing 'strict tempo' as not lively or varied enough

to keep people's interest. For examples, slow airs and songs may be played *parlando rubato* instead of waltz tempo. Within sets of similar tunes – reels or jigs for example – the tempo will be speeded up, especially towards the end. The music gets faster and faster until it finishes in a blinding fury of sound. Another strategy is to play tunes of different tempos in the same set, in order to create aural variety – a march followed by jigs, for example – which also has the effect of speeding up as the set finishes. The combination of a march or slow air, strathspey, and reel is a standard setting, especially in competition performances. So, rather than steady tempos we find variable speeds, especially increasing towards the end of a set for an exciting and dramatic finish.

The third feature is partly a function of increased speed, setting the music's momentum against its lift. This difference is a notable marker of the two styles. The locus of the energy in the music differs: the energy is located in the swing or lift in dance music, but it is in the fast speed and momentum in music for listening. Playing 'the spaces between the notes' becomes well-nigh impossible when playing very fast, but some bands do manage to achieve lift through sheer technical prowess. West coast dance bands tend to play faster than east coast ones, but are still recognized as having 'swing' by dancers and other musicians. I envision these differences spatially, with lift functioning in a vertical plane (like a bouncing ball), tied to the rhythm of the steps or marked by a tapping foot, while momentum is horizontal and temporal, like the clapping that sometimes becomes more frenetic as it tries to keep pace with the music that flies faster than the listener can translate from ear to hands. Dancers distinguish between bands that may be good to listen to as opposed to those that are good for dancing, while other audiences are more dismissive of the strict tempo dance bands.

Finally, we have the issue of repetition. As we have seen, repetition is important for dancers as it provides aural cues that 'tell you what to do' in the figures of the dance choreography. This sophisticated match of music to choreography builds on the simple pattern of repetition that characterizes traditional music in Scotland (A A B B) in the highly structured context of dance. The kind of repetition needed for dancing is, for a listening audience, simultaneously too repetitious and too complicated, since the pattern of repetition is lost on listeners who have no dance associations with which to connect it. The complexity of the repetition, coupled with the length of the sets as played for dancing and the slow and steady tempo, makes the listening experience long as well as tedious, as we have seen above. In contrast, when dancers are listening to dance music, they draw on their kinaesthetic memories of dancing to provide a context for understanding the pattern of the tunes and hearing the figures in the music.

For listening audiences, however, repetition functions in a totally different way, to signal freedom and expressiveness and to generate excitement and enthusiasm. To achieve this end, bands may play a set with only one or two tunes in it, repeated up to half a dozen times each. For audiences less familiar with the music tradition, this repetition helps listeners recognize one tune rather than overwhelm them

with too much new information. Performers realize, however, that some variety is necessary to maintain audience interest, so they vary the tempo and change the ornamentation or instrumentation during some of the repetitions of the tune. Thus repetition occurs at the micro level of the tune itself rather than as a pattern within a set of tunes. This kind of variation signals individual style and creativity that may occur within the bounds of a traditional tune. In contrast, most Scottish country dance musicians play tunes as written ('as per book' e.g. RSCDS books), or as they have learned and practiced them, with little variation which might interfere with dance cues, or cause confusion in the complicated pattern of repetition they themselves need to maintain.

A great deal of internal repetition, then, joined with variable speed, generally quicker tempos, and fast, smooth playing, constitute the aesthetic of Scottish traditional music performance style as opposed to dance-band style, which is played slower, at strict tempo, with lift, and with structured repetitions. The features that mark good music for listening are not just different from, but are in some ways diametrically opposed to, good music for dancing. Given these striking and substantial differences in style and aesthetics, it is no wonder that practitioners of each style judge and find the other's performances wanting.

The instruments

While different aesthetics may help to explain the fundamental musical differences between the two styles, another difference, which carries enormous symbolic weight in contemporary socio-political discourse about identity and heritage, involves instruments. Aesthetic differences reflect different contexts for dance music; the politics of instruments reify more symbolic boundaries.

From the eighteenth century, music for social dancing was performed by fiddle and cello ensembles. While the fiddle remained the instrument of choice for dance music through the nineteenth century, by the 1930s accordion-led dance bands had become dominant, following the spread of free reed instruments throughout Europe. Enormously popular among all ages and social registers from royal to working class, these dance bands reflected the national enthusiasm, almost mania, for Scottish country dancing during the Second World War and post-war decades. The line-up standardized with fiddle and accordion (either button-key or piano key) as melody instruments, along with a second accordion, piano, bass, and drums. By the end of the century, an electric keyboard and midi bass had replaced the acoustic piano and upright bass, but the rest remains the same. The second accordion plays chords and the 'back row' instruments (piano/keyboard, bass/midi, drums) balance the melody instruments, providing the desired complete sound across the entire frequency range, and help to give the 'dunt' of rhythm that dancers need.

What changed after the mid-century involved two developments: first, the emergence of rock and roll in popular music, and second, the folksong revival. Both resulted in the marginalization of traditional social dance, removing it from the realm of common, national experience. Rock and roll, unlike earlier international

popular dance musics such as the waltz or quadrilles, failed to be naturalized in the Scottish context, and young people's dance experiences were severed from continuity with the past.¹⁶ Scottish dance traditions became the purview of specialist groups rather than being a collective experience. To the youth, Scottish dancing and dance bands came to signify an old-fashioned, romantic-nationalist culture, and the popular radio and television programmes that featured dance music four or five times a week in the 1960s gradually lost their audience.¹⁷

At the same time, Scottish oral traditions – ballads and folktales – were being re-discovered and valorised by the burgeoning folksong movement. Scholars, literati, and political nationalists argued that Gaelic-speaking Highlanders and Scotland's Travelling people represented the authentic stream of oral tradition, unsullied by popularization.¹⁸ To these revivalists, what passed for Scottish music and dance represented the sentimental kitsch of popular invented traditions: tartan and dance bands on the one hand, and classically-trained singers and the genteel elegance of RSCDS dancers on the other. Unaccompanied ballad-singing and storytelling were preferable in every way.

However, in the 1980s, as folk singing became dominated by singer-songwriters rather than by traditional performers of ballads, songs, and stories, the folk revival took an instrumental turn. This instrumental revival aimed to reinstate the fiddle (and later, the small pipes) at the centre of the tradition as a more authentic representation of national culture. According to this view, technically sophisticated accordions had usurped the place of the homely fiddle, mouth organ, and melodeon in the tradition.¹⁹ The evidence is to be found in the fact that almost never is there a Scottish country dance band without at least one accordion. Because accordions represent the decline of the instrumental tradition, the accordion-led dance band carries the baggage of being kitsch, sentimentalized, unreflective, dance music.

Proponents of the older-style dance bands and associated song traditions that derive from Burns, farm bothy, and music-hall repertoires, refer to their music as 'our kind of Scottish music', and can claim continuity with a two-hundred-year history of dance-music practice. From their perspective, it can also be argued that the British chromatic 3-row button-key accordion developed by the late Sir Jimmy Shand should be recognized as a unique invention and artistic addition to the world of free reed instruments.²⁰ These musicians and dancers, moreover, wear their nationalism on their sleeves, literally, dressed in and surrounded by tartan, which, despite being an invented tradition of a nineteenth-century British imperial monarchy, resonates with their self-image as Scots.²¹ Proud of their Scottish heritage, their ideas about national identity are largely unionist. Contemporary nationalism, in contrast, strives to reverse the historic subordination of Scotland by England, and establish an indigenous foundation for national identity. Although folk revival musicians claim to be rediscoverers of the tradition, they are sometimes perceived as naive utopians who are out of touch with mainstream Scottish life and tradition represented by 'our kind of music'. Rather than naive romantics, the revival musicians may be better understood as imagining a nationalism that foresees an independent Scotland in

Europe, connected more with international affairs rather than those of Britain alone. They seek to ground traditional music in a Scottish experience separate from that of imperial Britain.²² The competing claimants for the definition of the instrumental tradition articulate their respective versions of authenticity in musical terms which are politically loaded.

Conclusion

The combined socio-political and aesthetic significance of the instrumental turn in the folk revival was that it enabled younger generations to rediscover traditional dance music.²³ As revival musicians began to play more instrumental music, audiences wanted to dance to it, not just listen. The flame of this new expression of traditional music in Scotland was fed by the emergence of 'Celtic' music as a category of world music. New instruments appeared and older ones reappeared: banjo, bouzouki, whistle, and small pipes. These instruments achieved international 'folk' or 'roots music' credibility, and their place in a Scottish context grew out of that association. Following the romantic ideal of free-spirited expressivism, no particular line-up of instruments was regarded as authoritative, although fiddles took centre stage.

These younger musicians, however, knew little of dance. Their aesthetic, grounded in performances for audiences at concerts, clubs, or festivals and on recordings, brought them into conflict with the older style of playing for dancers. The widespread popularity of the accordion throughout Europe stems from its being an ideal instrument to accompany dancing, combining melody and bass as it does, and capable of producing enough sound to carry through a village hall or farmer's barn. Add the supporting instruments and the dance band emerged. The folk revival instrumental bands, on the other hand, feature upper register melodic instruments, with rhythm provided by a guitar, which, while adequate for a club or concert, cannot be heard in the din of a dance hall, even with sophisticated amplification equipment. Lacking this support, bands have 'nae lift' for dancing.

It may be that we are now, with a reconvened Scottish Parliament centring people's identity in new ways, entering a new period. Younger generation dance-band musicians, who I know, cross over between the two styles because they play in more varied settings and understand the different aesthetics. The reverse is less common; the shift from playing for listening to playing for dancing requires musicians to be more structured, disciplined, and willing to be subject to external constraints defined by dance requirements in their playing, which can appear to stifle the individual expression and creativity associated with the artist in Western thinking. And the economic success and international media recognition of folk revival performers consigns dance bands to a second-class position, serving to exacerbate the historic tensions between the two groups. While aesthetics may explain the fundamental differences between the styles, politics and economics are the boundaries that must be breached.

What may eventually bring the two together is dancing – what is now called 'ceilidh dancing', which are the old social dances that have been rediscovered by

the younger generation and taken up with nationalist fervour since the mid-1990s. Accordionist and band leader Freeland Barbour, whose own experience crosses boundaries between dance and performance, revival and old style, comments:

It does seem to me that the new enthusiasms have a lot to offer and once the new dancers progress and start to appreciate the structure of the old dances and music then they will demand of their musicians a more solid approach to tempo, and to the style of the music for the dance. I think the new wave [...] will go down a few wrong roads but will get there in the end and is quite definitely the future, once it has pulled in the best of the past.²⁴

If this indeed occurs, the 'problem' of dance music will be transformed. Instead of two aesthetics with adherents at daggers drawn in the competition for authenticity, musicians will be able to select their playing fields and adjust their styles accordingly, recognizing the legitimacy of the diversity of the traditions of Scottish music and dance.

Notes

¹ See David Johnson, *Music and Society in Lowland Scotland in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972) and J. F. and T. M. Flett, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964) for historical overviews.

¹ Compare the discussion of the relationship between Norwegian fiddling and dance in Jan Petter Blom, 'Making the Music Dance: Dance Connotations in Norwegian Fiddling', in *Play It Like It Is: Fiddle and Dance Studies from around the North Atlantic*, eds Ian Russell and Mary Anne Alburger (Aberdeen: Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen, 2006), pp. 75–86, for a similar tradition.

² J. F. and T. M. Flett, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland* is the standard reference. See also Evelyn Hood, *The Darling Diversion: The Story of Scottish Country Dancing* (London: William Collins Sons, 1980) for accounts of country dancing in Scotland. Publications by the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society describe individual dances as well as the style of performance.

³ Old time couple dances are briefly introduced in Jessie Stuart, *The Good Old Times: Favourite Old Time Dances* (Keith: Keith Printing Service, 1994) and Robbie Shepherd, *Let's Have a Ceilidh; The Essential Guide to Scottish Dancing* (Edinburgh: Canongate Press, 1992). For an overview of ballroom dancing in Scotland, see Elizabeth Casciani, *Oh! How We Danced! The History of Ballroom Dancing in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 1994).

⁴ Jean C. Milligan, *Won't You Join the Dance? The Scottish Country Dance Manual* (London: Paterson's Publications, [n.d.]) sets out the principles for the revival. George S. Emmerson's book, *A Social History of Scottish Dance: ane celestial recreatioun* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1972), details the history, development, and spread of the country dance. See also Peter Knight, ed., *Scottish Country Dancing*, compiled in association with the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society (Glasgow: Harper Collins, 1996).

⁵ Milligan, p. 32.

⁶ Milligan, p. 32.

⁷ The slower style of dancing the strathspey has been challenged by the recent introduction of the Cape Breton step dance tradition where strathspey stepping is lively and bouncy.

⁸ Milligan, p. 32.

⁹ Scottish country dancing is currently performed in several stylistic variations. RSCDS style is that which is taught by the Society, primarily through classes and the Summer School, and which is seen at Society-sponsored events such as informal dances and formal balls, and performances by RSCDS demonstration teams. Outwith RSCDS auspices, country dances are performed at local community halls, referred to as 'village hall dances', and at ceilidh dances, which constitute a late-twentieth century revival of country dances and old-time couple dances among university students and urban young adults.

¹⁰ Milligan, pp. 22–24.

¹¹ While this is admittedly an overgeneralization, it may be said that west-coast style tends to be bouncier than east coast style.

¹² Laban Movement Analysis is based on concepts developed by Rudolf Laban. Effort, or movement dynamics, consists of the categories of Space, Weight, and Time that describe single actions of the moving body, and Flow, which describes the body's continuous movement. Flow is conceived as either bound or free. Bound Flow characterizes movement that is contained by specified choreography.

¹³ Milligan, pp. 27–28.

¹⁴ Freeland Barbour, 'Music for Dance', in *Scotland's Dances: A Review of the 1994 Conference on the Diversity of the Scottish Tradition of Dance* (Edinburgh: Scottish Arts Council, 1994), pp. 39–41 (p. 39).

¹⁵ While ballroom dancing could develop side by side with set dancing since both are based on the unit of the couple, rock and roll moved away from dancing as a couple to more and more individualized performance.

¹⁶ BBC Scotland now schedules just one feature programme, *Take the Floor*, on Saturday evenings, and a talk-and-request show, *The Reel Blend*, on Sunday lunchtime.

¹⁷ See Ailie Munro, *The Folk Music Revival in Scotland including Morag MacLeod 'Folk Revival in Gaelic Song'* (London: Kahn and Averill, 1984); revd edn, *The Democratic Muse: Folk Music Revival in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Scottish Cultural Press, 1996); Niall MacKinnon, *The British Folk Scene: Musical Performance and Social Identity* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1994); and Michael Brocken, *The British Folk Revival, 1944–2002* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

¹⁸ 'Melodeon' is the term generally applied to one or two-row button-key instruments (single action, diatonic) that gained popularity especially in rural districts at the turn of the twentieth century. Accordions (double action, chromatic) have become more and more sophisticated through the century. The main types now seen in Scotland are 5-row continental style button-key and piano-key accordions. The Scottish 3-row operates on the same principle as the melodeon, each button producing two notes, one on the push and one on the draw of the bellows as opposed to the continental and the piano-key systems which produce the same note on both push and draw.

¹⁹ Shand specified the requirements he was looking for in a button-key accordion to the Hohner company in Germany, and Vincenzo Morino designed an instrument to these specifications that became known as the 'Shand Morino' accordion. Dr Sandy Tulloch, a long-time friend of Jimmy Shand and fellow musician, assisted in the design. Interviews, 16 September 2002; 5 May, 12 May 2003; 21 June, 7 July, 2 August 2004.

²⁰ Hugh Trevor Roper, 'The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland', in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 15–42.

²¹ Some may argue that dance music is more a 'popular' rather than 'folk' tradition. But the

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real issue at hand is whose definition of 'Scottishness' is most authentic. Recent studies on this topic include David McCrone et al., *Scotland – the Brand: The Making of Scottish Heritage* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), and Carl MacDougall, *Painting the Forth Road Bridge: A Search for Scottish Identity* (London: Aurum Press, 2001).

²² An account of this shift is found in Bob Blair, 'Scottish Ceilidh Dancing', in *Scotland's Dances*, pp. 46–48.

²³ Freeland Barbour, 'Music for Dance', in *Scotland's Dances*, p. 40.