

Further Notes on Planning SCD Programs: The Teacher and the Musician

by Bobby Frew

Reprinted from TACTalk , Letters to the Editor, Vol. 19, no. 4, March 1995, 3.

I have been considering writing to TAC for some time about music for workshops and classes. My involvement with the Musicians' Workshop at the Teachers' Weekend prompts these personal opinions: I hope they will prove helpful.

A musician appreciates a teacher making contact in advance to advise what he or she plans to teach and to make any particular requests for music. Advising a musician of the format of the class—the teaching plan and the type of tunes required—eliminates any last-minute scramble by the musician to find appropriate music. It also saves time at the start of the class. The teacher is prepared, and, if contact has been made, the musician can also be prepared.

Sometimes I receive a programme with a "strange" dance—perhaps a Leaflet Dance—and it might say "Any good jig (reel, or strathspey)." There are many good tunes, but their style may not fit the particular dance the teacher has in mind.



Anne Hooper and Terry Traub

JIGS. There are three types of jigs in general use, not including two-steps:

6/8 Double Jigs—"busy": for example, *The Irish Washerwoman*, *The Blackthorn Stick*, *The Laird of Milton's Daughter*

6/8 Single Jigs—not as "busy": for example, *Hooper's Jig*, *St. Andrew's Fair*, *The Fyket*

9/8 Slip Jigs, as used in *Strip the Willow* (running step)

REELS. There are two types of reels in general use:

2/4 or 4/4 Double Reels—"busy": for example, *General Stuart's Reel*, *The Dancing Man*, *The De'il Among the Tailors*

2/4 or 4/4 Single Reels—not as "busy": for example, *Trip to Bavaria*, *Bratach Bana*, *My Love She's But A Lassie Yet*, *The White Cockade*, *Shiftin' Bobbins*

In my opinion, the following should not be classed as Reels; they are really March Tunes normally played by Pipe Bands: *The Australian Ladies*, *Mairi's Wedding*, *The Earl of Mansfield*

Hornpipes are like reels but are generally played more slowly than reels.

STRATHSPEYS. There are two types of strathspeys in general use:

Traditional—for example: *Dalkeith's Strathspey*, *John McAlpin*, *The Birks of Invermay*, *Duncan Davidson*

Highland Airs and Pastorals—for example: *Miss Gibson's Strathspey*, *Seann Truibhas Willichan*, *The Duchess Tree*, *The Highland Cradle Song*

While there are many traditional strathspeys to choose from, it is not always easy to find appropriate tunes to make up selections for Highland Airs and Pastorals. They are nice to dance to but should not be classed as strathspeys.

Dance instructions are usually not helpful to musicians in deciding a proper tune for the dance because there isn't time to study. If you don't know what music suits a particular dance, compare it to another one. Is it like *Ladies' Fancy*, *Hooper's Jig*, *Bratach Bana*, *Maxwell's Rant*, *Miss Gibson's Strathspey*, and so on? If that is difficult, tell the musician which music you customarily use for it. Any of this information is helpful to the musician in determining what type of music suits the dance. The flow of the dance can be enhanced if the proper music is played.

Yet More Notes on Planning Dance Programs

by Barbara and Robert McOwen
(teachers and musicians, both!)



[from an undated loose leaf—Ed.]

Some principal points:

The program should take into account the event itself: what is the experience and energy level of the dancers and where are they from? Is it a hot or cold night, and is it a formal or informal occasion?

Will the dances be talked through, and, if so, by whom? The personality and ability of the MC to talk through a dance and keep the evening moving are more important than maintaining a tradition of keeping a particular MC to run a particular party, giving different MCs their turn, or making a nice gesture to a visitor.

The first dance should be an easy three-couple jig, for example, *Jubilee Jig*. The initial dances should not require much pas de basque, should be relatively easy for the dancers and musicians, should perhaps be two, three, or four couple dances to allow variety, and should not require much more room than the set itself—so no double figures of eight, for example, because the floor is likely to be crowded.

Dances with considerable changes

of orientation, lots of quick two-bar movements, local but perhaps not widely-known favourites, and dull music should be avoided.

Dances with a high energy level, like *The Cadgers in the Canon-gate*, are good, but not too often. Strathspeys late in the evening should have lots of action and require three or four couples.

It is better to err on the side of an evening that is “too simple” than one that is too difficult. Simple, basic dances with standard figures and great music will be enjoyed by all.

The RSCDS tradition is quick-slow-quick groups of dances: jig, strathspey, and reel with perhaps three such groups before the intermission, and three afterwards. Other arrangements can provide other feelings to the evening, such as quick-quick-slow-quick-slow for a set of dances, or three sets of six dances each with one short and one longer intermission. The musicians and many dancers prefer to limit the number of breaks to eliminate “cooling off.” This is especially easy if a dinner or after-party is scheduled, because the socializing (one of the benefits of the event, after all!) does not have to be done during the dancing.

A figure grid or matrix is very helpful when devising a program. This is a list of figures (e.g., rights and lefts, or set and cast) across the page with a list of dances down the left-hand side of the page. You fill in the grid according to the figures in each dance. The grid makes it very easy to see if a particular figure is being repeated over and over again, especially in consecutive dances, and enables you to see if any major figure—like a quick-time poussette—has been inadvertently left off the program.



Barbara McOwen at the AGM
30 August 2003