

This month there were marginally more - 8 dancers - and I had a varied programme of dances which I had "discovered" for my radio show (www.radiogh.co.uk) over the last 4 or 5 weeks. We couldn't do any of the 5 couple dances which I had chosen but we did manage a 3-couple medley ...

We began with Musically Marvellous, an 8x32 reel by Anne Thorn from her Magic of Music 2 book. I had chosen Ian Muir (of Prestwick)'s version of The Sailor with 8 great tunes - the dance was written to honour Ian Muir & Kenny Thomson's Wardlaw Band and this track was certainly marvellous music! The dance flows well and is a perfectly good starting dance.

The Travellers' Jig by Bob Campbell from 1978, first 16 bars are almost identical to The Falls of Rogie (except the second cross for 1s is LH & cast L and therefore 1/2 RSh reel across rather than LSh), and then there is another 1/2 RSh reel across (it was felt this might work better LSh), all set & change up/down. In the last 8 bars, 1s cast R to own sides & set then all turn RH. This dance has it's own recording by Muriel Johnstone & Keith Smith.

Now time for that medley ... in 2020 Murrough Landon was preparing to take his Unit 2 exam for his teaching certificate, but then along came Lockdown, so with time on his hands, and a brain whirring away with formations and 8 bar phrases, he created a unique dance, Unit 2 Fantasia - 32 bars of each tempo, therefore 12 x 8 bar phrases. By taking a phrase from each of 12 dances, some modified to include different couples or be danced in a different tempo, he put them together to be danced to David Cunningham's recording for Everchanging Medley 2 (The Vallin Suite 2). And it worked! We found the reel time the trickiest, partly as it is last but also remembering the crossing (only 2 couples) in the reels of 3, and then straight into Set & Link for 3 twice. Not having the list of Unit 2 dances to hand, we were making guesses as to where some of the formations came from. Anyway, very clever, Murrough - thanks for the challenge.

We did 2 dances which were published in Many Happy Hours for the Pretoria 35th Anniversary. The first was by Roy Goldring in 2007, Under African Skies an 8x32 bar reel, also published in Auld Friends Meet for which Muriel Johnstone & friends recorded a double CD quite recently. What attracted me to this dance was the unusual diagonal angles for both the Balance-in-Line and the parallel reels of 3. These are sort-of on the 2nd corner diagonal but "flatter" as they are between 2 places (1st Lady & 2nd Man, also 2nd Lady & 3rd Man) rather than 3. It worked OK, but I am never keen on a forced progression - the last 8 bars is a 3-couple Allemande with 1s (now at the top) casting on the last 2 bars - especially at the end when 1M is immediately starting again.

A 3x40 strathspey from Northampton, Massachusetts - 30 years ago when they were celebrating their 20th anniversary, so will be Golden now if they are still extant - is Loves Weaves the Web by Virginia Van Scoy. This was also OK though was slightly odd having a 3-couple promenade, then a 3-couple Knot and then, having all been turning LH to go into a normal 6H round & back.

We began the second half with a 3-couple jig, Hey Johnny Cope, by Roy Clowes, but I was teaching from a crib which wasn't clear how far "1s+3s+2s circle 6H round to left" actually meant. It was a long way in 4 bars, but equally doesn't say 1/2-way which would be quite do-able (and the order given at the end of bar 24 seems to indicate it is a full circle). The dance was very trivial anyway so we gave up after a couple of attempts.

We only fared slightly better with our next dance, The Upsidedown Jig. 4x32 by Harry Rhodes from 2004, and no idea why it is called what it is as it doesn't seem upside down at all and has a standard 2 4 1 3 progression. The last 8 bars were like a double horseshoe chain (where you turn at the ends rather than change, so always stay on your own sides). It began with the middle 2 couples changing R on the sides whilst the end couples turned in 2 bars, then everyone is changing L on the sides, and repeat those 4 bars. Difficult timing, and the previous 8 bars had been tandem figures of 8 which were rushed for the person following, and could make it difficult for evryone to start the last 8 on time. That dance earned a Nay!

There was no diagram for the next dance - Love Stricken, a 4x32 reel - and I had difficulty envisaging it from the crib. It was certainly "different", though I felt it was almost either threatening or sad, as 1s retired down the set, a place at a time as each couple came in to face them. A strange dance ...

From there we went to Lover's Lane, a 3-couple jig by Jane Lataille who has written books of dances for small classes. This dance is primarily for 1st couple - 2s join in the first 8 bars and 3s get 4 bars 20-24 - however if you want a simple dance which is all travelling step and lots of figure of 8 movements, then this is fine. I used the music for Staggering Hame by Ewan Galloway - thought that might be appropriate after Lover's lane. :-)

And another Love dance, Dance of Love by Aymeric Fromherz which is a nice little 3-couple strathspey with a Tourbillon and 8 bar reels of 3 across, so, again, if that fits your class plan ...

Our last dance was Love & Sunbeams, an 8x40 jig by Irene van Maarseveen, and our second from the Pretoria 35th book. It certainly had some meat in it compared to most that we had done that day. It begins 1s

cross LH to face the 2s and change places with them using La Baratte. Then there was 16 bars for the 1s & 2s, which included the Men chasing 1/2way while the Ladies 1/2 turn & twirl, also 6 bars of a reel of 4 but all with the end result of 2s at the top and 1s facing 1st corners for 12 bars of Dance to Corners & Set, finishing with 1s turning to 2nd place own sides whilst the others chase home.

So, here endeth the October class, and I am hoping that by the end of this month my life will be back to normal speed and I will have time to prepare for these classes properly - and report afterwards in a timely manner!

Hope you enjoy reading this and/or actually enjoyed dancing them, and after 12 days in Scotland later this month maybe I will have picked up something "new" for the next class ...

Keep dancing, stay healthy and happy.