

I hope that you have had a good time over this festive season and will enjoy Hogmanay.

As you might remember, we did not have a class in November as numbers were low, then I had my hip operation - very successful! - and so December was going to be a return in strength for everyone. However, various people went down with bugs and lurgi and we finally only managed a 4 couple set in the first half and a 3 in the second. So, I still have plenty of 5 couple dances to try out but we did get through quite a few "different" dances. Most, if not all, of these dances have featured in The Sunday Class Dance programme on RadioGH (www.radiogh.co.uk) and, for me, it's a good way to find "new" dances and interesting movements.

We began our December/Christmas class with one of Chris Ronald's dances, Grand Central Station, an 8x32 bar jig with a "Unisex Chain" which, to look at, is a Men's Chain danced up/down the set, but it is between 2nd & 3rd couples who are on their own sides to begin, so 2L & 3M are the ones "chaining" i.e. changing LH up & down as their partners dance across the set. This did not always go well - it is not that usual to have chains up/down and less experienced dancers who don't move "on the sidelines" just can't see what they are supposed to be doing. Chris recommended the Gordon Shand track for The Alder Burn.

Our first strathspey was Our Leading Lady (S4x32) by Anne Thorn, celebrating Helensburgh & District Branch's President Norah Dunn's 100 birthday in December 2013. Some very simple movements with the last 8 bars "stolen" from The Dundee Whaler. We danced this to Nicol McLaren's Christmas music.

On 14th December 1918, the United Kingdom general election occurred, the first where women were permitted to vote, In Ireland the Irish republican political party Sinn Fein won a landslide victory with nearly 47% of the popular vote. To mark this I chose a 4-couple reel Ladies First! by Alison Smith of the Aurora group - the dance was actually a tribute to two Aurora members who had both just received first class honours degrees - and the track by Deirdre Adamson which I used included the tune The General Election by Bobby MacLeod.

Another anniversary on 14th December was in 1542, Princess Mary Stuart became Queen of Scots at the age of one week on the death of her father, James V of Scotland, and John Drewry wrote a 4-couple strathspey, Queen Mary of Scotland in 1985. We were not overly impressed with this dance, which will be why it has never really seen the light of day.

Our last dance before tea was a 40 bar jig, Gone With the Wind, by Christiane Orgeret in 2017, "as a happy memory of her 30 years at the head of the RSCDS Lyon group, then Branch" and she says "spot the number 30 in the first 12 bars, and feel the wind in the last 12!". My choice of music (The Jersey Gals) did not help. :-)

We lost one dancer at tea-time, and I was not dancing - only one day short of 4 weeks with my new hip - so it was 3 couple sets now. A CD I really like - surprisingly as I am not normally a Muriel Johnstone & Keith Smith fan - is Spark o' Water from the Nova Scotia Branch, so we had a 3-couple jig V & J's Maggot (maggot = earworm) which is danced 6 times through. The first 3 times 1s dance figures of 8 on opposite sides and then own sides, and second time through all 3 couples dance reels for these first 16 bars.

The challenge dance of the session was Variations on a Theme by Murrough Landon, a 3x48 strathspey with a theme of the Bourrel. Murrough helpfully recommends a recording, which in this case was from the same CD by Deirdre Adamson as we had already used. The dance is well constructed as there are 2 8-bar phrases of "thinking time" - basic teapots and circle round & back - between the Bourrel variations. I liked the dance, but then I wasn't dancing it - you could see the defining features of a Bourrel each time.

December 14th is Monkey Day, to celebrate monkeys and "all things simian" including other non-human primates such as apes, tarsiers and lemurs, and conveniently Barry Skelton has written a 2-couple reel called 100th Monkey - no idea what that refers to! - I found a 6x32 reel track. The interesting move in this is what he calls Interlocking Reels of 3, which have 4 people in, but basically the 2 people who meet LSh in the middle dance all the way round each other to go back towards the end they came from.

Our last strathspey was another by Chris Ronald called Ducking the Wind, and this has Set & Link for 3, then 1/2 reels of 3 across, Set & Link again and 1/2 reels on the sides. All set, cross & chase to get home. A last chance for some Christmas music, this time from Jim Lindsay.

And our last dance, because I like it, but it meant I had to dance - well, join in, and it turned out to be just a scramble for everyone - was The Glens of Angus. Definitely a dance of an earlier age ... Book 23. Good music from Gordon Shand though. :-)

We have our next class on Sunday 11th January, and I do hope to see lots more of you all there. It's the day after the Leicester Caledonian Dancers New Year Te dance with George Meikle - so may see you there too!

Enjoy yourself at Hogmanay and wishing you a healthy & happy 2026.