

Linda Gaul, RSCDS Schools Director, talks about the

Royal Scottish Country Dance Society Summer School



For four weeks during July and August St Andrews will, as usual, play host to the Summer School of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society. This year, nearly 1,000 dancers and musicians from across the globe will come to the town, and in almost every available hall you will see kilt-clad gentlemen with their elegant partners, and hear the stirring sounds of reels, jigs and strathspeys.

This "friendly invasion" began in the early 1920s after Mrs Stewart of Fasnacloich and Miss Jean Milligan had launched the Society to preserve and promote the country dances of Scotland. Their enthusiasm for country dancing spread rapidly throughout Scotland, and beyond, and a network of Branches was set up to encourage local involvement. As the collection and publication of dances continued, the teachers in the Branches needed to ensure that all the dances were passed on in a consistent manner, and so the Summer School was born. It has continued to flourish since then, apart from a few years during the war, and it has always been based in University Hall.

Today, Summer School offers country dance classes for all levels of expertise, and all ages, for both the dancers resident in University Hall and those living locally. The introductory classes are very important and dancers enjoy being taught in small groups by enthusiastic teachers with experienced musicians – being totally immersed in the dance for six days leaves you no chance to forget what you learned yesterday! As dancers gain more experience they progress through the various skill levels. Physical fitness is required, a good memory is a help, but the best qualifications are a willingness to learn and an ability to laugh!

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The Royal Scottish Country Dance Society has always been very proud of its teachers and training for its two-part qualification is another integral part of Summer School.

These dancers work really hard, as do their tutors, as there is a lot to learn in a fortnight. During the assessment, dancers must answer written questions, demonstrate an ability to dance to a high standard and teach a short lesson to a group of dancers. For those whose mother tongue is English this is quite a daunting experience but for the many who come to St Andrews with a limited knowledge of English it needs amazing dedication and courage. Translators are made available for written work but the lesson needs to be taught in English – this is where the invaluable advice, "don't tell them, show them" really comes into its own!

For those more experienced dancers wishing to try something a little different, both Highland dancing and Step dancing for ladies are also taught as optional classes. Traditional highland dancing was once the preserve of the men, but now the ladies take part, ensuring that all enjoy the challenge of intricate steps, and they need real stamina.

Our musicians, who play the piano, fiddle or accordion, have a pivotal role at Summer School. It is they who give all the impetus to dance and who keep us dancing when the feet and legs want to give up! Playing for dancing is a specialised skill – one that is addressed by providing specialist courses for musicians.

These have proved very popular and this year I am very pleased to have two weeks where there are dedicated musicians' courses. The tutors have many years of experience and are always delighted to pass on their knowledge and to help others in acquiring new skills. The Saturday evening dance, where all the musicians come together to play, is a delight, both for dancing and for listening!

Dancing at Summer School is not only about classes – there are plenty of opportunities to dance socially in the evenings. There are events every evening within University Hall and I am very glad to be able to work with the local Branches in St Andrews, Perth, and Dunfermline, who welcome dancers from Summer School at their events. For the overseas visitors especially, it is wonderful to be able to offer the opportunity to visit other parts of Scotland and to experience the talents of our many great musicians. I am also especially pleased to work with the NE Fife Tourist Board in organising the weekly dances on Thursdays in the Younger Hall. This is, without doubt, one of the very best dancing floors in the country – it is so well sprung that you can dance all evening without the legs feeling any pain. During these dances members of the Summer School show what they have learned during the week. There is a team who demonstrate some of the newly published dances and both the Highland class and the ladies' step dance class demonstrate their skills.

Part of the joy of visiting St Andrews is, of course, exploring the town and visiting the coastal villages of the East Neuk. Although I aim to keep the dancers busy I hope they will find time to enjoy their visit to Fife, whether it is the first or the "umpteenth" time.

This year, as I take over as the Director of Summer School, I am conscious of following in very illustrious footsteps. My predecessors, including Dr Milligan, all made their special contribution to the development of the Summer School and I hope to do the same. I am certainly no stranger to Summer School as I first came, in the 1960s, as a teenager with my parents!

In 2003, to celebrate the Society's long association with the town and the Society's 80th Anniversary, St Andrews Community Council wished to mark the occasion by way of a presentation. Two representatives of the Community Council, Murdo MacDonald (Vice Chairman) and Archie Strachan, came to dinner in University Hall on Wednesday 6

August. Mr Strachan was at one time involved in physical education at the University, and had great memories of the Society's co-founder, Miss Milligan. Murdo MacDonald presented the Society Chairman, Jean Martin, with a beautiful scroll.

The folk of St Andrews have always given the dancers a wonderful welcome. If you want to know any more, please come along to the Younger Hall on Thursday evenings, or to University Hall any time during our stay and find out how you can join in the fun.

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Scottish Music & Dance

Wilson Nicol, dancer, musician, and composer

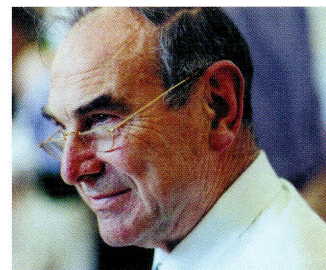
Scotland has a great tradition of music and dance. There are at least three different racial influences: the people of Celtic origin in the north and west; those of Anglo Saxon origin in the south and east; and those of Scandinavian origin in the far north including Orkney and the Shetland Islands. So the music and dance has had a rich diversity which continues to this day.

The Stewart kings in the 15th and 16th centuries were patrons of music and maintained musicians at their palaces of Holyrood, Linlithgow and Falkland, while the dances, 'brent new frae France', were influenced by the Auld Alliance between France and Scotland.

Around 1660 the violin had become established as the major Scottish musical instrument. Scottish craftsman began copying the violins of Italian masters and that craft of fiddle-making has continued to this day. By the 18th century, the Acts of 1649 and 1701 prohibiting 'promiscuous dancing' (passed through the influence of the church) were swept aside in a desire to make merry. The Earl of Selkirk in 1705 scandalised Edinburgh by engaging in dancing. But it was popular, and this led to the building in 1725 of the first Assembly Rooms for dancing in Edinburgh, to be followed in other major towns in Scotland. The dances at that time were mainly from the French Court, but included some English country dances by John Playford. Two of the earliest records of Scottish music and dance are the Duke of Perth's manuscript dated 1737, and the Castle Menzies manuscripts dated 1749. The first Scottish publication of dances was by James Bowie in Perth in 1789.

The dances then included the Scottish Reel – figures of eight for three or four dancers interspersed with setting steps – longwise country dances, and the Minuet. Later, around 1760, the new rhythm of the Strathspey incorporating the traditional Scottish Snap, and the hornpipe, were developed.

The first Golden Era of Scottish traditional music started in the middle of the 18th century. The first book of Scottish tunes had been published in 1600 by Henry Playford, then in 1757, Bremner published in Edinburgh his collection of Scots reels and country dances. After that, a flood of publications continued for the next 50 years. The outstanding musicians, composers and dancing masters of the period were; Niel Gow and two of his sons William and Nathaniel who had a classical training and published several volumes in Edinburgh; Robert Mackintosh also from the Dunkeld region; and William Marshall who had a long career in the service of the Dukes of Gordon in Huntly. All were excellent fiddlers and prolific composers. It is a testimony to their quality that much of their music is still played today.



In the 19th century, the quadrille in square sets and the waltz came to Scotland from the continent and were incorporated into Scottish dances. Examples are, the Waltz Country Dance, the Lancers, and the Eightsome Reel, which is only just over 100 years old! In the latter half of that century a large number of hybrid dances were introduced. Circassian Circle and the Dashing White Sergeant are both round-the-room dances with somewhat tenuous Scottish connections, but are good mixers. The polka, originating in Czechoslovakia, arrived by mid-century. Then there were the Highland Schottische in 1855, and the barn dance in 1888. By the end of the century the circle and square dances had all but ousted the country dances and reels.

The second golden era of music was almost exactly 100 years later, and this was dominated by the violinist James Scott Skinner born in Banchory 1843. At the age of 10 he ran away to Manchester to play in Dr Marks Little Men and while

there he had tuition from the great French violinist Charles Rougier. In his late teens, Scott Skinner was back in Scotland outplaying all other fiddlers in competitions. He earned his living as a violin and dancing teacher, and was retained by Queen Victoria to teach at Balmoral. When giving a public performance, he always had a classical programme in the first half with traditional music in the second half. In his 84 years he composed over 600 pieces.

Learning to dance was not confined to the better-off: Robert Burns writes of his going to dancing classes in his youth, and in the 19th century spilling over into the 20th there was an army of 'dancies' – itinerant fiddler/dancing teachers who would play and dance. One of the most famous in our time was dancie Reid from Forfar who taught the late Queen Mother at Glamis. His orchestra was one of the foremost dance bands in Scotland in the early part of the 20th century.

At the turn of that century, dances from the Americas came flooding to Europe. First there was the cakewalk, popular among the negroes, and then ragtime, and later

the foxtrot and many other dances which we now classify as ballroom. These new dances stimulated the expansion of dancing schools in the big towns while in the country areas dancing was still dominated by the dancies. Programmes at dances were a pot-pourri of all the types. Faced with all these innovations, the truly traditional Scottish dances were in almost terminal decline.

It was in those circumstances that Mrs Stewart of Fasnacloch in Argyll and Miss Jean Milligan decided that it was time to save the traditional Scottish dances before they were completely forgotten. Together with 27 interested people at a meeting in Glasgow they formed the Scottish Country Dance Society in 1923. From that small beginning the Society, now Royal, has members all over the world totalling around 20,000. Scots are great wanderers and are to be found all over the world. It is not surprising then that Branches of the Society sprang up all over the world and not only Scots were drawn in to the dancing net. The Society's annual summer school, which it has held in St Andrews for over 60 years, is a Mecca for dancers from far and near. The Society has published over 40 books of dances so far. Originally these were traditional dances only, but now, accepting that dancing is a living art form, the Society includes new dances with new figures. Other groups concentrating on Highland, Ceilidh, Old time, Ballroom, and more modern styles of dancing all flourish in Scotland.

Traditional music is very much into the next golden era with scores of excellent young musicians and composers coming forward. It was thought at one time that dancing would eventually be accompanied by recorded music, but that is not happening. Dancers realise that there is an extra dimension to their enjoyment by having live music. The violin has been superseded by the accordion which has a greater harmonic contribution and is more amenable to amplification. The style however remains traditionally Scottish even if there are influences from all round the world.

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