

# FUNDAMENTALS OF SCOTTISH COUNTRY DANCING

To enjoy Scottish Country Dancing, it helps to be familiar with some basics of the dance.

A **set** is usually a longwise line of couples. Normally, a set has four couples. The men stand with their left shoulders toward the music. The top of the set (**up**) is toward the music; the foot or bottom of the set (**down**) is the other way. Some dances are done in three-couple sets; there are also square sets, and dances done around the room with couples or trios facing each other.

**Progression:** A dance may require two, three or four couples to perform the figures. The figures of *progression* change the dancers' positions in the set. You get to dance with and meet everybody!

After one round of the dance, in most cases, the first or "dancing" couple normally progresses one position down the set, and finishes in second place. They are still first *couple*, and they repeat the dance from second *place*. The figures of the dance move the supporting couples up the set until they reach the top, where they wait out one round and then become the new first couple.

In a two-couple dance, the first couple remains in the starring role as first couple until they reach the bottom of the set (three rounds or repetitions). In a three-couple dance, first couple does the dance twice, finishing in third place, and simply steps to the bottom. We normally do each dance eight times through, so that each couple has at least two turns of being first couple. The exception is a dance requiring four couples; the figures of the dance will usually get first couple to the bottom after only one round.

**Music:** Most dances are 32 **bars** or **measures** long. Most music is played in phrases of 8 bars. It takes one bar of music to do one traveling or one setting step, which can be counted "one-two-three-and." Most figures take four or eight bars of music. **Phrasing** is matching the movements of the dance to the phrases of the music. **Covering** is matching the movements of other dancers.

## Elements of Scottish Country Dancing

Phrasing -- matching your movements to the music  
Good and helpful use of hands  
Covering -- matching your movements to other dancers  
Posture  
Pleasant eye contact  
Foot positions: turnout, extension, heels off floor  
Appreciation of the music  
Ballroom etiquette

## Basic Steps

Jigs and reels (quick time):  
    Skip change of step (traveling)  
    Slip step (used mostly in circles)  
    Pas de basque (setting in place or traveling)  
Strathspey (slow time):  
    Traveling  
    Setting  
Stepping up or down (both tempos)

## Basic figures and movements

Advance and retire  
Back to back  
Down the middle and up (leading or dancing)  
Turns with right, left or both hands, in 2 or 4 bars  
Casting down (or "off")  
Casting up  
Hands round (circles for 3 or more)  
Hands across (right or left hands in a "wheel")  
Rights and lefts  
Figures of 8 and half figures of 8  
Grand chain  
Promenade  
Balance in line  
Petronella turns  
Ladies chain  
Progressions  
    Allemande  
    Poussette (quick time)  
Corner figures  
    Turn corners and partner  
    Set to and turn corners  
    Set to corners  
Reels  
    Reels of three  
    Reels of four

## Intermediate and advanced figures and movements

Double triangles  
Poussette right round (strathspey)  
Progressions  
    Half poussette (strathspey)  
    Knot  
    Rondel  
    Tournée  
    Tourbillon  
    Set and link (for 2 or 3 couples)  
    Set and rotate  
Corner figures  
    Set to corners and partner ("hello-goodbye")  
    Corner chains  
    Corners pass and turn  
Reels  
    Half reels of three or four  
    Crossover reels  
    Inveran reels  
    Tandem reels  
Highland setting steps (Glasgow Highlanders, schottische)

There are others, plus non-RSCDS figures as well; these are just more commonly done.

## When have you become an intermediate dancer?

Two useful rules of thumb are:

- when you usually go the right way in reels of three; and
- when you are usually in the correct place at the end of a phrase, ready to begin the next figure.

Another rule of thumb is, if you usually need help to get through a dance, you're a basic-level dancer. If you can remember and link together the figures on your own, you're probably an intermediate dancer. If you can do the dance correctly with good technique and help others at the same time, you're a candidate for advanced!

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