

FUNDAMENTALS OF SCOTTISH COUNTRY DANCING

To enjoy Scottish Country Dancing, you need to be familiar with some basics of the dance. These are taught during the FUNDamentals section of our class.

Some background:

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 "active" couple normally progresses one position down the set, and winds up 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** 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.

Elements of Scottish Country Dancing

Phrasing -- matching your movements to the music
Good and helpful use of hands
Covering -- matching your movements to those of the 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
Highland setting steps (Glasgow Highlanders, schottische)
Poussette (strathspey)
Set and link
Progressions
 Half poussette (strathspey)
 Knot
 Rondel
 Touree
 Tourbillon
 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

There are other, non-RSCDS figures as well.

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!