

A favourite Scotch measure: the relationship between a group of  
Scottish solo dances and the tune 'The Flowers of Edinburgh'

Mats Melin

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Ón gCos go Cluas

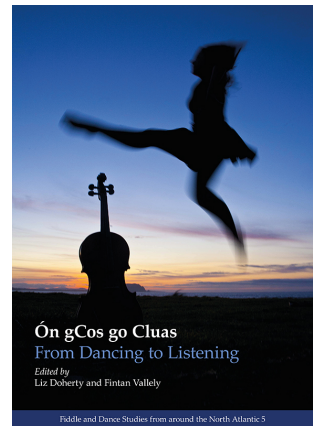
From Dancing to Listening

Fiddle and Dance Studies from around the North Atlantic 5

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About the author:

**Mats Melin** is a Swedish born traditional dancer, choreographer and researcher who has worked professionally with dance in Scotland since 1995 and in Ireland since 2005. Currently lecturer in dance at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance at the University of Limerick, he has been engaged in freelance work nationally and internationally, was traditional dancer in residence for four Scottish local authorities, and co-founded the dynamic Scottish performance group Dannsa in 1999. He is an office bearer for Dance Research Forum Ireland and completed his PhD on Cape Breton step dancing in 2012. His monograph, *One with Music: Cape Breton Step Dancing Tradition and Transmission*, was published by Cape Breton University Press in 2015.

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## A favourite Scotch measure: the relationship between a group of Scottish solo dances and the tune ‘The Flowers of Edinburgh’

MATS MELIN

Certain Scottish melodies seem to have inspired the dancing masters of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Scotland to devise a diverse set of dances designed to be performed to particular tunes. ‘The Flowers of Edinburgh’, a 4/4 Scotch measure, has inspired a number of soft- and hard-shoe solo dances taking their names from the tune, as well as a Scottish country dance. This article focuses on how the creative processes of various dance teachers have left us with three or four dances with varied movement segmentation patterns, and several versions of these dances in relation to versions of the same tune. My aim is to illustrate the diversity of choreographic ideas and motifs in relation to a single tune, but also to examine whether we are dealing with discrete dances from different sources, or rather, similar versions of a smaller, shared repertoire of nineteenth-century dances.

### The melody

‘The Flowers of Edinburgh’ appears today under many alternative titles in a plethora of music publications. In Scots it appears as ‘Da Flooers o’ Edinburgh’, and in pseudo Gaelic as ‘Blata Duin-Eudain’. James Oswald is said to have composed it, according to eighteenth-century Scottish fiddler Niel Gow among others, sometime around 1740 in Lowland Scotland – even though Oswald does not claim it himself. Oswald was a Scottish musician, composer, arranger, cellist, music publisher, and dancing master born in Crail, Fife, in 1710. He died in Knebworth, Hertfordshire in 1769, having moved to London from Edinburgh in 1741.<sup>1</sup> Written music for the tune first appears in print in 1742 in London in Oswald’s *Curious Collection of Scots Tunes (II)* as a ‘crude’ song under the title ‘My love’s bonny when She Smiles on me’.<sup>2</sup> It appears again in another collection by Oswald in 1750 with the words ‘Love was once a Bonny Lad’, and Oswald himself republished it in 1751 in his volume *Caledonian Pocket Companion* under the title ‘The Flower of Edinburgh’ (see Figure 1).<sup>3</sup> The tune should be classified as a ‘Scotch Measure’ but it is commonly played as a 2/4 or 4/4 reel. It seems to have been played normally in an AABB (= 32 bars of music) tune motif

## Ón gCos go Cluas – From Dancing to Listening

sequence, which suits all of the soft-shoe versions and the country dance, while this structure only fits some of the hard-shoe arrangements. At least one of the hard-shoe arrangements, known as ‘Dannsa nan Flurs’ collected in Cape Breton Island, Canada, in 1957 by Frank Rhodes, was danced to the less common structure of ABAB (= 32 bars of music).

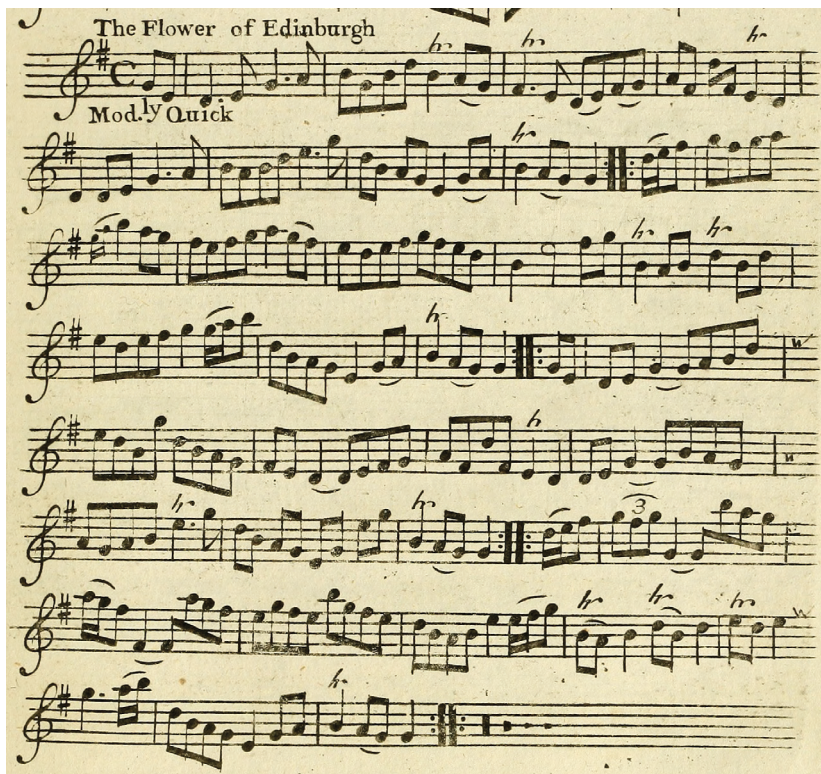


Figure 1 Oswald’s *Caledonian Pocket Companion*, 1751, volume 3, page 19.

### The Scottish solo dance tradition

Researchers Emmerson (1972) and the Fletts (1996) have described the Scottish solo dance tradition in great detail, but it is useful here to single out some facts. The term ‘high dance’ appears in many dancing master repertoires in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Many music collections reflect this, with tune titles such as ‘Miss –’s High Dance’ or ‘Mr –’s High Dance’ as dedications to their patrons, especially for the children of the gentry, and for favourite pupils. Other dance name terms in use were ‘Pas Seul’ as in the dance ‘A Pas Seul for Miss Jane Forbes’, or simply naming the type of dance after a person such as in ‘Gayton’s Hornpipe’.<sup>4</sup> Very few of these dances or step arrangements seem to have survived into present day and it is quite likely that most were only made for specific people or families. Another group of solo dances are those like the Highland fling which do not necessarily have a specific tune linked with them. These dances seem, rather, to have groups of suitable strathspeys, reels, or hornpipes associated with them.

In the cases where tunes and dance names correlate, the list includes dances such as 'The Flowers of Edinburgh' (2/4 or 4/4 Scotch measure), 'Highland Laddie' (2/4 or 4/4 reel), 'Over the Water to Charlie' (6/8 jig), 'Gorm' (4/4 strathspey), 'Blue Bonnets' (6/8 jig), 'The Lads wi' the Kilt' (Gillean an Fheilidh, 6/8 jig), 'Over the Hills and Far Away' (4/4 reel or hornpipe), 'Calum Brougach' ('Calum Crubach' or 'Miss Drummond of Perth', 4/4 strathspey), and 'Dusty Miller' (3/2, 3/4, or 6/4 hornpipe) to name but a few. They all exist in various versions, with each version distinct in its appearance in relation to its geographical occurrence or in its character displaying a particular dancing master's trademark movements. A number of 'new' dances have been devised to particular tunes too since the 1950s, particularly within the framework of the Scottish Highland and Country Dance organisations.

These dances have survived to this day through a combination of oral tradition and that same oral tradition being written up and published, notably by the Fletts and Rhodes in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>5</sup> It further survives through a few historical notebook entries, for example the 1841 Hill manuscript,<sup>6</sup> and through a number of dancing masters' published ballroom guides. More recently, many similar versions of these dances have been recorded and published in dance examination instruction manuals belonging to the BATD, ISTD, SDTA, UKAPTD organisations, and by the New Zealand Academy of Highland and National Dancing. Since the 1960s a number of publications by Scottish dance teachers and dancing groups have also featured versions of these dances, notably the RSCDS publication *The St Andrew's Collection of Step Dances*, volume 1 (2009) and volume 2 (2010).<sup>7</sup>

Before the advent of national dance organisations (or similar) and the standardisation of dance vocabulary, each dancing master described these dances using his own terminology. This inevitably results in differences of interpretation of written material, as vocabulary used to describe the versions of the dances is thus not consistent from version to version. The formerly-prevalent tradition of handing down the dance orally has come to take second place to written instructions as primary sources. A contrast to this process can be seen in the Irish solo set dance tradition in which, for example, arrangements of the dance 'The Blackbird' (dance- and tune-name is the same) are passed on orally within modern dance organisations, dance schools, and by individual dance teachers, or as remembered as danced in certain areas by particular dancers. Few of these dances have been researched and notated in detail with the exception of Foley's research on North Kerry solo step dances (2012, 2013), where a version of 'The Blackbird' can be found.<sup>8</sup> The Irish tradition's competition circuit allows for a certain amount of creativity within the oral transmission of these solo set dances, so at any given time a number of versions of a dance devised for a single tune are in use. Few of these named Scottish dances have versions performed in hard-shoe, as solo percussive step dances, but 'The Flowers of Edinburgh' is one of the few that exists in many versions, and as both a hard-shoe and a soft-shoe solo dance, and as a social country dance.

### **'The Flowers of Edinburgh': soft-shoe versions**

It has not been possible to establish with certainty an originator for any of the soft- or hard shoe versions of 'The Flowers of Edinburgh'. We can only establish that they existed in both eastern and western Scotland from the mid-nineteenth century. Looking at the

available notations in chronological order, it seems that the current soft shoe version danced in Scotland are variants of arrangements of six 16-bar-long soft-shoe steps initially danced to the tune ‘Highland Laddie’, another well-known Scotch measure in 2/4 or 4/4 from the early twentieth century.

The earliest of these arrangements of 6 steps appears in 1929 in dance teacher G. Douglas Taylor’s book *Some Traditional Scottish Dances* and is given as ‘Highland Laddie’.<sup>9</sup> Taylor does not give us his source for his notation. Keeping in mind that a version of ‘Highland Laddie’ devised by Dundee dancing master David Anderson was re-arranged into the double jig time (6/8) by Highland dance teacher Jack McConachie (1906-1966) in 1952 and renamed as ‘Bonnie Dundee’.<sup>10</sup> It is quite possible that some dance arrangements over time have become associated with different tunes in this manner. Indeed, dance teacher Colin Robertson suggests that Jack McConachie, with so many versions of ‘Highland Laddie’ existing from different sources, decided to find suitable alternative tunes for some of them and changed the name in order to separate and preserve the versions of the same ‘title’ dance – hence ‘Bonnie Dundee’ and ‘The Flowers of Edinburgh’.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, most soft-shoe dances labelled ‘The Flowers of Edinburgh’ seem to be versions of the Taylor’s dance. In the 1972 posthumously published description of ‘Flowers of Edinburgh’ by Jack McConachie it is labelled as being a Hebridean dance. This is not quite accurate as the version known today in the Hebrides was introduced by Fearchar MacNeil in the 1980s and was taken from McConachie’s publication. In fact, it seems that all subsequent versions found relate back to McConachie, as in the case of the late Aberdeen dance teacher Robert ‘Bobby’ Watson’s version.<sup>12</sup> In the same manner, London-based dance teacher Colin Robertson published a version very similar to McConachie’s in the 1970s. The late Dundee dance teacher Charlie Mill’s version from 1986 is another similar example. The UKAPTD published a similar version in the early 1990s, while Janet T. MacLachlan from Canada compiled two very similar versions in the late 1980s. I myself learnt two versions from Katie Ann MacKinnon and Fearchar MacNeil in the Isle of Barra in 1989. These latter versions were referred to as ‘Lusan Dhun Èideann’ in Gaelic at the time.

In researcher Tom Flett’s archives, which are privately held, there are mentioned a ‘Flowers of Edinburgh’. Flett’s sources indicate that these steps originated with the Greenock-born dancing master Ewen MacLachlan (c. 1799–1879) who taught in South Uist and Barra from around 1840s to the 1860s. D. G. MacLennan (1952) mentions that Ewen MacLachlan taught a version of ‘The Flowers of Edinburgh’, but he does not describe it. The vague fragments of descriptions given of the dance indicate a hard shoe dance incorporating difficult shuffling movements. The Fletts only found a few steps and refer to it as a beating-dance similar to the style and versions of dances taught on the mainland by Mr Adamson of Fife and Mr Anderson of Dundee.<sup>13</sup> Going through the Flett archive notebook manuscript we find, for example, an entry indicating that one South Uist source, John MacLeod, never learnt the ‘The Flowers of Edinburgh’ from another local dancer, Archie MacPherson, as he found it too difficult because it contained a double treble done simultaneously with both feet and a step in which the dancer drops on one knee.<sup>14</sup> A similar movement is described in ‘The Trumpet Hornpipe’ found in the Hill manuscript of 1941.<sup>15</sup> John MacLeod did, however,

know another hard-shoe dance, 'The First of August' ('Latha Lunasdail'), which has been described fully by both the Fletts (1996) and by Metherell (1982).

The Fletts also found indications that the hard-shoe dance arrangement was known under other names in the Hebrides. They found fragments of steps of 'Carraig Fhearghais' ('Maillie' or 'Màili a Chrandonn'), and from what their sources told them it suggests that this was the same dance as 'The Flowers of Edinburgh', but performed to a different tune. I have not been able to trace either tune or any song related to these names that could be danced to. It is worth noting that 'Carraig Fhearghais' included a step where the dancer drops on one knee, a movement that was mentioned earlier. According to South Uist source Donald Walker, this solo dance had complicated arm movements, when he recalled Donald 'Roidean' MacDonald performing it. Dr MacLean, the island doctor in 1955, who guided Frank Rhodes in his research, said that 'Màili a Chrandonn' ('Mary of the Brown Mast' [tree]) was the song sung to the tune 'Fheargais'. Dr MacLean had a tape recording of this tune at the time, which he played to Rhodes. Dr MacLean related that the song was in praise of a rock, Carraig Fhearghais, which a lost man remembers and thus enables him to get back on his path for home. Slightly different is the tale from Mrs Monk of Benbecula, then around 70 (28 April 1955), who told Rhodes that the song was composed in praise of a girl, Mary, with a round face and brown hair, who put up the composer of the song for a night when he was lost, and set him on his way again the next day. Mrs Monk had not heard of a dance called 'Carraig Fheargais'. I refer to Flett for further general information on these Hebridean dances.<sup>16</sup> It is conceivable that 'The Flowers of Edinburgh', 'Carraig Fheargais', and 'The First of August' are all arrangements of a collection of steps known by and/or devised by Ewen MacLachlan that he set to different music.

That the soft-shoe dance descriptions are versions of the same dance becomes even clearer if one makes aspects of a basic structural analysis. The soft-shoe dance consists of movement motifs that are common in all other reel and strathspey dances in the Scottish solo dance tradition. Named motifs such as 'shake-shake-down', 'high cuts', 'shake', 'Fling turn', and 'back step' are all commonly understood as used in written Scottish dance descriptions since the 1950s at least. Structurally the soft-shoe versions have in common an 8-bar long 'step', which is danced off the right foot and repeated off the left foot giving a 16-bar, or one music part repeated. In Scotland the tune is generally played AABB so each step in full would fit an AA or BB part of the tune. A full dance, as six steps is a common length, would musically be AABB AABB AABB (96 bars). It is furthermore common today to have a short 4-bar introduction played which is generally bars 5-8 of the A-part, to allow for a bow to be performed by the dancer. When I asked Fearchar McNeil about this in 1989 he said that when he was young, there was no formal introduction. The music started and you simply got going on the dance was his recollection.<sup>17</sup>

All soft-shoe versions have a 2-bar finishing motif acting as an A or B part finisher for each 8-bar part of the music and which stays the same throughout the dance on bars 7-8 of each repeat. The first 6-bars of each step consist of three 2-bar long phrases. The three repeat patterns for the 11 versions (1929–present) known to me are in Figure 2.

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The style in which these dances are performed today commonly conforms to the preferred modern day, light and technical Scottish Highland dance aesthetics. The descriptions accessible are all using the foot and arm positions and step terminology as

8 bars = Phrase 1 (2 bars) / Phrase 2 (2 bars) / Phrase 1 (2 bars – Same or Mirrored) / Finishing Motif	(Steps 1, 4 and 5)
8 bars = Phrase 1 RF (2 bars) / Phrase 1 LF (2 bars) / Phrase 1 RF (2 bars) / Finishing Motif	(Step 2)
8 bars = Phrase 1 (2 bars) / Phrase 2 (2 bars) / Phrase 3 (2 bars) / Finishing Motif	(Steps 3 and 6)

**Figure 2** The Three Repeat Patterns Used in the Soft-Shoe Versions.

developed by modern day medal and competition organisations. An older mnemonically described version, such as the one notated by Taylor (1929) is slightly more open to the readers' interpretation. Flett and Rhodes's descriptions are very clear, as their published works (1985, 1996) contain detailed movement vocabulary descriptions.

### **Pivot Left / Pivot Right – To the Left**

Bars	
7	Spring on to LF, extending RF to 4th Intermediate Aerial Position (5 and); Hop LF, executing a shake action with RF in 4th Intermediate Aerial Position (a 6)
8	Bringing RF to 3rd Crossed Position, Pivot to Left on the balls of both feet, finishing with LF slightly forward of 5th Position (7 8).

**Figure 3** An example of how the finish motif for bars 7-8 of each A or B part is described using standardised Highland dance notation vocabulary.

### **Hard-shoe versions**

Another branch of 'The Flowers of Edinburgh' dances which can be interpreted as hard-shoe step dances come to us primarily through interpretations of Frederick Hill's notebook entry from 1841 and Dancie (dance master) John Reid of Newtyle's notebook description from 1935. The notebook titled *Frederick Hill's Book of Quadrilles & Country dance &c &c* [sic], *March 22nd, 1841* provides us with a number of written descriptions of solo High Dances. Of the fourteen solo or 'high dances' as they are labelled in Hill's notebook, five have the characteristics of the nineteenth-century hornpipe tradition, all employing trebling movements, but also including elements currently associated with Highland Games dancing.

The five dances are 'College Hornpipe', 'The Flowers of Edinburgh', 'Trumpet Hornpipe', 'King of Sweden', and 'Earl of Erroll', all in 4/4 time. Two dances, 'Dusty Miller' and 'Wilt thou go to the Barricks [Berwick] Johnnie', are triple time hornpipes written in 3/2 time (sometimes written as 6/4). Frederick Hill appears to have lived in Clatt, near Alford, Aberdeenshire, in the 1841 Scottish census where he is listed as a tailor. He died in Alford in 1903. Hill was clearly a student of several of the local mid-nineteenth-century northeast dancing masters who were active at the time. Their names, [John] Allan, 'Huat' (most likely William Howat of Turriff), [Adam] Myren and [John] Taylor, are given as sources for many of the dances.<sup>18</sup> The Angus fiddler and dancing teacher Dancie John Reid of Newtyle's own notebook from 1935<sup>19</sup> describes what he labels as two hornpipes – 'The Flowers of Edinburgh', and 'Jacky Tar Hornpipe'. Dancie Reid was primarily a pupil of Dancie James Neill of Forfar, but it is likely he took classes from dancing master David Anderson in Dundee as well<sup>20</sup> and Reid's notebook indicates this too. Both Neill and Anderson taught trebling (or 'treepling') steps, so the northeast and east of Scotland usage of these percussive types of steps is clear in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

We also know from MacTaggart<sup>21</sup> that a hard-shoe version of 'The Flowers of Edinburgh' was in use in Kirkcudbright and Galloway in the early 1820s alongside other trebling dances such as 'The Sweden March' ('King of Sweden's March'). Other similar versions can be found in the Fletts' 1950s research (including notes that it was taught by North-East Scottish dance teacher Betty Jessiman in the 1950s). Colin Robertson's 1982 description, based on notes taken at the RSCDS annual Summer School at St Andrews sometime in the 1970s, also conforms to a similar original version, as do two versions found in Canada as described in the late 1980s by Janet T. MacLachlan (one of which is set to the tune the 'White Cockade' and the other as taught by Betty Jessiman). The New Zealand Academy of Highland and National Dancing includes one version in the *Senior Gold Medal Test* booklet from 1991. In 2010, RSCDS published eight steps and three variations on these in their booklet *The St Andrews Collection of Step Dances*, volume 2. All these versions have a common structure regardless of aesthetic style of the dance. The aesthetic preference is up to interpretation, but Reid (1935) seems to suggest that it is a percussive step dance in the hornpipe tradition, while the 1841 Hill manuscript has been interpreted as both a soft- and a hard-shoe dance. We do not know the originator for this particular set of dances, but as the Hill manuscript originated from the teaching of dancing masters based in Aberdeenshire in the North East, and with Dancie John Reid being based in the Angus district of eastern Scotland, a North East source is suggested for this dance. We do not have enough data in the Flett archive to distinguish the form and style of the hard-shoe dance as faintly remembered in the Western Isles in the 1950s.

The step structure follows the same repeat pattern as the soft-shoe dance. An 8-bar step danced off the right and left foot (AA or BB). Commonly six steps are danced from the eight steps known to us, so a 96-bar sequence with the music played AABB AABB AABB is the format here as well. It is quite possible that in the nineteenth and early twentieth century all eight steps were danced for performance. We do not have any details if a specific version of the tune was ever used for the dance, but perhaps we can surmise that any local version of this well-known tune was played. Structurally the hard-shoe dance differs from



## *Ón gCos go Cluas – From Dancing to Listening*

the soft-shoes versions as illustrated below with the finishing phrase being 4-bars long and two unique phrase patterns making up the first half of the steps:

8 bars = 4-bar Phrase / Finishing Phrase

8 bars = 2-bar Phrase RF / 2-bar Phrase LF / Finishing Phrase

<b>Break RF</b>	
<b>Bars</b>	
5 – 6	Making a complete turn to the right on the spot, dance a Double Treble with RF. Count: and a 1 and a 2 and a 3 and a 4
7	Facing the front, dance a Single Treble with LF, finishing with RF in 4 <sup>th</sup> Intermediate Aerial Position. Count: and a 5 and a 6
8	Assemble with RF in 5 <sup>th</sup> Position (7); Jump, on to the balls of both feet in 2 <sup>nd</sup> Position (and); Jump, LF in 5 <sup>th</sup> Position (8).

**Figure 4** The finishing phrase, called a Break RF or LF, as described by Colin Robertson in 1982.

All the Scottish soft-shoe versions have six or seven steps described, while the hard-shoe versions have eight steps. For both the hard and soft-shoe versions of this dance, the order of the steps performed is set in the written descriptions. There is no indication about whether a dancer could or would be encouraged to improvise and make up their own order as they pleased when performing. Some indications from sources in the Hebrides<sup>22</sup> do however suggest that this was the case with some of the dances. The late Barra native dancer and teacher Fearchar Mac Neil told me in 1989, when I visited him in Castlebay, Isle of Barra, that as long as you started with the ‘lead round step’ the order of the following steps did not matter as much. As long as you danced the tune you were all right.<sup>23</sup>

Perhaps the most characteristic features of the hard-shoe versions are the combinations of 1-bar or 2-bar Treble motifs, labelled ‘Single Treble’ and ‘Double Treble’ respectively. The feature prominently in the 4-bar finish phrase and in a number of the first half step segments of the described eight steps. From the descriptions we have, the style of performing these percussive treble movements is very much like the ‘treepling’ described by the Fletts (1985 and 1996) and by Dundee dancing master David Anderson (1897). This particular dance is an interesting hybrid between percussive footwork and some movements commonly associated soft-shoe Highland Dances. Perhaps this dance represents some kind of combination between one hard and soft-shoe dancing? The way a dancer decides to perform the movements will render the whole performance more or less percussive in nature, while the choice of dancing in hard- or soft-soled shoes also will have an effect on its aesthetic look and feel.

### Cape Breton 'Dannsa nan Flurs'

Of all the versions of the 'The Flowers of Edinburgh' the one surviving in Cape Breton Island, Canada, and noted down by Frank Rhodes in 1957 and by myself 50 years later in 2007 is perhaps the most interesting from a structural and music relation point of view. Known as either 'The Flowers of Edinburgh' or 'Dannsa nan Flurs', the dance is described by Rhodes in the Fletts' 1996 book *Traditional Step-Dancing in Scotland*. Frank Rhodes visited John Gillis, in Gillisdale, South West Margaree, twice and learnt that his grandfather had come from Morar in west-coast Scotland, and had been 'taught dancing as a child in Cape Breton Island by an itinerant tailor from Scotland, Donald Beaton'.<sup>24</sup> John's daughter, Margaret, danced a number of solo dances for Rhodes during his two visits, including 'The Flowers of Edinburgh', of which she could remember ten out of an original twelve steps. In fact, all the dances in the family repertoire had twelve steps, including 'The Fling', 'The Swords', 'Princess Royal', and 'Tulloch Gorm'.

What is significant about this version is that in 1957 it was danced in an ABAB fashion with recurring 'Reel', a circle or lead round danced for 6 bars to the A part ending with a 2-bar finishing motif, which stays the same throughout all A parts played for the dance. Ten (or twelve) unique 'steps' were danced in succession to each B part of the tune with the same finishing motif. The B part 'steps' reflect the character of second part of 'The Flowers of Edinburgh' tune to perfection. If you take the music away when the B part step is danced you can clearly make out the tune. Each step is uniquely constructed but all carry the tune. Thus we find a structure where the movements of the A part are more generically constructed in relation to the melody with only the motif of the last two bars reflecting melody structure, while the whole stepping in the B part reflects the rhythmic structure of the melody in full. The structure thus was a circle clockwise which Rhodes called the Reel ending with the finishing motif followed by a step off one foot during the B part.

A part – 8-bars – 'Reel' phrase (6 bars) / Finishing motif (2 bars)
B part – 8 bars – Characteristic phrase (6 bars) / Finishing motif (2 bars)

**Figure 5** Structure of 'Dannsa nan Flurs'.

When I met Margaret Gillis in her family home in Gillisdale in 2007 and asked her about the dance, she demonstrated parts of the dance to me. What was significant was that her style and aesthetic of dancing reflected all that Frank Rhodes described in 1957, but the structure of the dance had changed. It was now twice as long. In the fifty years between the two visits the dance had changed from being danced ABAB to AABB. The A-part circle was now danced to the right (counter-clockwise) and repeated to the left (clockwise) (AA). Then the step was danced off the right and left feet (BB). I queried this change, but Margaret said that as far as she could remember she had always danced it this way. Asking Dr Rhodes in 2011 about the same he reiterated his memory that all the dances he found remembered had the ABAB structure, and 'The Flowers of Edinburgh' was no exception.

We can only speculate that perhaps the general playing of the tune has over the years changed from predominantly being played ABAB to being played AABB? Perhaps when the frequency of the dance being danced in the community declined the older way of playing the

tune was no longer strictly adhered to? When I met Margaret she indicated that it had been at least twenty years since she had danced the dance. She also said that when she used to dance it, she performed with her late sister and that they used to mirror the dance movements when dancing on stage. This could be another reason why the movements were doubled up at some point. When she showed me the steps there was certainly no hesitation in her doubling up the ‘steps’ in an AABB fashion. As Margaret showed no apparent concern that there had been a change to the structure so perhaps it can be seen as an acceptance of natural change in the performing of the music and dance traditions. As Margaret’s father was present when Rhodes notated these steps in 1957 one would have thought he would have said something if the pattern danced was not as he felt it should be done? There is nobody, to my knowledge, that performs ‘The Flowers of Edinburgh’ in Cape Breton today.

### **The current use of the dance today**

Within the global Scottish Highland and country dancing community today, versions of both the soft- and hard-shoe ‘The Flowers of Edinburgh’ are still in use to some extent. Only a handful of people, to my knowledge, are trying to keep versions, based on Rhodes notation, of ‘Dannsa nan Flurs’ alive. My aim above has been to highlight that some Scotch measure tunes, in this case ‘The Flowers of Edinburgh’ have attracted the attention of dance devisers since the early nineteenth century. It is certainly so in the case of the hard-shoe version/s of the dance. In the case of the soft-shoe version it looks likely, however, judging by the above analysis, that the dance started out as a version of ‘Highland Laddie’ (see Flett and Taylor’s descriptions) and that Jack McConachie was the originator on this particular combination of steps being danced to and renamed as ‘The Flowers of Edinburgh’ in the 1950s. All current versions seem to hail back to more or less the same ‘Highland Laddie’ arrangement that was known both in the Western Isles and on mainland Scotland. The hard-shoe versions are slightly more diverse with historically both east coast and west coast versions in use. Furthermore a west Highland version was taken to Cape Breton Island in Canada.

One final thought. How well do the melodic characteristics of the tune ‘The Flowers of Edinburgh’ reflect the movements applied to it? In the case of hard-shoe, percussive versions many foot movements reflect an actual note in the melody line. This is certainly the case in the Cape Breton version as indicated earlier, and is also reflected in the second half of each step in the east coast Scottish versions. In the soft-shoe versions this relationship is not as strong. The arrangement of steps seems to fit equally well to ‘The Highland Laddie’ as it does to ‘The Flowers of Edinburgh’. This may be because most of the movements in the soft-shoe versions occur on the main beats in the music, rather than using many or most the intermediary beats as in the hard-shoe versions. This, perhaps, gives us an indication that hard-shoe dances in the Scottish tradition depend on a rhythmic reflection of the melody line of an associated tune, as do similar percussive dances in the English and Irish dance traditions, compared to those versions of a soft-shoe nature. I speculate that there are a number of dances, such as ‘Seann Triubhas’ (4/4) and ‘Over the Water to Charlie’ (6/8) that may well have started out as hard-shoe dances, but over time morphed in to soft-shoe versions and could well, if compared to their original associated tunes, show signs of a close melody line and movement relationship.

## MELIN *Scottish solo dances and the tune 'The Flowers of Edinburgh'*

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> David Johnson, *Music and Society in Lowland Scotland in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972; 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. edn, Edinburgh: Mercat, 2003), pp. 61–62; D. Johnson and Heather Melvill, 'Oswald, James', in *Grove Music Online* [accessed 15 April 2012].
- <sup>2</sup> Mary Anne Alburger, *Scottish Fiddlers and their Music* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1983).
- <sup>3</sup> George S. Emmerson, *Scotland through her Country Dances*, revd 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Oakville, London, Ontario: Galt House, 1981).
- <sup>4</sup> Joan F. Flett and Thomas Muirhead Flett, *Traditional Step-Dancing in Lakeland* (London: English Folk Dance and Song Society, 1993); J. F. Flett and T. M. Flett, *Traditional Step-Dancing in Scotland*, with an appendix, *Step-Dancing in Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia*, by F. Rhodes (Edinburgh: Scottish Cultural Press, 1996).
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- <sup>6</sup> A. MacFadyen and A. MacPherson (eds), *Frederick Hill's Book of Quadrilles & Country Dances &c &c* [sic], *March 22nd, 1841: A reproduction of the original manuscript* (Stirling: Hill Manuscript Group, 2009).
- <sup>7</sup> The acronyms represent the following organisations: British Association of Teachers of Dance (BATD), Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (ISTD), Scottish Dance Teachers Alliance (SDTA), United Kingdom Alliance of Professional Teachers of Dancing (UKAPTD), Royal Scottish Country Dance Society (RSCDS).
- <sup>8</sup> Catherine E. Foley, *Irish Traditional Step Dancing in North Kerry: A Contextual and Structural Analysis* (Killarney: North Kerry Literary Trust, 2012); Catherine E. Foley, *Step Dancing in Ireland* (London: Ashgate, 2013).
- <sup>9</sup> George Douglas Taylor, *Some Traditional Scottish Dances* (London: Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing, 1929).
- <sup>10</sup> Jack McConachie, *Bonnie Dundee* (London: Caber Feidh Publications, 1976).
- <sup>11</sup> Colin Robertson, *Hard Shoe Step Dancing in Scotland and the Flowers of Edinburgh* (Reading: Scottish National Dance Company, 1982), pp. 4–5.
- <sup>12</sup> Mats Melin, personal research archive, Limerick, 2015.
- <sup>13</sup> Thomas Muirhead Flett, archive of research papers, privately held, accessed 2015.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>15</sup> MacFadyen and MacPherson.
- <sup>16</sup> Flett and Flett, 1996, pp. 64–65.
- <sup>17</sup> Melin, 2015.
- <sup>18</sup> MacFadyen and MacPherson.
- <sup>19</sup> John Reid, 'Solo Dances / John Reid', Newtyle, 1935, privately held MS, Limerick, Melin Archive.
- <sup>20</sup> Flett and Flett, 1985.
- <sup>21</sup> John MacTaggart, *The Scottish Gallovidian Encyclopedia* (Glasgow, 1824).
- <sup>22</sup> Flett archive; F. Rhodes, *Step Dancing in Cape Breton Island*, in Flett and Flett, 1996, pp. 185–211.
- <sup>23</sup> Melin, 2015.
- <sup>24</sup> Rhodes, 1996.