

HUGH MACKINNON, CLYDALE, ISLE OF EGG.

(Aged 55)

An Danisa Mòr: This dance originally belonged to Skye, and came to Egg via the neighbouring island of Rhum. Some Egg men who were working in Rhum learnt the dance there from some men from the Strathaird district of Skye, and brought back with them when they returned to Egg. A son[†] of one of these men, and the nephew[‡] of another are still living, both aged about 80, so we may say that the dance reached Egg about 80-100 years ago. It is still performed at concerts on the island, the two principal parts being taken by Hugh Mackinnon and Donald Archie Macleod, the gamekeeper.

The dance as now performed was described to us by Hugh Mackinnon as follows: it is danced by men only, as many as please taking part, to verses sung by two of the men, with a chorus at the end of each verse sung by all of the dancers.

The dancers join hands to form a ring, all facing inwards, the hands being held just below shoulder height, with arms straight^{††}. The two men who sing the verses whom we shall call X and Y start in diametrically opposite places in the ring. The first man, X, sings the first line of the verse, and, as he does so, both X and Y come inside the ring. The second man, Y, immediately follows with the second line of the verse; then X sings the third line, and so on. As they sing, X and Y walk about inside the ring, looking at each other the whole time. While X and Y are singing the verse, the other men continue to stand in the ring with hands joined, but leaving gaps for the two men X and Y. On the first line of the chorus, which is sung by all of the dancers, X and Y fall quickly into their places in the ring, joining hands as at the start, and the whole ring dance round to the left, moving slowly for the first half of the chorus and then quick until the chorus is finished. The two men, X and Y, then come into the centre and sing the next verse, and so on. During the chorus, the dancers hop round on their left foot, keeping their right legs extended towards the centre of the ring, with legs straight, at the feet about 18" from the floor. They make 4 hops to a line in the chorus.

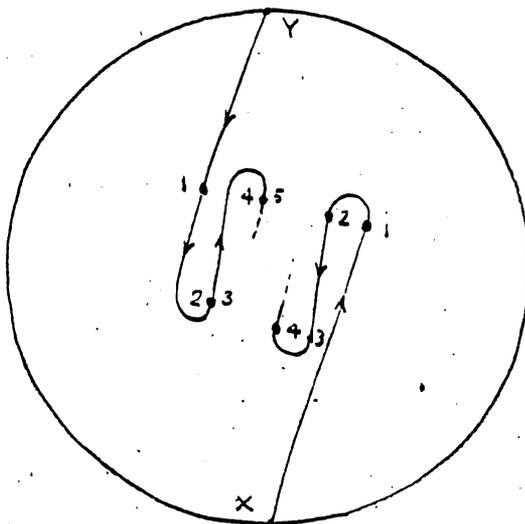
We were told by Hugh Mackinnon that no definite movements are prescribed for the dancers X and Y while they are singing the verses, and each dancer gives

[†] Neil Macdonald, son of Angus Macdonald.

[‡] Lachlan Campbell, nephew of Duncan Campbell. Hugh Mackinnon remembers Duncan Campbell who was old when he was a boy.

^{††} Hugh Mackinnon himself joined hands by hooking his fingers in those of his neighbour but this probably varies from dancer to dancer.

his own interpretation of the part; but the movements should not be rough or abrupt. He and his wife demonstrated the movements, as done at present, and the following description applies only to this; there have been wide variations from this in the past.



The positions of X and Y at the ends of successive lines of the verse are shown in the figure above. During the first line (sung by X), X and Y come inside the ring moving obliquely to the right. X comes at least half way across the ring, and Y not so far. As Y sings the second line, he walks past X, and both turn counter-clockwise to keep more or less facing each other. As X sings the third line, he walks past Y, who remains stationary, watching X. X looks over his shoulder at Y as he passes him. As Y sings the fourth line, he walks away from X, and both turn clockwise to face each other; and so on. As X sings a line, he walks without turning, and Y remains more or less stationary, watching who crosses over his shoulder at Y as he passes him. As Y sings a line, he walks away from X, and both turn to face each other.

The "walk" here is a light jaunty walk on the balls of the feet, arms swinging & elbows well bent, with a neat lifting, not arrogant inclination of the head as they watch each other.

At the beginning of the chorus the two men make a very quick whole turn their right and spring into their positions in the ring, landing on the left foot and raising the right leg, ready to step round as already described. Hugh Mackinnon himself used a very rough *Pas de Basque* (begin with the right foot) but this was a turn.

The only variation from this occurs in the verse beginning "The Miller's daughter" here X portrays the Miller's daughter and comes into the ring with hands over

his eyes, and body bowed down, as if sobbing[†]. He sings his first four lines in this way, but on his fifth (i.e. the ninth line of the verse), he springs defiantly erect, swinging his right arm up as if warding off the other man with his forearm. During the whole of this verse, Y walks about quietly, with no swagger, singing his own lines, & watching X. The trace of the two dancers is much as before.

There is one other, slight gesture which Hugh Mackinnon made quite unconsciously. On the line "Le sadaich na mull" of the last ~~two~~ verse, he made a gesture as if he was throwing up two handfuls of dust to cover himself: "I can even dance covered with the dust of the mill."

Hugh Mackinnon also told us that two dancers whom he had seen take the principal parts used to make the dance much more like a war dance. They steered across the circle and almost shouted the words at each other. He was quite sure that this was not the correct way. It was probably a performance of the type which gave the dance the name of the "Eigg War Dance".

The verses which follow are partly from a MS. version taken down from Duncan Macneil, of Craighall, ca 1932, by the late Donald Maclean, and partly from the traditional version sung by Hugh Mackinnon and his wife. We are indebted to Miss K. Mackay, sister of Donald Maclean, for permission to see the MSs.

[†] He also shakes his head from side to side while "sobbing".

An Dannsa Mór

Fonn

Si ùbh uidil uidil uidil	Ùbh uidil à thurabh à
Hal-dar-al uidil-an	Ùbh à uidil-an
Si ùbh uidil uidil uidil	Ùbh uidil à thurabh à
Hal-dar-uidil ùbh-an.	Hal-dar-al ùbh-an
Si ùbh uidil uidil uidil	
Hal-dar-al uidil-an	
Si ùbh uidil uidil uidil	
Hal-dar-uidil ^{al} ùbh-an. †	

Rann

Ùbh uidil à thurabh à
 Ùbh à uidil-an
 Ùbh uidil à thurabh à
 Hal-dar-uidil^{al} ùbh-an

Tha òr aig Coinneach a' Rudha,
 'S gun òr aig a h-uile fear;
 Tha òr aig Coinneach a' Rudha,
 'S aig fear Rudha 'n Dùnain.
 Ùbh uidil à thurabh à
 Ùbh à uidil-an
 Ùbh uidil à thurabh à
 Hal-dar-uidil^{al} ùbh-an.

Pòg do nighean a' Ghobha
 'S gun phòg dha'n a h-uile tè,
 Pòg do nighean a' Ghobha
 'S do ogha Mhic Lùcais
 Ùbh uidil à thurabh à
 Ùbh à uidil-an
 Ùbh uidil à thurabh à
 Hal-dar-uidil^{al} ùbh-an.

† These lines were not in D.M.'s MSS. They were noted from Mrs Hugh Mackinnon. D.M. marked the next 4 lines as the chorus, and his verses consisted of the first four lines of each of the verses above. I have rearranged these to make the description simpler. Hugh Mackinnon referred to lines 9-12 above as the "chorus".

Bidh poll air osan nan toll,
'S tric air feadh nan nighean e;
Bidh poll air osan nan toll,
'S bidh e feadh na dùtheha.
Ùbh uidil à thurabh à
Ùbh à uidil-an,
Ùbh uidil à thurabh à
Hal-dar-uidil ^{at} ùbh-an.

Ciamar a ruitheas mi'n nighean,
'S dithis a's a' rathad orm?
Ciamar a ruitheas mi'n nighean,
'S ceannadh[†] air an ùrlar?
Ùbh uidil à thurabh à
Ùbh à uidil-an,
Ùbh uidil à thurabh à
Hal-dar-uidil ^{at} ùbh-an.

† D.M. had "ceathrar" here. Hugh Mackinnon said it should be "ceannadh": a crowd of big fellows. [Angus Matheson says "ceathrar" is correct.]

* D.M. had "Fal" here & elsewhere instead of "Hal".

Fonn

Arsa nighean a' Mhuilleir Òig
 Arsa nighean a' Mhuilleir
 Arsa nighean a' Mhuilleir Òig
 Arsa nighean a' Mhuilleir
 Arsa nighean a' Mhuilleir Òig
 Arsa nighean a' Mhuilleir
 Arsa nighean a' Mhuilleir Òig
 Arsa nighean a' Mhuilleir

Rènn

Ùbh is ùbh is ùbh,[†]
 Arsa nighean a' Mhuilleir;
 Ùbh is ùbh is ùbh,
 Arsa nighean a' Mhuilleir;
 Gu dé lochd a rinn mi?
 Arsa nighean a' Mhuilleir,
 Gu'n d'laigh mi le saighdear,
 Arsa nighean a' Mhuilleir;
 Nach iomadh té rinn e?
 Arsa nighean a' Mhuilleir.

Mo ghaol a' Ministèir Buidhe,
 Arsa nighean a' Mhuilleir;
 Mo ghaol a' Ministèir Buidhe,
 Arsa nighean a' Mhuilleir;
 Cuide riut a dheandinn suidhe
 Arsa nighean a' Mhuilleir;
 Anns a' ghàradh 'm biodh na luibhean,
 Arsa nighean a' Mhuilleir;

Cha féid mise chun a' stòil,
 Arsa nighean a' Mhuilleir;
 Cha féid mise chun a' stòil,
 Arsa nighean a' Mhuilleir;
 Gus am faigh mi gun an t-sròib,
 Arsa nighean a' Mhuilleir;
 Abaran oidhe gu bòsd.
 Arsa nighean a' Mhuilleir

† From here onwards, D. Mackay had omitted all repeated couplets.

24

Dhannsainn le trombaid,
Arsa nighean a' Mhuilleir;
Dhannsainn gun trombaid idir,
Arsa nighean a' Mhuilleir;
Dhannsainn le fìdhleir,
Arsa nighean a' Mhuilleir;
Dhannsainn gun fhìdhleir idir,
Arsa nighean a' Mhuilleir;
Le sàdach na muine
Arsa nighean a' Mhuilleir.[†]

[†] Donald Mackay left out the second couplet, & repeated the last

Marbhadh na Béiste Duibhe: This was brought from Rhum at the same time as Dann Mór. It is not really a dance, for it is not performed to music. We could find no one on Eigg who remembers either a song or a tune of this name. It is still acted occasionally at gatherings on the island.

It is performed by two men and a cushion. The otter is represented by the cushion for which one of the men provides the animation. The other man is the hunter, and is armed with a stick or cudgel. The first man takes the cushion, and kneeling down behind the table (or other suitable piece of furniture), makes the otter poke its head (a corner of the cushion) out beyond the table leg, the head moving from side to side as the otter looks around for signs of danger. The hunter now stalks the otter, creeping along on all fours until he is within striking distance of it. He tries to hit it with the cudgel, but the otter draws back its head just in time. The otter now reappears, poking its head from behind another piece of furniture - a chair or dresser - and again the hunter stalks it and tries to kill it with his cudgel. But again the otter withdraws its head just in time. This goes on for some time, but eventually the hunter finally succeeds in "killing" the otter. At this stage, the first man retires and the hunter is left alone with the "dead" otter. In great glee he examines the carcass, and then picks it up by the tail (the opposite corner of the cushion) he swings it over his right shoulder, and walks off with it. He doesn't get very far, however, before the otter comes alive again, and "slices" him on the buttock. The hunter lets go of the otter, clutches at the painful portion of his anatomy, and falls backward - on the otter - screaming. He rises and, taking hold of his cudgel, gives the otter several heavy blows, and nearly kills it this time. Then he picks it up by the tail, swings it over his shoulder and walks off with it.

The Kissing Reel: Hugh Mackinnon gave us a description of this exactly like that of Mrs Macellan (p. 1). He said that it was last danced on Eigg about 7 years ago - a very little for 40 years before that.

The Scotch Reel: He had never seen a "cric" figure in his young days. The men & the men had different steps. The men used their arms, knuckled their fingers and hooked while the ladies had their arms acimbo. He had seen high-cutting done by older men, 40 or 50 years ago.

Heandem Weaving: He had never heard of the dance, nor heard the tune.

† Which is, however, supposed to be merely stunned.

11, Stourcliffe Road,

Wallasey,

Chester

15th July

Dear Mr. Mackinnon,

I have recently been

writing up my notes on Damma Mör, and

of find there is still a small doubt

in my mind as to whether I have it

noted correctly. My ~~words~~ ^{words} concern the

words of the chorus, and I wondered

if you would be so kind as to

confirm that the following is correct.

1) The first time that the two men

go into the ring, they sing

Uoh widil ä thurakh ä

Ukh ä widil-an

Uoh widil ä thurakh ä

Hal-dar-widil übh-an

This is the correct version

Uoh widil ä thurakh ä
 Ukh ä widil-an
 Uoh widil ä thurakh ä
 Hal-dar-widil übh-an
 Si' ukh widil widil widil
 Hal-dar-al-widil an
 Si' ukh widil widil widil
 Hal-dar-widil übh-an

the dancers dancing more quickly round in the last four lines than in the first ?

You will notice that in the 4th & 5th lines it is Hal-dar-al ukh an. Dancers move quickly round in the last four lines

The dance dancing round more quickly,
during the last few lines than in the
first four?

I'm sorry to bother you again over
this, but I would like to make sure that
it is correct. If you No. 1 is correct,
perhaps you would just like to put a
title in the margin, or do the same
with whichever of the two choruses is the
correct one [I think ~~the~~ the first is
correct, but I may be wrong], and
return this letter - if would some you
some trouble. If both choruses are
wrong, or if No. 1 is wrong, ~~perhaps~~ it
should be very grateful if you would
correct it for me.

They then jump back into the ring,
and all dance round singing the chorus

They then come back into the ring and

Sing

"The, or aig Coineach a' Rudha,

'S gun or aig a h-uile fear;

Tha ar aig Coineach a' Rudha

'S aig fear Rudha 'n Dinnair.

Ubl uidil a' thuraidh a'

Ubl a' uidil-an

Ubl uidil a' thuraidh a'

Hal-dav uidil iuk-an.

Then jump into the ring & all dance

round and sing the chorus again.

Is this correct? Yours,

2) And is the chorus

22nd June 1953.

A.353
Cleardale,
Isle of Bigg,
Inverness-shire
Scotland.

Dear Mrs. & Mr. Flett,

I was very pleased to get your letter and particularly for one reason. Shortly after your visit to Bigg you very kindly sent us a gift parcel and a note with your address. This note got lost or mislaid somehow and we could not write back to thank you. This I do now in all

Sincerely,

I see you are still wrestling with the "Damsa Mor". I have made the necessary corrections and I am

returning your own letter so that
you can see my remarks.

I shall be pleased to have a
copy of your article when it is
written and better still I hope
to see you both in Bigg in the
not too distant future.

Thanking you again for
your kindness.

Sam,

Yours sincerely

Hugh Mackinnon

