

RINKAHHYN VANNIN

A Review by the Editor

An authoritative book on Manx dancing has been overdue for many years, as indeed has any book on this subject. Although my feeling is that this particular volume falls under the "any" section it is none the less welcome as the first publication dealing with these dances since the 1930's.

The book, which is published by a consortium of Manx dance groups, contains not only traditional Manx dances, both solo and group, but also details of the White Boy's Sword Dance and play and several pieces of dialect. Music for each dance is also included.

At first sight the book appears excellent. The standard of production is high and it is accompanied by an optional cassette tape containing enough of each tune to allow dancers to practice the dances without the benefit of a live musician. On closer examination however it readily appears that the book is seriously flawed and indeed often misleading.

Most if not all the dances have been collected by Mona Douglas, the doyen of Manx dancing. Regretably, no sources are given for the most part and one is left high and dry with dances out of their social and historical context. It is a pity that this information is missing as the background to many of the dances is fascinating and in some cases throws interesting sidelights onto not only the dances themselves but also the methods used to collect them, allowing an assessment to be made regarding their authenticity.

Perhaps a specific example is in order. The Walking of the Women is a dance supposedly performed at the Kirkmichael Hiring Fair on Michaelmas Day by girls who were available for hire. It is a particularly beautiful and satisfying dance. The dance is in alternate slow and quick tempo and is supposed to show the agility of the prospective employee! In fact Miss Douglas never saw the dance performed. She stated that the dance was collected from an old lady who "knew how to do it", but did not know whether she had ever taken part in the dance at the hiring fair. Anyone with any experience of collecting would of course view any such description with extreme caution. The music for this dance is also subject to much doubt and it is a pity that the authors have not sought to be more critical of the material at their disposal.

It must be stated however that for all its shortcomings the book is well worth buying and whatever the sources and however much the dances have been the subject of "interpretation" or "realisation" they remain a beautiful and often haunting collection.

Concealment of facts leads to speculation of the worst kind and those involved in the Manx revival would better serve their cause by a more critical scrutiny of their material rather than leave the reader to draw what may be doubtful conclusions. Rinkahhyn Vannin is available from Dave Collister, 22 Highfield Cresc, Onchan, Isle of Man and costs #5 including the cassette.

LETTER

This issue we are pleased to have a lengthy communication from Ian Dunmur, concerning his Lakeland routine.

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So: my name appears in an article about Norman Robinson's 17 Step Routine in INSTEP 11. Someone did once ask me, after a performance, if I had learned from Norman because he thought my style familiar. I had forgotten that Norman had a 17 step routine. Quite fortuitously my, now at last standardized routine, also has 17. I thought some of your readers might be interested in a list of my steps plus a few comments.

Until last year I used to alter my routine to suit the occasion. This meant I had to concentrate on remembering the sequence instead of the steps. Having, at last, worked out how to do all the steps in JF & TM Flett's Traditional Step Dancing in Lakeland (by being pressed into it by people at workshops), I thought I would like to work out a routine to show the variety of steps learned by those children in Furness and the South Lakes up to 1920s. I will make a few comments after listing the steps. Just one point first. When Joan and Tom Flett first saw Norman Robinson dance, it was in his little parlour on Walney Island. Then they invited him to a Caledonian do in Wallasey and were amazed by his moving all around the floor. So, my routine consists of groups of relatively stationary steps joined by moving ones to take me round clockwise through three stations and back to the start.

Page numbers and Roman numerals refer to the Flett's book.

1. SINGLE SHUFFLE I changing to II p29. Shuffle off I.
2. DOUBLE SHUFFLE I p30 with jump onto both feet as seen done by Norman, before Shuffle Off I. (Compare with step 12 in Instep 11.)
3. TREBLE II or DOUBLE TREBLE V SHUFFLE pp31,32.
4. ROLLING I SEQUENCE p56 (Diddy Dixon). Ends with treble which leads perfectly into -
5. LONG SHUFFLE p33 (Fred Clifton, left of 3 boys on p92). Ends with back treble.
6. SWIVELLING CRANCH IV Sequence b p44. Shuffle off I.

7. MRS STOREY'S SIDE STEP Not in Flett. (From Late Ettie Storey "Welsh" girl on p94). Shuffle off I.
8. LONG SIDESTEP III bars 9-16 (Diddy Dixon). Moving to right. Ends with a treble - weight on right foot, behind.
9. KNOCK TOE AND HEEL using Rolling III (N Robinson) but three knocks to end (Mrs Ethel Wall) p58.
10. FLATTER OVER KNOCK HEELS CRANCH II p47 (Mrs May Rigg who insists on calling this Lancashire Clog Dancing).
11. CROW WALK p53. Shuffle off I.
12. DIDDY DIXON'S 1ST STEP p64. Ends with Treble leaving right foot in front for -
13. DOUBLE CRANCH p40 Cranch V p39. To right, to left, to right again giving normal Shuffle off I on left.
14. BACK TREBLES foot of p53 with BACK TREBLE AND KICK p50 - 2 to right, 2 to left.
15. DIDDY DIXON'S 2ND STEP p56. Ends with 2 Swivelling cranches, 2 stamps.
16. DIDDY DIXON'S 5TH STEP p49. (Kicking step without heel drops) Ends with three stamps.
17. HAROLD EDGAR'S FORWARD STEP p60. Ends with special finish to |1 2&a3 4|- a2 3 -|.

Music - preferably Soldiers Joy. A music for 17th step because it fits the finish better.

I first learned the Shuffle off from Mike Quinn, who had played for Tom Flett's dance team in Liverpool, in the early 1960's. Then, about 1964, Jennifer Millest, from Tom's team, turned up and we formed the Reading Step & Traditional Dance Group in 1965. About the first thing we did was the Lakeland steps. Jennifer used to go and get new ones from Tom. Then Tom came down and sorted out a few details - especially the spring which features in all the treble shuffles and raising your rear foot - see the silhouette on pp25,31.

Since then, Ailsa and I have visited some of the old dancers, and some of the younger ones (Bruce Wilson, Malcolm Caine) who were learning from Norman Robinson when he died in 1970. So my style was influenced by Norman but also, especially as regards the treble shuffle III by the late Mr Benson Taylor, and the cranch by Mr Bruce Milburn (left in lower picture on p94). They were both Tommy Cannon's pupils. The late Mrs Ettie Storey (B Milburn's sister) remembered a simple sidestep not given by the Fletts and also gave a vivid idea of the girls' style of dancing, as did B Taylor's sister, Mrs Polly Sprout.

Bruce Wilson stresses the importance of elevation (see p26) - leaving a lot of air - and getting your feet up behind before the taps on the &s in 1&2&3 at the start of the Shuffle off. Mr Tom Prickett, judging at the Kendal competitions, said "get your knees up higher" in the hop before Wiggly Twist and, I think also the Kicking step. Bruce Milburn explained that you must use the 5 tap cranch in Step-over-cranch in order to get your weight correct for the return. (There are other ways of doing it.) This attention to detail - positioning at the end of one movement ready to start the next - I regard as most important. It is something which does not show well in printed descriptions: neither is it too often seen in performance, especially by those whose only aim seems to be to learn (?) ever more steps. As taught by Jennifer early on, I almost always put in a preparatory double beat before starting shuffling steps; but not others. (see foot of p28).

Bruce Wilson has indicated that Norman danced at a rather slow pace, which seems, sometimes, to have been adopted as a general feature of the Lakeland stepping. I suspect it may just be that he did it slowly whilst teaching at the evening classes. I do not remember his dancing as being slow. His speed in the news film taken outside the Royal Albert Hall is about 48 bars per minute.

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