

The Sailors' Hornpipe

(The December 1st, 1942, issue of "English Dance and Song" quoted parts of the following article by R. J. Sharp, of Chichester. In view of the recent enquiry (March, 1951, issue) readers may like to read the complete article.)

IN considering the question of the Hornpipe, it should be borne in mind that the frequently recurring stresses in our history have continually caused the augmentation of our professional seamen by landsmen, and by reason of his calling the seaman has always been prone to self-recreation, attention to detail and cherishing traditions, especially in the days of sail.

The Hornpipe dance is of considerable antiquity, its name being derived from the wooden single-reeded pipe of British or Keltic origin which originally played the dance tune. Chaucer alludes to the "Horne-pypes of Cornewall." It was popular in Tudor times, being included in a list of fashionable dances in 1581. Morley (1597) also refers to "many other kindes of Daunces as horne-pypes." The dance is continually referred to in later literature. Circa 1700, it was very popular in Derbyshire, Lancashire and Nottinghamshire. That there was divergence between the land hornpipe and the nimble and neat sea hornpipe is indicated by a passage from "The Manchester Strike": "It appeared from the heavy tread and shuffling feet that some were dancing hornpipes." Those of middle age will probably call to mind the tar-clad Pantomime girls of their youth, daintily hitching up their slacks and imitating hauling ropes, flat-handed, in their representation of the Sailor's Hornpipe. It seems to have been analogous from the Dance point of view to the Irish Jig and, from the musical, to the Waltz, as various composers, onwards from Byrd and including Purcell and Handel, wrote Hornpipes in varying forms. There is some ground for regarding the Hornpipe as the English National Dance, but being an intricate solo one, ashore, it fell an early victim to the trend for effortless slouching instead of dancing.

In Chappell's "National English Airs" (1839) it is entitled "Jack's the Lad or The College Hornpipe." Boosey's "100 Country Dances" for the fiddle include three Hornpipes: "Fishers Hornpipe," "College Hornpipe" and "The Soldiers Joy" (Hornpipe).

There seems no direct evidence as to how or when "The College" became the Sailors' Hornpipe, but there is direct evidence that the Tudor Sea Captains fully shared the prevalent appreciation of the virtues of self-amusement and fostered Musick and Drama among their ships' companies; as Dancing was so closely connected with these and as popular (as witness the numerous editions of Playford's "Dancing Master"), it is probably a correct surmise that adoption of the shore College Hornpipe by Sailors, occurred during this period. Drake, in his Diary of his most hazardous voyage round the world (1577) states: "Neither had he omitted to make provision also for ornament and delight, carrying for this purpose with him, expert musitians," etc. Shakespeare's

Plays were not uncommonly performed by crews of the East India Company's ships. On September 5th, 1607, Captain Keeling, of the "Dragon," allowed his crew to put on "Hamlet" (probably its first performance); the chorus of the old Sea-song, "We be three poor Mariners" (1609) runs: "Come let us dance the round, around, around." Purcell's Opera, "Dido and Aenas" contains two Sailors' Dances, indicating the then association of Sailors and Dancing. Another factor in fostering dancing aboard the small ships of that time was that it provided much-needed exercise. It is a pity that the Hornpipe is not more widely danced now, for a daily Hornpipe, besides being as physically beneficial as the "daily dozen," would be more exhilarating. Of the many Hornpipes brought aboard, "The College," with its breezy tune, probably proved most adapted for ship-life and so has survived the others.

The Sailor has always been musical, and as in the Royal Navy Chantying was not allowed, the Hornpipe provided a musical outlet, which may account for its survival in the Royal Navy only.

The Boatswain's Pipe is still used in the Royal Navy for passing orders and traditional ceremonial (e.g. Piping the Captain over the side). It is only a pipe in name, its present form being a species of metal whistle capable of varying tone. It may well be that it is a descendant of the ancient Horn-pipe and that both the pipe and the dance originally came aboard together and in long course of time have both completely changed their form.

I was at Gibraltar in 1918 and so was Petty Officer Arthur Wheatland (H.M.S. Bonaventure, some time Hornpipe Champion, R.N.) and Senorita Argentina (the noted Spanish Dancer). I arranged for him to teach her the Hornpipe, but circumstances prevented more than a detailed demonstration, in which she was very interested.

The figures he danced were: 1. Polka round. 2. Drop back hauling down. 3. English Twist. 4. Coiling down. 5. On the rocks. 6. Rope hauling (right and left). 7. Boat pulling. 8. Rope hauling (square). 9. Get cutlass. 10. Cutlass drill. 11. Return cutlass and get hand-flag. 12. Flag and cap. Finish.

The Hornpipe is as much a traditional Man's Dance as Morris or solo Jig, and one can only suppose that its fancy association with the feminine Chorus of Pantomimes and with School Displays has tended to obscure this fact. The real tradition, however, still survives in productions of Gilbert and Sullivan's comic opera "Ruddigore," in which the hero, Richard Dauntless, shows that "his Hornpipe is the best in the Fleet," and also at Navy Week Displays by boys of the Royal Hospital School.

R. J. SHARP.

ALBERT HALL FESTIVAL

Thanks to all who took part as Dancers, Musicians or Stewards, the Festival on January 4th and 5th was most successful. Full report in the next issue.