

Making a Balanced Dance Programme

We have all probably at some time or other been at a dance and thought not another allemande / my feet are sore with all these pas de basque formations / what a lot of time hanging around waiting to get that 4th or 5th couple yet again or are 6 dancers going to be asked to sit down/no strong, driving strathspey tunes tonight.

Good balanced programmes should leave dancers still on the floor at the end of the night as they say "wanting more!" How can we achieve this?

The attendees were split into groups for discussion on the same given topics and then they reported back to the assembly. Generally, there was consensus on the more fundamental areas within a programme, however due to the background of different attendees, we had variations in other areas, which were all quite valid.

Below is a summary of the questions posed and the suggestions given. While most of the suggestions will be reinforcing what we all know, there might just be a wee something that is new or we have forgotten about.

1. In order to have a balanced programme, what elements of a dance do you need to consider when arranging dances in order on a programme, such as the number of couples required to perform the dance?

Steps

- Preferably only skip change in the first dance
- Pas de basque in first / after interval dance - none or very minimal 2 bars
- Slip step - none in first dance

Number of couples required to perform a dance

- First dance - 3 couples in 4 couple set
- 2 couple dances - only a few and spaced out appropriately
- Variety of set sizes mixed throughout the programme (i.e. 3 couple, 4 couple, 5 couple fixed couple dances separated by 3 couple in 4 couple set, 2 couple in 4 couple set dances)
- Variety of set shapes (longwise, square, round room, triangular)

Formations

- Variety of formations spread throughout the programme
- Variety of complexity of formations spread throughout
- Last dance to finish with a circle. (Some groups felt this was more of a 'must have' than others .)

Types of dances

- Start with more familiar dances as this helps to build confidence and relax dancers
- Intersperse more challenging dances
- Last few dances - go back to the more familiar
- 40 and 48 bar dances or 'heavier' dances (lots of pas de basque) place appropriately e.g. if in quick time, place before a strathspey/ last dance before the interval
- Medley - only 2 groups mentioned they would use medleys

Music

- Have a good mix of jigs, reels and strathspeys
- Variety of types of tunes e.g. include hornpipes, slow airs as well as 'regular' tunes
- Start with a jig - allows band to warm up as not so many notes in tunes
- Dances with popular tunes
- Mix of 32 bars x 8 and 32 bar x 3 strathspeys
- Not too many 40 bar & 48 bar dances and not as the first dance

Other topics mentioned

- Who is the dance aimed at? Consider age, dance ability, mobility
- Include dances from a wide range of books
- Walk, or not, through unfamiliar dances especially if recently devised locally

2. What should you consider when choosing the order of dances on a programme for:

- a) Starting dance
- b) Before interval dance
- c) After interval dance
- d) Last dance
- e) Give three examples of dances for each of the above (a) – (d)

Starting dance

- Round room versus longwise
- Longwise then 3 couples in a 4 couple set
- Well known
- Not too strenuous with no pas de basque or minimal 2 pas de basque
- Tune - jig as not too many notes to allow band to warm up

Before the interval dance

- Reel or jig with a lively tune
- Place for a more energetic dance
- Suitable for all abilities
- 4 couple set dance only if 1st couple finishes in 4th place and band prepared to play it 5 times instead of 4 times through.

After the interval dance

- The longer the interval the gentler the dance
- Jig
- Familiar dance
- Good tune
- Little pas de basque
- 3 couples in 4 couple set
- Round the room

Last dance

- Good going dance and tune to keep dancers on a 'high'
- End with a circle - groups were split over this. Some felt it was a 'must have'.
- 3 couples in 4 couple set that can accommodate a 5th couple so no dancer has to miss the last dance.
- Familiar dance - the list of the dances suggested is at the end of the report.

3. Is there anything else that should be considered when compiling a dance programme?

- Who is the dance aimed at? age, mobility, experience
- Layout / size of the hall
- Will there be any walk throughs? Depends on those attending and if a new dance.
- Introduce only a few new dances on any one programme
- Number of dances on the programme and which might be encoered and still finish the programme within the scheduled end time
- Band - ability, experience
- Tune of first dance

Other considerations in relation to running a dance

- Who will MC the dance?
- Who will recap the dances? One person or shared?
- Band or recorded music?
- Liaison with band before and during the dance
- Programme compiled well in advance and sent to the band
- Avoid clash of dates with dances organised by branches/groups close by
- Accessibility of instructions, cribs, diagrams, videos of dances

4. Core Dance list

a) Do you have a Core Dance list for your branch / region? None of the groups had a Core Dance list. One branch published the programmes for all the dances in their area at the beginning of the dancing year.

b) List the advantages /disadvantages of using a Core List.

Advantages

- Useful for beginners
- Dancers build up a repertoire of known dances
- Progressive core for introducing formations
- Instructions easily available
- Other groups include them in their programmes thus encouraging less experienced dancers to attend dances outwith their own class dance
- Only use a few from the Core in each programme for variety

Disadvantages

- Too limiting if a small list and only these dances used
- Might be boring repeating the dances

c) What proportion of dances should be from the Core Dance list if using one?

- Depend on mix and experience of those attending the dance
- Approximately 1/4 or 1/3 of dances on a programme from the Core List
- 2 or 3 at most
- Core list could be compiled from dances enjoyed in class the previous year that are not on the 'well known popular list' to expand repertoire for less experienced dancers

List of Dance Suggestions (Dances in italics mentioned by more than one group)

This is a list of the dances suggested by the groups. Due to personal views you may or may not agree.

Starting dances

<i>EH3 7AF</i>	Jig	Bk 40	32 bars x 8
<i>Hooper's Jig</i>	Jig	MMM	32 bars x 8
<i>Good Hearted Glasgow</i>	Jig	Guide to SCD	32 bars x 8
Joie de Vivre	Jig	Bk 39	32 bars x 8
Liquid Assets	Jig	Drewry	32 bars x 8
Pelorus Jack	Jig	Bk 41	32 bars x 8
Flora's Fancy	Jig	Bk 49	32 bars x 8
Newburgh Jig	Jig	Bk 48	32 bars x 8
Tribute to the Borders	Jig	RSCDS Lft	32 bars x 8
Granville Market	Jig	Graded Bk 2	32 bars x 8
Luckenbooth Brooch	Jig	Bowie Dickson	32 bars x 8

Before the interval dances

<i>The Montgomeries' Rant</i>	Reel	Bk 10	32 bars x 8
The Reel of the 51st Division	Reel	Bk 13	32 bars x 8
Mrs MacLeod	Reel	Bk 6	32 bars x 8
Anderson Rant	Reel	MMM	32 bars x 8
Scott Meikle	Reel	Bk 46	32 bars x 4
Waverley	Reel	Bk 15	48 bars x 8
Mrs MacPherson of Inveran	Reel	Drewry	32 bars x 8
Falls of Rogie	Reel	Attwood	32 bars x 8
Black Mountain Reel	Reel	Haynes	32 bars x 5
Polharrow Burn	Reel	Foss	32 bars x 5
General Stuart's Reel	Reel	Bk 10	32 bars x 8
College Hornpipe	Reel	Bk 20	32 bars x 8
The Reel of the Royal Scots	Reel	RSCDS Lft	32 bars x 8
Good Hearted Glasgow	Jig	Guide to SCD	32 bars x 8
Pelorus Jack	Jig	Bk 41	32 bars x 8
Wild Geese	Jig	Bk 24	32 bars x 8
Diamond Jubilee	Jig	Bk 31	32 bars x 4
Midnight Oil	Jig	Drewry	48 bars x 5

First after interval

<i>Maxwell's Rant</i>	Reel	Bk 18	32 bars x 8
Nice to See you	Reel	Bk 40	32 bars round room
A Highland Welcome	Reel	Guide to SCD	32 bars round room
Highland Rambler	Reel	Henderson	40 bars x 8
Catch the Wind	Reel	Bk 45	32 bars x 8
Scotland's Gardens	Reel	Goldring	32 bars x 8
The Last of the Lairds	Jig	Bk 22	32 bars x 8
Happy Meeting	Jig	Bk 29	32 bars x 8
Wild Geese	Jig	Bk 24	32 bars x 8
Machine Without Horses	Jig	Bk 12	32 bars x 8
Light & Airy	Jig	Bk 4	32 bars x 8
Ladies' Fancy	Jig	Bk 13	32 bars x 8
The Duke of Atholl's Reel	Jig	Bk 16	32 bars x 8
The Laird of Milton's Daughter	Jig	BK 22	32 bars x 8
The Shetland Shepherdess	Jig	Graded Bk 3	32 bars x 8
Miss Hadden's Reel	Jig	Bk 23	32 bars x 8
Silver Tassie	S/spey	RSCDS Lft	32 bars x 8

Last dance

<i>Mairi's Wedding</i>	Reel	Guide to SCD	40 bars x 8
<i>The Deil Amang The Tailors</i>	Reel	Bk 14	32 bars x 8
<i>The Reel of the Royal Scots</i>	Reel	RSCDS Lft	32 bars x 8
The Duke of Perth	Reel	Bk 1	32 bars x 8
The Montgomeries' Rant	Reel	Bk 10	32 bars x 8
Highland Rambler	Reel	Henderson	40 bars x 8
The Final Reel	Reel	Barbour	32 bars x 8

Report compiled by Sue Porter, following TAS workshop April 2019