

The One O'Clock Canon - by the deviser

Consider a dance.

It has four hands across (right and left). It has rights and lefts. It has reels of four, some crossing casting and turning. And that's all. No unusual figures. No *tournée*. No set and rotate. No targe or spurtle. No complicated meanwhiles or new figures like in *Muirland Willie* or *Best Set in the Hall*. Each figure leads naturally to the next.

So why does *The One O'Clock Canon* inspire such terror? Why does it receive comments from very experienced dancers such as, "I think Ian must have written this in a nightmare"?

If you look at the structure of the dance, and think of it as ends and middles, it works out as follows:

Bars Activity

- 1-8 Top couple cross right hand, cast off two place, cross right hand and cast up one place while bottom two couples dance rights and lefts
- 9-16 Dance right hands across at the ends, followed by left hands across in the middle
- 17-24 All dance reels of four on the sides
- 25-32 Turn right hand at the ends (2 bars), left hands across in the middle (4 bars) and dancing couples cast off.

That doesn't look too complicated, does it? That's the essence of the dance. Apart from the first 8 bars of each half, you are doing exactly the same thing – you just do it at the top the first time, and at the bottom the second time. The first 8 bars aren't exactly tricky, either. You just need to be careful of your timing to make sure the cross doesn't get in the way of the rights and lefts. You have to be ready for the right hand turn, and it's quite nippy, but you've had the reel of four to settle yourself. In fact the hardest bit seems to be for the original first couple to remember not to start again on bar 129. So have another look at *The One O'Clock Canon*, with the thought that maybe it's not that difficult after all. It only contains simple figures, and there are only 40 distinct bars to it, you just repeat 24 bars at the opposite end of the set.

Ian Brockbank

How have you fared with *The One o' Clock Canon*?

Having seen *The One o' Clock Canon* taught more than once, I think teachers are giving little thought as to how to approach this unusual dance. It appears some branches, in organising a review of the dances in a new book for teachers, simply go through the motions of giving the instructions as to the geography of a dance. Unless teachers give more attention than geography to their teaching, we are surely failing many of our class members.

The One o' Clock Canon is a long dance with interlocking formations, and needs some care if we are going to have it appear on dance programmes and danced successfully. When *The*

Bees of Maggie Knockater and *Rob Roy* first appeared, they caused quite a lot of confusion. *The Bees* is done quite well now by the majority of dancers, though at the beginning, there were many times in a social dance, when it was ruined by those making a real mess of things. So many of the less experienced dancers were never taught the dance, but were just expected to follow the instructions. Thus, they ended up by being pushed around by other dancers making grabs for their hands and shouting at the set. Some old hands will remember these situations, and probably still see it happening when inexperienced dancers are involved in *The Bees*.

Let's get back to *The One o' Clock Canon*. Most classes are mixed ability groups, and the teaching has to cater for the less experienced. It is a long dance – a memory feat for the less experienced and some experienced dancers getting on in age! So point one is only to teach this dance when the class has a good grasp of the formations and terms meant by *cast one place, cast two places, dance up one place, rights and lefts, hands across, and reels of four*. These formations should be learned in other simple dances first.

The second issue is to consider the length of *The One o' Clock Canon*. It is really two dances of 32 bars each. So initially, success and confidence will be achieved by most of the class if taught the first 32 bars as a first couple.

- Cut out the talk.
- Put the weakest couples in first place, so they do any walking required.
- Go straight in with demonstrations of 8 bars at a time, giving instructions as one goes, in one set.
- Then perform in every set.
- Dance the easier movements straightaway with appropriate coaching; give way to walking where there is tricky phrasing, movements or a very inexperienced first couple.
- Follow the same strategy for the next couple.
- The other couples should try taking 16 bars at a time.
- Finally, all dance the 32 bars once.

It might seem slow progress, but every minute spent dancing successfully at this stage will reduce the time wasted later on. Keep the music and dancing to the forefront. Dancers have to learn to remember what has been said previously, because excessive talking or repetition simply leaves most of them switching off and forgetting what has been said!

As we move on to the next 32 bars, it is important to explain the terminology that is to be used. One successful way has been to call the original 1st couple the old first couple, and refer to the new top couple (2nd couple) as new 1st couple in all the subsequent instructions. This helps those who get confused as to which couple they are dancing. Usually third and fourth couples do seem to remember since their place is fixed for a longer period of time. Additionally, it is also easier for most dancers to follow instructions by place occupied, rather than their original number and this is a good idea when possible.

For the introduction of bars 33-64 there is more than one way to approach the teaching.

- It may be best to let everyone see the old 1st couple do the formations first. This means asking the new first couple to stand in 2nd place and dance as required, while the old first couple are prepared to do bars 33-64.
- Take 8 bars at a time after a suitable demonstration in one set, build up the whole 32 bars, eight bars at a time.
- When everyone has had a chance to see what happens once, then ask the new and old first couples to do bars 33-64 together to see the progression to the foot of the set.
- Now repeat the process until all the dancers have danced bars 33-64 once through, remembering to add and point out to the whole class that during the last 32 bars the original first couple do not start again but stand still.

Then comes the time to dance *The One o' Clock Canon* once through. It will appear to take a long time. Yes, teaching 64 bars can be expected to take twice as long as 32 bars. If the class is more at intermediate level than an experienced stage, then a short pause between each 64 bars can help them orientate themselves and bring to mind the next group of movements.

If the dance is repeated the following week, there are bound to be some who missed the first instalment so take the first 32 bars separately again, giving less time to the geography, but adding the details of covering and phrasing which will help make a good performance. It is always sound teaching to repeat new elements of dancing so that the performance can be improved to the enjoyment of all those participating. Including all these issues during the first time through tends to make the pace of the teaching rather slow.

How have you taught the dance? Any other ideas that you have found that assisted your class? Write in and tell us so we can all hear the experiences of learning this dance.

Notes on the dance – The One o' Clock Canon

A set slightly longer than normal is best – there must be room between 3rd and 4th couples; and also room for the casting behind the lines. The music is played 5 times 32 bars.

- Bar 16: Anticipate the exit from the left hands across, so that dancers pass through the side line positions for the start of the entry into the reel of four – it is easier in some positions than others.
- Bar 24: Middle dancers finish the reel of four passing by the left.
- Bars 25-26: There is a two-bar turn with no loops so that the turn flows into hands across.
- Bars 31-32: 3rd man must anticipate the change of direction to dance up with partner while (new) 1st couple cast off.
- Bars 33-34: New 1st couple giving right hands cross covering with those couples (old 1st couple and 4th couple) crossing in the rights and lefts.
- Bars 35-36: Keep the rights and lefts within the set while new 1st couple cast down outside the side lines to below third place.
- Bars 37-40: Careful phrasing so new 1st couple dance between old 1st couple and 4th couple and all cross together during the rights and lefts across - the new 1st couple taking slightly longer second step to be outside the set for casting up while the others are giving left hands within the set on the side line.

Bars 45-48: Anticipate the exit from the left hands across ready for the entry into the reel of four.

Bars 57-58: A quick two-bar turn, with no polite turn for the woman in third place.

Bars 63-64: New 1st couple and old 1st couple both cast off, while the 4th couple dances up to second place.

Next turn: The couples in 3rd and 4th (the new 1st couple and the old 1st couple respectively) places must be ready to dance rights and lefts at the beginning of the next time through as the original 3rd couple become the new 1st couple.

Errors in the printed instructions

Page 14, Bars 63-64: Last phrase "dance up to second place"

Page 15, Second paragraph, last line, "On the last two bars of the final repetition 3rd couple dance up to third place to finish all in the original order 1,2,3,4."

Peter Clark

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