

What is the Spirit of the Dance?

I recently borrowed a copy of Jean Milligan's "Festival" booklet. It is a small 16page booklet written by her in 1924 to give advice to teachers entering teams for the country dance sections of Music Festivals. This is what she says about "the spirit of the dance."

Take, for example, the first two figures of *The Triumph* when the first woman goes down the middle and up with her own partner, then down again with the second man followed by her own partner, then up the middle under the arch made by the two men, verily in triumph. Naturally, this figure must be done gaily and triumphantly, but without the least suggestion of exaggeration or overdone acting, or the charm is at once lost. The whole movement of the dance should seem to say, "Isn't it fun!" and when the dancers have this feeling they are indeed, in the spirit of the dance.

Another of the dances which requires the dramatic touch is *The Flowers of Edinburgh*. In this dance the partners chase each other, first the man follows the woman, who eludes him and comes up on the other side of the set, and then the woman follows the man. Again, the fun of this chase must be realised to get correct spirit. That there is a chase at all is often completely lost sight of, and the movement is done without the least attempt at showing this little piece of fun between the partners. As this chasing and escaping and chasing again is *The Flowers of Edinburgh*, the whole character of the dance disappears if it is not distinctly shown. To get this spirit it is not necessary to hurry or rush the dance. It can be shown almost entirely by facial expression and the movement

Of the head. Make the performers love the dance and you will have no difficulty in getting the correct spirit. It is the same in all types of dancing.

*Teachers may be interested to know that the figure in bars 1-16 of *The Flowers of Edinburgh* was a standard country dance formation, called "Hunting!"

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