

Notes for teachers on the dances in the Anniversary Suite.

As I devised these dances I had a particular teaching point in mind for each of them.

Jig

Kathleen & Walter McAdam,

This dance is about knowing where one is in space and being able to control the size of the set. This is the most advanced of the three dances, but is also fun to do for those ready for the challenge.

The cast on bars 9 -10 is different for each set of couples. The first and fourth couples do a regular cast, finishing just outside the set lines in second and third places and from here flow into the half wheel with energy. If they pivot instead of casting properly they will be too close together to make an easy entry to the half wheel and are likely to finish on top of the dancers on the outside corners, thus making the left hand half turn awkward.

The second and third couples should dance in close to each other, almost shoulder to shoulder on bar 9 (but not take hands) and curve out into the corner positions. Dancing in makes the turn to finish facing in on the diagonal much easier.

Similarly if the left hand on bars turn, on bars 11 - 12, to change places with the dancers on the corners of the set is fairly wide, it is easier for the dancers to enter the half wheel and for those dancing out to finish facing in on the diagonal.

15 -16 The right hand wheel for the original second and third couples just over a half wheel as it starts on the St. Andrew's cross and finishes on the St. George's cross.

The dancers should release hands in the center in time to slide in back to back for the reverse triangles.

17 - 24 There is a tendency for the set to have spread out quite a bit at the start of this figure so the dancers on the corners will need to advance to join hands with those in the center. Those back to back in the center must try to stay close together or the figure loses all its shape and becomes very difficult to dance. This is a good opportunity to throw in some practice on the correct way to dance traveling pas de basque!

25 - 28 It is unusual for dancers to advance on the diagonal and retire in a straight line, which is what happens here, but if the two men and the two ladies come in to be fairly close at the end of bar 26, it is not difficult to stay shoulder to shoulder as they retire to their new places.

Since the corner couples advance to the center of the set, those dancing around the outside can stay close to the set lines. It is not necessary to dance a wide circular track as there is no one in the way. The trickiest point of the dance is the end of bar 28, when all four couples should come into the set lines simultaneously. Since there is no standing couple this is strictly a judgment call. The dancers must work together to determine where the set line is and timing must be perfect, otherwise the back to back will be a shambles!

The rest of the dance is quite simple and requires nothing more than good covering. The only slight difficulty is for the second and third couples who need to go from retiring on bars 31 - 32 into crossing on bars 33 - 34. This requires a shift in weight to remain on balance and is something that is well worth working on as it occurs in many dances. This is also a point where dancers tend to have a memory lapse and might need a reminder from others in the set, to cross over.

Strathspey

Mr. Smith's Delight

This is the easiest of the three dances, both technically and from the point of view of remembering the sequence. The teaching point here is phrasing - the dance will not work if this is not fairly accurate - and maintaining the size and shape of the square set.

Bars 1 - 8 The first two hand turn is a fairly strong turn to allow the dancers to turn and open out back to back. If necessary the dancers can advance towards corners on bars 3 & 4 but it is preferable not to as the next turn is only a half turn and the dance will lose all its momentum if the couples are already too close together. During the half turn on bars 5 & 6 the dancers need to move out a little to make a diamond shaped set, with room to advance and retire. This is an asymmetrical turn, one dancer of each couple needs to move further than the other.

9 - 16 Provided that dancers have succeeded in opening out into a diamond shaped set, there should be sufficient space for everyone to advance and retire one step, twice. It is important to try to have the dancers retire a distance equal to that advanced, or the set collapses inwards. On the very last hop of the second retiring step at the end of bar 4, dancers should turn to face their present partners (original corner partner) On bars 5 & 6 of the phrase, all pass corner partner by the left shoulder, using strathspey setting step, to turn original partner by the right hand on bars 7 & 8. Couples finish in promenade hold facing clockwise around the set. It is preferable not to rush this turn.

17 - 24 Arms are lifted into allemande position on bar one of the new musical phrase, bar 17. The dancers must travel just halfway around the set in 4 steps, finishing with all the ladies' position opposite to where they started. If they overshoot it is difficult to enter the half ladies' chain. This is true of all four sections of this figure - the split allemande/ ladies' chain.

33 - 40 During this 8 bar phrase all the dancers progress one place clockwise around the set, ready to repeat the dance. The cast starts at the end of bar 3, everyone pulling back the right shoulder and dancing out to place in a slight spiral. The next 3 bars are used to dance round to the new place, men turning to face partners again at the end of bar 38. The advance and retire on bars 39 - 40 is a pleasant social gesture and a means to adjust the set if necessary. The retiring step should be small so that dancers finish a convenient distance from their partners to set to each other on bar one of the next time through.

Reel

The Fiddlesticks Frolic

The teaching point of this dance is to help the dancers listen to and count the musical phrases. Almost every 8 bar phrase has a different internal structure e.g. 2; 4 ;2 or 4;4.

This should be helpful when progressing to more complex dances where the dance phrase crosses the musical bar line. I strongly recommend teaching this in 8 bar phrases so that the dancers do not become lost in all the little pieces. Make sure they have grasped one 8 bar phrase before progressing to the next. Once they have the pattern it is possible to return to work on the internal make up of each phrase.

The most important thing to stress, throughout the dance, is that the active couple needs to be back to back every time they come into the center for a double triangles movement.

There is also ample opportunity to work on the helpful and elegant giving and releasing hands as it happens very frequently.

Bars 1 - 8 (internal structure 2;2;4)

As with Shiftin' Bobbins, the problem is to slow down the active couple so that they finish back to back in the middle and not practically in a straight line with their corners. I suggest having them advance towards each other one bar one and diagonally down on bar 2.

Every time there is a wheel on the side, one of the corners has the correct hand and is facing the right way, the other has to change hands and direction. A reminder will help here. The dancer who is facing the correct way can retain hands with the active dancer through bars 9 & 10

9 - 16 (internal structure 2;4;2)

The half diagonal reel of four occurs on bars 3 - 6. It flows quite easily from the double triangles setting but corners may need reminding to stop in their new places after 4 bars. The active couple has time to dance around each other in a nice wide, flowing loop turning to finish back to back facing their own side of the set at the end of the phrase.

17 - 24 (internal structure 2;4;2)

Again, it is important that the active couple stay closely back to back in the middle. The active couple is actually working its way around the set anti clockwise each time they dance the double triangles setting.

25 - 32 (internal structure 4;2;2)

This half diagonal reel takes place on the first 4 bars of the musical phrase, which is easier for the corners. It needs to be danced so that the active couple finishes in second place, more or less in the sidelines at the end of bar 4, so that they dance across to their own side on a curving track, passing left shoulders, on bars 5 & 6. The tendency is for the active couple to be ahead of the music. Everyone takes hands on the sides for the setting on bars 7 & 8

33 - 40 (internal structure (4;4)

The only difficulty with the cast to return the corners to their proper places is remembering it is coming. If they start with the music it flows nicely into the final four bar turn. The dancers in first corner places cast; their partners follow them.