

Preparing a Dance Programme

What makes a good Dance Programme?

Teachers/leaders of groups often have to prepare dance programmes.

- This task is far more difficult than people realise.
- Today it is usual to have a recap and/or a walk through at dances and balls. Programmes are now shorter than they used to be. 18 seems to be the average number of dances.
- It is usual to start with a **jig**, especially if there is live music, as they are easier to play than reels.
- The first dance should be very well known and be a 3 couple dance in a four couple set to be able to accommodate a fifth couple. The dance should only include skip change and very little pas-de-basque. Slip step is an energetic step and should also be avoided in the first dance.
- Include a mix of easy and more difficult dances
- The programme should include as many well-known formations as possible. It is helpful to use a formation check list, see below, this will ensure that formations aren't used twice, except for very popular formations, e.g. half figure of eight and hands across. Reels of three will appear several times but there should be a variety of types, e.g. with corners, mirror, parallel or unusual, e.g. as in Red House or Cadgers in the Canongate.
- Include the source of the dance.
- Some traditional formations, e.g. poussette and set to and turn corners in quick time are disappearing from programmes. Reinststate them!
- A square set should be included to add more variety to the programme. A round the room dance could also be included but not the first dance as it would be too energetic.
- Programmes are sometimes made up of dancers' favourites with no consideration to the formations the dances contain. This can lead to a very unbalanced programme.
- 8 x 32 bars strathspeys are disappearing from our programmes. It is not uncommon to find programmes that only include one 8 x 32 bar strathspey.
- 3, 4 and 5 couple dances require a specific number of dancers. If there aren't enough dancers to make up a set it means that up to possibly nine dancers will have to sit out. This is anti-social. There should be no more than two of these dances in each half.
- 2 couple dances are traditionally danced in four couple sets. Don't start with a 2 couple dance nor have two close or even next to each other.
- We all like to increase our repertoire of dances and if a 'new' dance has become popular in a club it often appears on a programme. Make sure that the source of the dance is given. *Do NOT include more than two 'new' dances on a programme, make sure that there are lots of old favourites*
- Remember that if it wasn't for the RSCDS we probably wouldn't be dancing today. A lot of clubs are affiliated to RSCDS so be loyal to the Society by choosing 50% of your programme from RSCDS publications. Branches should choose 75%.
- Include dances from a wide selection of RSCDS books, remember the earlier books.
- Include non-Society old favourites, e.g. Blue Mess Jacket, Dundee Whaler, Ian Powrie's Farewell to Auchterader, Lord MacLay's Reel, Winding Road and Baldovan Reel.
- John Drewry, Roy Goldring and Derek Haynes are probably the most prolific devisors of recent years. We all enjoy doing their dances but be careful that your programme doesn't consist of too many. There are other fine devisors.
- If using dances longer than 32 bars be careful not to have a 40 bar dance next to a 48 bar dance.
- Aim to include as many different types of tunes as possible, e.g. single jigs, double jigs, single reels, double reels, pipe tunes, two steps, hornpipes, traditional strathspeys, slow airs and song tunes.
- After preparing a draft programme show it to the band for their comments. It is quite likely that they will ask you to change the order or indeed a dance. If it is the latter make sure you choose a dance that includes the same formations as the first dance but is also acceptable to the band.
- If the programme is changed after being reviewed by others, check carefully the mix of formations introduced by the new dances with those already on the original programme.
- Never choose 2 dances that use the same original tune, e.g. None so Pretty and Mrs Stuart Linnell, Wee Cooper of Fife and The Copper's Wife, Highland Fair and Muirland Willie.

- Finish the dance with a well-known, '3 couple dance in a 4 couple set' so that a fifth couple can be accommodated if required. A lot of people like to finish with a dance with six hands round and back as the last formation *Never finish with a dance which requires a specific number of dancers, i.e. 3, 4 and 5 couple dances.*

Programmes

Programme					
No	Rhythm	Dance	Ref	Comments	About Tune
1	R	General Stuart's Reel	10	# Very poor choice as a first dance, difficult tune to play, too much setting.	Double reel
2	J	EH3 7AF	40	† Better to have started with this. Jigs easier for musicians to play. Only skip change for dancers.	Two step
3	S	The Gentleman	35	*	Trad strathspey
4	R	The College Hornpipe	20	#	Hornpipe
5	J	The Duke of Atholl's Reel	16	≈	Pipe jig
6	S	Gang the Same Gate	36		Trad strathspey
7	R	Struan Robertson's Reel	16	# 40 bar dance	Double reel
8	J	Miss Mary Douglas	10	† 48 bar dance	Single jig
INTERVAL					
9	R	Lady Susan Stewart's Reel	5	# Poor choice as first dance of second half, busy tune too much setting	Double reel
10	J	New Rigged Ship	9	† 48 bar dance after a very energetic dance	Single jig
11	S	Village Reel	20	† * ≈	Trad strathspey
12	R	New Waterloo Reel	21	Δ	Single reel
13	J	Muirland Willie	18	Δ	Single jig
14	S	Miss Ogilvie's Fancy	20	† *	Trad strathspey
15	R	Summer Wooing	38	† Δ	Single reel
16	J	Ladies' Fancy	13	† Δ ≈ Too energetic as a last dance Most people prefer to finish with a circle	Double jig

* 3 dances including all round poussette.

4 dances including 'hello and goodbye' setting

Δ 4 dances including poussette

† 7 dances include lead down and up

≈ 2 couple dances

Far too much setting.

Not enough variety of formations. Many formations missing.

Most dances from earlier books, not enough variety of books.

Difficult programme for newer dancers.

Difficult programme for musicians.

All 8 times through dances, no 3, 4 or 5 couple dances.

No square set.

Only four strathspeys.

A Non-Branch Programme

No	Rhythm	Dance	Reference	Comments
1	R	Scott Meikle	46	*
2	J	Jennifer's Jig	Drewry	
3	S	Miss Eleanor	49	*
4	R	The Spring Fling Reel	50	
5	J	Midnight Oil	Drewry	*
6	S	City of Belfast	48	• espagnole
7	R	Nottingham Lace	Bradley	*
8	J	The Weathercock	2nd Graded	*
9	S	Foxhill Court	Drewry	espagnole
10	R	The Queen's View	Forbes	
INTERVAL				
11	J	The Hazel Tree	Drewry	espagnole
12	R	Fisherman's Reel	Sue Petyt	*
13	S	Culla Bay	41	*
14	J	The Dancing Master	Drewry	*
15	R	A Trip to Applecross	50	
16	S	Kinfauns Castle	Haynes	*
17	J	The Cooper's Wife	Mitchell	
18	R	Swiss Lassie	39	
19	S	The Swan and the Tay	Perth 800	*
20	J	James Gray		*

- 12 dances using 3, 4, 5 or square set, including first and last dance.
- 4 square sets, three in succession!
- All modern dances.
- Very few formations using corners.
- Poussette (R&J), allemande, promenade missing.
- 3 dances using espagnole.

Branch Programme

No	Rhythm	Dance	Reference	Comments
1	J	THE MACHINE WITHOUT HORSES	12	
2	R	THE RUBY RANT	49	
3	S	ST COLUMBA'S STRATHSPEY	Sroule & Gillan	
4	J	FATHER CONNELLY'S JIG	Drewry	Set & rotate
5	R	CADGERS IN THE CANONGATE	9	
6	S	GANG THE SAME GATE	36	
7	J	IAN POWRIE'S FAREWELL TO AUCHTERARDER	Hamilton	Square set
8	R	THE MONTGOMERIES' RANT	10	
9	S	THE SINGING SANDS	Priddey	
10	J	THE HAZEL TREE	Drewry	Espagnole
INTERVAL				
11	J	THE JUBILEE JIG	Leaflet	
12	R	MRS STUART LINNELL	Imperial	
13	S	CHERRYBANK GARDENS	Drewry	
14	R	J. B. MILNE	Foss	
15	J	THE DANCING MASTER	Drewry	Set & rotate, square set
16	S	FOXHILL COURT	Drewry	Espagnole
17	R	MISS JOHNSTONE OF ARDROSSAN	Goldring	
18	S	THE BLUE MESS JACKET	Henderson	
19	J	THE LAST OF THE LAIRDS	22	
20	R	DUKE OF PERTH	1	

8 - less than half RSCDS dances

Basic formations missing, e.g. all round poussette, poussette, hello goodbye setting, double triangles, ladies' chain, promenade, allemande
5 Drewry dances

Only two 8 x 32 strathspeys
Branch Programme

No	Rhythm	Dance	Reference	Comments
1	J	Welcome to Ayr	47	
2	R	De'il Amang the Tailors	14	
3	S	Every Witch Way	G. Dale	*
4	J	Father Connelly's Jig	Drewry	
5	R	Lochalsh Reel	Skye	
6	S	Scotch Mist	Drewry	*
7	J	Hunter's Moon	Drewry	
8	R	The Kelpie of Loch Coruisk	Priddey	*
9	S	The Quern	Dunedin Book 3	*
10	J	Wild Geese	24	
INTERVAL				
11	S	Slytherin House	Chris Ronald	
12	J	Torridon Lassies	Brenchley	
13	R	Osgood Mackenzie of Inverewe	Michael Block	*
14	S	Ghouls & Ghosts	Rodney Burrows	*
15	J	The Zoologist	46	
16	J	Shadow	50	*
17	J	The Miller of Sessnie	Goldring	*
18	S	Gypsy Dreams	Glasspool	
19	R	Eileen Watt's Reel	Magazine	*
20	R	Bauldy Bain's Fiddle	Lothian Collection	

- * Nine dances using 3, 4, 5 or 7 couple set
- Only six Society dances
- Three jigs consecutively
- Too many unfamiliar dances

Non-Society Programme

No	Rhythm	Dance	Reference	Comments
1	J	Mrs Stewart's Jig	35	§
2	R	The Code Breaker	Drewry	
3	S	The Moray Rant	Drewry	*
4	R	Tomalena	Gratio & Douglas	*
5	J	Monica's Way	48	* §
6	S	Linnea's Strathspey	47	# §
7	R	Osgood MacKenzie of Inverewe	Block	*
8	J	The Raven's Dance	Haynes	
9	S	Leaving Benbecula	Forbes	*
10	R	The Cuckoo Clock	Barbour	
11	J	Spiffin'	Quarries & Friends	*
INTERVAL				
12	S	Miss Eleanor	49	* §
13	R	Rob Roy	Foss	*
14	J	Dragonfly	McMurty	
15	S	Scotch Mist	Drewry	*
16	R	Nottingham Lace	Bradley	*
17	J	Bees of Maggie Knockater	Drewry	*
18	S	City of Belfast	48	* §
19	R	Never at Sea	Haddow	*
20	H 40	Palace Pier	McLean	

* 13 Dances require 3, 4, 5 or 6 couples # Only one 8 x 32 strathspey § 5 RSCDS dances only from later books

A 'Good' Programme

No	Rhythm	Dance	Bars	Reference	Special	Main Formations	Type of Tune
1	J	EH3 7AF	32	40		Lead down & up, Promenade	Two step
2	R	Red House	40	7	40 2 cpl	Reels of 3	Single reel
3	S	May Yarker' Strathspey	32	42		Knot	Trad strathspey
4	J	Muirland Willie	32	21		Poussette	Single jig
5	R	Round Reel of Eight	88	27	Square 88 bars	Grand chain, half R&L	Double reel
6	S	Save The Children	32	51	New book	Advance & retire, hands round & back	Trad Strathspey
7	J	New Rigged Ship	48	9	48	Set to corners	Single jig
8	R	General Stuart's Reel	32	10		Hello Goodbye	Double reel
9	S	S-Locomotion	32	41	4 couple	Reel 4	Trad strathspey
10	J	Kitty Campbell's Reel	32	Graded		Set to & turn corners	Single jig
<i>INTERVAL</i>							
11	R	Maxwell's Rant	32	18		Reels on opposite & own sides	Single reel
12	S	The Gentleman	32	35		Poussette	Trad strath
13	J	The Chequered Court	32	42		D/T, corners pass & turn	Double jig
14	R	Bohemian Reflections	32	51	New book	3 hands across, ladies' chain	Double reel
15	S	Sugar Candie	32	26		CPCP	Trad Strath
16	J	The Kelloholm Jig	32	Leaflet		Advance & retire	Two-step
17	R	Polharrow Burn	32	Magazine	5 couple	Diagonal reel 4	Single reel
18	S	City of Belfast	32	48	3 couple	Reel 4 across, espagnole	Slow air
19	J	Rodney's Rant	32	Diamond		Set & link, diagonal R&L	Double jig
20	R	The De'il amang the Tailors	32	14		2 couple allemande, hands round & back	Double reel

This programme includes:

- A good selection of formations.
- Dances from a wide range of RSCDS Books.
- Dances using 2, 3, 4 and 5 couple sets
- One dance uses a square set.
- Dances of different length, 32, 40 and 48 bars.
- Different types of tunes are used.

Formation Check List

FORMATION							
Advance & Retire							
Allemande							
Back to Back							
Balance in Line							
Bourrel							
Chase							
Chain 'Chaperone' Progression for 3 cpl							
Corner Chain							
Dance to corner & set							
Corners Pass & Turn							
Crown Triangles							
Double Triangles							
Espagnole							
Figure of Eight Across							
Figure of Eight on Sides							
Grand Chain							
Hands Across							
Hands Round & Back							
Hello Goodbye Setting							
Knot							
Ladies' /Men's Chain							
Lead Down & Up							
Petronella							
Poussette (quick time)							
Poussette (strathspey)							
Promenade							
Reel of 3 with corners							
Reel of 3 'Gates of Edinburgh'							
Reel of 3 Parallel							
Reel of 3 Inveran							
Reel of 3 Across							
Reel of 3 Mirror							
Reel of 3 in tandem							
Reel of 4 on side							
Reel of 4 across							
Diagonal Reel of 4							
Rights & Lefts							
Rights & Lefts for three couples							
Rondel							
Set & Link for 2 couples							
Set & Link for 3 couples							
Set & Turn corners							
Set & Rotate							
Set to corners							
Turn C P C P							
Spoke							
Spurtle							
Targe							
Tourbillion							
Tournee							
<i>A square set dance</i>							
<i>A round-the-room dance</i>							
<i>A 48 bar dance</i>							