

WHAT HAVE I LEARNED?

by Bob Scott

During the past several weeks I have come to enjoy Scottish Country Dancing far more than I expected in my optimistic moments. And for many different reasons. It is often associated with people whose ancestry originates in Scotland. Many of the participants were either born in Scotland, educated in Scotland, envy the idea of being Scottish or simply enjoy the idea of whirling around the dance floor with a more logical progression than apparently visible in some of the more modern dance steps.

Scottish Country Dancing is, in my view, an elegant form of exercise. It involves two basic and highly complex challenges. How to move and where. But for me it also comes with a unique language or vocabulary. Jargon, typical of lawyers, doctors and accountants and other professionals, forms an indispensable part of teaching and learning Scottish Country Dancing.

Jigs, reels and strathspeys represent most of the types of dancing. As well, other dances that are associated with SCD are the Gay Gordon and the Dashing White Sergeant. Some, like jigs and reels are danced very quickly, but strathspeys are slower and more elegant. Men usually wear kilts and women usually wear tartan skirts. The principal difference is apparent immediately. Men's kilts are open on the right and women's skirts are open on the left. The open side of the kilt or skirt is held in place with a kilt or skirt pin which merely acts as a weight and minimizes the possibility of the garment billowing out and revealing what is worn, or not, underneath.

The part of SCD which I found most interesting is the vocabulary. The word 'bar' is indispensable as all dances involve a certain number of bars and most qualified dancers, apart from moving their feet, maintaining posture, being in the right position at the right time and appearing as if they know what they're doing, maintain a rhythm associated with the number of bars.

One problem often associated with many dance clubs today is the abundance of women and the shortage of men. The Kelowna SCDS is no exception; it too has more women than men members, and the women often have to dance as men and are so designated by a tartan scarf around their shoulders.

Having observed the dancers in full flight and having tried to use both my right foot and my left instead of both left feet, I fantasized one night about how I'd respond to a cop if I were stopped while driving home after dance class. Come with me on my brief dance fantasy.

I'm practicing the various steps. The skip change one moment and the strathspey travelling step the next moment. As these steps are performed in the car, as I'm driving. The car naturally wanders from side to side, accelerates and slows in keeping with the rhythm of the dance. Suddenly, an array of bright red and blue lights appears behind me and a siren is sounded briefly. A zealous and grim policeman approaches the car. He taps on the window to attract my attention. I open the window, still deeply absorbed in the dance routine and ask politely, "Yes, officer, what can I do for you?"

Flabbergasted, the officer, while traffic is driving past and fast, asks me, "Do you have any idea how fast and erratic you were driving?" Unfortunately, just as he utters some of the words, cars are sounding their horns and I don't hear him correctly. So I answered, "Oh, officer, I was just keeping up with the rhythm. It was supposed to be eight bars and after leaving Betwixt and Between, I couldn't recall where we went from there. Shelagh said that soon we'd have to do 16 bars and then 32."

Determined to extract answers from me, the cop asks, "Exactly where is this Betwixt and Between bar?"

"It's down on Richter."

"Where on Richter?" as horns interrupt us again.

"Well, tonight we used the Pas de Basque and the Pousette. Then we learned (horns sounding again) how to promenade and the allemande. It was all a lot of fun. You ought to try it some time. But, you know, there weren't enough men there tonight so lo and behold, some of the women became men, in the (horns again) twinkling of an eye. All they did. . . ."

But he cut me short. "Just exactly what sort of bar is this sir? You say some of the women became men." In an astonished tone.

I quickly allayed his fears, or so I thought. "It's at the Odd Fellows Hall."

But that didn't work either.

"Step out of the car sir (to horns sounding louder than ever). It sounds like you'd better come with me."

"Good, officer. See you next week." And I drove off quickly into the stream of traffic going over the bridge, leaving him scratching his head.

And if you don't believe me, my cell number is 767-9480.