

Old Time Dancing Part 2

Evolution of 'Old Time Dances' from the 1880s to the 1930s and a 'time set' by the 'modern dances'

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The last issue dealt with the development of some of the old time 'sets' from the Colonial era (First Set, Lancers, Alberts, Waltz Cotillion etc.) and some of the couple dances such as Waltz, Polka, Varsoviana, Schottische, Highland Schottische, Barn Dance, Polka Mazurka and Two Step. Also of key importance was the emergence of new 'sequence dances' from the dance associations and their academies at the turn of the century. This led to a consolidation of Edwardian sequence couple dances that were still based on the old style footwork with the balletic positions on the 'toes' shared with the same footwork in the sets and older folk style couple dances mentioned above.

Examples included the Veleta Waltz, Military 2 Step, Boston 2 Step, Eva 3 Step, St. Bernard Waltz and Pride of Erin as well as several others which were then followed after the Great War by the Maxina and Parma Waltz. Only the first three made any significant appearance in

Australia as well as the Maxina which was brought back by our soldiers practising on the returning ships. This important piece of information was passed onto me by war veteran Horrie Donnelly of Koo Wee Rup Victoria, when aged 87 some 25 years ago. Horrie was a violinist and dance musician.

These new sequence dances were popular in the dance teachers' academies but were not sensations in the manner of the great dances of the world when they were first introduced; examples being the Waltz, Polka, Mazurka, Quadrille, Lancers, Schottische and Varsoviana or the One Step, Foxtrot, Tango, Modern Waltz and Quickstep of the new century. Our soldiers also brought back these latest American 'modern dances' that peaked in popularity during the First World War. Also these soldiers were generally too young to have been well versed in the older dances and another factor in the increasing popularity and programme space for modern dances at the end of the war and leading into the gaiety of the 'Roaring Twenties' and arrival of new dance freaks such as the Charleston and the Black Bottom.

Old Time Dancing under that name for the first time appeared a decade earlier than I thought as the Old Time Dance Music series by Allan's Music and Alberts Music respectively appeared around 1932. Shirley Andrews in an interview with a Mr Les Barnes was told that at a dance in 1932 when a set Alberts

(quadrille) was programmed, the young people threw pennies on the floor in protest. They wanted Foxtrots, Quicksteps and Modern Waltz.

However to my amazement I discovered via the National Library of Australia's digitised newspaper site a reference to an **Old Time Dance first appearing in 1922** and there are quite a number following over the rest of the decade. The other surprise is that they were generally referring to the older dances of the **1880s** and it was the quadrilles, waltz, polkas, Schottische and Sir Roger de Coverley, Spanish Waltz & Circassian Circle that are prominent. The reaction of the young people was varied, some were surprised by the agility and grace of their parents and grandparents in these old lively dances and wanted to learn them, others simply wanted jazz and the management responded by imposing fines for those caught jazzing at old time dances. Another surprise was that the young did not know how to waltz and in fact had to be taught all the old time dances from scratch. It would be fair to say during this period of revival much of the more staid Colonial style of those dances changed, the sets became much more lively and there was probably a folk process in adaptation of the dances according to memory and changes in fashion. I have an MC's notation for the Fitzroy Quadrilles where he says to swing corners 'like blazes'.

The younger people would be using the parallel foot-steps that had consolidated following the introduction of the modern Foxtrot, Quickstep and Tango. The Modern Waltz (Jazz Waltz) Victor Silvester had developed and introduced in 1923 from the slowing tempo as the popular music changed. The old waltz could not endure that tempo change and the Hesitation Waltz from attempts to Tango to the slowing waltz tempo of around 1913 may well have been a bridging form in the development of the Modern Waltz. It was certainly incorporated as a variation of step within this new 'jazz waltz' routine. To understand the change you have to think of the music such as the Blue Danube for the old lilting rotary waltz and the quite different long slow step you would need to fill out the time in say 'Melody of Love' or 'Girl of My Dreams' as examples of the contemporary tunes.

Another thing to realise is that the modern dances came in with jazzy instrumentation, piano, saxophone, trombone, violin and possibly even drums. In the case of the revived old time dances, particularly in the country, it was more usually to piano, squeezebox (button accordion and/or concertina), fiddle and sometimes tin whistle. For old-time there was usually only one or two musicians. The modern bands may have been three piece in the country, but in the cities there was quite a line-up of instrumentation. You will see in some of my references in the following issues that sometimes for the first part of an evening dance it was old time to piano, accordion or fiddle, then converting over to modern dances with the resident or popular dance band. Later so called 50-50 dances became popular with an even mix alternating between an old-time sequence dance and the Foxtrots.

Colin and Ila Silk who conducted dances at Lockwood South said that in their youth at Geelong dancing was frowned upon by the churches and that instead games were played at socials for youth. Gradually a simple touch hands only dance or two was introduced and eventually they established a 50-50 mix between games and old time dances that the church would finally approve. One of the simple party type game-dance Colin and Ila recalled was 'Follow the Cook'.

Here is the interesting reference from the NLA's Trove digitised paper sources re the first of the 'Old Time Dances'.

The Argus (Melbourne) 7th October 1922 CASTLEMAINE, Wednesday –

Chief events in connection with the Back to Castlemaine celebrations on Tuesday were a procession and sports meeting at the Camp Reserve, which were largely patronised. In the evening an old time dance was held in the town hall, and proved successful. Only old time dances were allowed and the music was played on a concertina and tin whistle.

Healesville & Yarra Glen Guardian Sat. January 1924 p 4 WILL YE NO COME BACK AGAIN?

At every dance or social gathering in country towns one hears the oft expressed regret that the old-time dances are being let to die out and give place to modern and far less attractive dances of the "ragtime" variety. Whilst it must be admitted that some of the new dances have a great deal of charm and attraction in their own peculiar way when danced by experts, still they, can never replace some of the fine old dances of the past. For true grace, and, the "poetry of motion" what could be finer than the old waltz, with the orchestra playing some of the fine old tunes such as "The Blue Danube," or even "Merry Widow?" Then take the schottische or barn dance and compare them with more modern "hops." But for distinct sociability the old "square" dances take the palm. The pretty and graceful "waltz cotillion," "Alberts," "Fitzroys," or the stirring joy of the "First Set" or "Royal Irish" with their rollicking fun and good humour, also their little rests in between while the side couples were having their fling, which gave one fine opportunities of "getting acquainted" with the other fellow's girl; and the Lancers with its grand chain and the chance to give each charming fair one a little hand-squeeze, Rather! Then again, dancing is a pastime for young and old; but many of the gay young "sparks" of years ago who still wish to join in when opportunity offers, feel quite lost in a modern ballroom, and lose a lot of fun owing to the absence of the fine old dances.. The Rifle Club showed fine consideration for the "old brigade" by including some of the joys of the past in the program, and a general feeling was expressed that some big effort would be made to resuscitate the grand old dances which gladdened the hearts of all who participated in them.

Portland Guardian 12th May 1924

The old time dances awakened in the "has beens" memories of those good days gone by, and the lancers, polka and other old favorittes were danced with a vim that was good to witness. The younger generation, however, for the most part scorned to have anything to do with this "out of-date stuff" and converted the old time music to the foxtrot and other modern dances known to the ardent present day terpsichoreans. By coming infatuated with these entrancing ball room evolutions, many novices ventured a try, but with what measure of success is best known to their partners. During the evening enjoyable vocal and elocutionary items by Mrs Main and Mrs Greenwood were given, and the music for the dancing was voluntarily provided by lady and gentleman members of the company. Supper on a lavish scale was partaken of, and with the thoroughness for which the ladies of Portland are noted, nothing was left undone to ensure the complete enjoyment of those present,

The Mercury (Hobart) 18th July 1924 War Against Dances.

The social world of Melbourne, which troubles little about politics, is having a little war on its own. The industrial suburbs north of the Yarra are trying to drive out the modern dances, the fox trot and the two-step, and to reinstate what is called "old time dances," the waltz and the square dances. The dance palaces on St. Kilda foreshore are resisting the old time movement, because they have in a fierce trade war

brought costly musicians from America. Toorak still keeps the modern dances, but the dance palaces, while welcoming Toorak, cannot neglect the patronage of the northern suburbs, who are going where they can get what they want in less showy halls, and where there is just the old-time piano and a fiddle. The battle is at an interesting stage, but when the warmer days come, and the north goes south to St. Kilda in the evening, old-time will have much to say at St. Kilda.

The Morning Bulletin (Rockhampton) 8th January 1925

On Saturday night last a most successful old time dance was held in the school of Arts. It was got up by Messrs J Connors, M. Ryan, and N. Brazil, of Rockhampton, to raise funds for a Roman Catholic Church. There were about 200 people present, so the hall was fairly crowded. The function began with the grand march. The procession was a large one. Many elderly folk took part in it, Mr Brazil was master of ceremonies Mr Connors looking after several raffles that were held and Mrs and Miss Devenish and Mr W Greaves took an active part in keeping things going. Somewhere about £16 was realised. The gentlemen mentioned have done great work in helping this movement. They carried through two similar dances with great success - one at Rockhampton, the others at Emu Park. The old time programme included the waltz, Alberts, quadrilles, schottische, Lancers, mazurka, Royal Irish quadrille, Fitzroys and polkas.



‘The lively Fitzroy Quadrilles revived for the Centenary of East Loddon Shire at Serpentine Victoria, 1971.

The Brisbane Courier 29th Jan. 1925

DALBY. Old time Dance

A successful old time dance was held on Monday night in aid of the St Joseph's Church debt fund. The music supplied was piano and accordion. A waltzing competition was won by Mrs. Devaney and Mr F C Rashleigh. Messrs R J Hodge and J Marsletta were the judges. After 11 pm modern dancing was indulged in the music being supplied by Ryan's Orchestra.

Morning Bulletin (Rockhampton) 9th Feb. 1925

I notice that elsewhere some old time dances have been held. Yeppoon has followed suit. The younger folk, however, do not take too kindly to them. They can only be got to warm up properly by the introduction of jazz, foxtrot's, etc. A little novelty was obtained lately by some gay young bachelors giving a dance to lady friends. The ladies responded by inviting their best boys to a similar entertainment at the School of Arts. Between 40 and 50 attended.



1 Young couple in the modern Foxtrot 'full frontal hold' Image reproduced courtesy of the Melbourne Museum of Victoria.”

2 Yass Picnic Race Ball late 1920s or early 30s depicting the modern slow Foxtrot. Image Hood Collection Courtesy State Library of New South Wales.

“The intimate ‘full frontal hold’ of the modern dances such as Foxtrot caused considerable opposition to these dances by the Churches.

Longreach Leader Qld 19th June 1925 Jazzing Prohibited!

About the end of the month an old-time dance will be held in the Town Hall in aid of St. George's Orphanage . Nothing, but old time dancing will be allowed, and anyone, lady or gent, infringing this, rule will be fined 6 pence for each and every time; 'they must waltz', polka or mazurka, as the case may be. It is expected that a 'nice sum' will be collected in this manner.

And 24th July 1925 Devotees of the old time dance will have the pleasure of "Waltzing Matilda" at the Anglican Hall on Saturday, August 1st. to the strains of an accordeon and piano. 'Jazzists please note ! Should you wish to indulge that night you will immediately be fined.



“The dance is the Pride of Erin, Wedderburn Oldtimers Orchestra playing at the Bendigo Psychiatric Centre Open Day 1980”.

This illustration of a more typical old style hold with ‘daylight’ between couples as well as the long arm hold in the sets pictured in the Fitzroy Quadrilles which helped make the revival of Old Time Dances popular with the Churches and parents. An approved alternative to the despised modern dancing.