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# Scottish Social Dancing and the Formation of Community

CATHERINE A. SHOUPÉ

*We parked the car and eagerly approached the door of Largoward Hall on a light, midsummer Saturday night in June, 1997. It had been ten months since we left Scotland after spending a year there, and I wondered who we would see and if we would still be able to do the dances we had learned. We were a little late, and the music had already begun. We could see the swirl of dancing couples through the crack between the doors, and we waited until the music stopped before entering to pay our admission at the little table just inside the door. The hall was busy as I glanced around and started to recognize familiar faces; the band started playing again, but no one got up to dance. Then I realized they were playing a song, and people were smiling at us and singing: "Come in, come in, it's nice tae see ye . . . you're welcome here. . . ." Master of Ceremonies Bob Grier had spotted our entry and prompted the band to give us a musical welcome. As we made our way up to Bob, people greeted us with hellos and "fine tae see ye back again" and "how long are ye home for?" Our welcome "home" to Largoward was a welcome back to a community of dancers at this village hall in Fife.*

What draws folk to "the dancing?" Why do people come to dance at venues such as this? How does dance provide a locus of, an impetus toward, or an expression of community? In this paper I examine how communities are formed through dance, how these communities help to define dance and music traditions in Scotland, and how dancing creates an experience of individual and collective connectedness.

## STUDYING DANCING IN SCOTLAND

The Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust, founded in 1995 to research, conserve, foster, and promote dance, deliberately uses the plural form—*traditions*—to draw attention to the multiplicity of dance forms and dance communities in Scotland. Some are defined by region, others by style; some are social, others competitive.<sup>1</sup> Dance events include classes devoted to various kinds of dance, exhibitions of dancing, and competitions, including the summer Highland Games, where solo dancers compete for medals and certificates. In this paper, I look at the regular social

dances held in halls in villages and towns in the county of Fife throughout the year, but particularly in the winter season from September to May, which bring people together for an evening of recreation and social exchange. Some of these are classes sponsored by the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society (RSCDS) or local clubs, some are dances run by individuals or groups of enthusiasts, and others are occasional dances organized as fund-raising events for charities or institutions.

The social dances that occur at these kinds of events fall into three main types. First, couple dances are performed by partners who inscribe a series of movements around the room in a counterclockwise manner. Most often, these movements are performed in the same sequence by all the dancing couples simultaneously, but in one case, the Quickstep, partners dance their own sequence of steps individually. Second, set dances are danced by four couples in either longways or square formation. Longways set dances are also called “country dances” and take the form of four women facing four men in lines, partners standing opposite one another to begin and each couple dancing a series of figures as “top” or active couple in the set with the other couples. Square formation dances were introduced in the late nineteenth century and include various pan-European dances called Quadrilles and Lancers as well as the Eightsome Reel, created in Scotland circa 1875. In the square sets, a series of figures is danced, with the lead moving from couple to couple in the square. Third, miscellaneous forms are found in a small number of dances. These include trios of dancers performing a sequence of figures, couples or trios who face one another in small sets and progress either clockwise or counter-clockwise around the room after each repetition of the dance figures, and short lines of three to seven dancers who dance figures in sequence while progressing around the room. It can be noted here that Scottish dances are generally known by dancers and are not called, though within sets, dancers may use verbal cues to remind an uncertain dancer of the next movement. Some country dancers keep notes as an *aide memoire* for the complicated sets, but in general, social dances are learned through participation and observation.

Given this active dance scene and the wide choice available for dancers, the question of how music and dance may create or shape a sense of community for participants can best be understood through examining the complex of factors at play in particular dance events. Social dancing in Fife—at places like Largoward, Rathillet, and Letham—gives us a specific context for determining what is meant by community, identity, and tradition and can serve as an example of how these issues can be applied more broadly.<sup>2</sup>

Academic studies of dance usually assume that choreography, history, and aesthetics are the features central to analysis. These perspectives in the disciplines of folklore, anthropology, dance ethnology, or ethnomusicology approach dance empirically and formally as dance *per se*. Even the most inclusive of anthropological approaches keep our eyes categorically focused on the dance.<sup>3</sup> Despite efforts to broaden the focus of study to “human movement,” attention has only recently been drawn toward understanding how the experience of movement or dance *creates social meaning* for participants.<sup>4</sup> Here I am interested in examining how dancing fosters the interconnectedness of individuals through experiences that are essentially social, how the sociality that we term “community” is formed through dancing, and how the experience of community formation interfaces with the continual development and reinterpretation of tradition in dance.

A central concept in folklore and ethnomusicology, “community” is used broadly to signify a bounded social unit; it is also the locus for the kind of “artistic communication” we purport to study. However, those who conceptualize community as constituted by social and emotional networks of relationships emphasize the process of community formation—community re-creates itself through performance.<sup>5</sup> Community emerges as a concomitant of communication. Exploring this notion of “emergent community” in the context of Scottish dancing has led me to view the interplay between ideas about community and ideas about tradition as reciprocal. We need to ask not only how people use traditions of dance to create identity or define themselves as a community but also how such a dance community becomes the context for negotiating the definition of tradition or the identity of a particular dance as traditional.<sup>6</sup>

In the following discussion, I draw on observations of three dance venues—Largoward, Rathillet, and Letham—and on interviews with dancers who identify themselves with those locales, based on ongoing fieldwork begun in 1995.<sup>7</sup> Location; family history and friendships; issues of genre, style and repertoire; personal desires; and psychological dynamics are all elements in the dancers’ participation in and understanding of these events. The meaning of dance derives from the multifaceted and interconnected web of social features, individual motives, and interpersonal dynamics that constitute the experience. Examining the various ways that individuals become involved in a group locates social identity primarily in action. Ruth Finnegan posits that the habitual “pathways” people follow are defined by their “shared and purposive collective actions” (Finnegan 1990:305).<sup>8</sup> In the context of dance in

Scotland, I have identified four features that influence a person's pathway to involvement and subsequent understanding about the meaning of her or his participation in such groups. These features are the geographic context, the social context, the performance context, and the psychodynamic context. Using these four features of the dancing as a guide, we may begin to understand how people define tradition, form communities, and experience connectedness.

#### (1) "BELONGING: THE GEOGRAPHIC CONTEXT"

*It is Saturday night in Largoward. An upland village on the boundary between the Forth coastal shoreline and the interior plateau of east Fife, Largoward has been a venue for a weekly dance for over fifty years. Organizer and MC Bob Grier and his wife Margaret welcome between sixty and seventy dancers to the village hall for old-time and Scottish country dancing, with music provided by a different band each week. The dances at Largoward reflect the dictates of fashion through the decades; these days it is a mixture of old favorites like Pride of Erin Waltz, modern couple dances such as the Gay Gordons Two-Step, and popular set dances like the Black Mountain Reel and Postie's Jig. In some cases, two and even three generations in a family have danced at Largoward. It is the longest continuously running dance event in the county, perhaps even in the nation. People from miles around know about the dancing at Largoward.*

Identification with place is important in Scotland.<sup>9</sup> Names of famous places evoke a romantic identification with the countryside, with historical struggles for freedom, with warfare between clans or between clan and landlord, with native saints and heroes—Loch Lomond, Bannochburn, Skye, Glencoe, Iona. Local place names cover the map thickly: towns, villages, hamlets, farms, rivers, lochs, hills, crossroads, motorway interchanges, football stadiums, bridges, castles, woods, beaches, estuaries, moor, mountains. Such local place names situate individuals in a precise physical geography and locate identity in the physical world. Reflecting the importance of place names for identity in Scotland is the fact that in traditional music, place names account for about one-third of the titles of tunes, both old and newly composed—The Hills of Lorne, The Spey in Spate, The Birks of Invermey, Mormond Braes, The East Neuk of Fife, Bonnie Banchory, Caddam Wood. Moreover, identification with place locates people for each other on the symbolic map of the country: Highlander, Glaswegian, Aberdonian, Orcadian, Dundonian, Coaster, Fifer—all of which have personal characteristics associated with locale.

In Fife, one "belongs" a particular place if one is native to it and has family connections there. Rather than *coming from* a place, people *belong*

to it. Thus place is not so much what one leaves behind when going out into the larger world as that which provides one with a mooring, where one belongs, always. Place in this sense says something about who one is and how one came to be that way. Natives “belong Largoward” in the local idiom; place is prior to the person. Recent analysis of “the musical construction of place” examines how musical and dance performance can embody identity and ground it in place. Martin Stokes argues that “music is socially meaningful not entirely but largely because it provides means by which people recognise identities and places.” He further notes that “a sense of identity can be put into play through music by performing it, dancing to it, listening to it or even thinking about it.” Music and dance performance is a social activity, “a practice in which meanings are generated” (Stokes 1994: 4, 5, 24).<sup>10</sup> Dance, like music, creates not only a sense of individual identity based on place but, I argue, facilitates the formation of community that is grounded on such identities. Why Fifers dance is literally grounded in where they dance.

Among dancers in Fife, talk about dance is most often talk about dance venues: they say “going to Largoward.” Asking “Were you at Largoward on Saturday?” means did you go dancing there? For dancers, geography functions associatively on at least two levels—“going to Largoward” identifies one with a group of dancers who regularly meet at that venue. Geography may also serve as a distancing mechanism. Coupled with “crowd” in the phrases “the Letham crowd” or “the Largoward crowd,” the place name not only signifies a particular group but also implies a criticism of them for presumed insularity or clannishness.

Only a few folk who now live in Largoward attend the dances held there currently. Fifty years ago, Largoward was just one of many venues that drew folk to dances on a weekend. In the 1950s, there were several dance halls to choose from in cities like Kirkcaldy and Leven; and the West Fife mining communities all had dances held at the local Miner’s Institute, Cooperative Society, Masonic Hall, or church or community association hall on a Friday or Saturday night. But as public entertainment changed in mid-century with increased mobility and the introduction of television, town dances faded from the scene. Largoward, in its more isolated rural location, survived and continued to serve those folk from the industrial towns and villages who wanted to continue dancing. Thanks to the persistence of Bob and Margaret Grier, the dancing at Largoward has survived the vagaries of popular taste in entertainment.

“Going to Largoward” now signifies association with a place widely known as a venue for Scottish dancing. Despite increased mobility that

enables people to drive forty or fifty miles for an evening out if they choose, most of the Largoward dancers still come from the area of former mining villages, coastal towns, and rural hinterland within a fifteen-mile radius. The phrase carries a further sense of historical association, since dances have been held here every Saturday night continuously for over fifty years. Its use situates the speaker in a long line of dancers who have had an association with this place, and dancers sometimes refer fondly to the perception that time seems to stand still at Largoward. Some say that the hall, with benches lining the walls and tea still served out of the tiny kitchen in one corner of the building, hasn't changed for years. The sense of community identity that emerges at the Largoward dancing results both from attachment to place and to its historical continuity.

In contrast, "going to Rathillet" has emerged in people's *dance* consciousness only since the dancing started there in 1994. But "going to Rathillet" has been long a habit for those members who grew up on local farms and have continued to attend village hall events like the Harvest Home celebrations. It may be, in part, the familiarity with place that has helped people identify this as a welcoming venue for their new recreational interest in dancing. Almost all of those who go to the dancing at Rathillet either "belong Rathillet" now or did in the past, or are family, friends, or acquaintances of those who "belong" there. These dancers are, in this sense, geographically bounded.<sup>11</sup>

As the most recently formed of the three dance venues discussed here, the case of Rathillet suggests that identification with place still facilitates community formation, despite the increased mobility of the present era. As a pathway to identity, place still looms large in people's consciousness in Scotland. Identity as dancers is tied to identity with place, and a sense of group cohesion and community is formed with and through this attachment to place. At Rathillet, this attachment spills over into other events as associations: some dancers now also attend other hall social gatherings. And friends made at the dancing are now included in invitations to local birthday or anniversary parties. A community has emerged through the dancing at Rathillet that extends beyond the dancing.

The third venue is Letham, where Jimmy Shand, Jr. and his wife Margaret began organizing Old-Time Dances in the homey village hall in 1981.<sup>12</sup> When asked why he started holding these dances, Jimmy said that he had been traveling a lot with his band through the 1960s and 1970s, and wanted to establish a "home base." Reflecting the changes that had occurred in village life in the 1970s, he said: "There weren't any dances in the hall then, and we thought we'd try it." The decision to hold the



dance on a Wednesday night is partly pragmatic: it leaves his band free to accept jobs on a Saturday night elsewhere. It also draws people out during the week who might be otherwise socially engaged on a Saturday, and it does not compete with the long-established dance at Largoward.

As is the case with Largoward, few people who currently live in Letham dance at the hall on a Wednesday night. The local hall, once the focus for social activity in a village or town, has become instead a magnet for people from a wide area. Over the past two decades, the Letham dance has become known throughout the country as a locus for old-time dancing. It has been featured on BBC television, and a video called “Dancing with the Shands” is available for the tourist market. Thus, “going to Letham” signifies not only going to dance at a particular venue but also meeting friends there with whom a relationship has been formed through participating in a commonly valued activity.

## (2) “A GOOD ATMOSPHERE”: THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

*Half an hour before the start of the dance, people begin to trickle into the village hall at Letham in the central Howe of Fife. They exchange greetings, perhaps place an item for the raffle in the box under the table where tickets are being sold, and find seats that will be occupied only momentarily between the dances that will keep them up and moving for the next three hours. Five minutes before opening and the crowd has swelled to 30 or more. Jimmy Shand, Jr., announces the first number—always an old-time Scottish waltz—and dancers take the floor. More people arrive, and within half an hour the floor is crowded, the hum of conversation and laughter buzzes, people are stripping off cardigans and jackets with the heat, and “the dancing” is in full swing, as it is every second Wednesday night throughout the year.*

People choose to dance at Letham for a variety of reasons, and in so doing, they not only identify themselves with a particular place and an enjoyable activity but they also consider themselves connected to one another in this locale through their mutual connection with a famous personality and traditional musical family. “They are nice folk to be in amongst,” one faithful participant said to me. This leads to my second theme in the formation of community and identity through dancing—the social context.

Dancers profess that the reason they enjoy dancing is primarily for what they term “the social aspect.” To these dancers, a “good atmosphere” is essential for a successful dance experience, and this atmosphere is created not only by the organizer of the dance but also by the quality of the band and by the interaction of the participants themselves.



This sociality sets the stage for the connectedness that is created through the dance performance and the experiences that such performance generates. In the social setting of the dance, community emerges partly as a result of “a good atmosphere.”

The personality of the organizer of the dance event can be a powerful attraction for dancers. The video “Dancing with the Shands” demonstrates that the locus for identity may form around well-known individuals. The Shand name is indelibly associated with Scottish dancing, and association with the Shands means an identification with key players in the dance-music tradition. However, that this family is judged to be “nice folk” is significant in a setting where the activity is strictly voluntary: folk have little reason to spend their time with people they do not find to be compatible. The glow of association with famous people may also be an attraction, though one less readily admitted. This underlies the attribution of snobbery by outsiders to “the Letham crowd,” who run the risk of committing a cardinal sin in Scottish working-class consciousness—“thinking themselves better than other folk”—due to a close association with the famous family. To those who come to Letham, however, it is clear that the Shands demonstrate their solidarity with ordinary people not only through their own working-class roots but also simply by the fact of running the dances and creating a good atmosphere for folk to enjoy themselves.

The sociality of the Letham dance is facilitated by the fact that the organizer is also the bandleader, which creates continuity for participants. The band’s musical repertoire lends substance to the experience of familiarity. For example, the hallmark dances of Letham—the Quadrilles and the Lancers—are always introduced musically, and dancers, responding to the musical cue, quickly form the square sets for these popular dances. However, sufficient variation in the repertoire also keeps dancers alert to the subtle pleasures of matching tunes and choreography. The band’s ability, through the quality of its playing, to make the dancers want to get on their feet makes a significant contribution to the good atmosphere of a dance.<sup>13</sup>

At Largoward, a different band appears each week, with about eight or ten bands performing on a rotating basis. Although Largoward “regulars” attend every week, other people come only for the bands they enjoy dancing to the most. These fans swell the ranks of regular dancers, and their enthusiasm for the band adds a heightened sense of “occasion” to the evening, contributing to the good atmosphere. However, too large a crowd can jeopardize the atmosphere if there are

too many dancers for the space to accommodate comfortably, which is why achieving a balance between too large and too small a crowd is so important.

Bob Grier says he learned the importance of a good MC to the success of a dance in his native Glasgow, where he watched his older brother practice this talent. Shortly after Bob moved to Largoward in 1947 with his new bride, Margaret, he was asked to serve as “compère” or MC at dances in the village hall.<sup>14</sup> Bob agreed to take on the responsibility for the Saturday night dances, and 54 years later, he is still doing it with aplomb. His call for quiet before he announces the next dance on the program effectively maintains order and keeps the events flowing.

The dancing at Rathillet is organized by Sheila Piper, who initially selected and taught the dances, carefully gauging the interest and expertise of the members of the class. Her son Gavin provided the music with his accordion. As Gavin’s familiarity with the dances and skill in playing the music increased, Sheila turned the teaching over to him, though she still selects the program of dances. A comfortable rapport exists between the dancers and their young musician, which sometimes spills over into an exchange of teasing comments about the dances taught or the tunes played. This rapport between Gavin and the dancers contributes significantly to the sociability of this dance.

Friendliness is another important marker of “good atmosphere,” although this must be understood within the bounds of reticence characteristic of the rules for proper social interaction in Fife. Newcomers to a dance will initially be left to themselves; but after a dance or two, they will be greeted by people sitting next to them between dances, or standing beside them in a set. It is a gentle, reserved welcome. Once someone has been to the dance two or three times, however, he or she is accepted as part of the group and is greeted by others, either directly, or indirectly with a smile and a nod as befits the reserved social etiquette. Lack of friendliness is as serious a criticism of a dance venue as friendliness is praise. It is also crucial in a voluntary association: if people are friendly, newcomers are likely to return and become part of the regular crowd. Openness to newcomers and friendliness are thus requisite features of community formation in dance contexts.

The various reasons that people give for their participation in dance clearly cluster around ideas of sociality. They talk about meeting friendly people, engaging in a social activity with like-minded folk, joining a group event instead of sitting in front of the television, or escaping from work or family pressures. Most importantly, sociality is chosen; and this freedom of

choice in creating social ties is an important feature of voluntary activities in a complex, modern society. It is in this regard that we can identify community formation in another of its aspects: these are voluntary associations—Edmund Burke’s “little platoons”<sup>15</sup>—groups who self-consciously come together to pursue a common interest and, in the process, create ties among one another that are essential for an experience of social connection or cohesion. Community emerges in voluntary associations as individuals connect and create ties of interest and affection between and among themselves.

People come to Rathillet in part because Scottish dancing represents a pleasurable outlet and a social opportunity for them. Mostly people in their middle years with children grown, they now have more free time to engage in other interests. Dancers emphasize the sociality of the experience, saying things like “You meet a lot of nice folk,” or “It’s a good night out.” An implicit critique of modern social alienation fostered by passive entertainment is the comment that “It gets you away from the television.” The importance of getting out of the house to do something other than “your work” is also noted: “The week goes by that much quicker.” Even if you enjoy your job, this sociality represents another important aspect of daily existence. Reflecting an important psychological benefit of dancing as a stress-reliever in the hectic modern world, one Rathillet dancer commented: “There are enough worries in the everyday working world; dancing lets you forget your problems.” And acknowledging the importance of collective social experience, he added: “It’s fun because you’re all learning together. There’s no pressure.”<sup>16</sup> Dancing offers people a context for interaction that is collective and collaborative, where social connectedness emerges through the embodiment of dance and music in human action.

### (3) STYLE AND REPERTOIRE: THE PERFORMANCE CONTEXT

*Every other Tuesday night for the past six years, a group of enthusiasts have gathered in the village hall in the rural hamlet of Rathillet in North Fife to dance together. Forty dancers fill the small hall comfortably. A mother-and-son team, Sheila and Gavin Piper, provide a steady flow of interesting dances for the members of the class, who have become expert dancers of both set and couple dances through the years. Gavin plays an accordion equipped with a MIDI bass system that provides bass and percussion accompaniment, and guides the dancers through new dances with humor and patience. Representatives of the local hall committee provide the welcome cup of tea for “drouthy” dancers at the halfway point, run the raffle to augment funds, and make sure the space is tidy at the end*

*of the evening. And the dancers come, to dance with energy and enthusiasm, for two and a half hours.*

Dancers at each of the venues discussed here also form themselves as communities in ways that are bounded by judgments regarding correctness of style and by the selection of repertoire. These issues must be negotiated on a continual basis in response to the needs both of the organizers and of the dancers in the context of performance. It is here that the question of what is traditional about these dances arises most acutely. Are we talking here about Scottish social dancing in general, old-time, country, or ceilidh dancing? Performance as constituted by definitions of repertoire and style is a key context for creating identity and forming community. Some dancers frequent two or even all three of these dance venues, but each time that a group of dancers comes together at a particular venue to dance, they enact community through their performance.

Dancing at Rathillet began in 1994 as a class after two couples started talking about “getting something going” locally, having seen what was happening in other districts of rural central Scotland where a new interest in social dancing had been sparked by a reawakened appreciation for Scottish dance music. One of the couples fortuitously met Sheila Piper, who had started holding informal classes near Dundee. They asked Sheila, who “belongs Fife,” if she would like to “try a class at Rathillet.” Sheila was willing, and brought her son Gavin to provide the music on the accordion. The two couples commandeered a half-dozen other folk to come along and give it a try, and the Rathillet dancing began.<sup>17</sup> Now, with over fifty people on the class roll, an average night will see thirty-five to forty gathered in the hall for an evening of energetic dancing.

When I first visited the Rathillet dance, I was told by one of the organizers that what they were doing was “Scottish country dancing, but not RSCDS style.” This reference to, and conscious separation from, the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society has to be understood in the context of the history of the Society and in the politics of the Society-sponsored clubs and classes. Since its founding in 1922 by Miss Jean C. Milligan and Mrs. Ysobel Stewart of Fasnacloch, the Society has claimed authority as the arbiter of the tradition of country dancing. This has developed, over time, into what is perceived by some as an overly fussy concern for precision in footwork and style and a too-rigid standard for attire. A perceived snobbishness, coupled with the exclusion of dancers who do not measure up to the standards of technique and decorum, has caused some to refuse to attend Society dance events. Rebellion against

the Society by those who do not recognize its authoritative voice has led to alternative classes such as the one at Rathillet. “We don’t worry too much about steps here” is one way that the disenchantment is expressed at Rathillet. This leads to variety in steps and style, a variety which expresses individuality and personal experience rather than adherence to externally imposed standards. The dancers’ disinclination to worry about steps or “proper” style is supported by the practice of wearing everyday shoes, eschewing dancing “pumps,” soft-soled slippers that enable the dancer to point the toes and achieve turn-out, both essential aspects of RSCDS footwork and style. Also, the half-raised position on the balls of the feet of Society dancers contrasts markedly with the smooth, flat-footed footwork found here and in other non-Society dance contexts, including Letham and Largoward. Another element of style relates to how dancers turn their partners. Whether one does a leisurely turn once round, or the quick double turn called a “birl,” depends on arm position and steps. Taking right hands and turning once round using a walking or two-step is the standard turn, while a pivot step is used for birling. The hand-in-hand hold preferred by the RSCDS for turning does not place partners close enough to one another to allow for the quick pivoting birl with its single center of gravity. So alternate positions are used to move partners closer to one another: linking elbows, the standard ballroom hold, or the arm-on-arm grip called the Belgian birl. Both the differences in turning position and in steps mark differences in style.

Community identity, then, can be based on dance steps and style, here expressed mainly as anti-establishment: in their refusal to conform to Society style, these dancers implicitly critique the standardization of country dancing. Rathillet dancers are free to perform steps and turns however they like, including RSCDS style if they so choose, as long as the integrity of the dance formation and timing is maintained. The combination of traditional and apparently “nontraditional” elements that this group of dancers uses to define itself suggests that the boundaries of tradition are flexibly drawn. Here, the community is formed around political issues of dance style of long standing in Scotland.<sup>18</sup>

At Letham and Largoward as at Rathillet, performance style is different from RSCDS style. It can be compared with the “close to the floor” style described by Colin Quigley of step dancers in Newfoundland (1985:19–21)—smooth movement, footwork kept low to the ground, and a fine sense of timing and rhythm are characteristic elements. At these venues, dancers from other regions with a different style are quickly identified as being “too bouncy” or “wild.” Many Fife dancers

nonetheless have a predilection for fast turns or “birling”; this, however, must be kept within the bounds of control that seem to be the central tenet of their reserved style.

Repertoire is a complicated topic because the categories are not mutually exclusive, with a certain degree of overlap found among the dance communities. Nonetheless, dancers identify their dance experience on the basis of repertoire. To a certain extent, Sheila Piper, as organizer, defines the repertoire of the Rathillet dancers. Building on the minimal knowledge of Scottish social dances people had learned at school, she began by introducing popular couple dances found in the current social dance repertoire.<sup>19</sup> But the dancers were eager to learn set dances, and, quick to learn, they have progressed rapidly from the more straightforward older set dances to quite complicated ones of more recent composition: “A Trip to Bavaria” or “Ian Powrie’s Farewell to Auchterarder,” for example, involve all the dancers moving at the same time, with no couple ever inactive. The couple dances are now used as “breathers” after two or three set dances. Thus the Rathillet dancers have formed their distinctive dance community through their enthusiasm for set dances that they perform in non-RSCDS style. Although the Rathillet dancers describe themselves as doing “Scottish country dancing,” the inclusion of couple dances in their repertoire distinguishes them from the other Scottish Country dancers who exclusively perform set dances, and from sequence dancers who only dance the patterned couple dances. Rathillet dancers perform both old and new set dances as well as old-time and newer couple dances. More recently, the phrase “ceilidh dancing” has entered their vocabulary.<sup>20</sup> The terminological shift from country or old-time to ceilidh reflects the acceptance of a new name for what has long been simply called “the dancin’.” It helps to overcome the prejudice that many younger people feel about both terms: “old-time” connotes rustic and old-fashioned, and “country dancing” carries associations with the snobbery of “the Society.”

Comparing the dance repertoire at Rathillet with the self-styled old-time dances at Largoward and Letham reveals certain differences in emphasis. At Largoward, one will find the fewest set dances, usually no more than two or three on a given night. Postie’s Jig, Shiftin’ Bobbins, Broon’s Reel, and the Black Mountain Reel are current favorites. The remainder of the program consists of waltzes, couple dances in 2/4 or 6/8 rhythms, and by one ballroom dance, the Quickstep. As the longest continuing dance event, the Largoward dance shows perhaps the strongest continuity with village-hall social dancing as it was known

throughout the twentieth century. This continuity is realized less in the repertoire *per se* than in the adaptation of repertoire to current popular taste and desires. In the 1960s it was dominated by set country dances, in the 1990s by around-the-room couple dances. The question of tradition has to be raised here: are set dances more “traditional” than couple dances? Some would want to argue that they are, despite the fact that they themselves were introduced in the eighteenth century from the French and English courts. To my mind, one of the best examples of the adaptability of tradition is the Square Tango, a sequence dance incorporating a tango move but performed to the uniquely Scottish type of tune called a strathspey, with typical social-dance footwork that emphasizes a “close to the floor” style. Social dancing in Scotland in the twentieth century has always been inclusive of couple, set, and other figure dances, including some ballroom styles like the waltz and two-step. At Largoward, “tradition” is a flexible category.

At Letham, Jimmy Shand will feature two set dances during each half of the dance, one square set and one in longways formation. The squares are always the Lancers and the Quadrilles, while the longways sets or country dances are standards from the older repertoire, like Broon’s Reel or the Dundee Reel. Only reluctantly has he recently included newer country dances like Postie’s Jig and Shiftin’ Bobbins, to accommodate dancers’ requests. He maintains these are not “old-time” dances. In his own way, he, too, is rebelling against the dictates of the RSCDS’s definition of country dancing by his disinclination to include newly composed dances on the program. In keeping with his professed commitment to old-time dancing, Jimmy will also sometimes include a Grand March and Waltz Country Dance to begin the second half, dances that often began a dance fifty or sixty years ago.

The choice of what he terms an old-time repertoire is quite conscious: these dances are associated in his mind with history, particularly the “Auld Alliance” with France. The dances, Jimmy claims, were mostly from France. He and Margaret want to see these dances preserved, even though they admit that there have been changes in the repertoire over the past twenty years. A particular feature of the dancing at Letham is the regular performance of Quadrilles and the Lancers, both square set formations that do indeed derive from French styles introduced in the nineteenth century.

Repertoire and style are useful categories for characterizing a dance community in part because of their descriptive power. “Old-time dancing” connotes a social activity for couples and links people with a cen-



tury-long dance history. "Country dancing" signals the complex patterns of sets and the precision of coordinated movement required in them. In addition, repertoire and style work toward the formation of community because people attend those dances that allow them to dance in ways they most enjoy and with which they identify. When people start to travel a "circuit" of dances beyond their home hall, they select those venues that are similar in style, repertoire, and atmosphere. The emergence of community at any given place and time depends on the coincidence of these factors in the dancers' experience. Thus performance style and repertoire are an important dynamic in the definition of tradition and in the analysis of music and dance communities.

#### (4) THE MEASURE OF A GOOD NIGHT'S DANCING: THE PSYCHODYNAMIC CONTEXT

*After an energetic performance of The Lancers at Letham, or one of the longways sets at Rathillet or Largoward such as Black Mountain Reel, men mop their brows with towels and women fan themselves with paper or mini-electric fans. Some people sip refreshing tea, soft drinks, or water. Smiles are wide and eyes are bright, even if chests are still heaving from the exertion. "That was good," people say.*

A fourth way to think about community formation in dance is through the embodied sense of connectedness that develops through dance performance. As Martin Stokes puts it, music and dance experiences "encourage people to feel that they are in touch with an essential part of themselves, their emotions, their 'community'" (Stokes 1994:13). Dance facilitates this connectedness in several ways. One is choreographic: the patterns of dance movement reinforce the collective experience of social dance at Largoward, Letham, and Rathillet events. Visually and choreographically, dance shapes individuals into connected, communal, and collective bodies. Another way that connection is created is somatic or psychobiological: the measure of a good dance in part lies in its psychological and physical energy, spurred on by a good band and good company. Choreography and body come together as *communitas*, the creation of a bond between disparate individuals that unites humans in community and fellowship as described by Victor Turner (1969). *Communitas* is created as dancers embody social, physical, and psychological connectedness.

Choreography facilitates the emergence of a sense of community in two ways. First, in the set formations, dancers inscribe the choreography with one another through a patterned series of figures or movements performed to a specified number of bars of music. Dancing in sets (either longways or square for four couples, or pairs or trios facing one another)

is a collaboration among the members of the set. Even though each group has different members, the same pattern is inscribed by every set in a given dance. The psychosocial focus of these dances is centripetal, within the set. Because a satisfying dance performance depends on the interaction among the members of the set, some people choose to dance with the same group on a regular basis, and friendships are formed in this way. Intrinsically satisfying, this practice runs the risk of being thought of as exclusive, so care needs to be exercised in order not to damage the “good atmosphere” of a dance event with too much exclusivity. Gossip about dancers who “keep to themselves” is one mechanism that is used to control exclusive behavior. Dancing in sets with a variety of other dancers, moreover, has the added benefit of enabling other friendships to develop and new connections to be formed.

A second widespread choreographic formation is one in which couples position themselves in a large circle around the room. Here each couple dances as a unit, but all perform an identical choreography so that the entire room is constituted as a collective dance event. In each couple, partners are focused on the axis between them, and the physics of the dance relies on a reciprocity of tensions around that axis. However, all couples are simultaneously centripetally focused on the center of the circle of dancers, which provides the roomful of dancing couples their connection with one another. Often quite simple, these choreographies are most satisfying as a collective experience: to be one of thirty or forty dancing couples moving in synchrony around the room feels as if one is caught up in a collectively dancing universe. Like the set dances, couple dances engage dancers in collaborative movement that experientially enacts a communal identity. It is thus *in dancing* that the Rathillet or Letham or Largoward dancers become a community. In this sense, then, the community emerges, or is created, each time a dance is danced. Community emerges in the dance via its choreography.

Dancing offers people an activity that is social, performed to live music, challenging enough to keep people’s interest without requiring specialized training, and active enough to be aerobic. Scottish dance music is lively, energetic, and some would say relentlessly cheerful. In a world where “stress” is part of everyone’s daily experience, social dancing offers a healthy physical outlet: people comment that it is “good exercise.” The physical energy required for dancing, supported by a good band and congenial company, contributes to the good feelings people experience.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, an important collective physiopsychological phenomenon occurs at dance events. Scotland is a cool climate, and vil-

lage halls are not well heated, so that people are in fact physically cool when the event begins. They are also psychologically “cool” in the manner that is prescribed by normative etiquette: they chat quietly in small groups, sit calmly on chairs or benches placed on the periphery of the room, and wait patiently for the dancing to begin. But after about three-quarters of an hour of dancing, people are literally and symbolically “warmed up” and the “atmosphere” in the hall changes. The dancing generates individual as well as collective body heat. Soon people start to perspire and, simultaneously, the volume of conversation among participants increases. People joke and laugh as interpersonal interaction intensifies. This is part of the “good atmosphere” that people desire. And the “sweat factor” is judged by some as a measure of a good night’s dancing. Some men bring two or even three shirts along: one to change into at the half-time interval, and another to put on before going home. Women fan themselves or sip cooling drinks. Everyone comments, “Isn’t it warm?”

One way of thinking about what occurs at a dance is that dancing creates opportunities for more intimate, social connections to be formed among a group of people. The usual values governing conventional behavior—reticence, respect for individual integrity, freedom, and relativism (“It’s nothing to do with me”)—collapse under the pressure of energetic physical activity. If taken advantage of, these opportunities for connection also break down the barriers of individuality and enable bodies and spirits to cohere. In his conceptualization of *communitas*, Victor Turner cites Martin Buber’s thesis that “Community is the being no longer side by side but *with* one another in a multitude of persons” (Turner 1969:127). This “being with” is what I call “connectedness,” created in social dance at the events I have described here.

For Turner, *communitas* is “an essential and generic human bond, without which there could be no society” (1969:97). Writing about how Turner’s concept may be extended beyond the analysis of ritual, Paul Spencer argues that its relevance to dance is obvious: “It is not just that dancing is a highly social and leveling activity that draws people together in solidarity. . . . It contrasts with normal everyday life, taking the dancers out of their structured routine and into a realm of timeless charm.” And: “Through dancing, the individual is caught up in a very dynamic way in the powerful forces underlying community life. It is not just his imagination that is stirred, but his whole body” (Spencer, ed. 1985:28, 35). The embodiment of connectedness is what gives dance its power as “emerging community.”

In social dance, *communitas* represents the formation of community on two levels. At the existential level, emerging “where social structure is not” (Turner 1969:126), *communitas* represents behavior characteristic of marginal or transitional social situations where immediacy, equality, and spontaneity prevail. However, Turner expands the concept to include cultural or institutionalized expressions of *communitas* as well. This enables us to understand *communitas* as an *element* of rather than simply *opposed to* social structure. *Communitas* takes form in events that permit and encourage its expression in “the vitalizing moment” (1974:243). At the dance, community emerges through and in the *communitas* of dance performance.

When virtually all the dancers are up on the floor and the room is full of moving bodies, when the timing and rhythm of the music inspires the dancing, when familiar tunes lift the spirits of the dances, and when bodies have started to sweat and the usual reticence of everyday interpersonal interaction has begun to crack open, the experience of *communitas* emerges. People feel happy in the communal moment when the whole roomful of dancers creates a single pattern that is “the dance,” or when, within each set of eight dancers, the pattern is replicated throughout the room in a kind of kaleidoscope of movement and form. And they approach *ecstasy* in the birl when partners, delicately balanced, whirling and spinning, take one another to the edge of chaos.

These moments of *communitas* are experienced over and over again at the dancing. It is the memory of it, and the anticipation of its occurrence on a future occasion, that draws people back to events that carry the potential of *communitas*—that “essential and generic human bond, without which there could be no society.” And those events themselves then become moments of *communitas*, essential to the formation of community through dance.

## EPILOGUE

*It is a Sunday evening in December 1995, and we have joined seven other couples in Collessie Hall for our weekly ceilidh dance class. We form two sets and work our way through the currently popular dances that folk want to be able to perform when they go out to dance at Largoward or to another village hall event, a party, or a wedding. Most of the participants live in the village or nearby; they are neighbors or relatives and enjoy one another's company; they particularly want to learn popular ceilidh dances; and they get hot and happy dancing together. Geography, society, performance, and psychodynamics provide the context for this dance community. We are welcomed as knowledgeable and friendly “ringers” and enjoy our association with these friends. And although the class lasted only a few months,*

*when we return each summer, it is reconstituted for a barbecue and dance, and another dance community emerges again.*

*Saint Mary's College  
Notre Dame, Indiana*

## NOTES

- 1 Regional designations include Highland, Hebridean, Shetland, and Borders. Definitions referencing style are step, social, military, court, old-time, ceilidh, and country dance. Two national regulatory boards and organizations define styles, steps, and figures and also certify teachers: The Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing for Highland dancing, and the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society for country dancing.
- 2 Social dancing that is generally recognized as traditional in Scotland includes a number of different dance types, although not everyone agrees on the boundaries of what constitutes traditional. See Shoupe 1991:182–97 for a discussion of the complexities of this argument. The term “country dancing” usually signifies set dances for four couples in longways or square form, especially as promoted by the RSCDS. “Old-time dancing” is a broader category including country dance sets, around the room couple dances including ballroom dances, and hybrid forms such as couples that face one another and progress around-the-room after each repetition of the dance figures (sometimes called a Circassian Circle formation). The set dances performed at old-time venues are usually limited in number, while the RSCDS has supported the proliferation of new dances composed in “traditional” styles as well as dances revived from manuscript sources. “Ceilidh dancing” is a more recent term applied to essentially the same repertoire as old-time. It has emerged among younger musicians with a background in the folk music revival and appeals to younger dancers who reject the stodgy connotation of the term old-time. To a certain extent these are overlapping categories, and their use represents age and class distinctions. This issue was discussed in Shoupe (1997). “Sequence dancing” refers to the dance formation in which couples simultaneously perform the same sequence of figures in an around-the-room formation based on ballroom styles such as the waltz or fox trot. Certain sequence dances are part of the old-time repertoire, but some dance clubs and classes are wholly dedicated to this type of dance, which is perhaps best regarded as a subset of ballroom dancing.
- 3 The recent survey edited by Teresa J. Buckland (1999) includes discussions of the theoretical dimensions of field research by Adrienne L. Kaeppeler and Drid Williams that focus on methodological issues. The classic texts of dance ethnology—Lange (1975), Royce (1977), and Hanna (1979)—are likewise concerned primarily with dance as dance.

- 4 A forerunner is Spencer, ed. 1985, which offers functional, psychological, symbolic, and structural approaches to dance analysis. Tomko (1999) touches on one of the themes that interests me in her first chapter, in which she discusses the images of the human body being promoted by movement practices of the time, but her analysis is primarily historical and political. Politics and history are also the focus of Mendoza (2000). For gender-based political analysis, see Cowan (1990), and Savigliano (1995). Keil, Keil, and Blau (1992) provide historical and social analysis of polka in America.
- 5 The forum, "Emergent Communities," organized by Lucy Long at the Society for Ethnomusicology Midwest Chapter meeting, April 1998, Bowling Green, Ohio, served as the original impetus for my thinking about the idea of emergent community. I wish to thank Lucy and the other presenters—Colleen Coughlin, Alan Kagan, Mary Hatvig, and Cory Thorne—for their contributions to the development of the concept. The paper I delivered there was the first version of this article (Shoupe 1998a). I have also drawn from Shoupe (1998b), which was delivered for the panel called "Emergent Communities: Traditional Music and Dance" at the October 1998 American Folklore Society annual meeting in Portland, Ore. Thanks to Burt Feintuch, who served as discussant on that panel.
- 6 The social and political complexities of the interrelationships between community and tradition in Scotland is the subject of Shoupe (1995). I suggest that notions about tradition too often fall into conservative and romantic conceptions similar to those surrounding ideas about community: simplicity, democracy, purity, directness of apprehension, immediacy, artistry, and cohesion. These ideas posit tradition, and by analogy community, as historical, stable, and conservative rather than current, changing, and developing.
- 7 Research conducted in 1995–96 was supported by a sabbatical leave from Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana, and by an Honorary Research Fellowship at the St. Andrew's Scottish Studies Institute, University of St. Andrews, Scotland, Douglas Dunn, Director. In 1999, I received support from Saint Mary's College again in the form of a SISTAR grant, which supported summer travel and research. This research is the basis for a book manuscript currently in progress on the relationship between music and dance traditions in Scotland.
- 8 This study of Milton Keynes focuses on the pathways followed by people as they become involved in musical groups in the town.
- 9 See Shoupe (1994) for a discussion of "place" and "family" as two domains of identity in Scotland.
- 10 See also Leyshon, Matless, and Revell, eds. 1998, and *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 20, no. 4 (1995), both of which include papers from a 1993 interdisciplinary conference held in London on "The Place of Music." Solomon's appraisal of this trend in research notes that the idea that "musical performance serves as a practice for place-making" follows from Anthony Seeger's argument that music does not simply reflect culture, but musical per-

formance is rather a social activity through which culture is created, negotiated, and performed (Solomon 2000:257). See also Seeger (1987).

- 11 The dance class at Rathillet represents a historical continuity with classes offered by itinerant dancing masters at rural village halls, thereby reinforcing dance practice in local communities. A father and son, both nicknamed "Fiddley" Adamson, taught dancing in Fife over a span of seventy-five years. Alexander practiced from 1879 until his retirement in 1927, and his son, William, continued the practice until his own retirement in 1953. See Flett and Flett (1964:8).
- 12 The association of the name Shand with Scottish dancing dates back to the 1930s when Jimmy Shand, Sr. made his first recordings for Regal-Zonophone. Born on January 28, 1908, Sir Jimmy passed away on December 29, 2000, just short of his 93rd birthday. Knighted by the Prince of Wales in a ceremony in Edinburgh in January, 1999, Sir Jimmy first organized a band in the late 1930s, and in the 1940s it developed into a nationally and internationally known dance band. Primarily associated with Scottish country dancing, Sir Jimmy never lost his appreciation and enthusiasm for all kinds of Scottish dancing and music. His son Jimmy Jr. carries on the legacy at Letham, where dancers come to dance in the more broadly defined "old time" style, and in playing for country dancing all around the country. Interview with Margaret and Jimmy Shand, Jr., Auchtermuchty, January 15, 1996.
- 13 Joining Jimmy, who plays lead accordion and electronic MIDI bass (which serves as replacement for the piano and upright bass of older bands) are second accordion player Hamish Smith and drummer Jim Lawrie. Dr. Sandy Tulloch, playing a three-row button-key Merino accordion of the type made famous by Jimmy, Sr., usually joins the band during the second half of the program.
- 14 Interview with Bob and Margaret Grier, Largoward, February 1, 1996.
- 15 "To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed toward a love to our country and to mankind" (Burke 1968:135).
- 16 Interview with Dave and Muriel Simpson, Alan and Madge Wilson, and Bill and Ann Christie, Cupar, July 20, 1996.
- 17 Interview with Effie Trail, Rathillet, June 20, 1996.
- 18 For a historical view see Emerson (1971, 1972). Further discussion is found in Hood 1980. The burgeoning popularity of ceilidh dancing has resulted in a number of "how to" books, the most popular of which are Shepherd (1992) and Ewart and Ewart (1996). Two instructional booklets produced in conjunction with their CDs by the popular band The Occasionals are *Footnotes* (Edinburgh: Bonskied Music, 1992) and *Back in Step* (Edinburgh: Bonskied Music, 1997), edited by band leader Freeland Barbour. The way that the definition of the tradition is currently being negotiated and extended is illustrated by Knight, ed. 1996, which includes a contemporary statement of RSCDS definitions of styles as well as "ceilidh



and party dances,” which have not previously been included by the Society in their publications.

19. Traditional dances people typically learn at school (during the six weeks of P.E. classes devoted to social dancing before the Christmas party) include Gay Gordons, Dashing White Sergeant, Strip the Willow, Barn Dance, Military Two Step, Virginia Reel, and St Bernard’s Waltz. Popular couple dances in the current repertoire include Pride of Erin Waltz, Gay Gordons Two Step, New Hesitation Waltz, Boston Two Step, New Kilarney Waltz, Mississippi Dip, Viennese Swing, Swedish Masquerade, Eva Three Step, and Lomond Waltz.
- 20 The ceilidh dance movement is another manifestation of the rebellion against the RSCDS, fostered by bands who style themselves ceilidh bands and play for a primarily younger and mainly urban clientele. Ceilidh bands grew out of the folk music movement of the 1960s. The urban-based ceilidh dance repertoire overlaps to some extent with Rathillet but in fact is more similar to the old-time repertoire that excludes the complicated set dances that the Rathillet dancers prefer.
- 21 Lassiter (1998:182ff.) discusses *the feeling* that song generates in the context of powwow dancing among the Kiowa Indians of Oklahoma. The way that Kiowa people talk about their experiences in dancing is very similar to what I hear in Scotland. Lassiter’s critique of the use of Turner’s existential type of *communitas* to describe what happens at powwow events (Lassiter 1998:249, note 12) confirms my use of Turner’s cultural or institutionalized expression of *communitas*.

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