

Mike Ruff's Quick and Simple Barn Dance Book

Simple Country Dances for Schools
and Dancers of All Ages



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Disclaimer

The information in this book is meant to supplement, not replace, proper dance training. Like any physical activity involving speed, equipment, balance and environmental factors, country dancing poses some inherent risk. The authors and publisher advise readers to take full responsibility for their safety and know their limits, and the limits of the participants.

Before practising the skills described in this book, be sure that your equipment is well maintained, and do not take risks beyond your level of experience, aptitude, training, and comfort level.

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MIKE'S COUNTRY DANCES

Back in 2014, Mike's band Quicksilver produced a CD for The Maypole Manual. The band's own version was called Maypole Madness and provided the basis for this book. The tracks were designed for dancing, and so here are 7 really easy dances suitable for young children, inexperienced dancers (or teachers), or just very short lessons. After that there are 4 which introduce some new moves, steps, and styles. Finally, there are 3 tracks for Tudor Dances that are simple enough to include and a track of tunes from that period that works for a medieval dance, so there is a bit of instant history.

Some of the dances are well-known traditional ones that you might find at any English barn dance or ceilidh, or are simple adaptations of them. In a few cases I have taken a more obscure and complex dance from history and rewritten it to make it a little simpler or to fit the music. This process is quite common and has always been happening. I have taken some liberties (but not too many) and would definitely encourage you to do the same.

Note: The track numbers given are for the Maypole Madness CD. If you are using the Maypole Manual CD the tracks may be slightly different; please see the table on page 24.

English Country Dancing and the Music

English Country Dancing as we know it has been in existence for nearly 500 years. It has been danced by all levels of society and was the dominant dance style during much of the 17th and 18th centuries. As with any other art form, it has changed and evolved, being influenced by what people were wearing, where they did their dancing and the music that was being played at the time. These changes are still going on and it remains a thriving, living tradition danced by people of all ages and in many different places.

The music that is played for country dancing has been equally varied, often influenced by what instruments were available at any time. Anything from pipe and tabor to fiddles, a piano, or an accordion could be used, as well as full bands, orchestras and, of course, recorded versions of all the above for much of the last 100 years. The tunes that are played are equally varied and it is often up to the musicians, so you can find classical, pop, jazz and swing featuring amongst much older tunes.

Some Technical Bits

Country Dancing is almost always danced by couples and that used always to mean a man dancing with a woman or a boy dancing with a girl and the dances were described that way. Nowadays, it rarely matters who dances with who, but they sometimes do different things, so you might need to have 1s and 2s. In this book all the dances are described in a gender-free way, which now seems to be more appropriate for the 21st century.

Then it is all about the dancers making patterns called figures. So with quite a small number of figures, you can have lots of dances, which is what I have done here. Each figure will fit to a phrase of music or half a phrase. A phrase is usually 8 bars (or 16 steps), so half a phrase is 4 bars. Many tunes are 32 bars or 4 phrases long (two sections repeated AABB), so you only have 4 figures to learn.

The main rhythms used are the polka and the reel in 2/4 & 4/4 and the jig in 6/8. There are also hornpipes and waltz. For the dancer this will influence what steps are used and the feel of the dance, but there are no longer any hard and fast rules.

These steps can be anything you like but are most often a walk or a skip step, certainly for beginners, with a sideways gallop being about the only other step you will need to start with. Others, like the polka, can be introduced later and are included in the glossary.



Having fun



Glossary of Dance Figures

In & Out – What it says.

Swing... your partner. There are many ways to swing but to start with I suggest linking right arms and going around each other, then changing arms as shown on the right. Another version is to do a cross hand hold with your partner but this can get a bit wild and slightly dangerous in confined spaces. For adults the traditional favourite used to be the pivot swing, taking a ballroom hold and describing a small circle with the two right feet while providing the push with the left, as shown below. Now there are many other variations of hold [should you wish to experiment], two of which are shown below.



Here is the second half of the swing



Ballroom Hold



Elbow Hold (with crosshand)



Elbow High



Promenade – Walking or skipping around the circle. For young children just holding hands is fine but the traditional way I to use both hands, right hand holding right and left holding left, so the hands are held across in front of the body. Usually done in an anti-clockwise direction. See picture on page 10.

Two Hand Turn – Can be done two ways. Cross handed as in the text of Sandridge Reel, linking right hands over left or Open Handed so just joining hands with your partner.



Cross Hand