

Cape Breton Jig

Field research and notes by Jerry Duke, Ph.D.
Professor of Folklore and Dance, San Francisco State University

Cape Breton residents are ancestors of the Scottish settlers of the 18th Century. These dances are believed to be that old and did not appear to exist in Scotland or Ireland until a revival in Cape Breton.

Jig: This is the first of two dances that are done throughout western Cape Breton. Dances are held nightly in one community or another during the summer. Some call it a social dance, some call it a square dance. The first (and sometimes second) dance has no name except "Jig". Both men and women appeared to be using the same foot for the stepping and dance movements except for the "One-Step" section, (Figure 3), for which the women hold for a count at the beginning and again at the end to be the opposite foot from the man for that movement.

Music is 6:8, step on counts 1 & 4 of each measure except during the jig. Traditionally, there is no usual number of measures that each figure takes. A leader (the person who called the set together) simply starts each figure. However, I have constructed it here to fit the music.

Le = Leader, Fo = Follower

Dance: begins in a circle of couples facing in, Fo on the Le right.

Figure 1: 16 meas. (32 steps): The jig step

Count 1 - Stamp in place (usually with the left).

& - Swing the free foot forward hitting either the toe or heel

uh - Tap the toe of the same foot as it comes back to original

place, reverse or repeat the above action, or take weight and repeat the above several times.

Figure 2: 8 meas. Center in for 4 steps and out for 4 two times.

Figure 3: 8 meas. Circle clockwise 16 steps.

Figure 4: 16 meas. Le takes the (new) Fo on his left for a "One-Step" or "Two-Step". In relaxed ballroom dance position, Le begins with the left, Fo with the right. (Note: Follower has to cheat to get on the correct foot.) The couple turns slowly or travels slightly forward and backward

Figure 5: 8 meas. Fos star by the left (CCW) for 12 steps, turn for 4 cnts and star by the right (CW) for 12, get in promenade position with partner with whom you just did the one-step, 4 cnts.

Figure 6: 8 meas. New couple promenade CCW around the circle in varsouvienne or skater's position and face inward to begin the dance again.

The traditional ending with live music - When the group leader decides the dance has repeated enough times he will start clapping with the music. The other dancers stop dancing and clap with him to signal the musicians to stop.

Note: This dance varies according to village, but was done first and second in a three dance cycle throughout the evening when we first observed it in 1992.