

GENERAL IRISH DANCE INFORMATION

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SOLO DANCING

You will notice below that the beginner levels are all played at a faster speed than the championship level dances. This is because the championship level dancers perform faster and more complex movements which means that they require slower music in order to execute their dances properly.

Reel

This dance is in 4/4 time. From Beginner up to Prizewinner, dancers complete 32 bars (two steps) and dance at a speed of 122bpm in Beginner. In Prelim and Open championships, dancers must dance 48 bars (three steps) and they dance at a speed of 113bpm.

Light Jig / Single jig

Both of these dances are in 6/8 time, also known as "Jig time". Dancers perform 32 bars (two steps). The Light Jig is played at a speed of a 115bpm while the Single jig is played faster tempo of 124bpm. These dances are very similar in their sound except for the way they are "swung". Each tune is written with 6 eighth notes per measure yet, the light jig is played as groups of three with a rhythm of: Long-Short-Short, Long-Short-Short while the Single Jig is played in groups of two as: Long-Short, Long-Short, Long-Short.

These dances are only danced in competition up to Prizewinner level.

Slip Jig

This dance is in 9/8 which causes it to be difficult to count and also to be the longest soft shoe dance since each measure contains more beats.

Beginners dance 32 bars (2 steps) to a speed of 122bpm (beats per minute)

Older dancers dance to a slower speed (Oireachtas speed) which allows them to complete more difficult movements. Novice up to Prelim / Open use speed 113bpm.

Prelim and open championship dancers must dance 40 bars (two steps and a half)

Treble Jig

This is a dance performed in Hard shoes or, heavy shoes. This dance is in 6/8 time (Jig timing) and can be danced at either traditional or Oireachtas speed. Beginners dance 32 bars (2 steps) at a speed of 92bpm, while Prelim and open championship dancers must dance 48 bars (three steps) at a slower speed of 73bpm.

Hornpipe

This is a hard shoe dance. It is in 4/4 time like the Reel except it is "swung" when it is played and has a slower sound to it. So, to someone listening, each section would sound twice as long as one reel section.

Again, beginners use a faster speed of 138 which is also referred to as "traditional speed" dancing 32 bars (2 steps).

Prelim and open championship dancers must dance 40 bars (two steps and a half) at the slower "Oireachtas" speed of 113.

SPEED CHART (Listed at bpm)

	First Feis	Beginner	Adv Beginner	Novice	Prizewinner
Reel	122	122	122	113	113
Light Jig	115	115	115	115	115
Single Jig	124	124	124	124	124
Slip Jig	122	122	122	113	113
Treble Jig			92	73/92	73/92
Hornpipe			138	113/138	113/138

SET DANCES / TRADITIONAL SETS

There are 38 set dances and Traditional Set dances, each is its own unique tune and name. Some of these dances are in 2/4, 4/4, 6/8 and there is one in 9/8 time. A set dance in 2/4 or 4/4 is considered to be in "hornpipe timing" and a set dance in 6/8 is in Treble jig timing.

The set dances vary from the regular dances above in that each section of these tunes can be various lengths. Whereas in the previous dances, each dance has 8 measures per section or, 16 measures per step.

What is a set dance?

A set dance is danced to a specific tune with a set number of bars. The dances are named for the tune they are danced to. Set dances are performed by Championship dancers only (dancers in Prelim and Open). These dances are Choreographed by the dancer's teacher to suit the level, style and strengths of each particular dancer. The higher level the dancer, the more unique their set dance will be.

What is a Traditional Set?

Traditional sets have a specific tune and number of bars like Set dances. The difference is that the Traditional Sets use choreographies that have been passed down from generation, having been created by the "Dance Masters" of the 1600's. Of the 38 set dances used today in Commission competitions, only 7 of them are traditional sets.

The seven Traditional Set dances are: St. Patrick's day, The Blackbird, Job of Journeywork, Garden of Daisies, King of the Fairies, Jockey to the Fair and Three Sea Captains.

And, just in case your weren't confused already, some of the Traditional Set tunes are also used as set dances such as the King of The Fairies and the Job of Journeywork.

Some traditional sets have more versions floating around than others. For example, the St. Patrick's day has only one version whereas the Garden of Daises and the King of the Ferries have many.

What is the difference between Set dances and Traditional Set dances?

The traditional dances are used from the Beginner to the Novice competitions while set dances are used in the higher categories (Prizewinner, Prelims and Open).

The speed of Traditional Set dances are predetermined but the speed of a set dance is chosen by the teacher depending on choreography, a dancer's skill level and timing of the tune. For example, The Three Sea Captains (in 6/8 time) is usually danced from a speed of 69 to as fast as 72.

FIGURE DANCING

Competitions also involve group, figure, or "ceili" dancing. In figure dancing, we use the word "hand" to refer to the number of dancers in the dance. Ex: a "three hand" would consist of three dancers.

There are 30 ceili dances that are recognized by Commission and teachers are required to learn each and every one to pass their exams. These dances consist mostly of 4 hands, 6 hands, and 8 hands but there are also some with 10, 12, and 16 hands. These dances are used in competitions at both the local, national and world championship level, if the team qualifies.

Besides the ceili dances, dancers may also learn and compete in two hands and three hands that have been choreographed by their teacher.

Once a school becomes large enough, dancers can compete in a "teacher's choreography" or a "dance drama". These dances can also be performed at the national and world championship level and are usually the biggest attractions.

Teachers choreographies consist of dancing only and can sometimes tell a story or, are most often danced to a theme. Dance dramas always tell a story and often have sections of acting, mime, and speech contained within them.

Costuming for a teachers choreography consist of either a class dress or a special "Riverdance" style costume for the occasion.

Dance Dramas use elaborate costumes, makeup, props, backdrops and sometimes, lighting.

In both teachers' choreography and dance dramas, there is the option of having a poem or short story read at the beginning to introduce the piece. Often, the dancers themselves are encouraged to take part in creating, or to actually write the story or poem.

The music used for both types of choreography is usually non traditional and can include techno or other influences.

Both teachers choreography and dance dramas are usually very large dances of 8-20 dancers and are usually quite long (up to four minutes). The teams can consist of all girls, all boys or mixed.