

Australian Social Dance

An analysis by Peter Ellis

The Revival

When the Bush Music Club formed in Sydney in 1954 out of a nucleus of followers of the original 'Bushwhackers' Band (Sydney), the interest was in the collection and performance of Australian bush songs. There was little knowledge by these 'city slickers' of the actual dances that were associated with these 'bush tunes'. Apart from that it was at a time when standard social dancing was in decline and it remained unpopular for a generation or two.

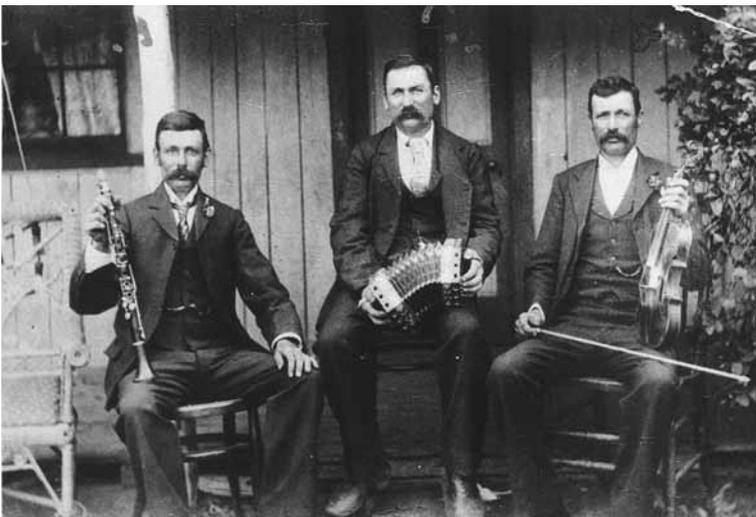
As Shirley Andrews has often bemoaned it was very difficult to find young people, particularly amongst males, who could waltz or polka at all or who could be encouraged to learn: yet so many of the true Australian dances popular in the bush relied on this accomplished skill. However, it was possible to entice these people to take on 'learn as you go' single figure folk and set dances which could be walked through



Peter Ellis at the National Folk Festival in 2003. Photo by Bob Bolton

briefly. The patrons could gleefully leap and bound about unrestricted by earlier social graces. It was the time of instant mania and 'do your own thing'.

Concurrently National Fitness Camps were promoting this style of dancing in the form of revived British and European folk dances as a major part of their recreation. This overflowed into a similar presentation in the school system, and particularly as a substitute for sport and phys-ed on rainy days. Also several prominent founders of the Bushwhackers' Band and Bush Music Club were members of the Eureka Youth League and had definite views on folk dance which would have eclipsed any focus on the ballroom derived social dances that had evolved, nevertheless, by the folk process in the bush. It was a period of romanticism that folk dance and music was not contaminated by commercialism or whims of society, and purely a working



The Colemane Band, a rural NSW dance band from the early 20th century. Photo SLNSW

class spawn. At least now we are coming to realise it was more a free-for-all in Australia and definitely a two way process across various levels of society.

Dance - Last Century's Fashions

Most of the dances came to Australia via the ballroom, and only rarely as a direct folk import but were originally taken from 'the folk' and 'dressed up' for introduction into the upper class ballroom. Then, on arrival in Australia as the 'latest fashion', the dances were snapped up by all levels of society in a frontier country anxious of news of anything new from the old country.

Gradually these ballroom dances and the music percolated throughout the country and quickly moved back via the folk process from courtly grace to neat and precise, sometimes exuberant, folk dance, often quite removed from the overseas original. And so it was the waltz in particular, and the polka and quadrille, all originally from Europe, that were the basis of our true 'bush dances'.

Origins of the 'Bush Dance'

However, the early members of the Bush Music Club(s) were dancing the Bridge of Athlone, (Waves of Tory - an Irish dance previously unheard of in Australia), Polish 'Krakoviak', Serbian Kolo and Swedish three part original folk form of Varsoviana. These had been adopted as part of the Bush Music Club dance performance more as light occasional variety to the Australian song which occupied the main program.

Immediately through association this set the scene for the early somewhat erroneous use of the term 'bush dance'. This had mushroomed by the 1970's with the conversion and adoption of many British and Irish folk dances and music as the core for 'bush dancing'.

In the absence of available printed music (city folk musicians are generally trained sight readers in contrast to the traditional bush musician) a new book 'Begged, Borrowed, and Stolen' was eagerly taken up as a source of tunes for the British, and particularly Irish dances. The authors Chris O'Connor and Suzette Watkins made no pretences that the tunes were Australian or for bush dance selection. It was simply a collection of music favoured by players in the Celtic Club of Adelaide. In this context the book was fine, proving extremely popular throughout the country and providing a more than adequate repertoire for musicians and their sessions of performance of Celtic music. However in a similar way to which British and Irish folk dances had been inappropriately dubbed bush dances, 'Begged, Borrowed and Stolen' was quickly adopted as the bible for bush dance music.

As a secondary source of material Max Klubal's *Music for Australian Folk Dancing* was also widely used. In both cases the major proportion of Celtic tunes provided were generally only suited to the Celtic dances and quite inappropriate to be applied as often the case for use for the social dances that really did survive in the bush and country scene. Most of the Irish tunes in these books were not known in Australia and it is astonishing to find that the very good danceable set tunes of Irish origin that were known by most of our pioneer musicians will not be found in either publications. On the other hand, Max Klubal did include several tunes that were suitable for dances including Varsoviana, Berlin Polka and Pride of Erin.

The newer Bushwackers Band (Melbourne), Cobbers and several others continued to perform Australian bush songs but did much to further promote the domination of celtic music and dance, not without a certain amount of 'ketchup' and commercial promotion.

The New Revival

In the last decade the tide has turned and various dance and musician groups attached to the Bush Music and Folk Clubs, Colonial and Heritage Dance Groups and the Traditional Social Dance Association of Victoria (TSDAV) have done much to raise the Australian profile.

Likewise the work of collectors-John Meredith, Shirley Andrews, Alan Scott, Chris Sullivan, Brad Tate, Rob Willis, David de Hugard and Mark Rummery ;rid others have contributed to putting the Australian tradition into perspective. Similarly recent publications - Australian Folk Songs Vol.2 by John Meredith, Bush Dance by David Johnston and the Collector's Choice series by yours truly are at least providing an authentic balance for the selection of appropriate tunes for dance music.

Even more recently the joint efforts of Rob Willis and David De Santi in the *Pioneer Performers* series published through 'Carrawobbity Press' with support by the Wongawilli Colonial Dance Club is to be commended. And the range has not been limited to New South Wales and Victoria, as the most recent publication takes in a *Queensland Selection* collected by Mark and Maria Schuster who are likewise making valuable contributions to the cause. Some further material from Ma Seal of Kimba, South Australia has also been published.

The purpose of this work is to attempt to describe the intrinsic characteristics of the various dance music categories, relate to original Anglo-Celtic (as distinct from contemporary introductions) and European origins and the form introduced via the ballroom and the final moulding by the most important factor - the tunes and the way they were played by our own traditional dance musicians.

In sections following it has been necessary to refer to Daisy Sutton, Harry McQueen or Clem O'Neal and several prominent players of fine Australian traditional music.

References about these people can be found in the pioneer work of John Meredith in his publication *Folk Songs of Australia Vol. 2*, also *Bush Dance* by David Johnston and *Collectors Choice Vols. 1, 2 and 3* by yours truly.

The Real Dance Heritage

A quotation from Vol. 2 of John Meredith's *Folk Songs of Australia* is an appropriate way of introducing the traditional dance music descriptions and highlighting our true heritage as distinct from that of the somewhat different Celtic tradition projected to our incoming young musicians seeking their Australian heritage.

'Sadly, these, for the most part, very talented young musicians have turned their backs upon the very tradition they imagine they are keeping alive. Almost without exception their music has been learned from Irish fiddle-tune books, and their repertoires are exclusively jigs and reels. Most of the dances they perform have come from the same source or have been recently made up. Yet they call themselves 'Bush Bands' and identify themselves by naities having a strong Australian flavour ... 'The Programmes of these 'bush dances' bear no resemblance to those of a real bush dance or country ball. Completely ignored are the dances enjoyed by our forebears: the varsoviana, mazurka, schottische, the waltz and the various polkas, not to mention the sets such as the lancers, first set of quadrilles, waltz cotillons or the Alberts. Excluded also are the many 'new vogue' dances so popular early this century, most of which are based on the waltz step.'

With the Anglo-Celtic revival in the folk clubs of Australia in recent decades, the tunes and dance music have been based

on a similar revival in Britain and, in particular, in Ireland. Quite a number of the perpetuators of this field are themselves immigrants from England, Scotland and Ireland and so they are keen to promote the traditional dances and music of their homeland.

There is nothing out of place in this context anymore than our immigrant Italians, Greeks, Thais, Vietnamese, Germans, Chileans, Hungarians, etc. carrying on and promoting their own national traditions and maintaining an individual identity. In the longer term they may all contribute or be absorbed in the general melting pot of developing Australian tradition. Folk heritage by its very nature is liquid, does not comply with political boundaries and flows with the times. Who can predict what will be absorbed and endure or what will be lost?!

At this given point of time, we can say in one instance that the revival of Anglo-Celtic tunes and dances that are popular in Australian folk club circles, through the promotion by city based 'bush bands' are by trend gradually receiving considerable exposure in the general community. By this percolation, many musical groups and educational establishments accept this as our tradition - rightly or wrongly. From now on it is definitely part of a newer developing Australian dance and music scene but it is recent, and to promote it as bush dance or music in an Australian folk or traditional sense, inferring it belonged to our pioneers and the bush is really erroneous and this applies to the British and Irish content as much as any. Australia's traditional background was very different to that now promoted in the folk scene as largely Anglo-Celtic.

The Early Days

It is true that in the very early days of settlement the British country dances, hornpipes, Irish and particularly Scottish

jigs and reels were the popular order of the day; but by the 1820's the French quadrille (first set) and the waltz (need I say of Germanic origin) were occupying respectable places next to Sir Roger de Coverley and the highland reels. By mid-19th century there were numerous repeats of the quadrille, waltz and lancers, and the waves of new fashionable dances based on European folk forms adapted for the ballroom that became the rage in Australia. The polka might have been most prominent at first, but the galop, polka mazurka, varsoviana and schottische all took place on popular programmes. The country dance and the reel had all but disappeared.

Although these were the same dances being introduced to the 'upper set' in Britain at the time (and we received them from there rather than first-hand from Europe) it took much longer to flow through to the British villages and lay communities. They had their own centuries older country dances and jigs and reels to be fervently held on to. But as the quadrilles and couples dances gradually adopted by these communities cross pollinated with the older country dances, new dances evolved. Many of these are now popularly performed after collections by notables such as Cecil Sharp. Seldom is it realised it is the quadrilles and adaptations of favourite figures from them in country dance formations that have created many of the revival anglo-celtic folk dances, e.g. circassian circle, tempest, cottages, sweets of may, eightsome reel and la russe. The couples dances also contributed to the stepping, e.g. waltz country dance, polka quadrille, galopede, whilst in the English ballroom the varsoviana, mazurka and schottische are said to have received only fleeting attention.

In contrast Australia was an isolated frontier country anxious to receive news of anything new. The latest fashionable dances were snapped up by all levels of society -

there was little resistance to the waltz for example or nostalgia about quadrille mania usurping the merry old country dance. The Industrial Revolution in the home country had already mixed the community with the convergence to urban dwellings and lifestyle. Coupled with the gold rushes attracting a veritable United Nations to Australia, the latest fashionable ballroom dances of European origin had as much common ground to be shared in a mixed community as the chance of individual surviving village dances of obscure and ageing background.

The quadrilles and new couples dance were really established by the time settlement extended into the bush beyond Sydney and Melbourne. As they spread they developed back through the folk process to be less courtly in nature, although, nevertheless, neatly and precisely performed, and with more exuberance and variety. Likewise, the music transformed from the manuscript and performance of the city quadrille assembly band to the freer style of the bush musician and his adaptation of tunes, and incorporation of some from the homeland as well.

Dance Instruments - Button Accordion and Concertina

Another factor that played a part in the second half of the 19th century was the introduction of the German style concertina and the button accordion. These were a layman's instrument and easily transported in the Australian bush. Their particular action and limitations, on the one hand, changed the music from the classical style of the city bands, but developed tremendous simplicity and excellent dance rhythm with the 'bellows punch' on the other. They lent themselves extremely well to the playing of waltzes, schottisches, polkas, mazurkas and simpler single jigs and reels that could well accommodate the sets. These instruments' popularity was

concurrent with that of the dances. They were of the same European blood. They did not easily handle the more complex British double reels and jigs and minor key tunes that might be favoured by the village band or groups of ceilidh fiddlers in the old country.

In rural Australia, the dance musician was often a sole player with no support from other musicians to carry him over intricate passages, and he had to adhere to the simpler tunes that would allow him to play with punch and emphasise the more important rhythm and dance beat. The squeeze box player because of the action of his instrument and the bush fiddler did much to modify tunes in the first instance by their style and the folk process did the rest. The following extract and quotation (*Concertina Magazine* No. 1 Winter, 1982, p8 of Clem O'Neal - Anglo player) aptly sums it up:

'While an occasional record may have provided a new tune, normally, the tunes on the records were not suited to the slower jerky style of concertina playing that was found in the bush. The principle source of the new tunes was those which were learned when people were away on trips. In some cases they would remember the whole tune when they returned, but quite often they had forgotten part of it. In these cases they would either combine part of several tunes, or else they would make up a piece to fill in for the bit that had been forgotten. The only way things were, was that someone would go away on a shearing trip and he'd remember part of the music, part of something. He'd have to keep it in his head; when he comes back perhaps he'd remember only parts of it. So to make up a dance tune, he'd probably remember bits of different things which someone had played in a town or somewhere or other, and he'd combine them together. Someone else would hear him play that, and eventually new tunes got created from one listening to

the other and these seemed to go right up and down twenty or thirty, miles along the river.'

The Bush Tune

I can give at least two examples of this from the playing of Harry McQueen (Castlemaine). A jig Harry plays was learnt from an older veteran, Bill McGlashan who used the tune for the first figure of the Royal Irish. Part A resembles part A of the 'The Muckin' O' Geordie's Byre' and part B which is quite catchy is either made up or taken from some other source. Obviously part B of 'The Muckin'O'Geordie's Byre' had been lost. Another set tune used by Harry McQueen consisted of Part A of 'The Barren Rocks of Aden' and part B was part A of 'McGregor's March'. Part B of each tune had been forgotten or lost. The names would not be known either; it was simply a set tune handed down for the first set or Alberts and the Sir Roger de Coverley. It might even now be used for the Gay Gordons or evening-3-step.

The original sources are varied, some may have been popular tunes and folk tunes brought out by the various immigrants from their homeland. Many came from the music hall songs, minstrel shows and broadsheets. The widespread use of sheet music and special children's editions of dance music in a simple easy-to-learn folk style have generally been overlooked as much as the effect of brass bands and the dance band music of the towns. They could interplay in the tradition and travel by the folk process described by Clem O'Neal - quite incognito. Some musicians would sit outside a dance hall for hours, simply to pick up snippets of tunes and new material.

The Irish Influence

It is presumed in the contemporary folk scene that because Australia's immigrant background was one third Irish that a large percentage of our dance tunes are Irish.

This is not so. Certainly with songs and ballads the Irish contribution is high and evidenced by the 'Drover's Dream' from Killaloo, 'Moreton Bay' from Boolavogue, 'Backblock Shearer' from Castle Gardens, the 'Bullockies'Ball' from Finnigan's Wake and the 'Cross of the South' from Kelly the Boy from Kellane, to mention a few. The 'Wild Colonial Boy' was sometimes sung to the 'Wearing o'the Green'. It is probably the desperate backgrounds to the Irish situation that fostered the adaptation of words from real instances in the new land to ballads and airs from their homeland. These would have been popular within the family household relating to their struggles past and present. But as far as social interaction in the general community, and particularly through the most popular form of the day - dancing - the Irish were keen to be accepted and assimilated as much as any other national groups in Australia. They were persecuted as it was and dare I suggest the lead up to the Ned Kelly drama in evidence.

The Irish were determined to be accepted as Australians (although proudly maintaining their identity) and to be seen in this light. In any case the popular social dances in their homeland were the quadrilles, waltz, polka, mazurka, schottische, and redowa. These were introduced by their own dance teachers by mid 19th century and became 'Irished'to a point, and certainly allowed for the adaptation and survival of a lot of their indigenous music. The Irish authority, Proinsias de Roiste, highlights this aspect in his notes on Irish Dancing in the *Roche Collection of Traditional Irish Music*, 1927 edition.

Some Irish tunes did survive as dance pieces in Australia but they were not of the form now promoted from the contemporary revival in Ireland, or their followers in the folk clubs of Australia.

Many of the best 19th century dance teachers in Australia were Irish, and they could generally fiddle the music as well. It was the quadrilles and couples dances of European origin that they were teaching. As entertainment items the Irish fiddler would come into his own and for the playing of solo step dances, but this would occur only once or twice in the evening as a demonstration or concert piece. The Irish were generally involved in playing as much popular dance music of the period as their own airs. This is confirmed in the following quotation: St Patrick's Night at Beechworth Tuesday 24th March 1857, as reported in the *Ovens Constitution*, and reprinted in *The Age* six hundred dancers present.

'Country dances, quadrilles, waltzes, etc were rapidly shuffled, whirled and figured when, as by a genuine Irish gush, the band bursts the enlivening strains of Donnybrook Fair. Twelve stalwart boys were in an instant up and at it ... The band was constantly asserting their ignorance of the existence of 'The Goose in the Bog', 'Boys from the West' 'Gone to Carlow' and 'The Priest in his Boots in the repertoire of Strauss, Musard, or Jullien, also an elderly gent complaining because the band couldn't play 'Yellow Wattle'.

It was held in the great hall of Beechworth and comments that it would "dissipate the popular fallacy that a row is a necessary adjunct to the feast of St. Patrick". The account mentions dancers from the Woolshed, Yackandandah and even Nine Mile.

With reference to the selection of dance music favoured (already evidenced above) one book that was particularly popular was *Allan's Music Book No. 37* (now No. 23 and still available) A Collection of Reels, Jigs, Hornpipes and other Country Dances'. Of the 108 tunes

listed only 15 are Irish. Similarly *Boosey's Musical Cabinet No. 65* of 1886 100 Reels, Country Dances, Jigs, Highland Flings, Strathspeys, etc, only 11 tunes out of the one hundred are Irish.

There is no suggestion that it was any different in aural tradition - our dances and music were of ballroom origin and in turn based on European rather than British folk dance: 'Walls of Limerick', 'Siege of Ennis', and 'Waves of Tory' were all unheard of - these came to us very recently and after the revival in Ireland this century and will be explained later.

Quite curiously the Royal Irish Quadrille which was sometimes repeated several times on a programme allowed a show of support for the Irish tunes - yet it seems unknown in Britain although it may simply be the Irish Quadrilles in Ireland. Understandably, the Royal tag would have been deleted. But the dance was extremely popular in Australia, or at least Victoria, and it was here that Irish music was played. Again it was not the complex tunes in minor keys but tunes such as 'Sprig of Shillelah', 'Paddy Whack', 'Rollicking Irishman', 'Nora Creina', 'St. Patrick's Day', the ever popular 'Irish Washerwoman', 'The Girl I Left Behind Me', 'Finnigan's Wake', 'Paddy Will You Now', 'Rakes of Mallow', 'Garry Owen', 'Humours of Donnybrook', and of course the favourite 'Wearing o'the Green'.

Although *Allan's Music No. 37* has 'Lannigan's Ball' included, there is only one isolated instance of this tune being collected in the aural tradition - from an Irishman and even then it had been obscurely converted into polka time. Of all the tunes listed above, only a few players might know more than two or three. Thus a few Scottish jigs such as 'Cock o'the North' or 'One Hundred Pipers' might have been played for the Royal Irish, and sometimes this century the 'Wild Colonial Boy', 'McNamara's

Band'or 'Phil the Flutter's Ball'would be adopted. Even non-Irish brass band marches might be used. (e.g. Repasz).

Irish Bush Jigs

Several other single jigs of Irish origin have been located which were used for sets such as the Alberts, First Set or Royal Irish. One I collected from Mr Semmens of Sedgwick near Bendigo turned out to be one played by the late Sally Sloane, for the first set, and it is possibly of Irish origin.

Another played by Jack Heagney's father for the first set in districts between Ballarat and Castlemaine is 'Bill O'Rourke'. Although it resembles 'Nora Creina', and we at first confused it with this (Jack's sister, Maric, said it was Nora Lacey). Jack finally recalled it was 'Billy O'Rourke'. I then found the tune in the Roche Collection of Irish music, under the Orange and Green Quadrilles. The same tune played in a different style for the first set was also collected as the Berrimal Set Tune from Ted Vallance of St. Arnaud.

Next is Bill McGlashan's 3rd figure of the first set which is similar to Lindsay Carr's lead up tune and Bert Powter's of Forbes tunes for the same quadrille. It is related to the tune 'The Perfect Cure' and has now turned up on one of Chieftains recent records 'James Galway and the Chieftains in Ireland', final track 'Up and About' (Kerry Slides) as part of a medley. The tune selected for the 'Flying Pieman' by John Meredith was a collected 'First Set' tune, and again of Irish origin.

If one looks closely at the favoured Irish pieces, either within their own communities or on the general Australian scene the ubiquitous 'Irish Washerwoman' is the universal fiddle piece and if further tunes are sought it might be 'The Rollicking Irishman' or 'St. Patrick's Day'. Occasionally a special technical piece such as the Irish Lilt'as favoured by the late Daisy Sutton (Wedderburn Oldtimers) would be a treat,

and the 'Connaughtman's Rambles'and 'Rory o'More'are two others. My mother recalls 'Garry Owen'being a favourite tune for Sir Roger de Coverley.

All of the above mentioned Irish tunes were brought out here last century and are quite different generally from those now promoted as Celtic music in the revival scene of recent decades. For every jig that might have once been played, there would be several times the balance for sentimental airs such as 'The Harp that Once Through Taras'Halls' or the extremely favourite 'Londonderry Air'(Danny Boy). Early this century dozens of pseudo Irish-American songs such as 'Peggy O'Neal', 'Rose of Tralee'or 'When Irish Eyes are Smiling'were becoming the most popular, and by the 1940s the Royal Irish Quadrille was giving way to the Pride of Erin as the favourite dance with Irish sentiments.

Ireland Over Here

It is the Irish political situation this century, (after the major immigration to Australia nearly one hundred years earlier) that has created the revival of Celtic music and which has been promoted by supporters in the folk clubs in Australia.

No one could blame the Irish who had been so dreadfully mistreated and oppressed for over a century for their dislike of the English. Following their rebellion and subsequent independence they were understandably hell-bent on creating an Irish Ireland and banning anything of outside influence.

However this has caused confusion with regard to Australia's tradition where the Irish contribution following their immigration early and mid nineteenth century is of a very different background to that of this era.

Last century the Irish were dancing quadrilles, country dances, schottisches, waltzes, polkas (ballroom form, similar to

our 3-hop polka) etc. and these had been taken over by their own itinerant dance teachers. Certainly these dances gradually evolved or were modified into uniquely Irish forms and the polka and its music by this century had altered by being played exceptionally fast and used for the Kerry Set, a merger of polka step with downwards shuffle action and in quadrille formation. None of this has any bearing on Australian development in general social dancing and music of last century or the present or the present, in contrast to that which folk dancers and musicians from an Irish influence promote somewhat erroneously as bush dancing or music. A reference provided by Shirley Andrews adequately illustrates the very different Irish exposure to tradition at the time that Australia was first being colonised.

This is taken from *A Tour of Ireland* by Arthur Young, Dublin 1780 and reprinted in Arthur Young's *Tour of Ireland 1776-1779*, edited by A.W.Hutton, 1892, London, Bell & Sons.

'Dancing is so universal among them that there are everywhere itinerant dancing-masters, to whom the cottars pay sixpence a quarter for teaching their families. Beside the Irish jig which they can dance with a most luxuriant expression, minuets and country dances are taught; and I even heard some talk of cotillons coming in!'

Also when travelling through Killamey he wrote again:

'All the poor people, both men and women, learnt to dance, and are exceedingly fond of the amusement. A ragged lad without shoes or stockings was seen in a mud barn, leading up a girl in the same trim for a minuet.'

Proinsias de Roiste in his *Note on Irish Dancing* Nodlag 1927, in the Roche Collection of Traditional Irish Music wrote:

'It was unfortunate that in the general scheme to recreate an Irish Ireland, the work of preserving or reviving our old national dances should have largely fallen to the lot of those who were but poorly equipped for the task. For the most part they were lacking in insight and a due appreciation of the pure old style, and had as it appears, but a slender knowledge of the old repertoire 'The musicians were, apparently as slack in tunes as most others proved to have been in dances 'The spectacular and difficult dances for the few were cultivated to neglect of the simple ones for the many, leaving the social side untouched except to criticise or condemn 'The ballroom dances in vogue at the time were the quadrilles or sets, lancers, valse, polka, schottische or barn dance, two step and mazurka. These were all banned and nothing put in their place but for a couple of long dances. An exception should have been made, one would imagine, in favour of the popular old Sets (that had become Irishised), if only on account of the fine old tunes with which they were associated, but they were decried amongst the rest. '

Dancing Differences

Ironically in Australia, it is the same imported, revived Irish material that is flooding the scene, yet nobody seems to have been interested or bothered to collect from the descendants in Irish settled districts that may have a lot of original material to offer. Also ignored is the fact that not only in Britain due to Queen Victoria's influence but also in Europe, Scottish music was extremely fashionable during the 19th century. Likewise the folk clubs in the capital cities often have a rich tradition at their back door which is seemingly ignored when it should be researched and fostered (e.g. the German settlements near Adelaide. and Brisbane).

Australian Social and Colonial Dance authority, Shirley Andrews, says in her paper *Our Dancing is Different*, in *Folklore in Australia- proceedings of the 1st National Folklore Conference*, Melbourne, November 1984:

*'Although our folk revival arose mainly as a reaction against the domination of the Australian scene by overseas music and culture, we also made the mistake of following overseas models too closely, especially those of Great Britain 'Certainly our early attempts within the folk scene to revive an interest in Australian social dancing suffered considerably from this general prejudice against dancing as well as from a reluctance to accept that the style of this dancing was different from that of the folk dancing of Great Britain 'The sort of music played now by most bush bands has not reflected real dance music traditions although a considerable amount of dance music was collected from traditional musicians in the very early days of collecting'. At the First Australian Folk Festival held in Sydney in 1955, their evening function included three dances, the Varsoviana, the Waltz Cotillon and Circassian Circle, all played by traditional musicians for audience participation. John Meredith's *Folksongs of Australia* has only four jigs among the forty-two dance tunes, in which waltzes, varsovianas and schottisches predominate. These are all tunes based on European styles of music, so one may well wonder why so many bush bands have limited their repertoire to Anglo-Celtic jigs and reels. All too often these are played at concert rather than dance tempo to the detriment of dancing standards. 'Many of these musicians have completely ignored the traditions of the past and their emphasis has been on playing what they fancy without any understanding or even recognition, of the needs of the dancers, or of the importance of having expert MC's or dance callers.'*

Of course, John Meredith, Shirley Andrews and myself are not being so pragmatic as to suggest some Celtic material should not be played: indeed dances such as Waves of Tory, Walls of Limerick and Dashing White Sergeant are extremely popular and it is appropriate to use Irish and Scottish tunes respectively in these situations. Inclusion of this material is part of the ongoing tradition.

What we are saying is that Australia has its own extremely rich tradition based on much variety of time signature and background and is more individual than realised and of multicultural origin of over one hundred and fifty years. We are saying the Australian tradition deserves no less attention than any other and the real proof of the pudding is that ordinary Australians relate to this instantly.

Fellow collector, Chris Sullivan, first started his interest in Australian folklore when he found his performances of typical folk club Anglo-Celtic material drew little response from country people who obviously had come from a 'different bush school'.

Perhaps the greatest tribute could be paid to the Wedderburn Old-Timers who found themselves inundated with requests for performances when they formed in 1974 and went to great pains to recreate the authentic Australian bush dance and concert program. They remain popular to this day and have several platinum and gold records to their credit which would be the envy of even many pop groups.

I know with my own band, Emu Creek (who play some selected Irish and Scottish jigs and reels), that the comments of praise come from country people and elderly veterans when a varsoviana or set of lancers is performed - above anything else and that when we play on Australia Day - the said word 'Thank goodness for a band that can play Australian tunes', rings home.

Amongst younger people there is a movement of change towards highlighting our true heritage. David De Santi and his Wongawilli Band are to be commended on their presentation of Australian songs and collected dance tunes.

More Information and Resources

As an extension to John Meredith's *Real Folk* and *Pioneer Performers* collection and display, David De Santi and collector Rob Willis have commenced a monograph series on traditional performers.

Many of the appropriate dance tunes are to be found in my series of *Collector's Choice Vols. 1, 2 & 3*, available from the Victorian Folk Music Club, PO Box 20255 GPO Melbourne, 3001.

Guidelines for arranging tunes and music for country dances and folk dances is given in the introductory section of *Collector's Choice Vol. 2*. A special section on music arranging for quadrilles is given on pp70-71 and p100.

Additional comments for couples dances are included in the introduction to *Collector's Choice Vol. 3* and also the history and inter-relation of folk dance and ballroom dance music and the development of the Australian tradition.

Peter Ellis, Bendigo, April 1995.