

# ***The Tartan Times***

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## *Editor's Introduction*

Ahh, spring! The warming temperatures, blooming flowers (and the reminders of seasonal allergies), new vegetation in that beautiful and fresh green replacing the grayish brown of winter. A season of renewal, a season of beginnings, a season of change.

Ed Perlman's article about the fascinating history of Scottish musical instruments and traditions gives us some of the roots of our beloved songs and dances. Kat Dutton's personal essay about their experience in folk dancing and its steady march into the future gives hope for a bountiful harvest in time.

Karen Sollins' quest to keep the dancing and enjoyment going during the pandemic is a prime example of the hardiness (and Scottish stubbornness) of our community during a potentially fallow season. Alan Wilson's account of 'rebranding' the Strathspey and Reel Society of New Hampshire to New Hampshire Scottish Music Club is not unlike the rings of growth on trees.

But before you turn the page, I'd like to share with you a comedic anecdote relevant to the topic of renewal and growth. Once upon a time, the fraternal society known as the International Order of Oddfellows was a male-only private group, like many of their contemporaries. In 1851, the IOOF, became the first fraternal order to allow women to join. What is funny is the oral-tradition story about this inclusion. Like many fraternal societies, the IOOF had a women's auxiliary, for the wives and daughters of the IOOF members. The story goes that the head person of the IOOF was asked to create a 'degree' (like a scouts' badge) for the ladies of the auxiliary. He said the only way to do that was to induct the women into the IOOF. The head of the Auxiliary retorted with some disdain, 'Well, men have always been welcome in our group. Such a shame the opposite is not true.' And from then on, the IOOF allowed women to join. (Nowadays, gender is no longer a requirement of either membership.)

I share this story with a chuckle and reminder. Stagnation is the killer of all things. A farmer who does not rotate his fields loses soil nutrients. A still pool of water contains no life-giving oxygen. Culture, language, and society do not exist in vacuums, nor do they fit inside neatly ordered chapters of history textbooks.

In this edition of The Tartan Times, we showcase these themes with musical archaeology, space-age technology, social mores, and with 'This Times' Tartan' - a reminder that reinvention can be hard, but it is also a lifeline to the future and can bring unexpected rewards.

Sincerely, Your Editors,

Nikki Lauranzano & Linda McJannet

# *The Evolution of Scottish Music - A Long View*

## *By Ed Pearlman*

Scottish music has gone through a tremendous evolution over the years, or should I say, millennia? Musical archaeologists (Yes, that's a thing!) have found Neolithic boulders that ring when struck, a song speaking of flora and fauna that hadn't existed since just after the Ice Age, and a bridge from a 2500-year-old lyre, the oldest in Europe, on the Isle of Skye. Music has certainly been integral to Scottish history.

By the 8th century, stone carvings indicate that the Picts invented the Celtic harp, whose triangular shape allowed for more strings and better resonance. These extra harmonic options may have contributed to the sophistication of medieval Scottish music, which included thirds while continental Europe still focused on fourths and fifths. Sadly, Scottish harps lay more or less forgotten between 1746 and 1891.

The first fiddles, predecessors to the 16th-century Italian violin, were portrayed in art works in the 12th-century Melrose Abbey after being brought back to Scotland by Crusaders. By the late 18th century, the violin, with its broad range of dance and listening music, and newly published tunebooks, became central to Scottish music.



*Ed Pearlman shown playing the fiddle of composer and famous 18th-century fiddler Niel Gow, in the library at Blair Atholl, the home of Gow's patron*

# *The Evolution of Scottish Music*

## (Cont.)

Scotland's third national instrument, the bagpipes, was first mentioned a few centuries after the fiddle. The earliest records of the instrument, in the early 16th century, included complaints by Gaelic bards about this noisy newcomer! Since then, the piping tradition has become a treasure trove of intricate and powerful music for listening, dancing, and military ritual.



The accordion, perhaps the fourth national instrument, was introduced to Scotland in the 1830s. The accordion's volume and ability to play both melody and accompaniment meant that a single accordionist could play a dance (pleasing many a budget). Today, some of the 50 Accordion and Fiddle Clubs in Scotland offer workshops to guide Scottish country dance musicians in playing what is now the primary type of Scottish social dance music found outside of Scotland. Within Scotland itself, high-energy ceilidh dancing is more popular, with ceilidh bands outnumbering RSCDS bands by about four to one.

# ***The Evolution of Scottish Music*** (Cont.)

World War I sent shock waves through Scottish culture, decimating a generation of men and disrupting daily life. Common instruments went into hiding in local homes and ceilidhs. One elderly woman saw Cape Breton stepdancing in the 1980s and joined in easily, pointing out that she'd grown up doing those steps as a kid, before World War I, but not since then.

Then came the era when British media portrayed Scotland as the epic land of kilts and bagpipes, true, but only part of the story. After World War II, folk revivalists spotlighted traditional songs, and in the 1970s, began reviving instrumental traditions such as the harp and smallpipes, and exploring the rich repertoire of Scottish tunes from previous centuries.

Since then, Scottish music has continued to flourish. In 1981, the Isle of Barra held the first Scottish Fèis (“faysh”), to teach traditional music, sports, language, and song. Today, nearly 50 annual Fèisean teach about 6,000 participants. Also in 1981, Fiona Ritchie launched NPR’s *The Thistle and Shamrock* to celebrate the energy and inventiveness of Celtic music, as compared with what she called the “prettified version of our heritage” she’d grown up with on British TV. Also in 1981, we started the Boston Scottish Fiddle Club!

Festivals, record labels, schools, and government support, especially after the Scottish Parliament reopened in 1999, have all ensured the health of Scottish music. The old “cultural cringe” Alasdair Fraser used to rail against has finally disappeared, and the music scene in Scotland is more vibrant than ever.

# *The Evolution of Scottish Music*

(Cont.)

## Fun links:

To hear the Rock Gongs: <https://youtu.be/rq0DjwSZzkc?si=hzSOKskWEUPVktEo>

For a motet sung at the funeral of King James III (1488): <https://youtu.be/vvlq0rIVpfc?si=wFkIN2s1JivvLqll>

Music from The Thistle and Shamrock can be heard at <https://www.thistleradio.com/>



**Ed Pearlman**, a fiddler, teacher, and writer, has played for Scottish country dancing and Scottish concerts since 1979. He formed Boston Hospitality with Beth Murray in 1982 and has served as Scottish Pinewoods music director many times. Ed also led the Boston Scottish Fiddle Club (1981-1999). His columns for *Scottish Life* (1996-2020) were collected and published as [MusicScapes of Scotland: Vignettes from Prehistory to Pandemic](#) (available from Amazon). He has often collaborated with his wife, dancer Laura Scott. His weekly blog about the walking tours he has led and Scottish music can be found at <https://edpearlman.substack.com>.

# *Both Sides Now*

## *By Kat Dutton*

When I began dancing in 2007, two men couldn't dance together. If, at the end of coupling up, the only people remaining were both men, they would go to the nearest partnership of two women and politely offer to split them up. I remember at the time feeling uncomfortable with the practice. Surely the men could not be so clueless at dancing that none of them could dance on a different side of the room for four minutes. Especially in Scottish country, a dance form with so few differences between gent and lady - except for a few rules for "who crosses in front" and the arm positions for the Allemande - nearly everything we do is identical! I chalked it up to a weird artifact of my new hobby and assumed I would understand better after I had been dancing longer.



Photo credit for the above photo and the next page -  
Meyer Billmers - Pinewoods, 2021



## ***Both Sides Now*** (cont.)



*Robert McOwen & Marc Hartstein, Kat Dutton & Katherine Giacoletti, and Julie MacRae & Frank Clayton*

However, as I began to try other forms of dancing, I realized that I would never understand SCD's insistence on man/woman couples wherever possible. It simply didn't happen at the contra or English dances, where I first encountered "beads or bares." Dancers on one side of the room wore bright plastic necklaces, and folks traded them back and forth as they found new partners. It was unknown at MIT's Tech Squares, where the joke ran "a square is six men, one woman, and a broom," poking gentle fun both at the difficulty of filling a square, and the enjoyable challenge of dancing with a ghost. Even at the Concord Scout House, the most mainstream local contra dance, men were so used to swinging with each other as they passed in the lines, that it was unremarkable for them to sometimes line up together as well.

# Both Sides Now

(Cont.)

Happily, SCD practices have evolved. Many dancers have a preferred role or ensure optimum height arrangement for allemandes, but very few dancers now assume that only certain people fill certain roles. Men dance with men, women dance with women, I dance with other nonbinary people, and everybody dances with everybody. The focus is less on outdated gender ideals that seem to assume only women are talented enough to learn both roles and more on the overall joy of the dance.

I'm happy to see these developments and others that have made the floor more welcoming to me as a nonbinary dancer who is just as comfortable in my kilt and Prince Charlie as I am a ballgown and sash. Including people's pronouns on name badges is also a wonderful change, which has helped me respect other people by referring to them correctly. MCs are being more careful with their language. It's been a long time since I've cringed at hearing "you should be looking at someone who looks like you," when I will be facing someone of the same role, who almost definitely doesn't look like me. Some teachers in the Boston Branch are experimenting with gender-neutral calling, a change which makes it easier for people of any gender to dance any role without feeling the intense discomfort of being mislabeled.

# Both Sides Now

(Cont.)

My goal at a dance has always been that: dancing. I am here for the joyful flight of the quicktime step, and the elegant power of the strathspey. I like smiling at my partner and waggling my eyebrows as I cover with someone else in the set. I love the challenge of puzzling out exactly how to move through a tricky meanwhile figure, and the satisfaction of my heels coming down exactly on “one” as I manage my phrasing. I have danced with people twenty years younger and sixty years older, with men, with women, with others like myself who are neither or both or something else entirely, and all of it has been fun because it is dancing, not because it is only with certain people.

In 2007, asked to split from a friend so two men wouldn't “have to” dance together, I felt embarrassed, uncertain, as if I had done something wrong just by being myself. In 2024, I'm thrilled to instead be in a space that wants me here, as I am. Let's dance together sometime - you can pick any side you want.

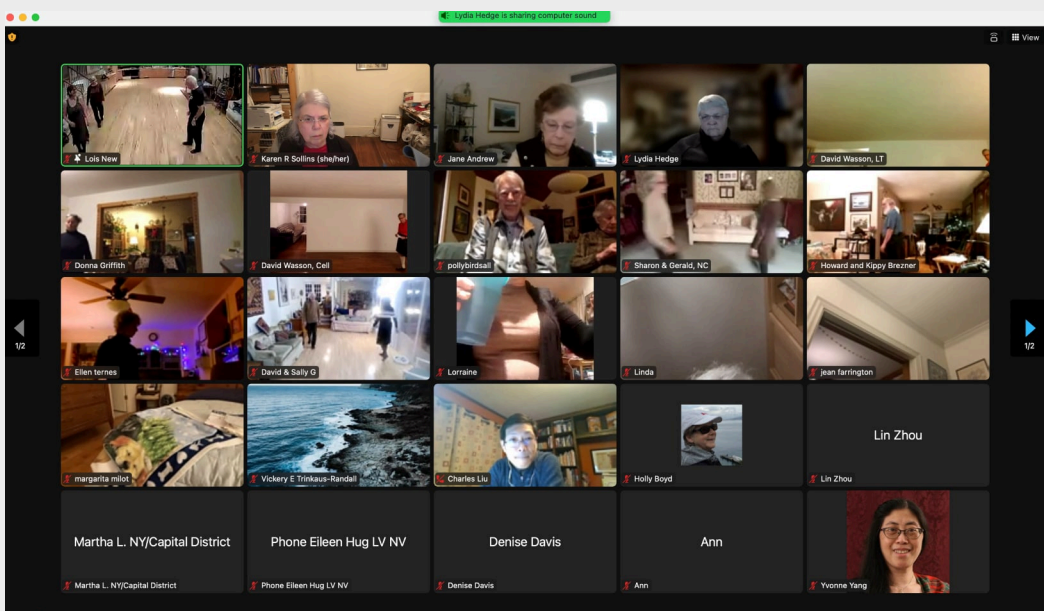


**Kat Dutton** is a nonbinary dancer and teacher in the RSCDS Boston Branch. Their home dance is Cambridge Class, but keep a lookout for their new gender-neutral class, starting in the next few months. Scottish Country Dance is their one true love, but they've been known to dabble in Contra, English Country, Modern Western Squares, Swing, Waltz, Blues, Fusion, Vintage, Rapper, and a spot of Morris. When they're not dancing, they're probably out ringing church bells or teaching math to high schoolers.

# *A Community Grows out of Lockdown in Upstate New York*

*By Karen Sollins*

In the summer of 2020, at the height of the pandemic, I was facing medical issues and the craziness of teaching online, and I found myself missing our dancing community. I discovered the Albany class had never stopped dancing. They went immediately to Zoom and welcomed all newcomers. Barb and Sam Bemis handled the technology, Lois New taught the class at her home, and Ilse Gilbert provided recorded music. Anita and Dave Wasson, Charles Liu, and Alex Bowers demonstrated dances from their homes. But what was so important was the continuity.



As word got out, dancers began to Zoom in from California, Nevada, and Arizona, to North Carolina, the mid-Atlantic, and Montreal, as well as New York and New England. There is a hearty “pod” in Maine that dances on Jane Strauss’s porch in mufflers and mittens! Currently, 1–2 sets of dancers meet at Lois’s on Sundays at 6:30, and 20–25 people join them by Zoom between 7:45 and 9:00. To manage such a large group and the demands of a hybrid class, we had to organize ourselves in new ways.

## ***A Community Grows*** (cont.)

Lois still hosts the in-person group, but a team of teachers and other volunteers handle all the preparation and technology. They choose the dances, post them online, write dance notes, and manage the email and logistics for classes and parties (including flyers and outreach). This dedicated team includes Sam Bemis (teacher in training), Dale Birdsall, Polly Birdsall, Beth Birdsall, Lydia Hedge, Charles Liu, Lois New, Holly Sherman, Karen Sollins, Ted Randolph, Ellen Ternes, Vickery Trinkaus-Randall, David Wasson, and Yvonne Yang. Barb Bemis handles all the email.



Each dance is briefed by a different teacher, sharing the load. One person is the evening's MC (usually Vickery), one person is the evening's "DJ" (usually Lydia), one person leads warm-ups (usually me), and so forth. The group is incredibly supportive, and someone is always ready to step up if another can't make it. The team meets weekly by Zoom to plan classes and parties, and the dance programs reflect the diverse experience and tastes of the planning team.

# A Community Grows (cont.)

Providing suitable recorded music is a challenge. While the in-person dancers enjoy regular 8x through dances in the first hour, once the Zoom begins, we do each dance only 4x through. To make the music work, we take a recording of 8x through and clip out 4 of the rounds (takes a fair amount of practice and skill to avoid hiccups) and include both a beginning and ending chord. We are moving to a streaming service that will let us make the tracks we've created available for playing but not copying, thus avoiding copyright issues.

Running a hybrid class takes a village, but it also can nourish, even create, a larger village. At a party at a suitable venue this winter, 40-45 dancers attended, many of whom were regular Zoomers who made the trip for the chance to dance with their community in person. The joy of it all is that we are all sharing our love of Scottish country dancing in our own ways and have built a wonderful, sustainable, wide-reaching community around a group of dancers who wouldn't let a pandemic stop them from dancing.



**Karen Sollins** has been dancing (modern, ballet, square dancing, and Scottish) since she was 4 years old, complemented by 12 years of piano and all the choral singing she could fit into her life. Although she had college friends who did Scottish, she began decades later in the mid '90's. Karen is a fully certified RSCDS teacher who teaches and dances in Watertown and Salem, and in Albany and Northern Virginia by Zoom. A computer scientist at MIT working on network protocols and security, Karen finds that engineering and science complement Scottish country dancing exceedingly well!

# ***The New Hampshire Scottish Music Club***

***By Alan Wilson, treasurer***

Our club was founded in 1988 by Barbara McOwen, Evelyn Murray, Lezlie Webster, Marianne Taylor, Viveka Fuchs and Sylvia Miskoe as the Strathspey and Reel Society of New Hampshire.

In 2023 the board voted to 'rebrand' as the New Hampshire Scottish Music Club, with the same goals, but a new website, and an electronic version of our Granite Skyes newsletter. Prior to this, the activities of your northern friends were being reported, first by mail, and then by email as a PDF file attachment.



## **The club at the Copperhill -**

***(counterclockwise from the right)***

Alan Wilson, Frank Stewart, Connie Eppich, Pat Edwards, Arthur Comegno, Anne Baier, Kip Ferguson, Katy Botsford, Sylvia Miskoe (partially hidden), Lillian Wilson (the author's wife).

## *The New Hampshire Scottish Music Club (cont)*

Like Scottish dancing, Scottish music is truly world-wide. During the pandemic the club kept going with virtual monthly Zoom workshops with musicians from Scotland, England, and the US, and our 'away' members were finally able to participate in our gatherings. When we rebranded, we underwent a similar website vs. newsletter quandary to yours - how to keep the Granite Skyes newsletter going with the advent of web publishing. Some changes were easy; the old [srsnh.org](http://srsnh.org) address will redirect you to the new [nhscottishmusicclub.org](http://nhscottishmusicclub.org)

A team of five members worked closely together via Zoom meetings to design and implement our new website. On the advice of one of our members we chose to build our website using the Square Space platform. The process has been a fun and creative endeavor. With five of us having knowledge of how to edit the website, regular maintenance and updates take place seamlessly.

After some poking around in the Square Space environment, our newsletter editor discovered that we could use that platform to maintain a mailing list and generate a monthly newsletter. Since we post most of our current news and music on our website, creating our newsletter becomes an easy process containing links to relevant blog posts and pages on our website. You can find a copy of our most recent newsletter [here](#), or use the link above to find it on our website!



*Full orchestra arrangement of NH Scottish Music Club*



# ***This Times' Tartan***

## ***Hands Across the Sea - North America***

**Designer:** Ken MacDonald  
**Day of the Tartan:** Feb 12<sup>th</sup>  
**Registered** in 2017  
**Reference #:** 12019



The Hands Across the Sea tartan was designed to commemorate those brave people from Scotland who left their traditional homes and faced many hard times in hopes for a better life across the ocean.

Ken MacDonald chose the red, white, and blue in tribute to both America and Canada's national flags, the deep blue for the hard times, and the bright red for the great and awe-inspiring achievements.

# Stay Tuned!!

## ***A quick preview!***

*Unless otherwise directed, consult the calendar on the website for time, place, and other details:*

<https://rscdsboston.org/event-calendar.html>

## **DANCE PARTIES, WORKSHOPS, AND OTHER EVENTS**

**Apr 4 - May 9** - Thursdays - Build Up to the Ball - Workshop of Boston Branch Highland Ball dances hosted by the Salem Class

**Apr. 6** - SDCEA Scholarship Dance - Weston MA - with Dirk Tiede and Friends.

**Apr. 14** - Dance Cèilidh - Canadian American Club, Watertown, MA Family and beginner-friendly 2:00–5:00 pm.

[www.canadianamericanclub.com](http://www.canadianamericanclub.com).

**Apr. 19 - 21** - New England Folk Festival (NEFFA) - Best Western Royal Plaza and Trade Center, Marlborough, MA

[www.neffa.org/events/neffa-festival-2024](http://www.neffa.org/events/neffa-festival-2024)

**May 3 - 4** - Youth Centenary Weekend - Toronto ONT  
<https://greatlakesball.wordpress.com/>

**May 10 - 12** - Boston Highland Ball weekend - Fri. through Sunday. Welcome Dance, Chelmsford, MA. Saturday Ball, Melrose MA. Sunday Brunch (TBA)

**May 18** - 19th Annual Fairlee Spring Fling, Fairlee VT - Walk-through, Dance, and Potluck - with Peter Macfarlane and Viveka Fox.

**May 25 - 26** - Belfast Memorial Day Weekend, Belfast ME –Walk-through, Potluck, and Dance Party with Terpsichore. Sunday Brunch.

**June 8** - Downeast Fling - Kennebunk, ME - with Ed and Neil Pearlman.

**June 24** - Cambridge Class End-of-Season Party

# ***Stay Tuned!! (cont.)***

## **SCOTTISH MUSIC NEAR AND FAR**

### **Special Events**

**Mar 24** - Elizabeth and Ben Anderson in concert, Seven Stars, Sharon VT [elizabethandbenanderson.com](http://elizabethandbenanderson.com)

**Apr 7** - Seán Heely Celtic Band, Somerville Mass. - [burren.com](http://burren.com)

**Apr 7** - BSFC Workshop, instructor Maura Shawn Scanlin, Belmont, Mass. - [bsfc.org/events](http://bsfc.org/events)

### **Recurring events**

**Lance Ramshaw's Slow Jam** - A hybrid (in-person if you rsvp) once a month mailing - [ramshaw.info](http://ramshaw.info)

**The Canadian American Club** - Open mike Friday nights. Gaelic Club 3rd Sundays, September through June. Occasional Saturday dances; Watertown MA., [canadianamericanclub.com](http://canadianamericanclub.com)

**The Druid, The Burren - Celtic Sessions!**  
Tuesdays & Fridays respectively - [druidpub.com](http://druidpub.com), [burren.com](http://burren.com)

**The Boston Scottish Fiddle Club** - Workshops taught by a local teacher on the 1st Sundays, Belmont MA, and 3rd Wednesdays at the CanAm Club, Watertown - [bsfc.org/](http://bsfc.org/)

**The New Hampshire Scottish Music Club** - 2nd Sundays, Concord, N.H., [nhscottishmusicclub.org](http://nhscottishmusicclub.org)