

The Tartan Times

*Volume LXXII - Number 1
Winter 2024*



*A publication of the Boston Branch of
The Royal Scottish Country Dance Society*
rscdsboston.org

Table of Contents

Editor's Introduction

Linda McJannet

Unexpected Good Fortune

MaryEllen Scannell

Of Tunes and Stories

Tom Pixton

“If You Hear This Sound...”

Nikki Lauranzano

This Times' Tartan

Stay Tuned!

In response to some readers' comments, we have added a preview of upcoming events based on the Branch Calendar listings. If you want your spring/summer event included in the spring issues (early April), please post it soon to <https://rscdsboston.org/event-calendar.html>.

Editors' Introduction

Tales for Winter: Origin Stories

According to a character in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, "A sad tale's best for winter," but most people want positive stories when the world gets dark and cold. When the fields are fallow and animals safe inside, sitting by the fire telling tales is a time-honored tradition. Stories nurture communities, and they also reveal the perhaps hitherto hidden talents of the story-tellers.

This winter issue of the *Tartan Times* invites you to reach back into your own memories. How did you discover Scottish dancing or Scottish music? What grabbed your attention, what made it fun, and what keeps you coming back? We asked two dancers (one veteran and one who's been dancing a year) and one musician (a major figure in many folk dancing communities) to tell their Scottish country dance "origin stories."

Certain themes emerged in all their accounts—the warm welcome they received, the power of a friend's suggestion and of friendships made, and the attraction of the rewards and challenges of these particular forms of music and dance.

In addition to the power of friendship, the internet and platforms such as Meetup and YouTube also played a role. In the last piece, be sure to click on the link and watch a hilarious account of unsuspecting tourists drawn into a pub Ceilidh. (The Edinburgh comedian imitates Strip the Willow while referring to Dashing White Sargent, but this only increases the fun.)

If you are inspired to share your own origin story, we'd love to hear it. Send a few sentences to tartantimes@rscdsboston.com. We'll compile the themes we missed this time around for a future issue (anonymously, unless instructed otherwise). Thinking about what brought us to Scottish dancing may also remind us to invite a friend to join us on the dance floor. Who knows? That friend might contribute their story to a future *Tartan Times*.

With all best wishes for the New Year,
Nikki Lauranzano and Linda McJannet,
Co-Editors tartantimes@rscdsboston.org

A note on the design of the TT: Making the TT attractive on various devices (laptop, external monitor, cell phone, and "four-up" paper booklet) is a challenge! We are still experimenting. We invite your feedback.

How do you read the TT?

How does this issue look on your device?

Unexpected Good Fortune

by MaryEllen Scannell

Once upon a time in the 70s, I was introduced to a lovely Scottish guy. We started dating, and he invited me for a weekend in New Hampshire (very early days of the Highland Games). He casually mentioned that I should bring my plaid skirt and frilly white blouse.

Plans for the weekend included a dinner at an inn. As we gathered to depart, my date and his friend disappeared, assuring us all they would be ready in a minute. To my amazement, they returned in full kilted regalia with large swords at their sides (pretty hot actually!). Up to this point there had been no mention of kilts or large swords or bagpipes or dancing.

When we arrived at our table, the boys laughed, grabbed their swords, raced to the center of the dance floor, and stood at attention as the pipes came to life. They proceeded to perform a highland sword dance. Oh my God, I thought, just who am I dating? He had a Scottish accent, but I had no context for all of this.

We dated long distance for a while and parted friends, but he suggested several times that I should go to the Cambridge Class. Okay! Along I went (wearing a skirt as instructed), but I had no idea of what Scottish Country dancing was or if an Irish girl would fit in. Despite my complete ignorance, I was met with kind instructors, welcoming people, and live music. WOW!

I attended the Cambridge class while living in Brighton, but when I moved closer to my job, I had to leave my joy behind. I married, moved to Lynn, and had two lovely daughters, but the urge to return to dancing and the community that had adopted me remained.

When I discovered a Scottish dance class in Salem--only the next town over!--I was excited and a bit scared. However, when I arrived at the hall, I was immediately greeted by Sally Dee. "Hey, MaryEllen, welcome back! Hurry up and get your dancing shoes on." I was home. I would never give up Scottish dancing again.



*From Left to Right -
Sally Dee, MaryEllen Scannell,
Kristin Wiggins*

Classes were stricter at that time. Footwork was emphasized in every class, and figures were perfected. With teamwork and “controlled abandon,” the dance floor was filled each week with smiling dancers sharing the joy of yet another great dance. I was completely hooked on the music and the physical and mental challenge. I attended as many classes as I could, as well as parties, balls, and other Branch activities. I was rewarded with a wonderful group of friends who shared a common passion.

As time passed, I realized I could give back to the community. Since the age of 16, I had been organizing events, dances and trips for the C.Y.O. (my church group) and later camping trips and workshops for the Girl Scouts. These experiences prepared me to do the same for the Scottish community.

Along with the joy I found in dancing, I derived great satisfaction from managing dance parties, balls, Pinewoods sessions, workshops and working with my dear friend and mentor Sally Dee every Thursday in Salem. I simply loved watching my fellow dancers enjoying the parties and events I had put together with the help of friends. Sharing the joy with folks new to SCD was yet another reward. Teaching classes every week and at many Girl Scout events allowed me to spread the joy of SCD as far as I possibly could.

After 40+ years, I still experience the thrill and happiness with which SCD has blessed me and my family. The family that dances together has a closet full of kilts and ball gowns and many happy memories of dancing with wonderful friends. Cue the fiddles!!!!



MaryEllen Scannell is a certified Teacher of SCD as well as a dedicated dancer. In addition to serving on the Teaching and Music and the Nominating Committees, she leads the Salem Class. She routinely organizes the Pinewoods Benefit Ball (most recently last December), and she and Sharon Gilmour are co-chairing the Highland Ball next May. Without a doubt, she is one of the unsung heroes of the Boston Branch.

Of Tunes and Stories

By Tom Pixton

In the 1990s, Marianne Taylor, founder of the Folk Arts Center of New England (FAC), encouraged me to play accordion for International Folk Dancing. I became aware of Scottish Country Dancing from the few dances Marianne or Irene Howard taught, such as Wild Geese or West's Hornpipe.

One Halloween, I was invited to a party at 63 Washington Street in Winchester, something of a commune for folk musicians. I arrived in a full-body gorilla suit and was surprised to see a guy in an identical suit playing the mandolin. It was Terry Traub. We both had taken off the slimy latex gorilla hands so we could play our instruments. A musical friendship was born.

That night, I met Susie Petrov and Betsy Hooper, who invited me to join in on Scottish tunes. Betsy invited me to an open-mic session at the Cambridge Class, which then met at the YWCA in Central Square. I showed up at the appointed hour, sheet music was plunked down in front of me, and someone yelled "Ready... and...!" At the end of the evening, the band leader said, "I see you can read music! Can you come back next week?" Thus began my long association with the Cambridge Class, the Boston Branch, and the opportunity to learn from SCD veterans, including Barbara and Robert McOwen, and Howard and Roberta Lasnik.



The Pinewoods Scottish Session Music Staff, 2009 - From Left to Right;

*Susan Worland, Keith Smith (UK), Debbie Jarvis, Paul Anderson (UK),
Tom Pixton, Barbara Pixton, Mike MacNintch,
and Muriel Johnstone (UK)*

In 1997, I joined the Pinewoods' music staff. Howard graciously loaned me a kilt. In 2004, I served my first term as Music Director for Scottish Pinewoods. I didn't feel ready for such an endeavor, but with the help of a supportive community, I muddled through. I discovered the magic of Scottish Pinewoods and made many life-long friends. I served as Director again in 2009-2010 and 2022-23. (In 2022, a bout of Covid-19 prevented me from attending in person—but the show went on!).

What keeps me coming back to Scottish tunes and dances? Scottish music combines the rural, rustic feel of Irish tunes with clarity of structure, vigorous harmonic progressions, and passionate melodic gestures.

Traditional dance tunes are almost always binary, with an A and a B part, each usually 8 bars. A good tune starts with a motif that is memorable and forms the opening gesture of a miniature story. There follows an alternate motif that supports and continues that story. The second section may introduce other motifs, but the tune usually ends with some version of the opening two motifs, ending the story with clarity and focus.

Scottish tunes exhibit these structures along with unique passion and drama, especially the strathspeys (which are in a class of their own among traditional tunes). Starting in the 18th century, tunes were curated and published by musicians who valued them as a national heritage and made them available to the educated classes for music making in the home. Now, they are enjoyed by new generations of dancers in Scotland and all over the world.

I look forward to many more years playing and dancing at Scottish events, and I am grateful to the many wonderful folk who make them happen.

Gu ma slàn leat gu bràth!
("May you thrive forever!")



Tom Pixton has been active as a Scottish dance musician for more than 30 years, and has provided music for RSCDS events in the Boston, New Haven, New York, Atlanta, and Chicago branches. Here he gives us a brief account of how he discovered Scottish dancing at the Cambridge Class, back when it actually met in Cambridge.

“If You Hear This Sound...”

By Nikki Lauranzano

My story doesn't begin with dancing at all, but with music. When I attended college, I fell sideways into the college's radio station and ended up hosting a show. “Rats in the Oven” played every type and kind of music under the sun, including Celtic and Scottish.

Years later, Erik Koper (Cambridge Class) sent me [this video](#) of Danny Bhoy, a Scottish comedian, “warning” tourists about Ceilidh dances, it was hilarious. We didn't have context for the dancing part, but we thought it was hilarious nonetheless. Several months later, I was perusing Meetup.com for interesting things and saw “Scottish Country Dancing.”

It was on Monday nights, boasted live music, and was only \$10. I called up Erik,
“What are you doing Monday night?”
“Nothing, why?”
“Great. There's live Scottish music and dancing nearby. We're going.”
“Okay!”

We show up and the comedian's skit is playing in our heads. There were several men in kilts. There was an “odd formation,” as the comedian put it. And best of all, there was Susie Petrov, on stage with her accordion. The comedian had a musical component to his bit and had cued the sound crew to play a recording of The Chord, “...When you hear this sound, get out! It's not safe!...” And there Susie was, on stage, playing the exact sound. All we could do was giggle.



*From Left to Right
Nikki Lauranzano, Mel Billings, and Erik Koper*

I don't remember who was teaching the Essentials class that day, but I remember making a note to buy better sneakers. Because I was most certainly coming back. I'd never had any dancing experience (the one week of 'maybe-Irish-step-if-you-squint' at a summer camp doesn't count), but the lack of experience didn't matter. Since then, only a year ago now, I've been a faithful attendee.

The immediate acceptance of newer dancers, the lack of assumption of dancing knowledge, and the friendly, non-critique-heavy atmosphere made it easy to return. I wanted to dance as a kid, as many people do. It wasn't in the cards when I was a child; but there is a freedom of being able to pursue hobbies and activities as adults that might have been denied to us as children. In dance classes, "beginner" is commonly expected to mean "young" or "thin" or "in-shape" – and that expectation, for my perspective and part, is entirely missing from the Cambridge Class. There has never been a time when I felt judged.

Even when Linda McJannet invited me to the open BCSD audition! I had gone, simply to check out what they were looking for, so I could audition next year. It was not, however, a sit-and-watch audition. I had come prepared, just in case they needed an extra - and just like Danny Bhoy said - the chord sounded, it was not safe, and I was pulled into the dance.

I ended up as the understudy's understudy, that was more than fine with me. I hadn't even expected to be invited back. I knew that I was the least experienced dancer in that open house. Instead, I got to dance with some of the best dancers in the Branch.

I don't think we, as humans in this capitalist society, feel that we are allowed to simply like or enjoy something. Everything has to have reasons, has to justify its existence or expense, It's very hard to simply BE when everything around is telling you to have a reason. "Fun" has to be distilled down into all its parts, examined, and then reassembled to be repackaged as "Meaningful" or "Useful" or "Productive." In my case, however, I return to the Cambridge class week after week because I enjoy the people, the dance. Because I have Fun!

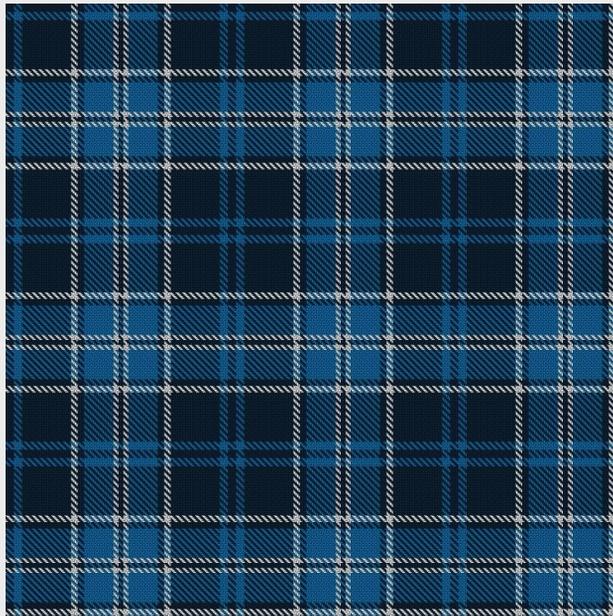


Nikki Lauranzano is a creative writer of transformative fanworks and other genres. To fuel her hobbies and feed the cats, she's a corporate manager for a home security alarm company. She has been dancing with the Cambridge Class for a year and is eager to be more involved with the Branch community.

This *Times*' Tartan

Salem Scottish Dancer's Wee Bluet

Designed By: Sally Dee (Salem, MA)
Day of the Tartan: Feb 26th
STWR Ref#: 2811



Sally Dee (*pictured on page 4*) saw a tablecloth at a branch dance party and fell in love with it. She contacted Dr. Smith, a Tartan expert & authority - he researched the thread count and colors. He came to the conclusion that was no such configuration belonging to any clan, Sally then championed the tartan be certified as the Wee Bluet Tartan, belonging to the Salem Scottish Country Dancers. At that time, Salem was the only SCD group in North America to have their own certified tartan.

Stay Tuned For Upcoming Events

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

Jan. 22 - Cambridge Class--Burns Night Celebration—Watertown, MA

Feb.11 - Workshop--Using Gender-Neutral Terminology When Briefing and Teaching Scottish Country Dances—Ipswich, MA (*in-person and on Zoom*)

May 10-12 - Boston Highland Ball Weekend—Chelmsford and Melrose, MA-- rscdsboston.org/event-highland-ball.html

May 19 - Fairlee Class Spring Fling—Walk-through, dance and potluck—Fairlee, VT

June 24 -Cambridge Class End of Season Party—Watertown, MA

SCOTTISH MUSIC—NEAR AND FAR

(*Courtesy of Barbara McOwen*)

Sunday Afternoon Jan. 7 – Boston Scottish Fiddle Club (BSFC) Workshop with Anne Hooper, Belmont, Mass. — bsfc.org

Jan. 10-15 - Jink in January Scottish Fiddle School with John Turner and more, Valle Crucis, NC--fiddletree-music.com

Jan. 11-14 - Boston Celtic Music Festival (BCMFest) –Cambridge, MA--passim.org

Jan. 17 - BSFC Session with Anne Hooper, Watertown, Mass. — bsfc.org

Jan. 18 - Maura Shawn Scanlin, Scottish Fiddle Champion--Cambridge, MA — passim.org

Jan. 24 - Matt & Shannon Heaton, The Burren, Cambridge, MA--burren.com

Feb. 2-4 - Elke Baker Visits Boston - house concert, BSFC workshop — elkebaker.com, bsfc.org, bmcowen@comcast.net

Feb. 15 - Kickoff Concert for Hanneke Cassel's Pure Dead Brilliant Fiddle Weekend, Groton, MA. — pdbfiddleweekend.com

Feb. 16-18 - Winter Roots Dance Flurry, Saratoga Springs N.Y. — flurryfestival.org

Feb. 16-19 - Hanneke Cassel's PDB Weekend, Groton, Mass. — pdbfiddleweekend.com

Feb. 16-19 - Winter Weekend, S.F. Scottish Fiddlers with Alasdair Fraser & Barbara MacDonald Magone in residence, Healdsburg, Calif. — sfscottishfiddlers.org

RECURRING MUSIC EVENTS

Lance Ramshaw's Slow Jam - for now, a hybrid (meaning in-person if you rsvp and streaming on zoom) once a month, plus a monthly mailing with tune suggestions and info– ramshaw.info

The Canadian American Club - Open mike every Friday night, and the Gaelic Club on the 3rd Sunday of the month, September through June --Watertown Mass., canadianamericanclub.com

The Druid, The Burren - Celtic Sessions on Tuesdays & Fridays respectively, often with Calum Bell, Eamon Sefton – druidpub.com, burren.com

The Boston Scottish Fiddle Club - Workshops taught by a local teacher on the 1st Sunday of the month in Belmont MA and a session on 3rd Wednesdays at the CanAm Club, Watertown, bsfc.org

The New Hampshire Scottish Music Club - meets on the 2nd Sunday of the month in Concord, N.H., nhscottishmusicclub.org