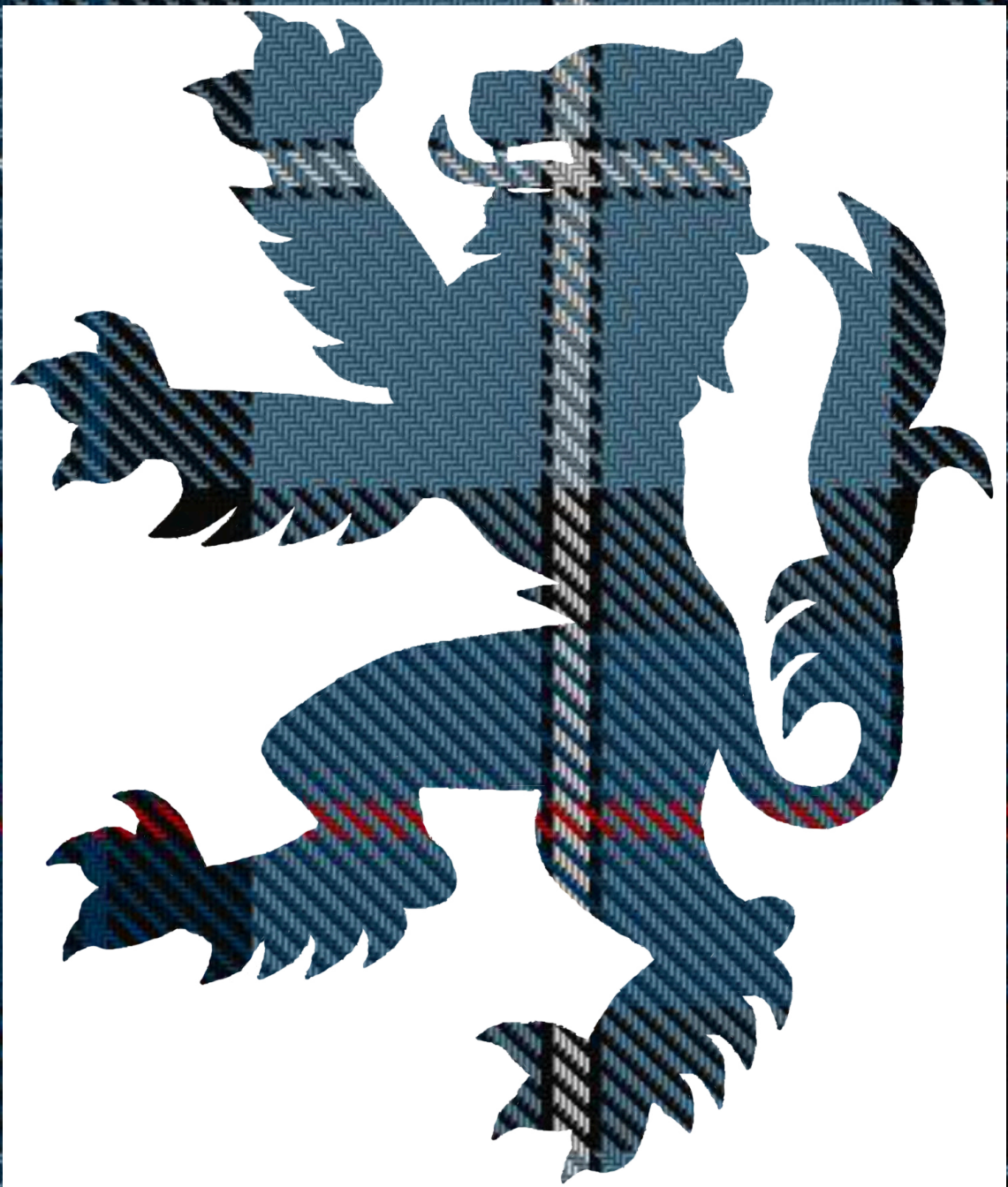


The Tartan Times

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Table of Contents

<u>Introduction</u>	3
<u>A Fiddler Came Down to Dance</u> Elizabeth Anderson	4
<u>The Story of Highland Dance Boston</u> Robert McOwen	6
<u>ESCAPE Artists</u> Connie Kent	8
<u>This Times' Tartan</u>	10
<u>Stay Tuned!</u>	11

Editor's Introduction

As the Winter Solstice approaches, this issue of the *Tartan Times* shines a light on some of the “class acts” of the RSCDS, Boston Branch. We are blessed with so many talented and dedicated teachers, musicians, class leaders, and volunteers, we can't fit them into one issue, but we aim to make a start.

We dancers often consider our good fortune in having so many excellent musicians who play for us—and work hard to perfect their skills. Elizabeth Anderson, 2020 US National Scottish Fiddle Champion, describes her journey to this high honor with humor and humility. In the process, she shares her insights into how achieve “danceability” when playing Scottish tunes. We are so proud of Elizabeth and *all* the Branch musicians who have tested themselves against the best --whether or not they brought home a trophy. We reap the benefits of their talent at every ball, dance party, class, or Pinewoods jam session. Thank you!

Robert McOwen, celebrated SCD teacher and co-founder of Highland Dance Boston (HDB), describes the genesis and evolution of this elite group of dancers. Founded in 2002, the group's record of performances and invitations to join other well known artists speaks to their technical and artistic excellence. They have been a mainstay of our fall concerts since their founding. In addition, this demanding form of dance (in which one typically lifts one's entire body weight off the floor on almost every beat of the music!) often appeals to those who have become expert in country dancing and are looking for a challenge. Robert's highland classes offer that challenge, and HDB models excellence in this form of Scottish dance.

Finally, Connie Kent reports on last summer's ESCape, the English-Scottish-Contra Session at Pinewoods Camp. ESCape was the brainchild of a group of younger dancers, including Daniel Blim, Stephen Thomforde, and Meghan Murray. When English-Scottish Week seemed to have lost its appeal, they proposed to add contra dancing as a way to appeal to a wider and potentially younger group, who had not yet discovered Scottish. As it happens, the committee created a camp session that appealed to all ages and in which everyone could learn something new. Congratulations to ESCape, yet another class act within the Boston SCD community!

We hope you will join us in celebrating these class acts. They enrich our experience and enjoyment of Scottish music and dance all year round.

Happy Holidays,
Linda McJannet & Nikki Lauranzano

Editors note: Over the course of 2024, we adjusted the *TT's* publication schedule so that the Winter issue would appear before the Pinewood Benefit Ball and other holiday SCD activities. As a result, volume LXXII (2004) has five issues (this being the fifth). Volume LXXIII (2025) will revert to our planned schedule of four issues per year, with number 1 (Spring) appearing in early March.

A Fiddler Came Down to Dance

Elizabeth Anderson

Scottish dancers often wonder what makes a good fiddler. In fact, fiddlers often ask this of themselves in their quest for artistic improvement. Luckily, if you're a fiddler, there is one way to see how you stack up - by entering a Scottish fiddle competition.

It is a difficult task to boil down artistic expression to a score, but the rubric balances a competitor's technical mastery with subjective stylistic preferences. As a seasoned competitor and competition administrator, I have seen judges use one word more than any other—"danceable." Many fiddlers know how to play the violin, but the most masterful know how to dance.

In 2020, I won the US National Scottish Fiddle Championship. It was a milestone on a long path that began, fittingly, with Scottish dance. I learned my first two Scottish tunes from Hanneke Cassel at English-Scottish Session at Pinewoods in 2005. With the support of my family, particularly my mom, I attended Boston Harbor Scottish Fiddle School the following summer and then competed as a Junior at the New Hampshire Highland Games.

In my first competition, I played a fiery Northeast style strathspey, Smith's *A Gallant Fireman*, which I had learned through colorful metaphors in Douglas Lawrence's class at Boston Harbor. I won the competition handily, and the judge, none other than Douglas Lawrence, asked impishly where I had learned such an authentic style!



Elizabeth, 4th from right, with award at a previous competition

Unfortunately, the ease with which I had won my first competition did not continue. Through years of competing in the New England Regional Open category, and then the US Nationals, I was defeated over and over again. I took the judge's comments to heart, especially when they advised me to make the tunes more "danceable."

What made a good dance tune? How could I add more drive, lift, liveliness, and power to my playing? How could I add more nuance and contrast? How could I make the beat more compelling? I began to find that the answer lay in what I did not play as much as what I did - the spaces created, the notes unaccented, the beat delayed. I thought about how I would move to the music I was making and tried to add more playfulness and surprise. And, of course, I practiced with a metronome.

My time finally came in 2020. The competition was held virtually, but with double the typical number of competitors, it felt like an earned victory. After the competition, I recorded my set, which you can view here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H_-F0ilhVXM

Although I have (mostly) retired from competing, I try to think like a dancer every time I am practicing. I challenge dancers in turn to try to think like a fiddler. Why does the music make you want to move in a certain way? What are the musicians doing to build the music up and manipulate the mood? On the dance floor, we have different perspectives on the same experience, and understanding each other will only make the experience richer.



Elizabeth Anderson is a Scottish fiddler and teacher in the greater Boston area. She is the 2020 U.S. National Scottish Fiddle Champion and the winner of the 2016 Perth All-Scotland Fiddle Championship. An active performer, Elizabeth plays with her brother as Scottish fiddle/cello duo “Elizabeth and Ben Anderson.”

She is also a frequent staff member at camps and workshops such as Maine Fiddle Camp, Pinewoods, and the Boston Scottish Fiddle Club. Elizabeth teaches orchestra full time in Walpole, MA, where she directs seven grade-level orchestras and teaches small group lessons.

The Story of Highland Dance Boston

Robert McOwen

In the Spring of 2002, I had an idea. I had been teaching highland and step dance in the Boston Area for many years, mostly to adults. Most highland dance classes are geared for competition, starting students at age 5 or 6 and continuing until they lose interest, usually around age 18. I did occasionally have teenage students (such as Debbie and Karen Billmers, who both competed several times), but I was more interested in performance.

I occasionally organized shows using my students and friends, including the annual concerts of the Boston Branch. Dancers interested in competition usually attended the classes of Karen Campbell Mahoney, who had been a U.S. champion as a teenager, and had a national reputation. She occasionally organized performances, but usually on a smaller scale and with younger dancers. Moreover, she was now pregnant with her first child, so I knew she would not have as much time to organize shows for her students.

It occurred to me that a performing group formed by combining our two schools would feature younger and stronger dancers than I had, and more performance opportunities than Karen had. She agreed, we adopted the name Highland Dance Boston, and we had our debut at the New England Folk Festival in April 2002, where we performed an eight person Broadsword (usually performed by only four dancers).

The troupe at this time consisted of several of my students, Karen's student, and her co-teacher - Lindsay Page. Lindsay was not only a teacher, but had recently been East Coast champion; needless to say, I was thrilled to have access to such a dancer.



Debut for NEFFA 2002

Back Row: Claire Brandt, Jen Schoonover, Lindsay Page, Margaret Lepley, Robert McOwen

Front Row: Piper, Bruce Mabbott, Abbie MacQuarrie Gregor Williamson

Not Pictured: Karen Campbell Mahoney



*Robert McOwen & Lindsay Page
dancing Blue Bonnets*

When the Boston Celtic Music Festival started in 2006, we frequently performed there, even though it sometimes conflicted with Burns Suppers; in fact, in January 2013 to 2016, we had to form two sub-troupes: one to perform at the BCMFest and another at the Ancient Universities Burns Supper.

Over the years, HDB has performed many shows, including formal concerts, Highland Games, Folk Festivals, and Burns Suppers. In December 2003, we did 18 shows with Christmas Revels, and in 2006 we performed at the Opening Ceremonies for the World Curling Championship! We have also put on our own concerts in 2007, 2009, and 2010.



Highland Dance Boston,
Branch Concert, 2015

One of the most rewarding aspects of Highland Dance Boston has been the opportunity for choreography - we weren't just performing the standard solo dances that you see at Highland Games; we arranged them for groups and devised new dances. Often to the music of the featured musicians in the event. For example, we have created dances to the tunes of Hanneke Cassel (*Shadow & Thought* and *We Are Dancer*), Halali (*Riptide*), and Alasdair Fraser & Natalie Haas (*Whitewater*, *Willichan*, and *Pitnacree Ferryman*).

We have also branched out into other styles of dance such as modern dance (*Shadow & Thought*), couple dancing (*Blues to Jig*), and hard shoe (*Cape Breton Step*, *The First of August*, and *Liverpool Hornpipe*).

Performance opportunities have decreased more recently, but we still perform and still create new dances. This year's Boston Branch Concert & Ceilidh on November 24 featuring The Scottish Fish is an example: one of our younger dancers, Aquila Gibbons, is creating a new choreography to a Fish arrangement called *Freefalling*. We hope you enjoy it!



Highland Dance Boston, Branch Concert, 2015

Robert McOwen, one of our frequent *Tartan Times* contributors, is well known in the global Scottish dance community as a teacher of Scottish country and highland dancing, co-founder of Highland Dance Boston, guitar and bass player and founding member (with his wife Barbara) of Tullochgorum, one of the first Scottish dance bands in Boston.



EScape Artists

Connie Kent

EScape 2024 at Pinewoods was a great success!

The Scottish country dance classes were taught by the Boston Branch's own Kat Dutton and Jen Schoonover, and they were joined by Geoffrey Wood from California. Local musicians Elizabeth Anderson and Ben Anderson rocked the Scottish tunes, along with Aaron Marcus (VT) and Laurel Swift (VT).

For those who don't know; ESCape is the English, Scottish, and contra dance week at Pinewoods Camp, proudly co-sponsored by CDS-Boston. Classes are offered in all three dance forms, and it is a great place to learn a new dance style, while also practicing the dance form(s) you already know and love.

One of the beautiful aspects of ESCape is that almost everybody who attends is a beginner at something. Roughly one quarter of campers this year had never been to ESCape before, but even for long-time veterans there is always something new to delve into. There is a strong sense of shared learning, exploration, and joy in discovering new skills.



Morris Dancers at the Tea Party, ESCape, 2024
*Seth Weidner, Jack Skidmore, Dave Herrick-Wallace,
Chris Bracken, Laurel Swift, & Kyle MacKenzie*

In addition to the three main dance forms, this year we also offered classes in morris dancing, harmony singing, conditioning, a song swap, and music. Additional impromptu classes were on offer as attendees shared their knowledge of contra flourishes, shape note singing, couples dancing, and more.



English Dance, ESCape, 2024

The melding of dancers from different backgrounds brings a delightful energy and sense of play to the dance floor. The overall familiarity and skill of the dancers lends itself to an environment where dancers can creatively dissolve the boundaries between forms. Each evening dance is divided into thirds: one hour each for English, Scottish, and contra; but any evening you will find mischievous dancers slipping a contra swing into an English turn or doing Scottish high cuts during a contra balance.

Apart from any particular dance or music experience, one of the best parts of ESCape is the welcoming community. Each year there are large numbers of new campers, but also many who return year after year. As everyone is there to learn, there is a community atmosphere of curiosity, inquisitiveness, and sharing ideas. Many people bring their friends, but there is also a charming number of family groups as parents bring their teen or adult children to camp, or occasionally adult children bring their parents.



Scottish Class, ESCape, 2024

We hope that you'll join us next year!
Registration will open in January and can
be found on our website:

<https://escape-to-pinewoods.square.site/>

Connie Kent serves on the Boston Branch Executive Committee and is also on the organizing committee for ESCape. She first attended Pinewoods as a crew member in 2009 and has been attending ESCape (and English-Scottish Session before that) since 2014. Although Scottish dancing is her first love, she can also frequently be found on the dance floor at English and contra events.



This Times' Tartan

Royal Scottish Country Dance Society

Designer: Kirsty Anderson, of
the House of Edgar
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With the first meeting at the Athenaeum in Glasgow on November 26, 1923, Ysobel Stewart and Jean Milligan, founded the society we all know and love.

Mrs. Stewart began as the first secretary of the Society, and built the solid administrative foundation, and Miss Milligan laid down the laws and principles of teaching, technique, and style for the dance that we still teach and dance today.

In 1947, then Princess Elizabeth, became the Patron of the Scottish Country Dance Society; bestowing the 'Royal' to the title when she became Queen.

It's been 101 years, and the RSCDS is still going strong with hundreds of branches world-wide and thousands of members.

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>

Upcoming Events

Nov 30 - 7PM - Pinewoods Benefit Ball & Celebrate 50 Years of the Salem Class - Located at the Chelmsford Community Center, 31 Princeton St, North Chelmsford, MA

Dec 16 - 8PM - Cambridge Class Holiday Party - Located at the Canadian-American Club, 202 Arlington St, Watertown, MA

Jan 1 - 3PM - Nashua New Year's Day Dance & Potluck - Located at 214 Main St. Nashua, NH

Dec 31 - Jan 1 - Delaware Valley's Hogmanay - Grand March at 8:30PM, Located at Trinity Memorial Church, 22nd and Spruce Streets. More details here: <https://delvalscottishdance.org/events>

~Reminder~

You can still renew your branch membership or join for the first time!

Go to <https://rscdsboston.org/member-membership.html>

Branch membership also includes membership with the RSCDS.