The Evolution of 'Bush Dance' part 3.

Interest in 'Bush Dance' or Mushrooming & Ketchup





The Bush Bands and Bush Dance tune repertoire. Leading up to 1988 I worked with Shirley Andrews on the publication '200 Dancing Years' for the Australian Bicentennial. 'Bush dance' in the 1970s style was referenced because although not original and of erroneous association with a real dance in the bush, we felt it had merit as a stepping stone towards the more traditional dances. Apart from that the term had become widely established, was popular and so regardless of historical reasons, we needed to include it somehow. We could both see a positive side to family bush dances.

The newer Bushwackers Band (Melbourne) of 1971, 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. But other groups such as Irishman Louie McManus's 'Ramblers' were naturally Irish based and performed at places like Emu Bottom out of Melbourne with the Celtic bush style dances included. (I went to one at Strathfieldsaye near Bendigo in the 70s - a wonderful night.). Louis, born in Glasgow of Catholic Irish stock also played with the Bushwackers and likely added tunes to their repertoire. Other Irish musicians in Melbourne such as the Fitzgeralds contributed tunes that became a base repertoire of the Melbourne bush bands of the 70s.

Also in the absence of printed music other than in Take Your Partners and Singabout a new book *Begged, Borrowed, and Stolen (1979)* was eagerly taken up as a source of tunes for the British and particularly the 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 really good, 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 the 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 for the next generation of aspiring bush dance musicians. The city folk musicians were in any case generally trained sight readers, in contrast to the traditional bush musician.

Another source of material was Max Klubal's *Music for Australian Folk Dancing (1979)* that was also widely used. It was a good publication. In both cases the major proportion of Celtic tunes provided suited the Celtic dances but were quite inappropriate to be applied, as often was the case, for use for the social dances that really did survive in the bush and country dance scene. Most of the Irish tunes in these books were not known in Australia and it is astonishing to find that the very good well phrased danceable tunes of Irish origin that were known by most of our pioneer musicians and used for the quadrilles, particularly the Royal Irish as well as the Haymaker's Jig (Sir Roger de Coverley) and Stockyards were not profiled in either publications. Although the Royal Irish has a connotation that one might think the Republican Irish would steer away from, the tunes were widely known in Australia, in any case the Royal Irish Quadrille as a dance was extremely popular on programmes providing a show of support for Irish music in a way that the Pride of Erin took its place with sentimental waltzes from World War 2 on. But the Irish material in the city bush dance scene was simply taken up because the material was more easily sourced from the Irish sessions rather than from original dance tune repertoire. In contrast Max Klubal included several tunes that were suitable for dances such as *Varsoviana, Berlin Polka* and *Pride of Erin*. It was a great all round publication for 70s style bush dance.

In 1984 the Bush Music Club published David Johnson's book 'Bush Dance' which was another excellent production. Again Celtic tunes were mainly profiled for the Celtic style bush dances which of course were well established by now, but collected Australian tunes were used where possible for the Barn Dance, some of the waltzes and several set tunes.

Likewise in 1986 the Victorian Folk Music Club (VFMC) published the first of my series of volumes of Collector's Choice. Volume 1 concentrated particularly on collected Australian tunes but also included the popular tunes that were typically used; thus for the set tunes (from and for the quadrilles) Cock o the North, Wearing of the Green, the Girl I Left Behind Me, Rollicking Irishman, St. Patrick's Day, Humours of Donnybrook, Irish Washerwoman, One Hundred Pipers are all there. But also included were some anonymous set tunes such as from Bill McGlashan's – 'God Bless You and Bugger Me' (first figure of the First Set) as well as his third figure of the First Set. In Volume 2 the first section was mainly on the Celtic styled 'bush dances' and so the tunes associated with these were the lead tunes and in the second section on the quadrilles the collected and popular tunes of the day were featured. Volume 3 was 'Old Time' so the popular tunes such as When Irish Eyes Are Smiling and McNamara's Band were chosen as these were what was typically played by the old time dance bands.

Following John Meredith's work on 'Real Folk' (late 1980s or early 90s) Rob Willis and Dave de Santi commenced a series of booklets called 'Pioneer Performers' in which collected tunes were profiled. Dave's new band 'Wongawilli' made the step to use more Aussie collected tunes rather than Celtic tunes for the various set and bush dances, and to great effect and it's a pity many musicians haven't followed this example. Merro had been an inspiration to all of us at that time and his quote from Vol. 2 of Folk Songs of Australia appropriately summed it up and most likely catalysed the production of the Pioneer Performers monographs.

> *'Sadly, these, for the most part, very talented young musicians have turned their backs upon the 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 names 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.'*

One of course has to accept that the 70s bush dance regardless of origin or authenticity is now part of our tradition or heritage. It really is of city origin but had wide community acceptance and usage, including that of rural areas a couple of decades later when the traditional old time dances and MCs had all but disappeared.

Shirley Andrews had questioned John Meredith on his views as to how the term bush dance had come into being. He felt it was an association of the Bush Music Club and Bushwhackers by name and the fact they included folk dances to provide variety between the bush songs and therefore thought to be 'bush dance'.

Shirley had certainly not coined or previously used the term. In fact correlating with the electronic rock beat of the later Bushwacker style she referred to it tongue in cheek as '*folk disco*'. Also in her paper 'Our Dancing is Different', in *Folklore in Australia - proceedings of the 1st National Folklore Conference*, Melbourne, November 1984, Shirley makes the following statements:

> *"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 MCs or dance callers."*

The original Bushwhackers Band's focus that John Meredith and his circle of performers initiated in Sydney in 1952 was in the collecting and singing for public audience – authentic 'bush songs'. It needs to be recognised however some of these bush songs were generally localised parodies or family ditties, not necessary known outside the family or district of origin. Furthermore the group had little knowledge of the dancing side of the bush, which was basically 'old time'. John had grown up in the country town of Holbrook, so he certainly knew all about the Lancers, Waltz, Varsoviana - but his socialist views and that of his associates would not have accepted or realised that the ballroom derived old time dances had in fact become the true folk dances of the bush. These had mutated by the folk process and survived there decades after the Foxtrot and Jazz had extinguished them in the cities. Shirley, a grand commo herself also admitted she had been on the wrong track for a long time trying to find Australian folk dances, before realising the above were it, in a folk style. When I took Merro on his collecting trip across the Nullarbor to Western Australia we stopped over at Adelaide and I conducted a dance workshop for the Colonial Dancers. One dance I profiled was the 'Two Step' and Merro commented he hadn't realised how folk style it was. The Two Step largely disappeared after the early 1900s but survived for a while when incorporated as a dance variation within the Foxtrot or Quickstep. Because of this association, Merro (and he was not alone) admitted he'd ignored the Two Step and not included any aural surviving tunes in his collection. Yet the Two Step had survived at Nariel and in districts around Wedderburn and St. Arnaud.

The Two Steps varied from earlier tunes in 2-4 to 6-8 including The Oldtimer's Two Step in 2-4 and Alf Radunz's Two Step in 6-8; see pages 5 and 6, respectively, below. Others, not shown here are songs in 6-8 such as The Albury Ram, Frog Puddles, Mademoiselle from Armentieres, What's the Matter with Father and Yi I Addi I Ay.

The Oldtimers' Two Step

(collected from Daisy Sutton of Wedderburn & Jack Condon of Cochrane's Creek by Peter Ellis)



Alf Radunz's Two Step

(Collected from Alf Radunz of Coolabunia-Booie (South Burnett) Qld by Mark Schuster & Maria Zann)

