

Fakelore to Folklore! Part 1, Authorship

Peter Ellis

Originally perceived in the early 1800s as the traditions and customs of the uncultured classes by the first definers of 'folk song, music and dance' the definition was extended qualifying that folk song had no traceable composer and no single composer to be postulated as in mere popular song. Remember also the lower classes in that era were generally illiterate.

Furthermore it has been said folk music is music that has been submitted to the process of oral and aural transmission. It is the product of evolution and is dependent on the circumstances of continuity, variation and selection. The term has therefore inferred music that has evolved from rudimentary beginnings by a community uninfluenced by art music. We'll question this whole concept further on.

It is the fashioning and re-fashioning of the music by the community that give it its folk character. But where does this sit in a modern world particularly in the Western World where lower classes have become literate and cultured following those early days of academic postulation about a definition of what is folk?

Australia and New Zealand would be an interesting one, because by the latter part of the nineteenth century, they fostered a most literate population across all levels and including the itinerant bushmen, shearers, drovers, timber cutters and so on and where by the turn of the century movements were leading the world for rights for women and their chance to vote.

Where do we place the folk songs and tunes within the folk clubs when a majority have been arranged in a perceived 'folk style', but definitely 'composed'? I don't know the answer to this and most likely the average 'folkie' couldn't care anyway; unlikely to give it a second thought or to

analyse and postulate any grounding for acceptance. As humans, we like what we like very much and that's what we accept and bugger the rules.

Nevertheless there is a nuance about folk song and music from both the handed on aural tradition and the innovative production of composed songs and tunes in the folk idiom that is quite distinct and set well aside from other genres such as Country and Western and Popular Song. Additionally it is now accepted that influences from popular streams, whether from the local brass band, record, radio or choreographed ballroom dance, interact in the repertoire and regular performance within communities. The academics now tend to use the term 'folklife' which is broader and encompasses all of the activities that may be fostered.

Perhaps, almost certainly, there was a romantic view that our dances and music were 'pure and unadulterated' folk, coming from the people and completely untainted by fashion and class and society. Shirley Andrews made the point that in terms of finding Australian dance she started off on the incorrect path. With her allegiances to the communist party, she set out to the country to find the dances of the people. In her own words, "*it took a little while before it dawned on me I was on the wrong track*". Other collectors in Shirley's ilk were of the same socialist persuasion, Manifold, Meredith, Scott and Edwards and for a time ignored the interaction of popular culture on 'the folk'. Later at a Folklore Conference Ron Edwards pointed out that contemporary material such as from Eric Bogle was not folk song (even if in the 'ilk'), but that in time as it percolated out to a community, it could become folk song. Marg Gregory has been doing a fantastic job finding links between our really well known folk songs to originals printed in newspapers of the latter 19C. Click Go the Shears from the Bare Belled Ewe in the Bacchus Marsh Express of 1891 but one notable example.

Shirley discovered most of our dances had come to Australia as the latest fashion, and not as folk dances from the immigrants, particularly those mainly arriving with the gold rushes mid nineteenth century, as the Quadrille, Waltz, Polka, Schottische, Varsoviana and Polka Mazurka were already well established, indeed rivalling and relegating the earlier Country Dance and Reel into second place. It was Shirley who provided the details of year of arrival of the Galop and Polka within months of first appearance in London from Paris; that the Australian way of life in the bush could not be compared with the rural traditions of the village in Britain, Ireland and

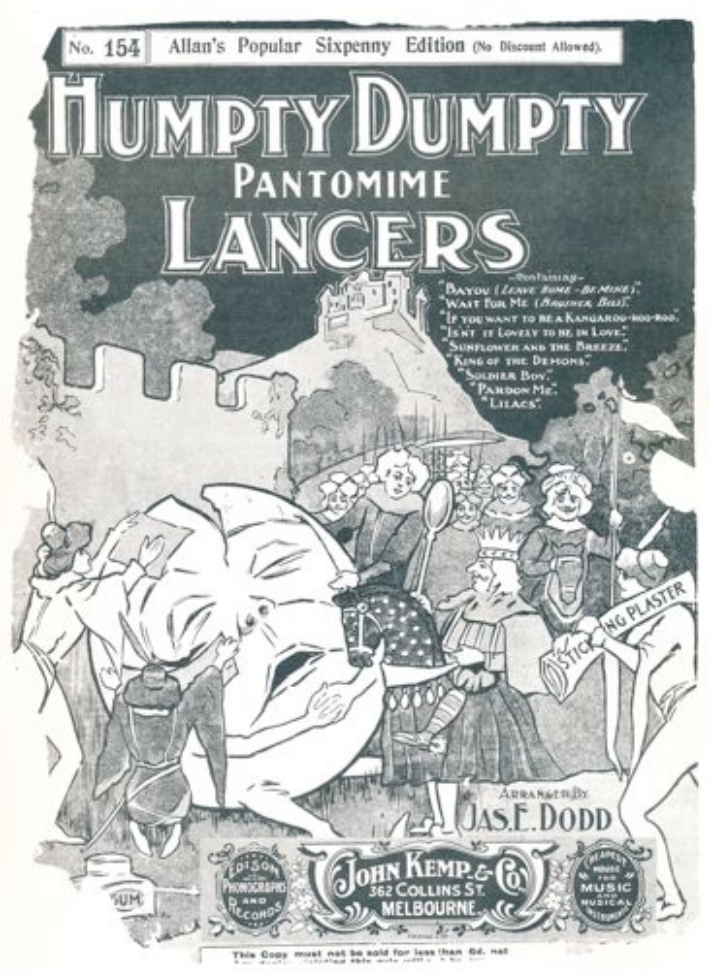
Europe. In fact she was later to state that in the folk revival we followed the traditions of the British Isles and Ireland too closely, not realising Australia's development of folk music and dance was largely different but extremely rich and interesting.

Those ballroom dances and their music had been taken up with great acclaim as the latest of fashion from the homeland, but they gradually mutated, and probably more so during a revival in the depression of the 1930s, to become the folk dances of Australia. They had shared connections throughout the western world, apart from England, Scotland and Ireland, but also in Europe, America, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa. If you took one example – the **Lancers Quadrille**, first known from a published source of music and description in Dublin in 1817, it became one of the most popular English ballroom dances alongside the European Waltz, Quadrille and Polka. Later a second edition of music, the New Lancers replaced the old, although many stalwart MCs complained it did not meet their approval compared to the original. It was danced with military precision and all the grace that would meet approval at court. The original music was classical style and played by the leading orchestras and military bands of the day. Then to extend its popularity over the century countless seasonal arrangements based on favourite operettas and pantomimes such as from Aladdin's Lamp, Humpty Dumpty and 'Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves' to national airs such as the Royal Irish Lancers with all Irish jigs and reels, St David's Day Lancers with a similar selection of Welsh tunes, to Spanish, English, Scottish, German arrangements respectively came into prominence. Then there were other special themes such as on **nautical airs**.



During the First World War in Australia Allan's Music brought out two standards of the time – The Songs of the Allies Lancers and the Songs of Anzac Lancers. National tunes from Servia, Italy, Japan and Britain were the various themes for each respective figure of the Songs of the Allies Lancers and for the 3rd figure the Australian

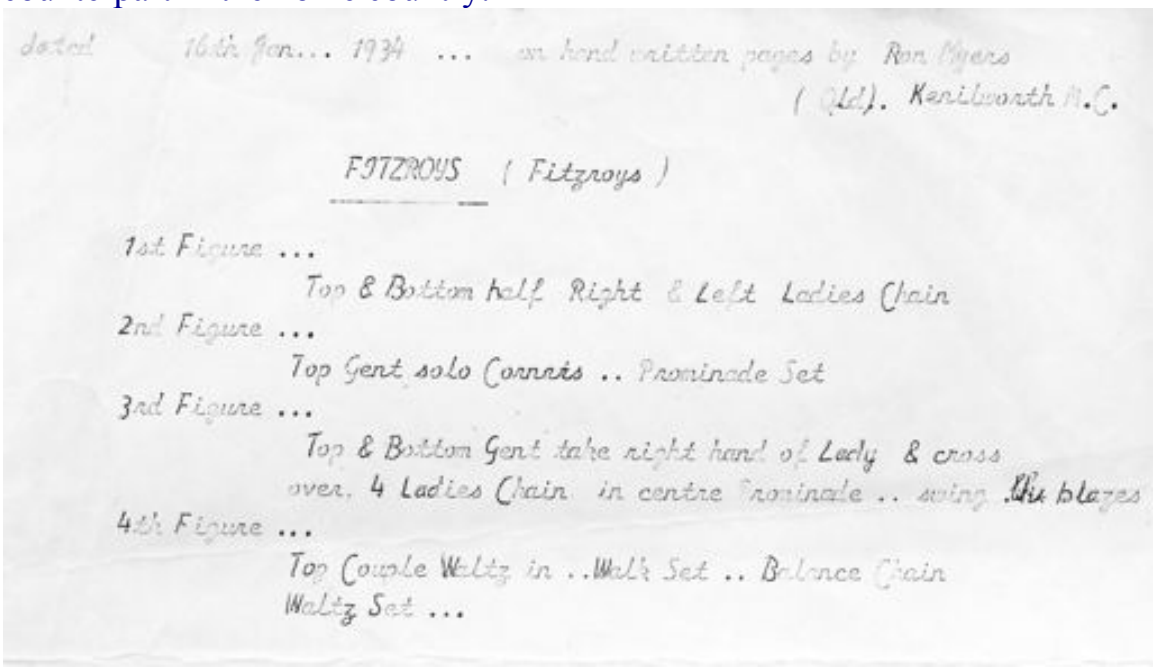
‘This Little Bit of the World Belongs to Us!’ The Songs of the Anzacs included ‘Goodbye my Sweet Australian Lassie’, Tommie Brown, Comrades Side by Side, When the Boys Come Marching Home and Tambour Avant March.



But by the 1930s the old elegant ‘set and turn’ partners had been replaced with a lively ‘swing’, one MC’s notes on his call card says ‘swing like blazes’ and the basket figures had replaced the graceful advance and curtsy and right and left stars of the Colonial era. Suddenly the woman lifted off the ground merry go round fashion in these figures and ultimately by and after the Second World War there were serious accidents as it became too wild and people slid across the floor to a sudden thump under the seats and sometimes with broken limbs as a consequence. The American soldiers when stationed out here were blamed for this but many of the women couldn’t praise enough the politeness and courtesy of the Americans in comparison to the jealous ocker Aussie - the real culprit. By the 1950s the Lancers was banned in many city ballrooms in Melbourne and Sydney and in the similar basket figure of the Fitzroy Quadrille, it was replaced with the full Waltz Cotillion figure to tone it down.

But the Lancers survived in the bush with all the vitality as a folk dance and there were even places in Queensland and Bellbrook in NSW as well as in the Applesheds of Tasmania where there was one large communal set of Lancers with equal numbers of couples lined around each wall, galloping

into the centre and dancing the figures with their opposites. A far cry from that of Dublin's English based society in 1817. The music wasn't provided by a Military Band, but by a lone fiddler or squeezebox player to anonymous tunes that had been handed on over several generations at least as far back as the 1880s. Ted Vallance of St Arnaud related that at a dance in a mud barn at Berrimal when the musician was late, he raced out and grabbed a gum leaf and played for first few dances – the only music they had. The Lancers had become an Australian folk dance and quite distinct from its original counterpart in the home country.



dated 16th Jan... 1934 ... on hand written pages by Ron Myers
(Qld). Kenilworth M.C.

FITZROYS (Fitzroys)

1st Figure ...
Top & Bottom half Right & Left Ladies Chain
2nd Figure ...
Top Gent solo Corners .. Prominade Set
3rd Figure ...
Top & Bottom Gent take right hand of Lady & cross over. 4 Ladies Chain in centre Prominade .. swing like blazes
4th Figure ...
Top Couple Waltz in .. Walk Set .. Balance Chain
Waltz Set ...

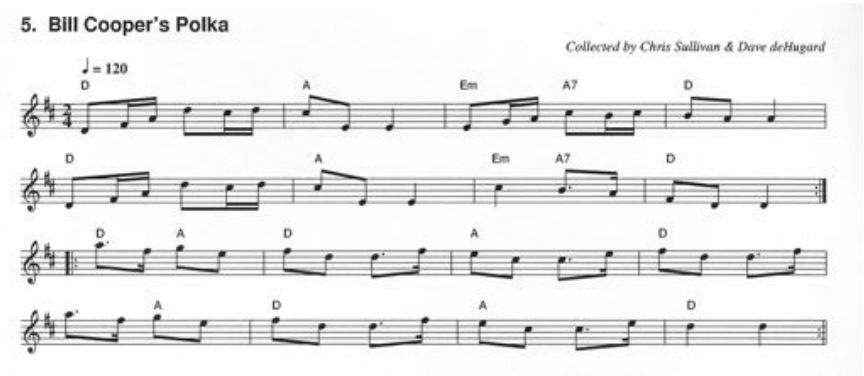
This MC's instructions (Ron Myers of Kenilworth Qld) for the Fitzroy Quadrilles were provided by sister in law Dos Radecker. Note the instruction in the third figure ***'Swing like blazes'****. This would never have occurred in the formal dance of the Colonial era.*

Likewise in the 'revival' of 'bush music' in Australia there was a similar view of the music being brought out by the immigrants and that the 'anonymity' of the tune is the significant factor. It may be my preference too, but I would have to suggest I believe most of our dance music and style is a direct derivative of the English ballroom of the day, not necessarily from the upper crust, but from the general social dancing that was taken up after the Industrial Revolution and by people of all backgrounds leaving villages and home districts to be crammed into the working class areas of the city.



The music publishing industry was enormous and you would find the same books of tunes, Chappell's, Francis Day and Hunter, Boosey's, Kerr's, Mozart Allen's and Coles being used by many of the dance bands throughout and by rural musicians, particularly the pianists and violinists in Australia. There were as many played by music as those who didn't and the district brass bands had this material in their repertoire also. Ron McNally recalled a Lancers competition in St Arnaud where the brass band played the original score.

These books had arrangements for the quadrilles including parts for cornet and clarinet based on popular airs, operettas and pantomimes as mentioned for the Lancers. I would suggest most of the Scottish and Irish jigs and reels have come into our repertoire via this medium rather than from Irish or Scottish grandparents whose tunes were relegated more to family gatherings and items than at the local dance under the auspices of the very strict Master of Ceremonies. The selections of Irish and Scottish jigs and reels in the special themed Lancers and Quadrille were tremendous and exposure to aural musicians widespread. Dave de Hugard found the connection with the well-known collected polka, Bill Cooper's Polka, also played by the Kurtz family (Stringybark Band) and Charlie Batchelor.



Above (on page 6) is the Hungarian Schottische by Charles d'Albert. Also on page 6 is Bill Cooper's Polka which has also been collected by Rob Willis and photo courtesy Rob. (Bill loved to sit on the floor to fiddle a tune.)

Swap part A and B of the Hungarian Schottische around and compare it to Bill Cooper's Polka.



In my take it is derived from the Hungarian Schottische composed or arranged by Charles d'Albert, renowned dance music composer in England during the middle nineteenth century. That is not to say d'Albert, following many classical composers, didn't base his dance tune on some well-known folk tune of the day, although the evidence suggests his tunes are in fact older and are those that were taken up later to become folk tunes. In this example don't worry about the difference between a Schottische and a Polka, one is simply half the tempo of the other, and bush musicians were adept at converting anything they liked between time signatures and tempo for a dance. There's the story of one musician being able to play only one tune, Home Sweet Home; and to play it in correct style for every dance on the programme.

But as Shirley Andrews commented, '*it would take a collection of numerous musicologists of various diverse expertise in classical, nineteenth century popular and national and folk tunes of various countries, to be able to track down the links with many of our collected Australian dance tunes'*.