

# Thistle News



## Nanaimo Scottish Country Dancers

Nanaimo, British Columbia

October, 2005

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### President's Message

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Hello fellow dancers:

As this is our first Thistle Newsletter of the dancing season, let me first welcome everyone back to dancing. I hope you all had a terrific summer.

I know those who attended Summer School at Shawnigan Lake considered it a marvelous experience and many are looking forward to the next time we have this event on the West Coast.

We had a very successful Open House on Tuesday, September 20th and a big thank you to all our members who turned out to make the visitors and prospective members feel so welcome. We had six sets of dancers on the floor and several others resting or just enjoying the music and the dances. There were about 60 people at this year's Open House, truly a great turnout.

Your executive is currently planning next season's activities including our two main events of the 2005/2006 dance season. This starts with the Annual New Year's Ball on Saturday, January 7, 2006 to be held again at the Nanaimo Yacht Club, and the Workshop and Tea Dance which will be on Saturday, April 29, 2006 at Dover Bay Senior Secondary School. We are fortunate, once again, to have Alex Jappy as our musician for both events, and for our new members, if you haven't been to a dance, where Alex was playing, believe me, you're in for a real treat. By the time you read this our teachers will have worked out the Ball Dance Programme and, no doubt, over the next few months they will be putting us through our paces as we learn these dances in preparation for New Year's Ball.

Heartiest congratulations to June and Hazel who spent several months over last winter travelling to the mainland to obtain Teaching Certificates at the Teacher Training Course which was held in Vancouver. It takes a lot of commitment to give up your spare time which meant catching the early morning ferry and then two buses to the South end of the city, not returning home much before 10 pm on a Sunday evening. As a club we are most fortunate indeed to have these two ladies teaching our Tuesday and Thursday evening classes. Once again, June and Hazel, congratulations!!

We have, unfortunately, lost the services of our co-editor, Liz Higgins who has moved to Chilliwack. Liz asked me to send her best regards to all and assures me that she will be back in Nanaimo as soon as her husband's work contract is completed. John Duffus, the other half of the "Thistle Publishing Duo" had visions of soldiering on alone, but help was on the way. Dorothy Young has very kindly "volunteered" to take over from Liz. Many thanks, Dorothy. Your knowledge and experience in publishing will be most welcome.

I must finish, regrettably, on a sad note and announce the loss of a dear friend and fellow dancer, Elma Harder. Elma, who passed away on July 24th, was a frequent visitor to the Tuesday evening class.

Elma also danced with the Nanoose SCD Club for many years and was very well known in Scottish Country Dance circles. Sadly failing health curtailed her dancing this past year and she will be sadly missed by all who knew her!

Happy dancing,  
**Brian McFadden**  
**President**

# Scottish Country Dance Music and Books

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The Teachers Association of Canada or T.A.C. is the association which represents Scottish Country dancing teachers in North America.

It does many things pertaining to Scottish Country dancing some of which are publishing a newsletter "TACTalk", holding an annual Summer School, selling Scottish country dance music and books on Scottish country dancing.

It sells music and books through TACSound and TACBooks. Those ventures have a huge inventory.

The ladies who run those ventures had shops at this year's Summer School and I have never before seen such a large selection of Scottish country dance music and books. They ship music and books to every part of the world and they write articles on the latest releases for each publication of TACTalk.

Any of you can buy music and books from those ladies. If you are interested I have up-to-date catalogues of both TACSound and TACBooks.

If you wish to contact them about music or books their names and email addresses are

*TACSound Marie Disiewicz  
TACSound@telus.net 604 574 7530*

*TACBooks Nora Sutherland  
TACBooks@sympatico.ca 905 276 2602*

They would love to hear from you.

**Marguerite**



## **Birth Announcement**

We are pleased to announce the birth of **Lucas Alexander**, first grandchild of Alison and Sandy Shaw.

Lucas Alexander came into the world on July 23, 2005.

**Congratulations Grandma and Grandpa Shaw!!**

## **Welcome back Muneera!**

Good to see Muneera fit and well after her skiing mishap. Actually maybe "Welcome back" isn't the right expression as, with perfect timing, she hardly missed a beat of Scottish country dancing

*From the Globe and Mail 19 Sep 2005*

## **Scottish Dancing**

The Royal Scottish Country Dance Society has 166 branches and 21,000 members around the world, reports the Chicago Tribune. In Glasgow, according to a recent news report, "country dancing is the newest weapon against childhood obesity." Classes in that city's schools have proved hugely popular. An hour of vigorous country dancing has the potential to burn off up to 800 calories, the newspaper reports.

**Submitted by John Bell.**

# Teachers' Corner

## *Music, Music, Music!!*

Selecting music for the dances we do on Tuesday nights is a big part of the overall preparation of the evening. All the RSCDS dances already have their own music, but many other dances which have been published independently, do not. Once music has been composed for a dance it is beneficial to use that same music every time it is danced. From this policy of dancing a particular dance to a set tune the phrase has been coined, "The Music Will Tell You!" This repetition of tunes with their dances helps with remembering the patterns of these dances. As well, dancers begin to be able to identify a dance when they hear its designated music.

Usually there are approximately four different tunes used for each dance. These tune selections are called "sets" and can be arranged in varying orders depending on the arrangement of the formations in the dance. In most cases the musicians try to begin and end the dance with the same tune. In Jimmy Shand's recording of Mairi's Wedding that we use here in Nanaimo, he plays the 'name tune' through 3 times, twice at the beginning, twice in the middle, and twice at the end of the dance, adding on a few extras bars each time to accommodate the 40 bars in the reel.

When we are unable to find the "right" music for a particular dance in our music library we must seek out tunes which are lively, uplifting, and work well with the phrasing of the dance. We are very fortunate to have a myriad of music at our disposal from which these selections can be made. The only time I vary from using the "name tune" or "correct music," is when our library version is of poor quality or lacks some of the necessary elements which make Scottish Country Dancing a pleasure. The music should be played well, have a pleasant sound, and a good beat with accents at the beginning of each phrase. This helps dancers recognize when a new phrase starts and keeps them on track

during the dance. High quality, lively playing inspires dancers to participate more vigorously in the dance enhancing their pleasure.

Why is it that in some dances we just let ourselves go and thoroughly enjoy the dance, while in others we are wondering how long it will be before it is all over? Of course, the answer is: The music. Well-played, beautiful music is a pleasure to listen to and to dance to. Listen to the music as you dance!! Remember that you are dancing to the music and it is there to help you!!!

Happy Dancing To All,

**June McFadden**



No lady to dance in black stockings – nor must she have her elbows bare.  
To prevent spitting, no gentleman to chew tobacco or smoke. No lady to dress her hair with tallow candle, nor must she have a bunch of hair sticking up, top of her head. To prevent tearing the planking, no gentleman to dance in nailed shoes or boots.  
No whispering allowed – if anyone shall be found to make insidious remarks about anyone's dancing, he or she shall be put out of the room.  
No gentleman to appear with a cravat that has been worn for more than a week or a fortnight.  
Long beards are forbidden, as it would be very disagreeable if a gentleman should happen to put his cheek against a lady's.  
Those ladies who have not white cotton stockings and black morocco shoes will not be admitted under any pretence whatever. Two old ladies will be provided to examine all who enter.  
No gentleman must squeeze his partner's hand, nor look earnestly upon her, and furthermore he must not even pick up her handkerchief, provided it were to fall – the first denotes he loves, the second he wishes to kiss her, and the last that she makes a sign for both.  
*(A selection from "Rules of Etiquette 1903" reprinted from RSCDS Kingston Newsletter, December 2004, originally credited to David Holestrom, Petronella Newsletter via RSCDS Ottawa Branch Bulletin, December 2003.)*

## .....more from the Teacher's Corner

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*A work of fiction, or a true piece of  
Scottish country dance history? You  
decide.*

### **Changing of Steps**

This is the story about how the RSCDS steps were deliberately changed during WWII, and the reasons for so doing.

A person of some prominence in the RSCDS in Scotland told about a meeting he attended shortly before or during WWII. There were only three people present. One was Miss Jean Milligan, the other (who will remain nameless) moved to another country and has since passed away, leaving only our hero as the last living person to attend the meeting.

This meeting was called because it seems that the Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret were receiving instruction in Scottish country dancing society style at Holyrood House. The pas de Basque was being taught in such a way that when the "beating" foot went into 3rd position, the heel of the foot was actually placed on top of the other foot, rather than fitting snugly into the instep, which is the way we do it now. And in the strathspey travelling step, the foot was pulled through in a much more Highland way, with the sole of the foot being aimed at the calf and well off the floor, rather than being aimed at the floor and pulled through low to the ground.

The problem? The Royal Family always wear street shoes, not ghillies. For example, in the 1992 "Year in the Life of the Royal Family" they were wearing normal shoes at that dance The Ghillies' Ball at Balmoral. Street shoes have hard, sometimes irregular, soles, and doing these steps was tearing the silk stockings of the Princesses. (Shudder!)

The adjustment: modify the steps so that the stockings would not get torn.

The result to us: both steps changed, and the long evolution of the long slow draw through in the strathspey travelling step began.

The person who told me this story did not want it to disappear from our heritage, but had not "written it up" for obvious reasons. He told it with no malicious intent; it surfaced in the context of a discussion about the evolution of modern Scottish country dancing. I don't have his permission to credit him, or I would do so. I can only say he has been involved with Scottish country dancing for decades, and this meeting and change were no figment of imagination. I do not doubt his honesty or memory at all . . . and it actually appears to be a valid "piece of the puzzle" in discussions of technique.

*(Reprinted from the Nova Scotia Branch RSCDS  
Newsletter, May, 2004. Contributed by Ken McFarland.)*

**Submitted by Hazel**



### **Mind Your Manners, 1849 - 2005**

"Do not volunteer any directions about the dance, or even the correction of mistakes. Appear not to notice it, and wait quietly until your turn comes, when you can do it right. If you do interfere, depend upon it, no one will thank you, or think you know more about the dance than themselves. Besides, it only adds to the confusion."

*(from: Hazzard, William P. The Ballroom Companion: A Handbook for the Ballroom and Evening Parties. Philadelphia: George S. Appleton, 1849. Reprinted from Reeltime, RSCDS Newhaven Branch, Late Summer/Fall 2002.)*

## Report on the TAC conference

July 31 – August 7, 2005  
Shawnigan Lake School

When Hazel and Marguerite were promoting the TAC Summer School at our Thursday night classes, I thought it sounded like fun, and that it would be a nice break from my family mid-summer. I really didn't have any idea what it was all about. I didn't know that "TAC" stands for Teacher's Association of Canada, and that the best dancers and instructors of Scottish dancing IN THE WORLD would be attending.

I naively signed up and went along for the week. Well, the first surprise was that my beginner's class was lumped in with the intermediate group, as there were so few of us. We ended up as a class of about 25 – 30 dancers, while the other two hundred or so dancers were divided into various categories of advanced! I was reassured by the arrival of John and Elspet, as well as Sandy and Alison, who came along several times as off-campus participants.

The schedule was gruelling.

8:00 a.m. Breakfast in the lovely, wood beamed dining hall.

9:00 – 12:00 Dance class

12:00 – 1:30 Lunch

1:30 – 4:30 More dancing classes in the afternoon, all optional and varied. There were sessions on waltzing, salsa dancing, jigs, and Highland dancing.

Afternoon options also included Hazel's class on care of the dancing foot, and trips to Chemainus and Butchart gardens for out of town visitors.

6:00 – 7:30 Dinner

8:00 – 10:00 Evening dances or activities

10:00 - ??? Socializing in the great hall.

By the end of the second day, I was elevating and icing my ankles, popping Ibuprofen, and selectively missing out certain activities.

The food was served buffet style, and was delicious. The gardens at Shawnigan Lake School are beautifully kept and my class had a lovely

dancing venue, the Rugby Pavilion, which fronts on the playing fields. The instructors and musicians were world-class, and rotated around each day from one group to another, so all groups, from beginner to advanced, were able to experience the different teaching styles.

My overwhelming impression, (aside from aching ankles), was the tremendous kindness and patience of all the participants and instructors. I was frankly terrified at the evening dances, but someone would always take pity on me, and help me through the program. Very accomplished dancers, some of them dancing teachers in their other lives, would smooth my way through the dance and congratulate me afterwards. They could not have been more supportive.

Dancers were in attendance from all over the world, from Great Britain and other parts of Europe, as well as from Japan, the United States and all over Canada. Everything was well organized, including the food, accommodation, outings, and dancing activities, and Marguerite and her committee played a large part in that.

Evening activities included a nautical themed ball, a Ceilidh, an opening night dance, an Old Time Dancing evening and the final ball, with the men beautifully attired in kilts and regalia and the women in ballgowns.

The whole experience was amazing, incredible, almost beyond words. I met many kind, accomplished and interesting people, and I learned a tremendous amount....if only I could remember it now! I would do it again in a heartbeat, and I encourage anyone and everyone to sign up if TAC ever comes back to Vancouver Island. Or we could make a trip to Ontario for next year's TAC - a Nanaimo contingent?

**Katherine Miller**



# The Last Word

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As Brian mentioned, Liz, my fellow editor, has decamped to the mainland for a while. (Due to the wonders of electronics however she did not entirely escape contributing to the present issue.) She tells me that she is dancing in Fort Langley in Rebecca Blackhall-Peters' class but misses dancing with our group very much.

Thanks again to those who sent in contributions to the newsletter, especially to Katherine Miller for her account of her personal experience at the Summer School. As much as we appreciate the contributions of the regulars, the executive and the teachers, we also want to hear from members who have something interesting to pass along. That's all for this issue. I must admit it wasn't nearly as much fun doing on my own but with Dorothy coming on board that will be corrected next time around.

Your ed.,  
**John**

Before you criticise someone you should walk a mile in their shoes. That way, when you criticize them you're a mile away and you have their shoes.

**Bob Mann**

## COMING EVENTS

### **Nanaimo SCD Annual New Year's Ball.**

Saturday Jan 7, 2006

Nanaimo Yacht Club.

Music by Alex Jappy.

Tickets, \$35.00, will go on sale shortly to club members

### **Nanaimo SCD Workshop and Tea Dance**

Saturday April 29, 2006

9:00am to 5:00pm

Dover Bay High School, Nanaimo

Teachers:

Ruth Jappy and Rebecca Blackhall-Peters

Music by Alex Jappy

For further information please contact

Edith Morgan

250 245 2009

edithwmorgan@shaw.ca

### **RSCDS Victoria Branch Fall Workshop**

Nov 18 and 19, 2005

*Further information on these events can be found on our bulletin board and on the club web site at [www.nanaimoscd.00it.com](http://www.nanaimoscd.00it.com)*

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### **Hope you enjoyed the October Thistle**

**Comments, and suggestions for future issues are always welcomed by your editor:-**

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