

The Elgin Longsword Dance

Introduction

A five-man longsword dance that has some roots in Papa Stour. The pace of the dance is fast lope, almost a run. When danced well it is a physically demanding dance.

Music

Danced to well phrased nine/eight jigs, for example The cock chased the hen, played at about 144bpm. Nine/eight jigs have 12 beats or steps to each phrase, so a tune played with two A and two B music (AABB) will have 48 beats (4*12).

Figure Summary

| | |
|------|----------------------------|
| | Walk-on |
| 1-48 | Clash & Start |
| 1-48 | Tunnel (3*12) |
| 1-12 | Chorus - Hey |
| 1-60 | Double sword down (5*12) |
| 1-12 | Chorus - Hey |
| 1-36 | Over your neighbours (5*6) |
| 1-12 | Chorus - Hey |
| 1-90 | Tricky bastard (5*18) |
| 1-12 | Chorus - Hey |
| 1-60 | Cast (5*12) |
| | Line-up |

Walk-on

The walk-on is executed in silence. Line up 1,2,3,4,5, with swords held down in the right hand as though making a low basket. 1 starts right foot with the succeeding dancers following at three step intervals.

1 leads the dancers into a clockwise circle with sword held down and making a low basket. When the dancers are evenly arranged and the low basket is well made 1 and the following dancers stop.

1 brings his sword round in an arc from the low basket, in front of his body and into a high basket. When 1's sword reaches the high basket then 2,3,4&5 repeat the movement in turn until the high basket is made.

The musician begins playing and 1 calls for the dance to begin.

Clash & Start

| Beat | Action | Description |
|------|---|-------------|
| 1-12 | The musician plays once to himself. All clash sword on the last beat of the phrase. | |
| 1-12 | All start walking round clockwise on the right foot. Bring the swords down inside the circle. The right hand is lowered to the hip, or just behind it, while the tip of the sword describes a curve, passing back to the left hand of the man behind. Take the sword of the man in front with the left hand and continue walking round clockwise. | |
| 1-24 | Open a tight circle to a wide circle making the best use of the swords length, while accelerating into a fast lope. | |

Tunnel

Circle clockwise until 1 comes to the top of the set.

| Beat | Action | Description |
|---------|---|-------------|
| 1-24 | 1 raises his swords above head height and casts left to the bottom of the set where the swords are lowered to waist height. 1 then follows 5 up the middle of the set to the top. This is repeated casting right. | |
| 2,3,4&5 | repeat 1's movements and cast alternately right and left. | |
| 1 | casts three times, i.e. left, right and left again, then follows 5 and leads the set into a clockwise circle. | |

Chorus - Hey

| Beat | Action | Description |
|------|--|-------------|
| 1-24 | As 1 reaches the top of the set, he lets go of the point of 5's sword. 5 brandishes his sword to indicate this was not a mistake. All swords are raised above head height. | |

1 casts left and lowers his sword to waist height then leads under 2's sword passing right shoulder with 3. 2 now follows 1. 1 goes under 3's sword passing left shoulder with 4. 3 now follows 2. 1 goes under 4's sword passing right shoulder with 5. 4 now follows 3. 1 then leads the set into the clockwise circle and retakes the point of 5's sword.

The theory is that 1 should weave through the set, and to make the figure work well the other four move from side to side let him pass.

Double Sword Down

This figure is repeated 5 times with the sequence moving one place clockwise round the set as follows 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

| Beat | Action | Description |
|------|---|-------------|
| 1-2 | 5,1&2 sweep 5&1's swords forward while moving forward. 3&4 step forward and step off over the swords. | |
| 3 | 1 steps back, 5&2 move shoulder to shoulder. 3&4 land. | |
| 4-6 | 5,1&2 back out to place, 3&4 walk forward to place. | |
| 7-12 | All circle left six steps. | |

Over Your Neighbours

This figure is repeated 5 times with the sequence moving one place anticlockwise round the set as follows, 1,2,3,4,5

The set continues to move clockwise but at a much slower speed. It closes up so that arms are held vertically and swords are horizontal. At the end of the figure the set increases speed and makes a wide circle.

| Beat | Action | Description |
|------|---|-------------|
| 1-2 | 1 steps on the right foot, hops on the right foot lifting the left foot over the sword in his left hand, which is the sword in front of him, from inside the circle to outside the circle. | |
| 2-4 | 1 steps on the left foot, hops on the left foot lifting the right foot over the sword in his left hand, which is the sword in front of him, from inside the circle to outside the circle. 1 lifts the sword in his right hand, which is the sword behind him, over his head, with the assistance of 2 so that the sword stays parallel to the ground. | |
| 5-6 | 1 takes two steps to turn round anticlockwise and ensure his sword is in the right position for 2 to start. | |

Tricky Bastard

This figure is repeated 5 times with the sequence moving one place anticlockwise round the set as follows, 1,2,3,4,5.

The set continues to move clockwise but at a slower speed and closes up a little.

| Beat | Action | Description |
|-------|--|-------------|
| 6 | 1 stops | |
| 1 | 1 makes a window by bending down so that 1's sword is close to the ground and 5's sword is high and makes the arch. 2 bends down and lines up 1's sword so that it is in line with the original circle. 4 helps make the arch. | |
| 2-4 | 2 moves clockwise around the end and steps over the sword with the left foot on step 4. | |
| 5-10 | 3 follows on step 6. 4 follows on step 8. 5 follows on step 10. | |
| 11-12 | 1&2 stand up and all circle left. | |
| 13-18 | All circle left | |

Cast

This figure is executed 5 times with the sequence as follows 1,2,3,4,5.

The set continues circling clockwise but closes up and slows down

| Beat | Action | Description |
|--|---|-------------|
| 1-6 | 1&5 lift 5's sword above head height. 1 casts left followed by 2,3,4&5, who keep their swords down, to lead the set into an anticlockwise circle. | |
| 7-12 | Walk round. | |
| 2,3,4&5 repeat the cast with 2&4 casting right and 3&5 casting left. The last cast by 5 is different, instead of keeping all swords except the arch low, as each dancer casts left they lift their sword over their heads and all tie a lock while continuing to circle anticlockwise. 1 takes the lock. | | |

Line-up

4 lead the set into a line facing the audience,3,2,1,5,4 all continue to step in line. 1 calls the set off and leads off with 2&5 an 3&4 forming up in pairs. The musician stops once the dancers have left the arena and the music has reached the end of the tune.

Notation

North British

Elgin Longsword Dance