

# *Old Time Dancing Part 1 - Colonial Era*

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In my series 'Calling the Tune and Leading a Merry Dance' I covered the history of the very early period of dancing at the time Australia was first settled through to about the 1840s. The key dances were the **Country Dances**, longways for as many as will. Generally at this time they had consolidated in triple minor form with an occasional duple minor dance and new variations such as the Ecossoise, the Spanish Waltz or Guaracha and the Scottish Foursome Reel. By the 1820s the quadrilles had arrived in force, to be referred to as a period of '**Quadrille Mania**'. At the beginning of this appearance of the first quadrille around that of Waterloo, 1815, the 'indecorous' German **Waltz** also gradually gained attention. It was followed almost three decades later by the **Polka**; some claimed dancing went out when the polka came in. It was certainly to have enormous influence on the way

people danced as well taking over much of the music of the day.

In an earlier series I covered the history and tunes associated with the arrival of the **Galop** in 1829 and the Polka in 1844. Also covered in the Country Dance series was the history of the development of the Quadrille and the Waltz. A key difference with the new couple dances was the more intimate full frontal close hold that set the emerging couple dances aside from the older and respected hand to hand arms-length minuet and gavotte.

By the 1840s the Country Dances whilst still occasionally appearing on programmes had nevertheless been largely out-competed by the Waltz, Quadrille (First Set) and other couple dances to the extent the programmes were dominated by numerous repeats of these alternating in succession with the Lancers, Galop and Polka. Several of the newer dances from the 1820s such as Spanish Waltz maintained a profile as well as the new **Circassian Circle**. This was based generally on a progressive Sicilian form adapted usually from the first figure of either the Quadrille or the Caledonians Quadrille. But there were other variants including one with a galop step progression and another with the **Spanish Waltz** which was to become known in modern times as the *Waltz Country Dance*.

At the time of the gold-rushes mid 19<sup>th</sup> century the *Mazurka*, in the popular form of **Polka Mazurka**, the **Varsoviana** and **Schottische** increased the range of couple dances alternating on programmes with the waltz, polka & quadrilles. Generally the only surviving country dances were the old **Sir Roger de**

**Coverley** (usually as the finali) and the new **Highland Reel**, Circassian Circle and Spanish Waltz. At the private assemblies **La Tempête** found favour although it doesn't seem to appear on general ball programmes. The **Waltz Cotillion**, really a single figure Waltz Quadrille of about 1840 was upon the scene by the gold-rush and soon after French Dancing Teacher, Charles d'Albert resident in England had coined a 'party set' or jumble set by combining favourite figures from the First Set, Caledonians, Lancers and half of the Waltz Cotillion. This proved a popular quadrille and titled d'Alberts Quadrille or simply the **Alberts**. Nothing to do with Prince Albert. By the 1870s two similar Australian party or club sets appeared on programmes, the **Fitzroy Quadrilles** and the **Exion or Exiles Quadrille**. There were many more of these club sets on Western Australian Programmes, 'Bonnie Doon', Richmond Lodge, Metropolitan, Engine Drivers, to mention just a few out of perhaps dozens.

But overall things hadn't changed much over the balance of the century in the homeland as Queen Victoria went into mourning over the passing of her beloved Albert and dancing generally fell into the doldrums, at least in royal circles. The only new thing was an American influence with the arrival of the **Barn Dance** from the 1880s followed by the **Two Step** around 1900. The latter had been derived from the old Galop via a seasonal whim of 1897, the Washington Post. Of course in frontier Australia dancing gained momentum in the both city and bush with an excuse to celebrate anything from the opening of a new bridge, railways goods shed to end of the shearing season.

Forming in 1892 the British Association of Teachers of Dancing commenced running annual competitions to discover new dances and as a consequence of this the first of the created or 'choreographed' dances came into being. Several new quadrilles such as the Hussars (1894), Carnival (1895), The Gordons' Square (1898), Princess Ena Quadrille (1906) and the County Cotillion (1907) were also invented but seldom appeared outside the dancing master's academy, much less at public dances. However quite significantly the **Veleta Waltz**, the first perceived choreographed sequence dance, was entered in 1899, but it didn't win a place. The music publishers Francis, Day & Hunter, noted its potential and with the co-operation of the arranger Arthur Morris, it was re-vamped and introduced as a new dance in 1900. The Veleta was not really the first of the competition dances. One example is the Victoria Cross of 1898 by James Finnigan. According to F. Mainey (Old Time Dancers Handbook) this dance is exactly the same as the Military Two Step which Finnigan's daughter brought out in 1904.

### Twentieth Century

Nevertheless in popular opinion the **Veleta** is accepted as the dance that set the pattern for the popularity of many of the new '*choreographed sequence dances*'. Some of these included the Fylde Waltz 1902, **Military Two Step** 1904, **Eva Three Step** 1904, the **Boston Two Step** 1908, **La Rinka** 1908, **Doris Waltz** 1909, Latchford Schottische 1909, **King's Waltz** 1913, the **St Bernard Waltz** 1913, the **Maxina** 1917, Bradford (**progressive**) **Barn Dance** 1919 and the Royal Empress Tango 1922. Generally in Australia only those in blue became known during the Edwardian era, and the Maxina just after. The progressive Barn Dance doesn't seem to have been taken up in Australia until during the Second World War.

The **Parma Waltz** of 1920 doesn't appear to have survived in England. But it certainly became popular in Australia along with the **Pride of Erin** when introduced here in the 1930s. The date of origin of the Pride

of Erin remained obscure for some time in Britain but has now been identified as 1911. The Pride of Erin was first taught at O’Connell’s dance studio in Bendigo in 1934 and revered MC at early Nariel dances, Charlie Fardon, recalled the Veleta Waltz had arrived in the district around 1912.

Significantly all of these early dances in Britain were still described step by step with the five balletic feet positions on the toes – the same as for the country dances, quadrilles and old couple dances and of course stage dances.



**PARMA WALTZ OF 1920 SHOWING THE OLD TURNED OUT FOOT POSITION ON THE ‘TOES’ and step directions for the commencement of the Veleta Waltz of 1900.**

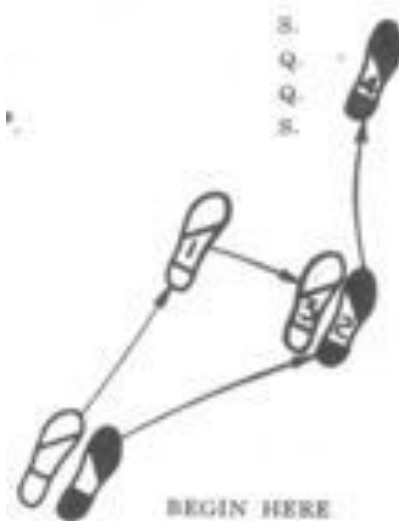
These new sequence dances were popular in the dance teachers' academies but were not sensations in the manner of the great dances of the world when they were first introduced; examples being the Waltz, Polka, Mazurka, Quadrille, Lancers, Schottische and Varsoviana or the One Step, Foxtrot, Tango, Modern Waltz and Quickstep.

*The modern dances* mentioned from America evolved from or after 1910 and heralded enormous changes from an embryonic new form of ‘free-lance’ dance having a characteristic step but with a ‘go as you please’ routine invented by the fancy of the man as leader ‘on the run’. This set the stage for what became known as **Modern Ballroom Dance**. It was greatly influenced or introduced with the emergence of jazz and ragtime music. The Cake-Walk in the late 1800s and first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> C was a forerunner and real trend setter to tunes such as Smokey Mokes, Coon-band Contest, and Whistling Rufus. I don’t think these titles were in a derogatory sense as might be perceived in our contemporary ‘politically correct era’. The jazz and dance crazes and likewise their bands evolving from the African-American population were an absolute rage with white society. A whole series of ‘animal dances’

appeared in rapid succession such as the **Turkey Trot**, the Monkey, Grizzly Bear, Horse Trot, Crab Crawl and Fish Walk. We even had a 'Kangaroo Hop'.

Settling out of these the first modern ballroom dance, the **One Step** to Alexander's Ragtime Band arrived in 1912. I recall my grandmother saying when she first saw it at a dance at Charlton a couple took to the floor and 'strutted' round and round the hall in one direction, just walking forward (the man) on their toes and never drawing breath. The modern dances drew enormous criticism and ridicule from the older generation and particularly as the older dances began to be dumped. Again my grandmother said that at Wychitella, only if the MC was 'a bit shicker', would he put a One Step on the programme, calling it the 'Donkey Trot'. Although many in that era still danced on their toes, they gradually converted to ordinary walking steps on the flat of the foot for the jazz dances.

The modern dances were the *new time* setters. The older dances of the earlier 20th century, although overshadowed, had established the pattern of the modern sequence dance even though their particular steps were still on the toes in the five balletic feet positions. But the One Step followed quickly by the **Foxtrot** and **Tango**, then **Hesitation Waltz** and finally the **Modern Waltz** (Jazz Waltz) and **Quickstep** introduced steps based on walking and running and with parallel feet as well as innovating the routine. The old balletic feet positions by the 1920s were being cast aside. "The slows" as in walking were on the flat of the foot or even with a 'heel lead' and only the runs on "the toes". The Tango was danced completely flat footed, slinking along and with sharp or jerky changes of direction. It was a very sensuous dance.



Notice the parallel foot position and leading step on the heel, not toe.

Typically the footsteps of the Foxtrot and Modern Sequence Dance Chassé. SQQS is the timing.  
Slow Quick Quick Slow

There were also other solo dance crazes such as the Charleston to add to the frivolous hype that followed the outbreak of a 'live for the moment' that celebrated the end of the Great War. Programmes by the 1920s in the cities consisted almost entirely of One Step, Waltz and Foxtrot in succession varied only occasionally by a Tango or new Maxina, set of Lancers or the Edwardian Veleta Waltz or Boston Two Step. The mentioned variety was rare, the first three dances sometimes occupying a whole night's dance. The Maxina of 1917, although a sequence dance had been based on a modern ballroom dance, the Maxixe. The Maxixe from Brazil only endured a season or so in the ballroom. The Quickstep actually came about from the incorporation of the Charleston into the One Step – The Quick-time Flat Charleston, or simply Quickstep.



The Yale Blues, another seasonal dance freak.