

The *hornpipe* is of English origin. It assumed its present meter and form around 1760 when it changed over from 3/2 time to 2/2 time. It was often performed during stage productions, being played and danced between the acts and scenes of plays.

Polkas and *slides* are particularly popular in *Sliabh Luachra*, which encompasses parts of the counties of Kerry and Cork. The polka, a fast dance tune in 2/4 time, is also present throughout the rest of Ireland. In the northern counties these tunes are played in a more even rhythm than in the south.

The distinction between *slides* and *single jigs* is a subtle and delicate one. Both have a characteristic quarter-note - eighth-note rhythmic pattern. The difference lies in the timing and beat emphasis of performance. Single jigs are played only slightly slower than slides and with less rhythmic emphasis. To understand a slide better, Caoimhin Mac Aoidh recommends listening to Pdraig O Caoimh, Denis Murphy, Julia Clifford, and Gerry McCarthy. To understand a single jig better, he suggests listening to John Gordon, John Timony, John McGee, or Pat Kelly.

Slip jigs are in 9/8 time. They are played all over Ireland but are particularly popular in Co. Donegal. In the west, and particularly the southwest of Donegal, it would not be unusual for a dozen or so slip jigs to be played in any one session.

Set dances, also called *long dances*, are pieces of music intended to accompany a particular solo step dance. The dance usually carries the same name as the tune. Set dances are usually in a jig or hornpipe meter and usually have two parts. Sometimes the meter changes when going from one part to the other. Very often one of the parts, usually the second, is longer in form than the other part or parts, often comprising twelve bars instead of eight. Set dances are called *table dances* in West Limerick, a name which arises from the custom of the skilled solo dancer performing his or her steps on the kitchen table or the dismantled half-door instead of on the clay floor of the house.

Highlands, *schottisches*, *flings*, and *highland flings* are different names for the same tune type. They are in 4/4 time and almost invariably derive from Scottish strathspeys. In the northern parts of Ireland they are often played with additional emphasis on the on-pulse notes, a remnant of their Scottish parentage. They are normally played at tempos somewhere in between those of hornpipes and reels. While they have been played all over Ireland, since the last half of the 20th century their popularity has been focused mainly in Ulster, and particularly Co. Donegal.

Barn dances and *germans* are also two names for the same type of tune, though the term “german” seems to be restricted to west and central Co. Donegal and is probably a shortening of “german schottische.” This name distinguishes the german from the “highland schottische,” or as it is more commonly known, the *highland* (see the paragraph above). Germans are in 4/4 time and are played at the tempo of a hornpipe. They are characterized by a particular and very determined rhythm: a recurring set of two or sometimes three quarter notes at the end of certain phrases, usually the fourth and eighth. In their geographic spread, barn dances are similar to highlands, though they now appear to be on the increase outside of Ulster.

Mazurkas are dances of Polish origin which appear to have been come to Ireland via associations between continental armies. They are in 3/4 time. There are probably not more than fifteen mazurkas played in the entire Irish repertoire today, and they are almost entirely restricted to Co. Donegal. Vague references are sometimes seen to a type of tune called a *varsovienne*. Apparently this is understood to mean a single tune, *Shoe the Donkey*, in its many forms. In truth it is simply a mazurka under a different name. Native Irish speakers in Co. Donegal often called the varsovienne a “reverse of Vienna,” in confusion with the term “reverse,” meaning to play in octaves.

The *strathspey* is a tune of Scottish origin in 4/4 time. In Ireland it is generally played slightly slower than a hornpipe and with a strongly dotted rhythmic pattern. Strathspeys are widespread in the province of Ulster, particularly in Co. Donegal. Such great fiddlers as Michael Coleman, Andy McGann, and Paddy Reynolds have played and recorded them.

Waltzes in Ireland are largely continental imports. Most of them have entered the traditional repertoire as song airs and through military regiments and ballroom influences. More recently, waltzes have come to Ireland through the Scottish and Cape Breton traditions. They are in 3/4 time and are played throughout the country.

DANCE-TUNE TYPES

To fully understand the variety of tune types found in traditional Irish music we first need to be clear on the ideas of *pulse*, *meter*, and *subdivision of pulse*.