

**Hornpipe.** The original hornpipe dance is unique to the British Isles. It can be characterized as belonging to the step-dance tradition, which emphasizes leg actions and beating, or sounding, rhythms with the feet. In its most traditional form, it is an important source for tap dance movements.

Historically, the hornpipe appears as solo soft-shoe step dances, as clog dance, as a round dance for mixed couples, as longways country dances, as solo and duet French-style Baroque period *entrées*, and theatrical character dances, including the well-known “Sailor’s Hornpipe.” It has been danced in one or another of these forms by shepherds, rural villagers, aristocrats, and stage performers.

### Etymology

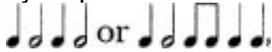
The word *hornpipe*, or *hornpype*, is Middle English and may be derived from the Saxon or Germanic word *hoerner* (“horn”). It was first used by the English, or Anglo-Saxons, to name the dance and its accompanying music. It is also the name of a particular style of rural shepherd’s reed pipe, often crafted from animal horns, with a reed mouthpiece and an inflated skin bag. There are numerous regional names for the instrument. The Irish Gaelic word, used by some traditional musicians, is *cornphíopa*, from the Latin for “horn,” *cornu*. In Scotland’s Lowlands the word is *stoc’n horn*. Some authorities give the Scots Gaelic term as *damhsa* (or *dannsadh*) *gradcharach* (literally, “dance of the sudden whirls”), but this term is not used by dancers. Gaelic-speaking people have generally adopted the English word *hornpipe* to describe their dances and music of this type.

### Musical Forms

The most consistent characteristic of the many hornpipe dances is the musical form. **The triple-time hornpipe**

Prior to the eighteenth century, hornpipes in England and Scotland were in triple meter, usually 3/2, although occasionally 6/4 or 3/4. These tunes had regular four- and eight-bar phrases, usually subdivided into two-bar units.

The peculiar jerky quality of the melody and the limping gait of the rhythm is due to frequent use of syncopation and an alternation of faster- and slower-moving rhythms. Syncopated rhythms, such as



, usually occur in the second and fourth measures, and the point of arrival, usually on the third beat of the cadential measure, creates an interesting rhythmic delay. While the tempo of the half note is slow, the dance is rhythmically complex and lively.

William Stenhouse (c.1824) indicated that 3/2 hornpipes had been played in Scotland “time out of mind,” and that “this particular measure originated in the borders of England and Scotland.” The standard repertory of the Northumbrian small-pipes includes numerous triple-time hornpipes. The comic or jaunty verses common to Border songs such as “The Dusty Miller” and “Jockey Said to Jenny,” as well as nursery tunes such as “Dance to Y’r Daddie” or “Wee Totum Fogg,” illustrate the lighthearted and rhythmic character of the triple-time hornpipe.

Hornpipes appear in dance suites and theater music from the sixteenth to the mid-eighteenth century, many cast as variations over a four-measure chord pattern, I–IV–V–I, and considered uniquely English by court composers throughout Europe. The earliest printed example is “Hornepype,” a keyboard composition by Hugh Aston (c.1524). This is followed by compositions of Guillaume Morlaye, Antony Holborne (in *The Ciththarn Schoole*, 1597), and Thomas Robinson (in *New Citharen Lessons*, 1609).

Traditional examples from England and Scotland, as well as newly composed tunes, can be found in the instrumental lesson books of John Playford (*Musick’s Delight*, 1666, and *Apollo’s Banquet*, 1690), Matthew Locke (*Melothesia*, 1673), Humphrey Salter (*Genteel Companion*, 1683), and Daniel Wright (*Pleasant Humours*, 1715). Examples from a valuable collection of “original Lancashire hornpipes” by

the celebrated hornpipe musician John Ravenscroft, dated 1705, were reproduced by John Hawkins in 1776. Rare copies of eighteenth-century fiddler's tune books also include traditional hornpipes.

Henry Purcell's second-most-frequent dance form is the triple-time hornpipe, which is as a result often referred to as the Purcellian hornpipe. Handel's *Water Music* contains two fully orchestrated hornpipes (nos. 9 and 12); his chorus "Now Love that everlasting boy" in act 2 of *Semele* is marked "alla hornpipe." **The duple-time hornpipe**

No other class of tune was designated "hornpipe" until the appearance in the mid-eighteenth century of the common-time hornpipe, now referred to as the "Jacky Tar." It is in 4/4 or 2/4 time, with staccato eighth-note runs punctuated by stresses on the second and third beats in a bar at regular intervals. This "pom-pom" rhythm also ends the phrase, so in combination with the cadential point of arrival on the first beat, the phrase ends "pom-pom-pom." The "College Hornpipe," firmly embedded in the contemporary mind as the "Sailor's Hornpipe," is the quintessential example (see example 1).

The ancestor of this type seems to be the duple-time Scottish measure, which was referred to in Scotland as a "double hornpipe air" though never designated as such in music collections. The term *Scottish measure* first appeared in print in Playford's collection of Scots tunes (1700). Prior to this, English publications called them simply "Scots tunes," for example, "Dumbarton's Drums," "The White Cockade," and "Floors o' Edinburgh." Purcell composed "Scotch tunes," imitating the Scottish measure, and he introduced a common-time jaunty tune called "Sailor's Dance" in *Dido and Aeneas* (1688). Thomas Arne is often credited with introducing the "new" hornpipe in his version of Purcell's *King Arthur* in 1767. Although the source and process of this shift from triple to duple time is complex, the earlier hornpipe gradually faded from use.

## Dance Forms

The hornpipe has undergone great transformation over the centuries. **Pre-1650**

The solo hornpipe is executed by one person, or by two or more people dancing independently and either simultaneously or consecutively. It has existed in Scotland and Wales since time immemorial and is believed to have originated as a shepherd's dance, mainly performed by men. The theory is that leg and foot dancing evolved as the shepherd played his hornpipe. From the mountainous north country, where dancers naturally developed strong leg and foot movements, the hornpipe migrated south during the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I, when Scottish dancing, particularly the male solo, was admired and cultivated by the English. English counties most associated with the hornpipe were Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, and Lancashire.

Coexisting with the solo dance was a rustic round hornpipe for couples. The English traveler Spelman (in his *Relation of Virginia*, 1609) likened the dancing of American Indians to "our darbyshire Hornepipe, a man first, and then a woman, and so through them all, hanging in a round."

While there is no definitive evidence for the dance source, one theory associates it with a ritual harvest dance. The horn of plenty, or cornucopia, symbol of the local dieties of abundance, supplies the link to the idea of dancing to a hornpipe. A more likely association would be to springtime festivals, related to abundance but more in the sense of a fertility celebration. This would coincide with the spring shearing and lambing activities, and of course celebrations, in a rural sheep-raising community.

In the earliest literary reference, *Digby Morality of Wisdom* (c.1480), three men and three women, servants of Lechery, dance to the music of a "hornpype." Richard Barnfield's poem *Shepherds Content* (1594) shows how a shepherd "Leads his Wench a Country Horn-pipe Round / About a May-pole on a Holy-day." And Robert Greene's play *Scottish History of James IV* (1598) has the character Slipper dance a hornpipe at the end of act 2 "with a companion, boy or wench," and with buffoons at the end of act 4, scene 3. As they depart Slipper says, "Nay, but, my friends, one hornpipe further! A refluce backe, and two doubles forward! What! not one crossepoint against Sundayes?"

It is difficult to distinguish the solo from the group form in all of these references. The late sixteenth-century ballad "Our Jockye Sale Have Our Jenny" gives an account of a hornpipe at a wedding. While all are urged to dance, "and the first to break the stroke must pay the piper a penny," the leader calls out movements to individual dancers: "In with fut, Robsone! out with fut Byllynge / Torn rownde, Robyne! kepe trace Wylkyne!" The ballad's climax includes a "gambold," or tumbling flip. Whatever the relationships might be, these two early forms shared a comfortable coexistence in village life. **1650–**

## 1760

By 1680, dancing masters in England, especially Mister Isaac and Beveridge, began to create longways country dances to the distinctive syncopated 3/2 hornpipe tunes. Generally called “maggots” from the Italian *maggioletta*, meaning whim or delight, these were designed for assembly rooms, balls, and private patrons. Often named in honor of the dancing master, they can be found in John Playford's editions of *The Dancing Master* and Wright's *Compleat Collection of Celebrated Country Dances*.

Not all maggots are hornpipes, and distinguishing them from other triple-time country dances is difficult; their figuration is generally intricate. The inclusion of hornpipe steps is likely because minuet steps, and later waltz and polka steps, were used in country dances set to such tunes. Throughout the eighteenth century, “stepping” in social dancing was familiar in Scotland, and hornpipe stepping was used in country dances throughout the British Isles, although it was considered vulgar in the more select assemblies. While in vogue, a few hornpipe country dances migrated to France, generally with distorted rhythms, and were said by composer Jean-Philippe Rameau to exhibit more boisterousness and crudity than dancing finesse.

An important group of six “French-style” hornpipes, choreographed by the court master Mister Isaac and later Anthony L'Abbé, has survived in Feuillet dance notation. Five are couple dances and can be categorized as “social” dances, although the special occasions for their presentation, such as the monarch's birthday celebration, and their complex steps and rhythms indicate that they were probably performed for the enjoyment of others by high-level amateurs and professional dancers. The latest one, by L'Abbé (c.1725), is a theatrical solo for a male to the same music as the 1713 Isaac duet, *The Pastoral*.

These particular hornpipe dances use primarily the composed steps of the French ballet tradition. However, the actual step units of the dance are created by combining regular steps into a vocabulary unlike other dances of this type. Frequent use of hemiolas and other cross-rhythms also distinguishes the phrasing, and the impression is one of choreographic originality rather than definition of a specific dance type.

Here the 3/2 hornpipe rhythms are delightfully complicated by a typical hemiola pattern in the steps. For example:

As the ballet tradition grew in the British Isles, so too the traditional step dancing evolved, including the hornpipe versions. Scottish Highland dancing extended the shuffles and beats of the feet to include ballet-influenced kicks, rockings, sheddings, shakes, balances, and *bourées*. Likewise, theatrical dance featured hornpipes with increasing popularity, the dancers embellishing the close stepping of the traditional form with technical and character contributions.

While any step dance, whatever its music, was often called a hornpipe, English playbills commonly distinguished the hornpipe as to the performer or character. “A Hornpipe by Tom Jones” was a specialty entertainment in the 1720s, and those plays with rural or Scottish themes often included hornpipes danced by both men and women.

Sailors' dances were familiar among other character or comic dances, but they were not associated with the hornpipe until after 1740. The dancer Yates, who frequently performed hornpipes, was suddenly billed at Drury Lane in May 1740 to perform “A Hornpipe in the Character of a Jacky Tar.”

Nancy Dawson had a phenomenal success in John Rich's production of *The Beggar's Opera* in 1759 with a hornpipe entitled “By Desire,” in act 3. This dance was unrelated to a sailor's character. The tune was really a jig, originally the Scottish “Who'll Come intae Ma Wee Ring,” now known as “Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush.”

When David Garrick at Drury Lane enticed Dawson to move from Rich's Covent Garden Theatre in 1760, a special counter-attraction was presented by Rich. Dawson was replaced by one Mrs. Vernon, who danced to “New Hornpipe” composed by Thomas Arne. This hornpipe predates Arne's 1767 compositions, and was perhaps the first of the new generation of common-time hornpipes.

In *A Treatise on the Art of Dancing*, Giovanni Gallini reflects on the English hornpipe dances:

They are no where so well executed. The music is extremely well adapted and the steps in general are very pleasing. Some foreign comic dancers, on coming here, apply themselves with great attention to the true study of the hornpipe, and by constant practice acquire the ability of performing it with great success in foreign countries, where it always meets with the highest applause, when masterly executed. (Gallini, 1762)

### **1760–1900s**

As the Royal Navy restored British glory during the mid-eighteenth century, the national security was seen to rest upon its ships, the “hearts of oak,” and its sailors, “jolly tars.” While hornpipes with no allusion to sailors are regularly billed, the association with the archetypal sailor Jacky Tar is clear by 1760. An interesting playbill from Drury Lane in May 1760 announced a “Hornpipe by a Sailor from *The Royal Sovereign*” (a ship of the royal fleet).

Although there is little reference to the hornpipe in the naval journals of the eighteenth century, the diary of a young Scottish woman traveling to the West Indies in 1774 tells us that “the sailors dance hornpipes and jigs from morning to night.” The London dancing master G. Yates comments in 1829 (*The Ball*) on the perfection to which many English seamen can dance the hornpipe. Schoolboys destined for naval careers generally made a point of learning it, and it was included in nineteenth-century naval training.

John Durang, considered the first American dancer, was identified with the stage version of the “Sailor’s Hornpipe” from his first appearance in the pantomimic dance about Jacky Tar ashore, *The Wapping Landlady*, in 1790. As early as 1780, at age twelve, Durang had learned “the correct style of dancing a hornpipe in the French stile” from the visiting French dancer Fousel, and made it his specialty. Hoffmaster, a prominent German musician in New York City, composed the music for “Durang’s Hornpipe” in 1785. Durang’s son Charles published what is considered to be an outline of the dance in his 1855 book, *The Ballroom Bijou*.

Each of the twenty-two steps takes one strain of the tune and the dance is at least partly decipherable by both traditional step dancers and theatrical tap dancers. The absence of nautical motifs, particularly for the upper body and arms, suggests that mimetic actions of the sailor’s occupation, such as “Climbing the rigging” and “Land ahoy!” were introduced in varying degrees by different dancers throughout the nineteenth century.

Many new common-time hornpipe tunes were composed after 1760, most named after the dancers famous on English and American stages—Fisher, Aldridge, Miss Baker, Durang. The associated tunes are not traditional hornpipes but a theatrical development, just as the dances themselves were. The dance maintained its strong “stepping” influence, but the character became increasingly associated with the sailor until the “Sailor’s Hornpipe,” with its music taken from the “College Hornpipe” tune, became synonymous with the term *hornpipe* in the nineteenth century. The Jacky Tar hornpipe was the favorite character dance for boys at the Glasgow balls of 1864 and is still studied today in Scottish Highland dance schools to cultivate nimble foot movements and rapid changes of balance.

This mimetic character dance is far removed from the traditional hornpipe and from what was probably cultivated as the original step dance of real sailors. Hornpipe stepping continued to be essential to the country dancing master’s curriculum, however, well into the nineteenth century.

In 1752, John McGill, the celebrated fiddler and southwest Scottish dancing master, wrote instructions for dancing hornpipes, jigs, and country dances. He indicated that the hornpipe contained sixteen steps. Hornpipes were danced as solos and in rows in northwest England’s Westmoreland area. The dancing master taught a special step to each pupil, who regarded this as special property to be exhibited during the dance at the country assembly. There, all the dancers advanced down the room side by side in a row.

The solo stepping and the country dances coexisted in much the same way that the earlier solo and round forms once had. Welsh, Scottish, and English sources of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries refer to hornpipes as part of the dancing at weddings, wakes, rural assemblies, and public balls. While the style of dancing was still associated with the vulgar, and considered taboo among the more formal

social dance customs, the *Second Hardy Tune Book* (1811) describes country dance hornpipes as being “fashionable in London.”

Hornpipe traditions continued to be cultivated among Canadian and New England settlers. Charles Durang (in his *Terpsichore*, 1847) includes among the fashionable Boston country dances the “Durang Hornpipe,” to the same music as his father's celebrated solo.

The solo McGill hornpipe of 1752, John Durang's dance, and the dances cultivated in the fashionable country dance classes, can be related to both the high dance of Scotland and the stage hornpipe. But the native nineteenth-century hornpipe of the English countryside had more in common with the pure step dance that developed and remained in Ireland. At feasts, wakes, and on Saturday nights in village alehouses, men and women took turns stepping to the music of country fiddlers. Stepping shoes or light clogs were worn, and the favorite surface was the top of a large table, often soaped in Ireland. The tunes were identifiable from the audible pattern of the dancer's stepping—the mark of a good dancer—and nimble clatter was essential.

An account from nineteenth-century Nottinghamshire relates how women “would draw up their skirts short, and pull the back of the skirt forward between their legs, to show their feet and ankles.” An account from the Worksop area relates how

sometimes there would be a couple of dancers on the table. When one had gone through an arranged number of steps, he stopped, the other taking his place; and this was done so deftly that there was no break in the music whilst the change was made. The old fiddlers were hard to tire, and one “crowdy” with intervals “to wet his whistle,” could keep it up for hours.

The Lancashire clog dance is probably the early Lancashire hornpipe, and the step and clog dance tradition in eastern North America evolved from this village style. The Irish hornpipe, while not indigenous, carries on this pure step-dance technique. In Ireland the hornpipe is distinguished from the jig by its duple time, and from the reel by the number of accents to the bar (the reel having one and the hornpipe two). A “single” is in 2/4 time, a ladies dance employing light shuffles and batters in an easy and graceful style. The “double” is in 4/4 time, and as a male dance exploits more difficult trebling steps with much drumming and grinding. The body and arms are kept still, and this trial of skill has been developed to competitive championship standards.

See also **Clogging**; **Jig**; and **Step Dancing**.

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