

English Country Dance

Introduction –English Country Dance

English Country Dance (ECD), as practiced in the SCA, is based on the first edition of the English Country Dancing Master published in 1651 by John Playford. English Country Dances appear, or at least dances of the same name, as early as the reign of Henry VIII (1509-1547) dances such as Half Hannikin and Sellenger's Round in recognizable forms.¹

Sometimes the dances are 'called'. Calling a dance means that someone, perhaps a teacher will call out the steps, like right double forward. Calling a dance is for the convenience of the dancers, new and experienced. As you learn the dance, you will find that the music actually tells you what to do and does the calling.

The Basics

Steps

Single

One step, example right foot forward followed by left foot to meet the right. This can be done forward, backward, to the left, to the right, with the left leading, with the right leading, or even in a slide.

Double

Two steps, example right foot forward, left foot past it, right foot past the left, left brought together with the right. This can be done forward, backward, to the left, to the right, with the left leading, with the right leading.

Set

A special case of a single. One turns to face their partner. Both partners step to the left/right. Meaning they will go in opposite directions.

Turn

Each dancer turns around in place. This can be done over the left or right shoulders. The dancers usually have time to use a DOUBLE to turn in place. The turn will continue the energy and direction the dancer is moving. Example if you set left, then set right, you will continue and turn around your right shoulder.

¹ Elizabethan Country Dances by John F. Millar, ISBN 0-934943-001, p. 2.

Siding

While facing your partner, you will do a small double so that your left/right shoulders come near to touching. Siding is done both left and right.

Arming

While facing your partner, you will cup your partners elbow in your hand, as your partner cups your (right to right or left to left) and proceed to go around in a circle back to your starting position. Arming is done both left and right.

More steps exist, but they are advanced.

Formations

Lines

English Country dances can be done by two couples, three couples, four couples, or all who will. The line formation has two flavors, proper and improper. Proper means Lords on the left and Ladies on right (note that I say ladies on the right). Improper is Lord 1 on left, Lady 1 is on the right, Lady 2 on the left and Lord 2 on the right, etc...

Circle

Very easy, as many couples as will, will form a circle going lord lady lord lady ... Ladies on the right.

Formula

One of the great things about ECD is that they are basically formulaic. The norm is a bit of stepping, a chorus, Siding, a chorus, then arming and a chorus. The chorus' can become complex.

Resources

Playford's English Country Dancing Master published in 1651. There are many reproductions, even available on the web

http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/playford_1651/

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