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THE AMERICAN BIG SET

BY DOUGLAS KENNEDY

DURING my visit to the Long Pond Summer School in August this year I came in contact with the Big Set Dance. This is a recent development of the Square Dance and has no doubt been influenced by the Play Party Game, an adult form of our traditional singing-game now much in vogue, especially in the recreational centres in the Southern States. The Big Set is not to be confused with its parallel of the modern ball-room, the Big Apple, although both seem to represent a general hunger for some satisfactory form of community dance.

Both the Big Apple and the Big Set are essentially round dances for-as-many-as-will but the Big Apple is not based on any tradition and simply consists of a ring of dancers who hold hands while they execute some ball-room dance steps. This large ring (the Big Apple) breaks up into couples who dance independently for a time before they unite again in the general ring. Occasionally some specially talented couple will take the centre of floor and act as "shiners." After that all the dancers try and emulate the movements of the shiners. There are no figures or patterns such as are found in traditional dancing.

The Big Set, on the other hand, is founded entirely on traditional dancing and might be considered an enlarged Square Dance with an indefinite number of couples. It is very simple, and its simplicity and the ease with which dancers can be absorbed into the general set has given it its present popularity. So long as there is a leader who knows the figures and can call them with sufficient clarity, no one need think, but the dancers should have had some previous experience of square or set dancing.

The Big Set as a rule is started in an open ring, the couples standing in the usual position with the women on the right hand of the men. The ring having moved to to the left and back again, the dancers release hands and linking in couples promenade round the room in exactly the same way as in the Kentucky Running Set. At a call from the leader the ring is formed again and the caller then leads a series of movements just as they come into his head. The dance is walked throughout with a great deal of lilt in the step.

The only other step which is used with any frequency is the 'pivot' step. The weight of the dancer rests mainly on the right foot, the left foot being used just to allow a temporary change of weight, while the right foot is moved to its next position. This pivot step is used for spinning and also for going side-ways in a ring.

The figures which are given underneath are those used at Long Pond when the Big Set was led by Mr. Richard Chase of Virginia, with whose permission they are reproduced.

SHOO FLY SWING (Progressive Round). *From North Carolina.*

1st man turns partner with right hand. 1st woman turns 2nd man left hand, then partner right hand, and so on until 1st woman has turned each man in the set. The 2nd couple begin as soon as the 1st couple are clear of the 3rd couple.

SHUCK THE CORN. *From North Carolina.*

As in double-under in a Long-Sword dance with a moving arch.

BREAK THE CHICKEN'S NECK. *From North Carolina.*

Starting as in double-under, but leading dancers breaking hands and casting back leading the two ends of the chain separately.

THE MILL WHEEL. *From North Carolina.*

Men in the centre clockwise with right hands on right shoulders or elbows. Woman stand still. Men reverse direction counter-clockwise in left hand wheel. Pick up partner and promenade straight home. Partners change using the right hand ("gents step out and ladies step in"). Women go counter-clockwise with left hands up. Men outside go clockwise. Dancers reverse direction and men pick up partners in left hand and swing them counter-clockwise to promenade.

THE BASKETS. *From North Carolina.*

Ladies to the centre make a ring and circle right while the men circle left. Reverse direction. Men duck under to the centre and circle left (with hands) while the women circle right on outside (without hands). Reverse direction and swing partner, swing contrary, and promenade.

Men to the centre and circle left while women go right. Reverse direction and the women duck under, etc.

In the Big Basket the dancers in the centre keep hands while their partners duck under. These dancers also take hands in the centre and lift arms over partners' heads to make one close circle with arms behind backs. All move round with pivot step, swing partners, swing contraries and promenade home.

LONDON BRIDGE. *From North Carolina.*

During the promenade the leading couple make an arch and retrace steps passing outside the other couples, who in turn make arches and follow the leading couple. On reaching the end of the column, the leading couple pass under the arches and lead on round into the promenade again.

FOUR-HANDED FIGURES (Progressive Round). *From Virginia.*

LADIES DO SI. Hands four, clockwise, right hands to contraries. Women cross over to make ring, men facing in and women facing out. Hands four clockwise. Keeping contraries with right hand, men cross over to make a ring with men facing out women facing in. Hands four clockwise. Turn contraries with right hand, turn partners with left hand and visiting couples pass on to next couple.

THE FOUR LEAVED CLOVER. Hands four clockwise. First couple duck under arch and keeping hands turn outwards to form four leaved clover. Dance round clockwise with pivot step. Turn contrary and turn partner.