

JIGS

some thoughts

Introduction

Why dance jigs?

Sources of jig material.

Music / musician(s).

Practising.

Why dance jigs?

They are very useful to practise and consolidate the figures of a tradition. Because you are on your own, you do not have the rest of the side to cover you for a less than a perfect dance. Also, the practice improves the overall presentation of the side's dancing.

To show off - we are all exhibitionists to some extent or we would not be dancing.

Just occasionally when in a group but, more commonly when dancing a jig, you are "lifted" (away with the fairies; on another planet) - a truly spiritual experience.

Sources of jig material

Instructionals - especially the Morris Ring.

The Black Book contains descriptions of a vast range of traditions, the figures of the dances, jigs and music.

Other dancers at feasts, dance outs etc..

Audio tapes, Audio and Audio visual CDs

YouTube, but **Be Aware**, it can be a very good source of how not to dance a jig.

If you are adventurous, you can make up your own jig, or adapt an existing jig or stick as closely as possible to a version.

It is your jig, you are on your own.

There is no right or wrong in a jig, only your performance and what you put into it. Your pride will make sure that you improve as far as you are capable.

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Practising

Tapes (ask if your side has a collection of audio tapes). CDs (Audio / Audio - Visual). These are available from the Morris Shop.

While dancing at home to get a feel for a jig is very useful, you will find that you dance to the sound and 'feel' of the music of the source. However when you dance with a live muso you will find that they do not sound or 'feel' the same as your tape or CD. So practising with live music is essential.

Music / musician(s)

The muso for you

We all dance slightly differently, and all musos play slightly differently so, whenever possible, try to dance with the muso who suites your style best. This also means that all musos get a chance to play either together or solo.

Occasionally you will be asked, or you will fancy dancing a jig but there is no muso you have danced with to be found. So ask around until you find one who can play the tune or knows a tune to which you can dance. Find a quiet place away from everyone and go through the dance / music until both of you are reasonably happy.

Communication(s)

This is a crucial aspect of any form of the dance (team or jig) but especially the jig. Having practised with your muso until both of you are 'happy' with the flow and your interpretation of the jig, you MUST be able to discreetly signal to him of any changes which you feel that YOU want; speed up if you are feeling a bit more bouncy or slow it down a bit. However it is up to the muso to 'feel' the rhythm of the dancer and adjust accordingly.

When it all goes wrong

As it will at some time ... and probably more than once. You make a splendid entrance, the other dancers are waiting with baited breath, the audience are straining to watch you, and you go completely blank. Your muso will appreciate what has happened and, if necessary, repeat the intro or something to jog your memory.

If you really cannot remember / think, announce to everyone that you are suffering from "stage fright" and make a dignified exit. Or, you go blank part way through the routine, an option is just to keep moving until it comes back. Your muso will keep playing (and praying) until you are back on course, or, if there is no return, then signal the muso that you wish to end the jig in an orderly fashion, and do so.

All the dancers will understand because we have all been there.

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Background

Preparation(s) prior to getting on, Getting on.

Finishing the jig & Getting off.

A Jig is a bit like a sandwich, getting on and getting off are the slices of bread and the jig is the filling.

The filling may be fine, but, if the bread is not as good as it could be then the whole sandwich is not as good as it could be.

Preparation(s) prior to getting on

If you fancy dancing a jig, firstly talk to the leader (Squire / Foreman etc of your side), or organiser of the event, tell them so that they can fit you in at a convenient time. Talk to your muso so that he is aware that you want to dance, what and when.

Agree with your muso where he will stand and you will dance.

When dancing out with other sides it is preferable to have two jigs ready in case someone else dances your preferred jig before you.

Check your kit

Pull up your socks (no wrinkles).

Check your bell pads are secure (we all have had a loose set of bells around our ankle). If this happens, make light of it - you could try shaking your foot to dislodge the bell pad and announcing that you have made up a new dance. If this fails, indicate to your muso to stop playing (if he has not already done so because he cannot play for laughing), remove the bell pad and place it beside your hat. DO NOT throw it away. Ask your muso either to start again from the beginning, or from a suitable point before the incident. In this way your confidence will be restored.

Check your hat is in good condition.

Make sure that your shoes, hankies and tabard / baldrics are clean, if not, SWAP them.

Leave your tankard behind.

Getting On

Hat on, walk out, (do not laugh / joke), head up, be proud, arrogant even - you are the best thing since sliced bread. Keep a calm, composed exterior, even if your stomach is tying itself in a knot.

When you reach your chosen spot, face your muso - the distance between you both will depend upon your dance. If the dance will be approximately on the spot or moving

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backwards, you can stand closer than if you will be performing a circular dance (in which case ensure that you have enough room to pass in front of your muso).

Take off your hat, place it on the ground in front of you and take two steps back. This ensures that you do not accidentally kick it into the crowd if you get a bit carried away.

Announce to everyone what you are going to do i.e. "A Jig in the style of ... entitled ..."

After the intro speech, take a few moments to prepare yourself. (Style Point, during this time rest your hands on your paunch.)

When YOU are ready, a polite nod and smile (or other discrete signal) to your muso will indicate that you are ready, the music will start, and you are away.

Ending the Jig & Getting off

How you finish the dance is entirely up to you.

One way to finish a jig is the hands in the balance position and one foot in front either slightly off the ground or with the heel resting on the ground (the heel helps with balance).

However you finish your jig, hold your pose for a few moments to bathe in the deafening applause of the audience.

Acknowledge your muso. How you acknowledge your muso is entirely up to you, from a polite bow of the head to a full flamboyant wave of you hankie, but always smile. Walk to your muso head up, proud, (even if it did not go quite according to plan) shake his hand and thank him.

Then quietly blend back into the set / crowd etc.

Etiquette

Do not make disparaging or critical remarks (so that others can hear), no matter how bad you think the dancing is.

Heckling, such as Higher, Faster or Wider etc is acceptable - encouraged even.

Do not perform his jig or another jig in view of the man dancing, other dancers or the audience.

Do not join in with the dancer, unless asked to / agreed to prior to the jig starting.

Try not to dance the same jig as someone else has already done, except when he is not around (on a tour), however, a jig with the same name, but, from a different tradition can be quite interesting.

Musos - please do not start playing until the dancer is ready and signals to you that he is ready to start.