

MYLECHARANES MARCH

or Cutting off the Fiddler's Head

This dance was usually performed at New Year, when the Laare Vane or White Mare was carried, and after their ceremonial killing, the fiddler was raised up, blindfolded, and led to where the Laare Vane was seated. There he knelt down with his head in her lap and was asked questions by the company, his answers being supposed to be oracular. At the New Year festivities the questions generally related to courtships and marriages, but when the ritual was carried out at Boat Suppers, as sometimes happened, they more often had to do with prospects for the next season, crops, weather, etc.

Each man carries two sticks, fairly stout and about two feet long. Involved in the dance is the sand step. This step is danced in three quick kicks round and outward, the sole of the foot is just touching the ground all the time, and across behind the other foot, with a simultaneous transfer of weight. During the kicking movement the other foot takes the weight and hops in time with the kicks, which are done by R and L feet alternately, with a change of weight on each cross. It is a very difficult step to dance smoothly, and the criterion of skill with the traditional performers was to keep the sand upon which it was danced always moving under the kicking foot, but never flung off the spring board. Less skilled performers danced it with two kicks to each cross instead of three.

It is important to have the music for this dance played by a fiddler as he enters the dance in the last figure and is ceremoniously 'killed'.

$\text{♩} = 132$

Music	Movements
(A music)	<i>Introduction or lead in.</i>
Bars 1-16	All dance round in a circle clockwise. Starting right, kick foot slightly forward tipping ground on forward and backward motion; then stamp, transfer the weight and repeat L. Simultaneously all swing sticks and strike them together above heads and behind on 1st and 2nd beat of each bar. They finish in two lines facing.
	(Strikers) 5 3 1 ◆ ◆ ◆ head of set ◆ ◆ ◆
	(Receivers) 6 4 2 Sticks crossing opposites and pointing downward.
A1 Bars 1-8	<i>The Links</i> Each side does a hey for 3 in skipping step. Nos. 1 and 2 turn outwards. Each man strikes his sticks together, above his head, half way (bar 4) and at the end (bar 8).
9-16	Repeat as above except on the last bar strike own sticks above head then behind as in introduction.
B1 Bars 1-12	Holding the sticks at the centre each man strikes his L stick with the R on a downward stroke (beat 2) then again with the R on an upward stroke (beat 3).

Then with the L stick strike the R on an upward stroke (beat 2) and a downward stroke (beat 3). This is all done simultaneously with the sand step, which is danced continuously through the whole music. The movements take quite some practice as the first scrape of the sand step is the first beat, then the second and 3rd scrapes are accompanied with the striking of the sticks.

- A2 Bars 1-16 *Foltyn or Cum dty heshaght* A circular hey tapping R and L sticks alternately as though 'handing', danced in skipping step. Top couple face each other, middle couple face bottom couple. Twice around finish in two lines back to back.
- B2 Bars 1-4 *Jannoo Jeel* 4 sand steps back to back passing left shoulders to face each other.
 5-8 Strikers now on R of set strikes opposite sticks upward (1st beat) and downward (2nd beat) then each tapping his own behind his back (3rd beat). This is done four times.
 9-12 All dance sand step to return to positions, back to back passing L shoulder. On last bar each strike own sticks high and then behind.
- A3 Bars 1-8 *Roie as Ratchan* Both lines cast out and down, strikers (1, 3 & 5) tapping opposites' inside sticks on 1st beat of bars 1, 2 and 3 respectively and again as they come back up the centre on the 1st beat of bars 5, 6 and 7 respectively.
 9-16 Repeat as Bars 1-8 ending in two lines face to face, each dancer holding the ends of his opposites' sticks as well as his own at shoulder level.
- B3 Bars 1-4 All dance 4 sand steps on the spot while the fiddler runs up and down again under the arches.
 5-12 Top couple break arch, cross by each other and skip right around the set tapping their sticks above their heads (1st beat) and behind them (2nd beat). The remaining four keep hold of their opposites' sticks and pass under each other's arches (middle under first), then pass under their own arches, once towards each other and then back, break and form into a single line.
- A4 Bars 1-16 *Test and Close In* No. 1 faces down the line and all others face up. All dance in skipping step up and down passing R and L shoulders and tapping R and L alternately (similar to 'handing'). When No. 1 reaches the top of the line again he skips around the fiddler and makes a circle with the other men as they come up the line enclosing the fiddler. Each man crossing hands and grasping his neighbour's sticks as well as his own.
- B4 Bars 1-12 *Cutting off the fiddler's head* Keeping this hold on the sticks the dancers change to the sand step and gradually draw their hands together making the circle smaller and smaller while dancing round clockwise. When the circle hems in the fiddler so closely that he can no longer play, each man releases his neighbour's sticks and draws his own out and upward, completely hiding and downing the fiddler by clashing all the sticks together above him with a wild shout - i.e. 'Cutting off his head'.