

On Common Ground 3: John Playford and the English Dancing Master, 1651

DHDS March 2001

Text copyright © Nicolas Broadbridge and DHDS 2001

PLAYING FOR PLAYFORD TODAY

A playing workshop with Aidan and Nicolas Broadbridge

The object of this workshop is to share with you the way we feel these tunes from three centuries ago can be played for country dancers today in an inspiring (for the dancers) way, yet still preserving their wonderful 17th/18th century feeling.

A few notes by way of explanation of the symbols used under the music:

Dm – D minor

Bb – play first inversion of the triad (Counter-bass for accordianists!)

dG7 – Play d bass followed by G7 chord (mostly, but not always, second inversion of the triad)

‘Up with Aily’ and ‘Drapers Gardens’ use an older convention for chord notation!

B2 – play B minor chord

A3 – play A7 chord

We have selected six tunes for dances which are currently reasonably well-known and danced. They all come from the Playfords’ editions of The Dancing Master and range from Parsons farewell in the 1st edition of 1651 to ‘Up with Aily’ and ‘Draper’s Gardens’ from the 12th edition published in 1706.

‘Parsons Farewell’

A very well known dance to a tune which is often not played to help dancers today. We shall talk about what the dancers are doing to the various bits of the tune, but in the mean time, try playing it at about 110 bpm, and try to get a bit of bounce into it!

Possibly start with a chord followed by a leading note (D-minim); play three times through and at the end pull it back with a great big rallentando in bar 7 of the B music and a lovely strong chord on the dotted minim in bar 8. The rallentando will help the dancers to regain their balance and slow down after a hectic couple of changes of a Hey followed by a half turn with partners.

‘King of Poland’

Known from the song in ‘The Beggar’s Opera’ “Man may escape from rope and gun ...”, this delightful tune has a four bar A music repeated – OK – but a 6 bar B music, which we must help the dancers to feel is a complete entity, and not missing something!

Parsons Farewell

Playford 1st edition 1651

The musical notation for 'Parsons Farewell' is presented in two staves. The first staff is in 3/2 time and features a key signature of one flat (Bb). It begins with a repeat sign and contains two endings. The second staff is also in 3/2 time and features a key signature of one flat (Bb). The notation includes various chords and notes, with chord symbols written below the notes. The first staff has chords Dm, C, Bb, Bb, F, F, and Dm. The second staff has chords F, Dm, F, C, C, Dm, Bb, F, C, and Dm.

King of Poland

D-M 10th edition 1698

Play AABB ad lib

Play the A musics with a nice swing but fairly legato – give a good lift on the first note to get them going. Then in B1, the 1st couple have a short lead up (2 bars) and all four then do 3 changes of a Hey, which means we need to phrase it as 2 bars followed by a 4 bar phrase: however in B2 the reverse applies, as the 1st couple do a half figure up through the 2nd couple (4 bars) and finish with a quiet half turn (2 bars). If you *think* with the dancers, you will play the tune in a way that reminds them what to do.

Try starting this one with a couple of leading notes (G–A– played as dotted crotchets, to give the dancers a feel as to the speed at which you are going to play it). Finish with a rallentando in the last 2 bars to a nice placed chord on the last note.

‘Mr Isaac’s Maggott’

One of the really great tunes which needs big treatment. It also needs to be played so that at the beginning of the A music each time the 1st man is *lifted* into his turn with the 2nd woman; and at bar 5 of A music the 1st woman is also *lifted* into her turn with the 2nd man. With a longways dance it is always nice to try and offer a bit of variety in the dynamics and in the ‘tricks’ you may employ. One thing you can do here is start the B music very quiet as they fall back for 2 bars, then start a dramatic crescendo in bar 3 so that at the beginning of

Mr Isaac’s Maggott

Playford 9th edition 1695

Play A B ad lib

bar 5 you and they hit the hey with a great driving sound; *but* be warned – only do this a couple of times in the course of the 7 or so turns the MC lets the dance run – there is nothing worse than wearing out by over-use an exciting musical device! Finish each turn with a *very* slight ritardando after the last 2 notes and then start the next A with a good strong note to get him off again.

Try starting this one by playing the last 2 bars of the B music as an introduction: if you are in a band, get one player to do this solo, which should tell the dancers “this is just the preparatory bit before it starts” – there’s nothing worse than the MC having to tell them “the band are going to play 2 bars intro first” – the musicians should tell the dancers that sort of thing musically: doesn’t always work, but it’s the ideal to aim at: finish with a nice big rallentando in the last bar to 2 big placed chords on the last 2 notes – G–C.

‘St. Martin’s Lane’

A tremendous tune by Henry Purcell used for an absolutely *splendid* triple minor dance. This needs to be played with lots of oomph and punch. Note the repeated quavers at the beginning of each strain – Henry Playford’s version in *The Dancing Master* has rising notes in each case, but the repeated ones are Purcell’s original version, and make it much more exciting (potentially – if you play it right!) The dance phrases are such that the A music helps the dancers if played in phrases of 2 bars – 4 bars – 2 bars. The B music starts with a quiet 2 bar phrase, then a great big long passage of 13 bars where 2 double figures are being danced without a break, then we need a quieter last 4 bars while everyone turns partners – and yes, the B music does consist of 19 bars!

We start this tune in a couple of different ways, depending on how the muse takes us. Try a strong chord, followed by the first 2 quavers played as a dotted crotchet and a quaver; but it needs to be done with strong emphasis to get the dancers going, so if you have an accordion or piano in the band, get them to play the two notes. Finish with a huge rallentando to a great crashing placed chord on the last note of the tune.

St. Martin’s Lane 1st Act tune from “The Virtuous Wife or Good Luck at Last” Henry Purcell 1694

♩ = 109

Up with Aily

Playford 12th edition 1703



‘Up with Aily’

This is the original tune for the dance, and can be very exciting for the dancers. We play it at 128 bpm and tell the dancers they need to use something between a fast springy walk and a running step such as used to be used in Running Set. You can generate a lot of excitement in this tune by varying the combinations of the instruments during the course of several turns. Try starting it on one instrument, adding another in the 2nd turn and so on.

Start this one with two leading notes (A–F# – played as dotted crochets): finish with a rallentando like a great sigh of relief in the last bar, then play a placed chord of D major after the last note of the tune.

‘Draper’s Gardens’

This is again the original tune for the dance. Sadly, the alternative tune published by Bernard Bentley seems to have caught on almost to the exclusion of this lovely and much superior tune. This alternative tune (‘The Margravine’s Waltz’) comes from a Preston collection published very nearly a hundred years later, when Country Dance was very different from the time at which Henry Playford was publishing.

This tune needs to be played with a lovely flowing feel and a nice degree of ‘lean’ on the first note in each bar – you really have to feel this one to get it right.

This one could well start with an intro of either the last 2 or the last 4 bars of the B music: finish it with a rallentando starting on the last beat of bar 7 of the B music, and give a nice placed chord on the last note of bar 8.

Draper’s Gardens

Playford 13th edition 1706

