

The Isle of Skye Highland Games Beyond Highland Dancing

By RAE MACCOLL

One of the most spectacular and popular events at any Highland Games is the Highland Dancing competition. Beautifully dressed, trim bodies execute intricate and exciting movements to the stirring music of the bagpipes. Visitors and locals alike are entertained and impressed by this traditional form of Scottish dance which brings competitors from all over the world, showing the tremendous influence Scottish culture has today.

In its original form, Highland Dancing was executed by men, arms upstretched to represent the antlers of a stag and displaying tremendous strength. The oldest dances were developed from dances of victory after battle, with the Sword Dance being the most evident example. There are many interpretations of the roots of this dance, but the most commonly believed is that of a victory dance over two bloody swords, one belonging to the victor, the other to the defeated. Quite a difference from the neat little girls stepping lightly over the swords today.



Highland dancing at the Skye Games

However, although the most common representation of dance in

Scotland, Highland dancing is only one part of a more exciting picture. At the same time as fighting men were performing their dances of victory, various forms of dance existed throughout the country within the communities. Many of these dance styles exist today, while research has proved an even great wealth of styles not commonly seen.

People always danced in response to music of all kinds: pipes, fiddle and song; and most areas of Scotland had their own particular styles or steps which reflected their local culture and lifestyle. Many have survived, though some disappeared at the time of forced emigration to North America and others have been obscured by centuries of depression and the suppression of cultures.



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Happily, today these many forms of Scottish dance are beginning to re-appear as people are encouraged to research their own tradition and

take pride in what they find. The 'Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust' has recently been formed with the aim of fostering all of Scotland's traditions of dance, wherever and however they are enjoyed.

So when you hear of Scottish dancing, think beyond the Highland dancer and look for Step Dancing, Hebridean Dancing, Ceilidh Dancing, etc... They are all valid and exciting forms of Scottish traditional dance and show the tremendous wealth of cultures within the large Scottish picture. We have one of the richest diversities of dance traditions to be found anywhere. Explore.