

**serTA 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Weekend**

**Report on the Talk: “A dancer’s look into The Frequent Dance Lists”**

21<sup>st</sup> March 2026 - Bournemouth

by Campbell Tyler and Raquel Fernández

The talk was divided into two main parts. The first part featured a recorded contribution by Campbell Tyler, who introduced the background of the Frequent Dance Lists, explaining how they originated and the process involved in compiling them. The second part was delivered by Raquel Fernández, who presented her article “*A dancer’s look into the Frequent Dance Lists*,” published in the RSCDS International Branch in February 2026.

In his video, Campbell Tyler explained that he began Scottish country dancing in 2003 and soon became involved in teaching and compiling the lists. As a statistician by training, he has always been interested in analysing data, and this curiosity led him to explore the large number of Scottish country dances and to question which ones were most popular. This initial curiosity led to further inquiries and ultimately to the systematic collection of dance programmes.

To develop the lists, Campbell first collaborated with someone locally in Cape Town to create a database. He then reached out to the wider Scottish country dancing community through the Strathspey mailing list, which allowed him to gather programmes from different parts of the world. These programmes are continuously entered into the database and updated over time. He noted that the COVID-19 pandemic influenced this process, with more internet searching involved.

One of the main challenges in maintaining the lists is the significant amount of time required. Campbell also addressed why he does not rely on the Strathspey Server database, explaining that it is not directly compatible with his system and does not contain all the information he needs for his analysis.

In terms of purpose, he hopes that teachers will use the lists to identify popular dances, understand trends in newly devised dances, and recognise those that may be falling out of use. For dancers, the lists can be useful for becoming familiar with commonly programmed dances and supporting a core of dances to remember. Campbell also expressed his enjoyment in responding to specific requests and exploring questions beyond the standard lists. He highlighted the value of collaboration and noted that additional contributors would bring new perspectives and regional insights. For him, one of the most rewarding aspects of the project is connecting with people, learning about their experiences, and discussing their events.

You can see Campbell’s full video intervention in the following link:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcKOTzJwJDQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcKOTzJwJDQ)

In the second part of the talk, Raquel Fernández presented an analysis of Scottish country dance programmes based on Campbell Tyler's Frequent Dance Lists. The database covers the period from 2008 to 2025 and currently includes 4,000 programmes from 620 organisers worldwide, as well as more than 3,600 dances. The database has been carefully structured using statistical methods to ensure consistency and reliability in analysing trends across different countries.

One of the observations commented is the diversity of dance programmes. Although all programmes consist of lists of dances, they vary significantly in structure, length, and presentation. Programmes can include between 9 and 20 dances, not always balanced in the interval, with varying numbers of breaks and optional extras. Some are simple and minimalistic, while others provide detailed information such as dance type, deviser, source, and graded values of the dances. Increasingly, digital tools such as QR codes and web links are also being incorporated.

The analysis of the list of the 500 most frequent dances reveals that a relatively small group of dances dominates the repertoire: the top 25 dances account for approximately 20% of all occurrences and show remarkable stability over time. Many dances are also associated with specific positions within programmes. For example, dances such as *Mairi's Wedding*, *The Deil amang the Tailors*, and *The Reel of the Royal Scots* are commonly used as final dances, while *Hooper's Jig*, *Maxwell's Rant*, and *Joie de Vivre* are often chosen as opening dances. Other dances, such as *Pelorus Jack* and *Catch the Wind*, display greater flexibility and appear in different positions.

The article also highlights changes over time. Certain dances, including *EH3 7AF*, *New Year Jig*, and *Good Hearted Glasgow*, have emerged as new positional favourites, while others such as *Trip to Timber Ridge* are increasingly used as final dances. In addition, some strathspeys, such as *City of Belfast* and *Water of Leith*, have become more prominent in recent years.

Beyond the most popular dances, there is considerable variability in the middle range of the repertoire. Dances ranked between positions 50 and 300 show significant fluctuations, sometimes moving up to 50 positions over time. This suggests that this part is particularly influenced by short-term trends, teaching styles, and regional preferences. Furthermore, around 42% of dances appear only once in the programmes, indicating a high degree of context-specific programming within the dance community.

Regional analysis reveals both similarities and differences across countries. While there is a strong shared core of popular dances across regions such as Scotland, the UK, the USA, Australia, Europe, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa, some dances show clear regional preferences. This demonstrates a balance between global consistency and local diversity in Scottish country dancing.

The *Montgomeries' Rant* emerges as the most frequently performed dance across regions, followed by *Pelorus Jack*, *The Deil amang the Tailors*, and *Catch the Wind*. Further comparative analysis reveals regional preferences, with certain dances favoured in specific areas while others remain relatively underrepresented elsewhere:

Region	Enjoyed	“Neglected”
Scotland	<i>Hooper’s Jig</i> <i>Highland Rambler</i>	<i>Flowers of Edinburgh</i> <i>Belle of Bon Accord</i>
Rest of UK	<i>Dream Catcher</i> <i>Belle of Bon Accord</i>	<i>Flowers of Edinburgh</i> <i>Best Set in the Hall</i>
USA	<i>Mrs Stewart’s Jig</i> <i>Wild Geese</i>	<i>Dream Catcher</i> <i>Belle of Bon Accord</i>
Australia	<i>EH3 7AF</i> <i>The Gentleman</i>	<i>Dream Catcher</i> <i>Highland Rambler</i>
Europe	<i>Sugar Candie</i> <i>The Gentleman</i>	<i>Jubilee Jig</i> <i>Belle of Bon Accord</i>
Canada	<i>Jubilee Jig</i> <i>Flowers of Edinburgh</i>	<i>The Gentleman</i> <i>Belle of Bon Accord</i>
New Zealand	<i>City of Belfast</i> <i>Best set in the Hall</i>	<i>Highland Rambler</i> <i>Belle of Bon Accord</i>
South Africa	<i>Best Set in the Hall</i> <i>Shiftin’ Bobbins</i>	<i>Maxwell’s Rant</i> <i>Jubilee Jig</i>

Finally, in the last part, she examines the presence of traditional dances in the 500 most frequent dance lists. By comparing the frequent dances with the chronology of dances (published in: [www.rscds-ib.org/index.php?page=16](http://www.rscds-ib.org/index.php?page=16)), it is estimated that approximately 11–15% of these dances have traditional origins. Although this percentage may seem low, it is still significant given the large number of newly devised dances available today.

In conclusion, the talk highlighted the value of Campbell Tyler’s Frequent Dance Lists as a powerful tool for understanding trends, and diversity in Scottish country dancing.

A debate followed, indicating the growing preference for three couple strathspey dances, as a big part of the new most frequent are of this type: *City of Belfast*, *Triple Happiness* and *Orchards of Co. Armagh*.

It was also notable that a large number of dances appeared only once, with the suggestion that this trend has increased over time.

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The frequent dance lists are kindly published in the International Branch website: <https://www.rscds-ib.org/index.php?page=13>