

Irish Dancing

Irish Dances follow a simple two-part structure. The A part is known as the tune and the B part is the turn. Each section is usually 8 bars long and are often played twice. The B section usually has more notes and has a higher range than the A section. Often one dance runs into another which is known as a set. Types of Irish dances include Reels, Jigs, which can be single, double or slip jigs, Hornpipes, Slides and Polkas.

The reel is the most common type of Irish dance tune. It was brought to Ireland from Scotland at the end of the 18th century. A reel is a lively dance tune in 4/4 or sometimes 2/2 time and consists mainly of quavers with an accent on the first and third beats of the bar. Most reels are in binary form (AABB) and the dancers wear soft shoes. Examples of reels include “Bonnie Kate” and “Cooley’s Reel”.

Jigs are divided into single jigs, double jigs and slip jigs. The Jig has been in Ireland since the 17th century and many are native in origin but some may have come from Italy. Like reels, jigs have 32 bars in binary, AABB, form. Dancers wear soft shoes for jigs. Single jigs are either 6/8 or 12/8 time and have a crotchet-quaver rhythm. Examples of single jigs are “Off She Goes” and “Smash The Windows”. Double jigs are lively in 6/8 time consisting mainly of quavers grouped in threes. Double jigs include “I buried my wife and danced on her grave” and “The Tenpenny Bit”. Slip jigs are in 9/8 time and the 8 bar sections are not repeated, unlike with other jigs. Slip jigs are danced with soft shoes and usually by women. There are three main beats per bar in groups of three quavers. Sometimes there is a crotchet quaver rhythm. “Hardiman the Fiddler”, “Drops of Brandy” and “The Fox Hunter’s jig” are examples of slip jigs.

The hornpipe dates back to the end of the 18th century and may have come from England. It is a slow dance in 4/4 time. They begin with an upbeat and have a dotted rhythm and some triplets. The first and third beats are accented. The dancers wear hard shoes and perform intricate steps as it was first adopted as a show piece. Examples of hornpipes include “Rights of Man” and “The Harvest Home”.