

Longways for as many as will in Playford's First Edition

by Cécile LAYE

Present-day dancers are fond of « *longways for as many as will* » because they expect a dance ranging from quite simple to very complex. Usually built on two repeated phrases, A and B, longways start with two lines facing each other and allow each couple to come in contact with all the others.

The number of couples varies according to how large a hall you get and how keen your dancers are. In a large enough place it is usual to find fifteen to twenty couples, or even more, dancing together. Early in the 19th century, dancing master Wilson wrote of sixty couples dancing together. That time it really was a “longways for as many as will”.

Not so, however, in the first edition of Playford's “*Dancing Master*”. Thirty nine dances are listed as « *longways for as many as will* » while thirty four show diagrams for 8 dancers, making it difficult to distinguish them from the sixteen « *longways for eight* » included by Playford. Four dances are meant for six couples: « *Once I loved a Maiden faire* », « *Lavena* », « *The Country Coll* » and « *The Fryar and the Nun* ». Only one, « *Step Stately* », called a « *Long Dance* », is meant for 3, 5, 7 or 9 couples.

Besides, 1651 *longways for as many as will* are long, complicated dances. They include introductions with or without *sets and turns* in between, and/or segments with progressive or non-progressive figures. Our CD *Sugar and Spice* » includes some dances with those characteristics and the attending problems:

1. « *Saturday night, Saturday morn* » is built up with a first introduction and three non-progressive figures, followed by three progressive figures. If we played by the rules, the 2nd progressive figure shouldn't start until a couple has run the whole set down and up again with the first progressive figure and is back home: « *and so forward, the rest following in order* », which makes for numerous repeats and a complicated structure.
2. « *The Maid peeped out of the window* » is made up of all 3 usual introductions followed by 3 different non-progressive figures ending with a *set and turn*.
3. « *Staines Morris* » has an introduction of six double steps and a repeated *set and turn* danced by all, procession-wise, and a second part where only the lady of the last couple moves up.

“*For as many as will*” no longer means that an unlimited number of dancers can join in, but that no part of that particular dance implies a specific number of dancers (as would, for instance, a straight hey for 3 or 4 dancers). It doesn't matter, then, that 3, 4 or 5 couples take part, as long as the music is played accordingly.

Of course recording freezes things but that is not the only reason that made me limit participants to 3 or 4 couples in the dances mentioned above. Beyond historical reasons, I always try to keep in mind how to maintain interest for dancers and musicians alike, or

conversely what they are likely to find boring. Many repetitions of a short musical phrase could go against the dance.

Nowadays in « *longways for as many as will* », dancers form groups of 4 or 6 and all begin together. However as late as the early 20th century Cecil Sharp noted that in the traditional dances he was able to watch, only the first two couples of the set would begin the dance; the other couples would wait until the top ones reached them: «*Amongst traditional dancers it is customary for the dance, whether duple minor or triple minor set, to be started by the top minor set only, and for the rest of the dancers to remain neutral until the leading couple reaches them*». (Cecil Sharp, C.D.B. part I).

T. Wilson, the above mentioned dancing master, noted the same thing in his 1811 « *Treasures of Terpsichore* ». He wrote that if there was a large number of dancers, several *longways* could be formed, each called by a letter (A - B - C...). The top couple who had chosen the music and the figures to be danced to it would go down the whole set and only stop three places below their starting point ; they would be at the bottom of the set in the next dance: « *The couple that are going to call the dance must inform the Master of the Ceremonies both of tune and figure, that he may give directions to the different sets, and direct the band accordingly... When all the couples have gone down the dance, and the couple that called it have regained the top and have gone down three couples, the dance is finished; for the next dance, they stand at the bottom.*» (T. Wilson, *The etiquette of the ball-room* in « *Treasures of Terpsichore* »).

I think the same should apply to the *longways* in the first edition, making the process even more tedious.

The way all dancers are now implied from the start suppresses the long wait. In the same way nowadays *triple minor sets* often work with a double progression, for the same reason.

« *Longways for as many as will* » already make up one third of all dances in Playford's book (out of 104 dances), a trend that only got stronger in the following decades, until nothing but *longways* remained.