

SONNET

The lilting beauty that is in your dance
Is only part of what is in your soul.
Oft times it seems when you, head high, advance
In prayerful dance your Maker you extol.

For who can tell what's in the depths of being
That raises us to such majestic heights?
This thing that is beyond our knowing or seeing,
But which we feel in spiritual delights.

Each simple movement you embellish so,
Move here and there with grace and joy and ease;
You glide and wind with heavenward surge as tho'
The longing in your soul for God appease.
Your dancing is an overflowing of your soul;
and in your rhythm poetry you unroll.

LIAM FITZGIBBON

DANCING

To trace the history of Irish dancing is indeed a difficult task. For in the greatest flowering of Irish learning, the sixth to the ninth centuries, researchers can find nothing concerning dancing recorded by the Irish monks. It has been suggested that Cronan, a nasal kind of singing done with the lips closed, was done for dancing. Yet what kind of dancing? We know that even in the most primitive times people danced.

There is ample evidence in ancient manuscripts of Irish musicians with as many as 14 different kinds of instruments. Galileo, in his dialogue on ancient and modern music (1582) writes of the harp:

"This very ancient instrument was brought to us from Ireland (as Dante has recorded) where they are excellently made and in great number, the inhabitants of which island have practiced on it for centuries."

Giraldus Cambrensis in the twelfth century comments on the excellence of Irish music and musicians. From this testimony we see Ireland had plenty of music to dance to.

Today there are two main classes of Irish dancing--Solo or Step dancing and Group dancing. The Step dancing is divided into four different kinds--Reel, Jig, Hornpipe, and Slip Jig. The group dancing is divided into long dances, which are progressive dances, and may be performed by any number of people, and figure dances.

Although the writers of the Gaelic language make no mention of dancing, I have found the following fourteenth century verse called "Irish Dancer" in an anthology of Irish Literature, edited with an introduction by David H. Green.

I am of Ireland,
And of the holy
Land of Ireland.

Good Sir, pray I thee
For of saint charite
Come and dance with me
in Ireland.