

WHAT IS A CÉILIDH? (pronounced 'Kay-lee')

(Adapted from Wikipedia.org)

A **céilidh** is the traditional Gaelic social dance in Scotland, Ireland and Atlantic Canada. Other spellings encountered are **ceilidh**, **céilí** (Irish reformed spelling) and **cèilidh** (Scottish Gaelic reformed spelling). Before discos and nightclubs, there were Céilidhs in most town and village halls on Friday or Saturday nights; they are still common today.

Originally céilidhs facilitated courting and prospects of marriage for young people and although discos and nightclubs have displaced céilidhs to a considerable extent, céilidhs are very popular in rural parts of Ireland and in Scotland (especially in the Gaelic-speaking west coast regions).

It is common for some clubs and institutions such as sports clubs, schools and universities and even employers to arrange céilidhs on a regular or at least annual basis. The formality of these can vary. Some mix modern pop music with a Scottish country dancing band and dress codes range from compulsory Highland Dress to informal clothing. Knowledge and use of the basic dance steps is not always strictly necessary and dances often alternate with songs, poetry recitals, story telling and other types of "party pieces".

Céilidh music is often provided by an assortment of fiddle, accordion, flute, tin whistle, pipes, bodhrán (Irish drum) and in more recent times also percussion and electric bass guitar. The music is cheerful and lively and the basic steps can be learned easily; a short instructional session is often provided for new dancers before the start of the dance itself.

The general format for céilidh dancing is a 'Set' (line of couples facing their partners). Square set dances also exist. However, about half of the dances in the modern Scots céilidh are couple dances performed in a ring. These can be performed by fixed couples or in the more sociable "progressive" manner, with the lady moving to the next gentleman in the ring at or near the end of each repetition of the steps.

In the last 15 years, the Scottish public céilidh seems to have grown again in popularity amongst young people. Since then a subculture in some Scottish cities has evolved where some people attend céilidhs on a regular basis and at the céilidh they find out from the other dancers when and where the next céilidh will be.

Privately organised céilidhs are also extremely common now and bands are often hired to play at dances held to celebrate weddings and birthdays.. These bands vary in size, although they are commonly made up of between 2 and 6 players. The appeal of the Scottish céilidh is by no means limited to the younger generation and dances vary in speed and complexity in order to accommodate most age groups and levels of ability.

Some céilidh bands intersperse céilidh dancing with a DJ playing disco music in order to broaden the appeal of the evening's entertainment.

Modern céilidh dancing generally includes a mixture of four styles: Scottish country dancing, Old time dancing, Ballroom dancing and International folk dances.

USEFUL VOCABULARY FOR A CÉILIDH

Find a partner / Face... / Look at... / Hold hands with.... / Waltz / Polka
Take your partner in ballroom hold / Lift your arms / Make arches
Turn away / Step away / Change places / Drop your hands / Towards
Hop / Jump / Stamp / Clap / Step / Side-step / Walk / Pirouette / Swing
Turn / Spin / Kick / Space out / Use all the space / Let go

Right / Left hand / Arm / Shoulder / Foot / Heel / Toe / Waist / Back

together / away / in / out / forward / back (wards) / down / up
in front / behind / under / over / through / past / round / parallel
back where you started / beside / clockwise / anticlockwise

beats (of music) / long line / couple / partner

