

Sword Dance (Ghillie Callum)

(Time 4/4)

There is no older dance known than the Gillie-Callum (Sword Dance). This is danced as a sign of victory by a dancer with a crossed sword and scabbard. The tradition is that this Gillie-Callum was no less a personage than Calum-a-Chinn Mor or Malcolm Canmore, King of the Scots,(1058-1093) is credited with originating the Sword Dance. He slew an opponent, one of Mac Beth's chiefs. He then placed their two swords in the form of a cross and danced jubilantly over and round them. It is a warlike dance requiring great skill. The feet must be placed close to the swords, but must never touch them. At one stage it was performed with much shouting and vigorous arm movements, with finger snapping and flourishing of the bonnet. Later, before a battle the clans men danced over crossed swords. If they completed the dance without touching the swords, they would be victorious. It has been suggested that each time the foot crossed the sword, it represented a sword thrust into the enemy. The Sword Dance was included in the St. Fillan's Society Games in 1819. This is, possibly, the first time that it was danced competitively.