

projet davantage mûri, avec une dimension ethnomusicologique explicite où les analyses musicales de terrain apporteraient un contrepoint, indispensable selon nous, au discours. 🍀

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John Gibson's comprehensive book, *Gaelic Cape Breton Step-Dancing: An Historical and Ethnographic Perspective*, seeks to address, in his words, how "Nova Scotia step-dancing is the one and only key to the old puzzle: What were Gaels dancing [in

Scotland], these people who were so often highly praised by outsiders for their dancing ability and their widespread love of dance?" (13). Gibson traces step dance practices to what he calls "a much broader demography of old Gaelic Scotland" in a diversity of religious parishes, as well as to the persistence of step dancing in Gaelic-influenced regions of northeastern Nova Scotia (5). In approaching the subject matter with both historical and ethnographic perspectives, this book plumbs the depths of the many approaches that can be taken when examining a vernacular dance form such as step dance. This multi-faceted approach aligns with Gibson's stated goal to "nudge into its proper place" the dance form, and to examine the links between music, dance, and religion in Scottish Gaelic culture (3). In order to do this, Gibson has drawn from his own fieldwork from 1972 onward as well as other primary and secondary source research, though historical analysis tends to supersede ethnographic material. Rich with maps, photos, and family trees, Gibson's book immediately impresses upon the reader his thorough approach to the material. Extensive notes (117 pages worth!) and a comprehensive bibliography and index complement the text itself.

The structure of the book takes the reader from Scotland to Cape Breton and back again, with chapters divided by historical time period, region, and religion. Case study chapters focus on the influence of Gaelic songs and songsters, Scottish attitudes towards dance, and dancing schools and dancing masters in Gaelic Scotland. The book concludes with a discussion on what Gibson terms a Scottish country dancing enigma, wherein he contends that Cape Breton step dance, as the "one Scotch civilization that still exists," is the key to

understanding what he terms “graceless” dancing in late 18th-century and early 19th-century Gaelic and Saxon Scotland. As Gibson asserts, “there is no plausible alternative” (260). He compares the endurance of step dance in Cape Breton today as a popular, vibrant dance form with competition-focused Highland dance and Scottish Country dance, both of which he contends have modernized because of deliberate choices on the part of its practitioners. Step dance, he asserts by contrast, is a dance form that is in touch with its 18th-century roots.

Perhaps of particular interest here is Gibson’s treatise on links between song and dance genres. He traces references to percussive dance back to the mid-19th century, linking Archibald Campbell’s “Song to the [unidentified] Kinlochearn Piper” to the Cape Breton practice of seated fiddlers and pipers who “step” while they play (203). He furthers this argument by identifying that terms such as “diddling” and “deedling” reference step dance, as well as by highlighting specific songs such as Niall Mac-Gilleain’s “A Song of Praise to *Diorall* Dorothy MacKinnon after the Poet Saw Her at the Mull Ball,” which features lyrics that describe a maiden who is “marching/stepping,” with “the neatest foot doing through the reel” (206). His subsequent chapter focuses on the *Four Doctors Gaelic Songster*, which includes music, dances, and songs collected between 1845 and 1914.

One issue that often arises in step dance research is nomenclature (see, for example, Sparling, Johnson, and Harris Walsh 2015), especially how to precisely describe this particular style of percussive dance. Gibson addresses this in his case study by stating that the term “step-danc-

ing” is a modern term used in Gaelic Nova Scotia and was not used in either Gaelic or English in Scotland from 1790 to 1914. However, he argues that Scottish Gaelic descriptions of dance in general were likely describing step dance in particular, as are Scottish Gaelic songs that often reference dance as well. He says that the steps are almost never described because of the difficulty in doing so; the lack of description may also have been the result of subtle differences in execution amongst dancers.

While word-based descriptions of dance steps can indeed be problematic, the scholarly dance community has created some alternative modes of description that might have aided the reader in coming to a deeper understanding of these steps. For example, dance notation and descriptive methods such as Laban Movement Analysis are all ways in which dance writers have conveyed steps and choreography that go beyond mere written descriptions. Moreover, for a dynamic subject matter such as step dance, the energy behind the static photos in the book could be further illustrated with a companion website featuring videos of the step dance discussed. While these go beyond the scope of the book as described by its author, they would undoubtedly bring to life many of Gibson’s ideas through visual means.

Interestingly, Gibson did not record his fieldwork in Cape Breton, instead relying on his own memory and notes he took after his interviews. He argues that this ensured no breaks in conversation with informants, and that multiple conversations with different people clarified and confirmed information he received during his interviews. However, interviews can be conducted with little physical interference or imposition from a recorder;

moreover, contemporary approaches to fieldwork often incorporate member checks or constant comparative methods of transcribing and thematic coding to ensure that researcher power is mitigated, and informants are seen as participants as much as they are research subjects. Without ethnographic documentation, there is little opportunity for other scholars to benefit from and build on Gibson's primary research. Memory is also a fickle thing. Greater reflexivity on the methodological approach would strengthen the ethnographic elements of Gibson's research.

Overall, Gibson's tome is rich, almost exhaustive, in detail and his extensive referencing includes not only archival and historical sources, but also contemporary step dance scholars (such as Catherine Foley, Mats Melin, and Brendan Breathnach, for example). Gibson's historical descriptions include discussions of religion, nationality, migration, and culture through the lens of step dance. While more historical than ethnographic in nature, *Gaelic Cape Breton Step-Dancing* provides an invaluable resource for dance historians, ethnochoreologists, and those interested in embodied expressions in Scotland and Cape Breton cultures. 🍀

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Cet ouvrage est le deuxième paru dans le cadre d'un projet retenu par l'Agence nationale de la recherche (ANR, France) en 2009, intitulé « Création musicale, circulation et marché d'identités en contexte global » (Globamus). Il complète *Musiques au monde*, édité par la coordinatrice de Globamus, Emmanuelle Olivier, en 2012. Les articles de ce premier volume soulignent les multiples limites des approches culturalistes adoptées jusqu'à la fin du 20^e siècle, et l'importance, pour les ethnomusicologues notamment, de mobiliser de nouveaux outils et de nouvelles pistes de réflexion pour prendre en compte les récents développements des scènes musicales et chorégraphiques contemporaines dans un monde ultra-connecté. Les études proposées visaient ainsi à explorer les musiques « en train de se faire ». Tout en questionnant déjà les processus de création musicale et chorégraphique, il visait à renouveler les approches épistémologiques des études liées à la musique, pour mieux appréhender la grande diversité des enjeux à l'œuvre et les développements contemporains. *Création artistique et imaginaires de la globalisation* complète donc cette première publication et va plus loin : en portant, dans certains cas, sur les mêmes répertoires et danses déjà abordés dans *Musiques au monde*, les contributions rassemblées questionnent le sens de la « globalisation », son omniprésence au sein des créations, de même que les stratégies des artistes.