

The Circassian Circle

Reel



The Circassian Circle: This is published in Henderson’s *Tutor and Collection* set by a “J. Wallace” but rather awkwardly expressed; the setting here is perhaps a better one. The tune is quite old, appearing in the fiddle collections from about the 1840s onwards. Dance band leader Fergie MacDonald describes a typical Highland ball at the beginning of his career:

Dances never finished before four o’clock in the morning. That was the normal time for finishing. The rota for dancing was ‘Quadrilles’, ‘Lancers’, ‘Eightsome Reel’, ‘Circassian Circle’ and ‘Petronella’. Real hard set dancing, and this went on all night long. There would be at least six shots at the ‘Quadrilles’ and the same for the ‘Lancers’. It was a marathon. The standard of dancing was so high as well. Everyone knew these dances and everyone was able to dance, and dance well. At all these dances, there would always be a tea, and this was the highlight of the night. It would always happen about one in the morning. An old tub loaded with cups would be taken round the hall, and everyone would take one. This would be followed by women who went round with these huge urns full of tea and with jugs of milk and sugar. Then tray after tray of sandwiches, cakes, scones and pancakes would be carried round the hall. That, in my book, was Highland culture at its very best. It grieves me terribly that this has been lost...

(Fergie MacDonald with Allan Henderson, *Fergie Memoirs of a Musical Legend*, Birlinn: Edinburgh, 2003)