

Styles & Genres



Tune Types: Strathspeys

THE STRATHSPEY DANCE is a type of reel, but slower, and the type of tune used for the dance - also called a *strathspey* - differs mainly in its irregular rhythm, whereas the reel uses regular rhythm. The first published strathspeys were in about 1745, when James Oswald, in his *Caledonian Pocket Companion*, included two tunes titled *A New Strathspey Reel*.

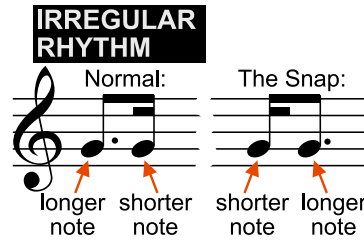
Unlike the reel, the strathspey



did not catch on in many other places. In Ireland and the U.S. musicians tended to straighten them out and use them as reels and square dances. The exceptions are Cape Breton island in Nova Scotia, where strathspeys are enjoyed enthusiastically and, to a lesser extent, Donegal in North-West Ireland. It is with Scotland, however, that the distinctive sounds of the strathspey will be forever associated.

Rhythm

The sound which most people connect with the strathspey in particular is the "snap" - one of the signature characteristics of Scots music. Strathspeys are in an *irregular rhythm*: in a pair of eighth notes (quavers) the first is lengthened slightly, and the second is shortened. In notation, a wee dot is after



the first of the pair and a half-beam is on the second. In a strathspey, every so often that pattern is reversed, and the first of the pair is shortened, the second lengthened. Called by many the "Scots Snap," it can be recognised when the half-beam is on the first of a pair of eighth notes (quavers), and a little dot is after the second (see the diagram on the left).

Captain Campbell (traditional)

strathspey

Strathspeys