

**SOURCES, REMARKS, OBSERVATIONS, ANECDOTES,
TRANSLATIONS, AND PERHAPS DIFFERENT
INTERPRETATIONS OF**

NEW ENGLISH

MAZURKA SOURCES

1830

**DANCE MATERIAL (EXCLUDING DANCE MANUALS) TO
BE CONSIDERED AS AN ADDENDUM TO PREVIOUSLY
PUBLISHED WORK (1984) OF**

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**A CONTINUING WORK IN PROGRESS NOT IN ANY
PARTICULAR THEMATIC ORDER**

What is for us, the ultimate source in the English language of the course of the Polonaise and Mazurka in England, comes to us indirectly via the United States! Here we only shall deal with the Mazurka. In 1830 in Philadelphia a general book of culture, literature, history, advice, etiquette and news appeared. It also contained instructions and descriptions of the contemporary and fashionable Dances of Society. This description from Philadelphia testifies to the close connection between the elites of England and America. The Duke of Devonshire had only begun to Mazurka in England in 1827. Someone authored an article in the "London Court Journal" entitled, *THE MAZURKA*. The date of this original article is unknown to us at this time.¹ We present here the Philadelphia copy.

THE MAZURKA

"The Mazurka is a dance of Polish origin, and we believe its execution was never attempted by 'heels polite' till his Grace of Devonshire enlightened the northern capital with his presence as ambassador extraordinary. Be that as it may, it is evidently reserved for the above named autocrat of fashion to introduce the illustrious stranger into English society, no less august innovator daring to undertake the hazardous office. In the mean time, let us lay aside, as we have promised, all critical dissertation on the nature on the nature and origin, the aspect and sentiment, the scope and tendency of this new of locomotion, and proceed to describe it in a manner that shall make it 'lovely to the meanest capacity;' for, after all, there is no other method of rendering our labours of practical utility;—there is no 'royal road' to the Mazurka, any more than there is to the mathematics. Indeed, we doubt if even our directions will supercede the necessity of a more tangible guide.

The Mazurka resembles the quadrille in so far as it is danced by sets of eight persons—four of either sex, who arrange themselves in couples, the lady in each couple taking the place to the right of the gentleman; and the first and second couple, and the third and fourth couple face each other. The dance (as introduced, or intended to be introduced, in this country,) consists of what may be described as twelve different movements; and, as in the quadrille, the first eight bars of the music are played before the first movement commences.

Having no wish to supersede the services of the Misses Prince, we shall not describe every movement of the Mazurka minutely. The first movement may be considered as preparatory, and has no figure since it consists merely of a motion, from right to left and then from left to right, by each person, four times repeated.—The steps in this first movement are three and of a character that at once gives an eccentric air to the dance, and as it were excites and stirs up a corresponding spirit in those who are engaged in it. They consist of a stamp, a hop, and a sliding step, or glissade. In the next movement the leading cavalier describes a circle round each lady, to his right, (beginning with his own partner, who accompanies him throughout this movement) and is followed in this by all the party—the step being still the stamp, hop, and glissade. This movement, in the course of sixteen bars, brings each couple to the spot whence they started. A movement now commences which also occupies sixteen bars, and in the course of which the dancers set to each other with their left

¹ Sometime written between 1827-1830.

shoulders forward, clap the hands once, and assume that pretty and naïve attitude which consists in placing the back of the hands on the hips, and pointing the elbows forward. The next movements include some of those which are well known by their use in dances that have been naturalized in this country—the quadrille and the waltz. These continue till about the middle of the dance, when the chief and the most characteristic and striking part of the movements commence, and which consist in each lady turning first round her partner and successively round every other gentlemen of the set; each couple passing under the raised arms of all the other couples; each gentleman kneeling on one knee, while his partner passes round him, holding his hand; and finally some of the first movements having been repeated, and the first couple having regained their original place, the first gentleman has the privilege as leader, of moving forward wherever he pleases (even into and different room)—and the other couples being required to follow and repeat his movements—‘follow-my-leader’ fashion.

Our readers will not do the Mazurka the injustice of supposing, that the above is the only, or even the best method of dancing it. On the contrary, its merit consists in the almost infinite variety of movements of which it is susceptible, and which variety renders it available for all classes of dancers—from the wild Indians of the backwoods of America to the serene Highnesses of Almack’s or Devonshire-House. It is, in fact, the very Proteus of dances—being capable of changing its form, colour, spirit, and general character, according to that of the party practising it, and answering one moment to the ‘tipsy dance and revelry’ of the troop of fairies and bacchantes, and the next to the ‘Lydian measures’ of a May-fair Exclusive. In short it can be ‘all things by turns;’ and it is moreover altogether without the ordinary accompaniment of that versatile quality, insomuch as so far from being ‘nothing long,’ it is absolutely interminable, if such be the will and pleasure of its leader for the time being.

It has another merit, which qualifies it in an especial manner for acquiring universal popularity; every one of the cavaliers engaged in it has the privilege of claiming the exclusive hand, and even the waist for a time, of every one of the dames respectively—so that each person of every set is, in fact, the partner of every other person in the same set.

The Mazurka has another quality, which will gain it especial favour in the sight of our readers in particular; it is incomparably more difficult to perform, in a graceful and efficient manner than any other dance which has prevailed since Minuets exploded; the effect of which quality will be, its confinement for and reasonable time to the saloons of high life; since there is little fear on the one hand, or hope on the other, of its penetrating to the provinces for at least and quarter of and century to come. Another consequence of this quality is, that a due performance of it will, for the present, amount to a patent of nobility to the happy performer. ”²

Let us list the principle features of this article.

- 1 that, the Polite Society— the Aristocracy of England, was introduced to the Mazurka by the Duke of Devonshire,

² “The Mazurka,” in *The Lady’s Book*, Vol. I, (Philadelphia: 1830), p. 108-109.

- 2 that, the thrust of the article was to describe the dance for the people who did not belong to the social circle of the Duke of Devonshire: he who represented the “Royal Road” of the Highest Society,
- 3 that, here the mention of the Misses Prince in this article, proves that they were active as dance teachers during the 1820s,
- 4 that, the merits of the Dance, for this author were its variation, its interchanging of partners during the course of the Dance and its remaining a Dance associated with the Highest Nobility for another 25 years.