

The Limerick Tumblers

Composed by Terry Moylan © 1997. Republished © 1999 Brooks Academy.



The Limerick Tumblers set was composed by Terry Moylan in response to a commission from Dr. Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin of Limerick University. Dr. Ó Súilleabháin had composed a piece of music for the celebrations marking the 800th anniversary of Limerick's city charter, which he called "The Limerick Tumblers". (A Limerick Tumbler is a kind of homing pigeon.) As he had written the piece in 12/8 time, which is also used for slides, he wished to have a figure of a set to go along with it, and by extension, a set which would contain the figure. The set was danced to his music for the first time in Limerick in October 1997, and has since been performed to the original music throughout Ireland and Britain. Terry Moylan describes the set, and how it was composed:

As the original commission was for a slide figure, I decided the set which contained it should be a polka set, so I decided to model the set loosely on the Sliabh Luachra or Kenmare polka sets. So the figures could be danced to polkas, with a slide and a hornpipe to finish. I had always said that if I ever composed a set, each figure should "end with the music", that is the musicians should be at the end of a tune and not half way or a quarter or three quarters way through one when the figures finish. This provided an outer constraint into which I tried to fit the figures. I decided that the figures should be of average length. Figures as short as the South Galway or Ballyvourney Reel sets are too short, and figures from such sets as the Victoria and Televara are too long. Each figure contains only one dance motif, which I believe is enough. When two or more different movements are included in a figure they no longer feel like set-dance figures and are more like céilí dances. Given that the length is constrained to 96, 128 or 160 bars (average length and full tunes) the task was to come up with enjoyable movements and arrange them symmetrically for one, two or four couples within those lengths.

The first figure is based on the first figure of the Sliabh Luachra set, with a twist. I once had the pleasure of watching John Taimín from Cuas dancing the show-the-lady figure of the Corca Dhuibhne set. Instead of sticking to the "setting step and double house" of the books, he just danced for 16 bars, improvising his movements and directions. I thought it would be a good idea to give people the knowledge that this is an option. So "show the lady" is freeform - just dance!

The second figure is based on one of the figures of the Jenny Lind, which I like so much I took the movement, and turned it inside-out and upside-down to make my figure.

The third figure contains several conventional moves put together in a different way, and is based on

the idea of continuous motion. In the first figure one couple dance the figure at a time; in the second two couples at a time; in the third all four couples are dancing all the time.

The fourth figure doesn't fit my time constraint because it was written to fit the already-written "Limerick Tumblers" music which contained 200 bars. It contains mostly stock movements, again combined in a new way. The slide in the direction of the next couple was contributed by Mary Friel. The change partners in the middle is new. It should be done, if possible, while dancing, without breaking step. It is an attempt to change partners "on the move".

The fifth figure is a "change-partner" hornpipe figure, in keeping with the models I used of other polka sets. the manner of changing partners is different, and incorporates a movement from the Kenmare polka set. The set is written to be danced to any polkas, slides and hornpipes, like any other polka set.

The Limerick Tumblers - Figure 1

Figure 1

Polkas - 160 bars

Opening position: All couples take the waltz hold.

A	Body	All couples dance one step towards the centre of the set, and one step back towards their own place (2 bars). They then dance, turning clockwise, two steps into the position of the couple to their right (2 bars). This movement is repeated three times to bring them back to their own places.	16 bars
B	Figure	First Tops couple dances around the house in 16 bars. They may do this in whatever way they please, such as 'House & Home', 'House & Square', 'Setting Step & Double House', 'The Four Shoves', 'The Walking Polka', 'House & Double the House' or whatever they like.	16 bars
C	Body	All couples repeat A.	16 bars
D	Figure	First Sides couple dance the figure in their own way.	16 bars
E	Body	All couples repeat A.	16 bars
F	Figure	Second Tops couple dance the figure in their own way.	16 bars
G	Body	All couples repeat A.	16 bars
H	Figure	Second Sides couples dance the figure in their own way.	16 bars
I	Body	All couples repeat A.	16 bars
J	House	All couples dance around the house.	8 bars

The Limerick Tumblers - Figure 2

Figure 2

Polkas - 128 bars

Opening position: All couples take the waltz hold.

A	Body	All couples dance one step towards the centre of the set, and one step back towards their own place (2 bars). They then dance, turning clockwise, two steps into the position of the couple to their right (2 bars). This movement is repeated three times to bring them back to their own places.	16 bars
B	Figure	<u>(a) Advance, Retire & Pass Through:</u> Tops gents and their partners, holding right hand in right hand, advance and retire (4 bars), the gents turn the ladies to their left hand sides and the couples pass through, gents on the inside	8 bars
		<u>(b) Advance, Retire & Pass Through:</u> Tops gents and Sides ladies repeat the above movement. They advance and pass through in the same way but this time the ladies bring the gents to the ladies' left and the ladies pass through on the inside.	8 bars
		<u>(c) Advance, Retire & Pass Through:</u> Sides gents and their partners repeat as above, the gents bringing the ladies to their left, and the gents passing through the centre.	8 bars
		<u>(d) Advance, Retire & Pass Through:</u> Sides gents and Tops ladies repeat as above, the ladies bringing the gents to their left, and the ladies passing through the centre.	8 bars
C	Body	All couples repeat A.	16 bars
D	Figure	All couples repeat the figure. The side couples dance the movement first.	32 bars
E	Body	All couples repeat A.	16 Bars
F	House	All couples dance around the house.	8 bars

The Limerick Tumblers - Figure 3

Figure 3

Polkas - 96 bars

Opening position: All couples hold hands in front and face anti-clockwise around the set.

A	Lead Around	All four couples lead around until they return to their own places. As they reach their own places the couples release right hands and each gent turns his partner clockwise under his left arm to bring the ladies into the centre of the set where they make a right hand wheel.	8 bars
B	Ladies Wheel	The ladies wheel around the set in a clockwise direction while the gents dance around the outside of the set in the other direction.	8 bars
C	Advance & Retire	(a) As the Tops Gents reach their own places they meet their partners coming towards them and take their partners' left hands in their left hands. They also take the right hands of the ladies to their right to form two groups of three at tops positions. The ladies turn	8 bars

under the gents' arms to face into the set. The two groups of three, and the two single gents, advance and retire twice. On the second occasion the ladies stay in, leave the Tops Gents and turn under arm to the Sides Gents.

(b) The dancers repeat the above movement from the sides positions. On the second time retiring each lady joins left hand in left hand with her partner and they both turn towards each other and around into the lead around position.

D	Lead Around	All couples repeat A.	8 bars
E	Ladies Wheel	All couples repeat B.	8 bars
F	Advance and Retire	The four couples repeat C, with Sides Gents dancing in threes first.	16 bars
G	Lead Around	All couples repeat A.	8 bars
H	Ladies Wheel	All couples repeat B.	8 bars
I	Swing	As they reach their own places each gent turns his partner left hand to left hand as they pass by, and all couples swing in place.	8 bars

The Limerick Tumblers - Figure 4

Figure 4

Slides - 200 bars

Opening position: All couples face anti-clockwise around the set, gents on the inside with right arms around their partners' waists, the ladies' left hands on the gents' right shoulders.

A	Lead Around	All four couples lead around until they return to their own places.	8 bars
B	Slide	All four couples dance forward towards the positions to their right (2 bars), back to place (2 bars), and then, in waltz hold, half way around the house to the position of the couple opposite them (4 bars). These movements are then repeated to bring them back to their original places.	16 bars
C	Figure	<p><u>(a) House</u> : Top couples dance around the house.</p> <p><u>(b) Square & Change Partners</u> : Tops couples dance 1--2--123 to the place to their right, and 1--2--123 backwards to their opposite places (4 bars) and then dance a half house to end up facing each other in the middle of the set (4 bars). As they reach these positions each couple should open out so that first tops gent faces second tops lady, and vice versa. The dancers now change partners.</p> <p><u>(c) House</u> : The new couples dance around the house.</p> <p><u>(d) Square & Change Partners</u> : The two new couples repeat C(b) to bring them back to their original partners.</p> <p><u>(e) House</u> : The two couples dance around the house.</p> <p><u>(f) Christmas</u> : At the end of the house the two couples meet in the</p>	<p>8 bars</p> <p>8 bars</p> <p>8 bars</p> <p>8 bars</p> <p>8 bars</p> <p>8 bars</p>

centre of the set, make a circle of four, and swing.

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(g) Swing: The Tops couples break out of the Christmas and swing in place. The Sides couples also swing.

8 bars

D	Lead Around	All couples repeat A.	8 bars
E	Slide	All couples repeat B.	16 bars
F	Figure	Sides couples repeat C.	56 bars
G	Lead Around	All couples repeat A.	8 bars
H	Slide	All couples repeat B.	16 bars
I	House	All couples dance around the house.	8 bars

The Limerick Tumblers - Figure 5

Figure 5

Hornpipes - 160 bars

Opening position: All couples take the waltz hold.

A	Body	All couples dance one step towards the centre of the set, and one step back towards their own place (2 bars). They then dance, turning clockwise, two steps into the position of the couple to their right (2 bars). This movement is repeated three times to bring them back to their own places.	16 bars
B	House	All couples dance around the house.	8 bars
C	Circle & Change Partners	(a) All dancers join hands in a circle and dance one step into the centre, stamp on the fourth beat, and dance one step back to place (2 bars). (b) All dancers release hands with their own partners. The ladies dance behind the gents, turning clockwise under their left arms, to move to the ladies' positions to their right, as the gents turn in place, all dancers ending up facing out of the set (2 bars). (c) Couples release hands again and join hands with the dancers to their other sides. The ladies pass the gents again, turning under the gents' right arms, and the two dancers turning to face into the set (2 bars). (d) The couples release hands again and join hands with the dancers to their other sides. While the gents hold the ladies' right hands in their left hands, the ladies dance behind them into the the gents' partners' positions, the gents turning to face the ladies and take the waltz hold. The ladies will have moved three places around the set. (2 bars)	8 bars
D	Body	All couples repeat A.	16 bars
E	House	All couples dance around the house.	8 bars
F	Figure	Repeat C to bring the ladies to their opposite places.	8 bars
G	Body	All couples repeat A.	16 bars

H	House	All couples dance around the house.	8 bars
I	Figure	Repeat C to bring the ladies to the right of their own places.	8 bars
J	Body	All couples repeat A.	16 bars
K	House	All couples dance around the house.	8 bars
L	Figure	Repeat C to bring the ladies back to their own places.	8 bars
M	Body	All couples repeat A.	16 bars
N	House	All couples dance around the house.	8 bars