

The Red River Jig

The most famous Métis dance is the Red River Jig or as it is known in Michif, "*oayache mannin*". The accompanying fiddle tune is considered an unofficial Métis anthem. The tune was very popular in the mid 1800s and was known from Alaska to James Bay. The dance is a combination of Plains First Nations footwork with Scottish, Irish and French-Canadian dance forms. The basic jig step is danced in most Métis communities. However, dancers often add their own "fancy" dance steps during certain segments of the tune. Some dancers use fancy steps to identify their home community.

There are three theories of the Red River Jig's origin. The first states that it was brought over from Lower Canada (now Québec) with the French-Canadian voyageurs and was originally called "*La gigue du Bas Canada*", or "*La grande gigue simple*". Métis fiddle player Fredrick Genthon said that he learned the jig from his father who had learned it in 1842 from a French Canadian named Lauterelle. The second theory has its origins in the Red River Settlement. The theory states that the Scottish lived on one side of the river (either the Seine, Red or Assiniboine Rivers), and the French Canadians and Métis lived on the other. The Scots played bagpipes on the one side of the river, while the people on the other side listened. Then one night a man decided to imitate the bagpipes with his fiddle and played a sad tune, but then started playing a rollicking beat that made everyone want to dance. The final theory states that the tune originated at a Métis wedding in 1860 when Mr. Macdallas composed a new fiddle tune for the celebration, which Father Boucher, the wedding's officiating priest, dubbed the "Red River Jig".

The following is a sequence of the "Red River Jig" steps:

1. Back step four times.
2. Front step four times. Double.
3. Front step four times. Single.
4. Triple tap four times.
5. Triple tap four times, accented right.
6. Triple tap four times, accented left.
7. Triple tap four times, accented right and left.
8. Triple tap four times, accented double.
9. Time tap.
10. Cross over handclasp with triple tap.
11. Right tap turn.
12. Triple tap four times.
13. Double tap four times.
14. Heel-toe step four times, right foot.
15. Heel-toe step four times, left foot.
16. Heel-toe step four times, double.
17. Triple tap, four times, half circle facing each other, cross over, handclasp to places.

References:

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