ROYAL SCOTTISH OFFICIAL BOARD OF HIGHLAND DANCING

TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

SAILORS' HORNPIPE – HISTORY OF ACTIONS, MOVEMENTS & OUTFIT

ARM POSITIONS

1st Position – Akimbo

The palms of the hands are not placed on the tunic as the sailor has tarry / dirty hands.

2nd Position – Folded

As for 1st position, the palms of the hands are not placed on the tunic as the sailor has tarry / dirty hands. The thumbs should be underneath the upper arm.

The arms can be horizontal or tilted in character with the movement.

3rd Position – Shading

Ships were navigated by the sun. Sailors are shading their eyes from the sun.

They are also looking for other ships and/or dangers.

4th Position – Interlaced

Represents the interlacing/interweaving of the ropes and masts of a sailing ship.

ARM ACTIONS

1 – Hauling

Hauling rope with both hands. The rope is thick i.e. the rope used for tying up ships.

The fingers should be open and then closed as they haul the rope.

2 – Pulling Ropes

a) Downward Pull

Imitates the sailor climbing up the rope to get the crow's nest. The lower hand is holding the rope in the centre of the body. The top hand touches the bottom hand before the bottom hand reaches up to pull the rope down.

b) Inward Pull

The sailor is pulling ropes from the quayside back onto the ship or pulling the anchor up.

3 – Gathering In

Thinner rope than downward / inward pulls. Pulling ropes in. The pulling action should be "hand over hand" and not a "roly poly" action.

4 – Pumping

Sailors are using a T-Pump and the elbows should be out to the side.

The "up" action represents the pump sucking the water in; and the "down" action represents pushing the water out.

5 – Casting

Sailors are throwing their heavy kit bag onto their shoulder.

6 – Farewell

Sailors waving goodbye to people on the shore using a handkerchief. Dancers used to have a handkerchief in a top pocket on their outfit and would use this during the step.

This action also represents the sailors using flags to communicate from ship to ship (semaphore).

7 – Look-Out

This is linked to the Shading arm position (3rd). Sailors are looking out for ships – and not down for submarines.

8 – Hitching

The sailors are hitching up their trousers – keeping their dirty hands off their tunic.

BASIC MOVEMENTS

Shuffle Over the Buckle

Sailors wore black shoes with a silver buckle over the metatarsal. The shuffle goes over the buckle of the shoe.

Hoisting Slacks

This is linked to the Hitching arm action (8)

Heel-Roll

The ship is rolling and the sailors are pulling the ropes in.

Crab Walk

Imitating a crab.

Forward Crab Walk

Imitating a crab going forward.

Rocking

Drunken sailor or rolling of the ship.

Low Cutting

This movement represents a sailor being hung. This also represents a sailor tied to the mast of the ship and the side-to-side movement is when the ship is rolling.

Look-Out

This is linked to the Look-Out arm action (7)

OUTFIT

Bell Bottom Trousers

- Introduced in 1817 and known as "cracker jacks".
- The bell bottom design made it easier for the sailors to roll-up their trousers when they were washing the ship's deck and protect the material.
- Trousers could be kept under the sailors' mattress. They were folded with either 5 or 7 folds depending on the height of the sailor. 5 folds represented the 5 oceans; 7 folds represented the 7 seas.
- The shape of the trousers made it easier for sailors to remove them in the event they had to abandon ship. The legs could then be knotted and the trousers used as a float.

White suits – these were worn when sailing in the tropics to keep the sailors cool.

Collars

- The three stripes represent Nelson and his 3 battles, namely Copenhagen, Nile and Trafalgar
- The black ribbon bow is a salute to the death of Horatio Nelson

Lanyard (no longer worn) – taken off and used for lighting fuses for cannons to fire.

Sailors' hair - worn in pigtails and covered in tar. This kept the hair tidy and out of the sailor's face and lice off the hair.

Sailor's hat - is known as a "Pork Pie" hat as it is a similar shape to a pork pie.