

Slap the Churn

(Ireland)

Slap the Churn is a Country Dance also known as Clap-Dance. This dance was an event all over Ireland at one time. Junior Crehan remembered it being danced in Clare and I heard stories about it from Limerick to West Cork. I wasn't able to trace a surviving form until I searched for it in Ulster finding my first version in the back woods of Tyrone at Michael McKenn's, where he and I danced it to Paddy Joe's fiddle at 7:30 in the morning on a cold stone floor. I say cold because Michael was in socks and night-shirt and this was still in the cold of the year.

The first version is from Fermanagh where I learned it from Mick Hoy, a gentle man and a pleasure, learned in his kitchen where I had the best cabbage I've ever eaten, and on the shores of Lock Erne fishing illegally for meaty and delicious eel.

Sources: First version: Paddy Joe Gormley of Co. Tyrone and Mick Hoy of Co. Fermanagh.
Second version: Michael and Margaret McKenna of Co. Tyrone.

Music: Soldier's Joy; the White Cockade; Flowers of Edinburgh; or Miss McLeod's...
2/4 meter

Formation: Originally 2-hand or 4-hand, men only and non-progressive, the versions given below are Sicilian or Longways, and are progressive.

Steps: Polka steps; 3's. Michael used a step to start the dance and at other points in the dance to initiate a change. Changing step: (on the 4th or 8th bar) jump onto ball of L ft; then stamp full R ft slightly fwd. This is usually done while making a partial or quarter turn.



Style: Light and playful. This is not a dance to be taken seriously in the slightest, except in sarcasm. The changing step described above is sometimes exaggerated. Sometimes the M involved got carried away with the claps and a fight would break out, so the story goes--don't overdo it. Again, the stepping is low to the ground.

Meas

Pattern

- FIRST VERSION.
- A 1-8 (With opp) 9 alternating slaps on chest/clap own/clap opp.
Repeat twice more.
4 times clap own/clap opp.
- AA 1-8 (With ptr) 5 alternating slaps on chest/clap own/clap R's ptr/clap own/clap L's ptr.
Repeat twice more.
2 times clap own/clap ptr's R/clap own/clap ptr's L.
- B 1-8 8 times clap own/clap ptr's R/clap own/clap ptr's L.
- BB 1-8 R-hand star once around to place.
Half-House exchanging places and turning once into new position to face original direction.

Slap the Churn -- Continued

- SECOND VERSION.**
- A 1-8 (With opp) 3 times clap thighs/clap own/clap opp. 2 times clap own/clap opp.
Repeat entire pattern.
- AA 1-8 (With ptr) Clap thighs/clap own/clap ptr's R, clap thighs/clap own/clap ptr's L,
clap thighs/clap own/clap ptr's R, clap own/clap ptr's L/clap own/clap ptr's R.
Repeat entire pattern.
- B 1-8 8 times clap own/clap ptr's L/clap own/clap ptr's R.
- BB 1-8 R-hand star once around to place.
Half-House exchanging places and turning once into new position to face original
direction.

Note: In both versions, B can be just with ptr, or half opp and half ptr. The original version does not have the progression in it; you do the dance with the same four people for as often as you like. Additionally, II A 1-8 is done usually with only one's ptr, the claps continuing non-stop to the formation of the star (also called the wheel), and BB 5-8 is merely a reversal of the star, giving the L hands in the middle and turning back to place CCW.

Presented by Danny and Joan Hathaway