

British and Irish Dancers during the Colonial Era: A United Front

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the relationship, which existed between Irish and British dancers during the colonial era in Ireland. Between 1536 and 1691, Ireland was fully colonized by Britain; then Irish peasantry, were killed or driven to the west of Ireland and British planters seized full control of Irish land. Politically the countries were at war, but another relationship grew and developed through dance. It manifested in differing ways. For instance, when British travellers toured Ireland, they showed respect for Irish dance in their notes; they also joined Irish dancers during social gatherings. In addition, British and Irish dance masters adopted and adapted each other's teaching styles, dance styles and dance steps. It led to the fertilisation of the dance repertoires in both countries. Finally, Irish dance masters entered the homes of the British landlords, where they taught the children to dance. It was ironic, that, the relationship started to disappear when Ireland gained freedom at the turn of the twentieth century. Then, Irish nationalists banned dances of British origin and Irish dances, bearing nationalistic undertones, replaced them.

Key Words: Landlord; Nationalism; Plantation; Repertoire; Traveller