

The Great Permian Mass Extinction

A 40 bar reel for five couples in a longwise set. Each dancer also has a “volcanic partner” who is their 1st corner (except 1st woman and 5th man) with whom they dance from bar 25.

Dedicated to the memory of my dear friend Martin Hammond who would surely have been able to tell me more about trilobites, ammonites and other extinct species than I really needed to know (including that ammonites survived the Permian extinction and died out later).

Bars Description

- 1-8 1st and 2nd couples circle four hands round to the left and back while 3rd, 4th and 5th couples set to their partners with arms raised highland fashion, cross over giving right hands, set again with highland arms and cross back giving left hands.
- 9-12 2nd man and 4th woman exchange places by dancing across and casting right shoulder around 3rd couple. Meanwhile 1st man and 5th woman also exchange places, starting by following 2nd man and 4th woman but dancing between 3rd couple, passing each other right shoulder.
- 13-16 5th, 1st, 4th and 2nd women (at the top) also 4th, 2nd, 5th and 1st men (at the bottom) dance right hands across staying in the centre while 3rd couple turn one and a quarter times by the left hand to end on the centre line.
- 17-24 All dance a “snakestone pass” (an extended snake pass figure for five couples):
- 3rd man followed by 4th, 5th, 1st and 2nd men, passing the women by the left shoulder, dances up the woman’s side and back down the mens side;
- Meanwhile 3rd woman followed by 2nd, 1st, 5th and 4th women, passing the men by the left shoulder, dances down the men’s side, across and back up the women’s side.
All end opposite their “volcanic partner” with the men in the order 2,1,5,4,3 and the women 3,2,1,5,4. 3rd couple are at diametrically opposite corners of the set from their partner. All other couples have their partner diagonally to their right.
- 25-26 All set on the sides.
- 27-32 All dance up to the top, nearer hands joined with the opposite person (their “volcanic partner”) and cast down on their own sides. The order is now 3,4,5,1,2 on the men’s side and 4,5,1,2,3 on the women's side.
- 33-34 All set on the sides.
- 35-36 All stand still.
- 37-40 3rd woman dances up alone to end in 1st place opposite her partner. The other four women step down on bars 39-40. The final order is 3,4,5,1,2.

Notes

I no longer remember why I ever thought it might be a good idea to try to represent the most severe of all known mass extinctions as a Scottish country dance, but it quickly occurred to me that I could dedicate it to the memory of my friend Martin with whom I used to have many fascinating conversations about biology and evolution. It was also an interesting and brain teasing challenge to organise the figures to allow the single surviving dancer's solo in the last four bars.

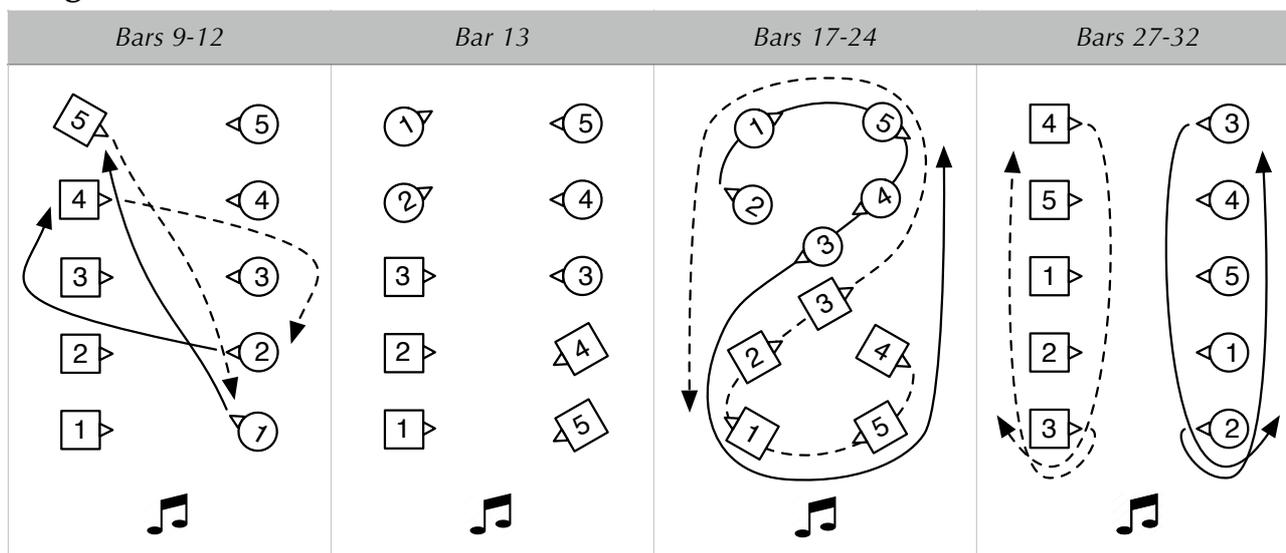
The first 8 bars are supposed to represent a trilobite (on its back) though the real ones had many more legs than are here depicted by the highland arms of six dancers while the first two couples are illustrating the head. Bars 9-12 are a convergent evolutionary progression via different paths leading into bars 13-24 which represent a pair of ammonites. Fossil ammonites used to be called snakestones, so an extended version of the "snake pass" figure seems suitable. Disaster arrives in bars 25-32. The figure here starts with a warning preshock which is followed by immense supervolcanic eruptions and falling ash and lava. Enthusiastic and extrovert dancers might add their own sound effects here! In bars 33-34 the dust settles and in bars 35-36 all is still. I am not normally in favour of dancers standing idle, but a moments silence after the "great dying" which ended the Palaeozoic era feels very appropriate. Finally in bars 37-40 3rd woman dances up alone to start the repopulation of an almost empty world.

Music

An ideal piece of music would be full of life in bars 1-24, then fairly explosive for 25-32, quietening down funereally for 33-34, even quieter for 35-36 but ending with a hopeful rising cadence for 37-40.

In lieu of that, try The Mathematicians from Opus Dance - Tweeddale (J Gray & S Petrov).

Diagrams (music at the bottom)



Trilobite (Cambrian-Permian)



Ammonite (Devonian-Cretaceous)



Martin Hammond (1956-2014)

At an early gay pride march, signing his civil partnership to Nick and celebrating afterwards.

