



Scottish Ceilidh Dance Guide



Orcadian Strip the Willow

The big one — multiple couples stripping simultaneously in one glorious high-energy set

Formation Long lines of couples	Difficulty ♥♥♥ Energetic	Music Fast reels
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About This Dance

The Orcadian Strip the Willow is the turbo-charged cousin of the standard Strip the Willow. Where the regular version has one active couple working their way down the set at a time, the Orcadian version sets multiple couples stripping simultaneously — creating a glorious, high-energy wave of spinning bodies all the way down the room. It takes its name from Orkney, where it evolved as a feature of Hogmanay celebrations and is traditionally danced as the last dance of the night before Auld Lang Syne. Once you've danced it, you'll understand why.

How It Differs from Standard Strip the Willow

The key difference between this and the standard Strip the Willow is that here, multiple couples strip simultaneously rather than waiting for the couple above to finish. This creates a faster, more chaotic, and far more exhilarating experience — but it requires a longer set (ideally 12 or more couples) to work properly. In a short set of 4–6 couples, the standard version works better.

How to Dance It

1	Form two long lines facing each other — one line of gentlemen, one line of ladies. The caller will number the couples from the top (nearest the band).
2	On the caller's signal, the top couple spin each other with right arms linked for the count of eight.
3	The active couples then begin stripping down their respective lines simultaneously. The golden rule: right hand to your partner, left hand to the person in the opposite line.
4	Active lady: turn the first gentleman in the opposite line with your left arm, turn once, then return to your partner and turn right arms, turn once, Repeat down the line.
5	Active gentleman: mirrors this simultaneously down the ladies' line — left arm to the first lady, right arm back to partner, repeat down.
6	The non-active couples in the line give their arm to the active person as they arrive, then return to their place. Keep your feet moving even when waiting — the energy of the dance depends on it.
7	When an active couple reaches the bottom of the set, they spin each other once more for the count of eight, then join the bottom of their respective lines.
8	As active couples reach the fourth couple, the next couple up becomes active and begins their spin at the top. In a long set, multiple waves of couples will be stripping downward at the same time.
9	The dance continues until all couples have stripped down the set, or until the band signals the end. The final active couple finishes at the bottom and the dance ends.

Caller's tip: Repeat the golden rule twice: 'right hand to your partner, left hand down the line'. Once it clicks, the dance runs itself. Keep your voice up throughout as the energy in the room will be loud.

What to Watch For

- Active couples losing the sequence and turning two people in the same line consecutively — remind them: opposite line, partner, opposite line, partner.
- Non-active couples drifting out of position while waiting. Encourage everyone to keep their feet moving and stay in line.
- Timing going to pieces when two active couples get close to each other in the set — they need to keep their own rhythm and trust the process.
- The bottom spin being forgotten — active couples sometimes just collapse into the line. The final spin is important for the transition.
- People joining the wrong line after finishing — gentlemen join the gentlemen's line, ladies the ladies' line.

Did you know?

The Orcadian Strip the Willow takes its name from Orkney, the archipelago of islands off the north coast of Scotland. It is a fixture at Orcadian Hogmanay celebrations and is considered by many the definitive finale to any ceilidh night. The dance works best in very long sets — the longer the lines, the more waves of couples can strip simultaneously, and the more spectacular the result.

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Don't worry — every step will be called on the night before the music starts!