

A Neal Ball

The Assembly Players

own label, APCD1101

A Neal Ball presents the music for dances from John and William Neal's A Choice Collection of Country Dances, published in Dublin in 1726, and usefully includes the dance instructions in the accompanying booklet, along with notes on the dances. The Neals, who were the first music publishers of any note in Dublin, published five collections of country dances, but this is the only one known to have survived.

The dances are typical country dances of their time, and some of the tunes and dances are similar to those published in London during this period. All are fairly straightforward, so this is a useful addition to the ball repertoire for dancers and callers wanting to include some different, but accessible, dances. The dances were originally all triple minor longways, but these have mostly been adapted to duple minor and three couple longways, plus one two couple and one sicilian circle.

The music is delightful, performed by Nicolas Broadbridge on accordion, Aidan Broadbridge on violin and mandolin and Brian Prentice on piano. Nicolas says in the notes that some of the tunes 'have an indefinable Irish feel to them.' As always, the Assembly Players perform with impeccable musicianship. There is also a lovely dance lilt – Brian is a superb dance pianist and really helps this along. Nicholas provides interesting arrangements, so that even seven times through a tune (ten in the case of 'Squirrel', to a variant of the well-known 'Hunt the Squirrel') makes excellent listening. The tune is, however, never obscured, so the dancers do not lose their way.

It would have been easy to play these tunes

at similar tempi, but the Assembly Players present a pleasing variety: we have no idea how these dances were played, and it enhances the atmosphere of a ball to present these contrasts. There is also rhythmic variety: as well as the usual reels and jigs, there are a couple of slip jigs and one triple time hornpipe. One dance, 'Marlbrough', starts as a reel, then changes to a minuet.

This is a lovely, well-produced CD, both for dancing and listening, and the quality of the recording is excellent. www.nicolasbroadbridge.com

Madeleine Smith

Excerpt from EDS Spring 2012.