

Escher's Metamorphosis

A 96 bar strathspey for four couples in a longwise set.

The inspiration for this demonstration dance came while visiting an exhibition of works by M.C. Escher in Lisbon after the December 2017 Curia SCD weekend in Portugal. However it was nearly two years before the idea emerged from its larval stage to become a mature dance.

My favourite Escher drawings are those that show geometrically and/or gravity defying buildings with multiple perspectives. But unlike those, or the eternally climbing monks, the three Metamorphosis woodcuts do at least have both a beginning and an end so are more amenable to representation in dance form.

This dance is a pale reflection of the complexity of Escher's drawings, but is still difficult and suitable only for a group of mathematically and/or artistically minded expert dancers with some time on their hands. It is loosely based on Metamorphosis II, the 2nd in the series, which has roughly 12 sections that transform from one to another. The succession of figures tries, in some way, to match the images with some similar transformations between them.

<i>Bars</i>	<i>Woodcut image</i>	<i>Dance figure (visual or metaphorical link)</i>
1-8	Metamorphosis: single or crossed	Half turns and hands across.
9-16	Fields and squares	Rights and lefts (and more hands across).
17-24	Lizards	Weasel reels (well, they both have 4 legs!).
25-32	Beehive	Teapots (joins between hexagons) and both hand turns (body, upper and lower arms making a hexagonal cell).
33-40	Bees	Bees of Maggieknockater reels.
41-48	Birds passing through fish	Arches and underarm turns.
49-56	Fish passing through birds	Mirror reels of four.
57-64	Cubes	Diamond poussette (lozenges).
65-72	Townscape (Atrani)	Zigzag steps up and down hillside town.
73-80	Chessboard	Castling, knight, rook and bishop moves.
81-88	Squares and fields	Rights and lefts (and start hands across).
89-96	Metamorphosis: crossed or single	Hands across, half turns.

The M.C. Escher Foundation unfortunately refused permission to include the woodcut image in these instructions. However it can be found at <http://www.3quarks.com/en/Metamorphose/index.html> or <https://uploads7.wikiart.org/images/m-c-escher/metamorphosis-ii.jpg>.

Bars Description

- 1-8 1st couple half turn right hand twice, then dance right hands across with 2nd couple; while 2nd couple stand for 2 bars, half turn right hand, then dance right hands across; while 3rd couple stand for 4 bars, then half turn right hand twice; while 4th couple stand for 6 bars, then half turn right hand.
- 9-16 1st and 2nd couples dance complete rights and lefts starting on the sides; while 3rd and 4th couples dance right hands across then half rights and lefts starting on the sides.
1st and 3rd couples end in promenade hold facing down and up on the centre line. The men have their partner on their left (opposite from the usual convention).
2nd and 4th men end on the women's and men's sides respectively and face clockwise.
2nd and 4th women pull left shoulder back on the last bar to end with their backs to each other in 2nd and 3rd places on the centre line facing up and down.
- 17-24 All dance a complete Weasel reel with 1st and 3rd couples in promenade hold starting by passing 2nd and 4th women right shoulder. Each dancer or promenade pair dances half a reel down or up the centre line, passes right shoulder and dances back up or down the men's or women's side, all ending back in the place they started.
- 25-28 1st couple with 2nd woman and 4th woman with 3rd couple dance right hands across while 2nd and 4th men half turn with both hands then twirl away passing right shoulder with their partner to end facing 1st and 3rd couples respectively as 2nd and 4th women end on the women's and men's sides.
- 29-32 1st couple with 2nd man and 4th man with 3rd couple dance left hands across while 2nd and 4th women half turn with both hands then twirl away to face out in promenade hold with 4th and 2nd men on the men's and women's sides.
- 33-40 All dance right shoulder "Bees of Maggie Knockater" reels of three on the sides. To start 2nd man with 4th woman pass 3rd man right shoulder as 4th man with 2nd woman pass 1st man right shoulder for the first half reel.
On bar 36 4th and 2nd couples change to take promenade hold with their partner and continue the second half reel by passing left shoulder with 3rd and 1st men respectively. 4th and 2nd couples end facing each other down and up the dance with nearer hands joined as 1st and 3rd couples come in to take nearer hands facing the ends. The order is 1,4,2,3 with 4th and 3rd couples on opposite sides.
- 41-42 1st and 3rd couples change sides with the women dancing under their partner's raised arm. Meanwhile 2nd couple dance up under an arch made by 4th couple who dance down. All end with nearer hands joined facing down, up, down, up in the order 1,2,4,3 with 1st and 4th couples on opposite sides.
- 43-44 1st and 4th couples dance down under arches made by 2nd and 3rd couples who dance up. 1st couple faces 3rd couple as 2nd and 4th couples face the ends.
- 45-46 All repeat bars 41-42 from new places: 2nd and 4th couples change sides with the women dancing under their partner's raised arm. Meanwhile 3rd couple dance up under an arch made by 1st couple who dance down. The order is now 2,3,1,4 with 2nd and 1st couples on opposite sides.
NB all the arches in bars 41-46 are made by those in 2nd and 4th places.
- 47-48 All half turn with left hand on the women's side and right hand on the men's side to end in the order 3,2,4,1. 3rd and 4th couples face in and down as 2nd and 1st couples face out and up.

- 49-54 All dance the first six bars of mirror reels of four on the sides with 2nd and 1st couples starting up and out.
- 55-56 4th and 1st couples, in 1st and 3rd places respectively, dance in and down one place, face partner and take both hands. Meanwhile 3rd and 2nd couples continue the reel for one more bar, then dance in to take both hands. The order is 3,4,2,1, both hands joined in the centre, with 2nd and 1st couples on opposite sides.
- 57-64 3rd and 4th also 2nd and 1st couples dance a slightly modified diamond poussette. 3rd woman, 4th man, 2nd man and 1st woman have a foot change.
On the first bar, all four couples, still both hands joined, half turn to diagonal lines with 3rd and 4th men facing up (unusual), 2nd and 1st men facing down (as usual).
All then continue with bars 2-6 of the diamond poussette from these orientations.
On the last two bars all couples half turn and open out, tourbillon style, to end beside partner on the sides.
The order now is 3rd woman, 3rd man, 2nd man, 2nd woman down the women's side and 4th woman, 4th man, 1st man and 1st woman down the men's side.
- 65-72 All set.
Then the top three on the men's side cross down diagonally giving right hands with the bottom three on the women's side.
Then the top three on the women's side cross down diagonally giving left hands with the bottom three on the men's side.
Then the top three on the men's side cross down diagonally giving right hands with the bottom three on the women's side.
The order now is 2nd man, 3rd man, 3rd woman, 4th woman down the women's side and 2nd woman, 1st woman, 1st man, 4th man down the men's side.
- 73-76 2nd and 4th couples half turn right shoulder, without hands, face and cast away (castling); while 1st and 3rd couples set and petronella in tandem (knights).
- 77-80 2nd and 4th couples set and cross back passing left shoulder (rooks); while 3rd and 1st men cross passing right shoulder then set facing in diagonally and pull back left shoulder to face the ends (bishops); while 3rd and 1st women set facing in diagonally then cross passing left shoulder (women bishops). Anyone can consider themselves a queen.
All end opposite partner facing down and up on the sides in the order 2,1,3,4 with 2nd and 3rd couples on opposite sides.
- 81-88 2nd and 1st couples dance half rights and lefts starting on the sides, then dance left hands across; while 3rd and 4th couples dance complete rights and lefts starting on the sides.
- 89-96 4th couple dance left hands across with 3rd couple, then half turn left hand twice; while 3rd couple dance left hands across, then half turn left hand, then stand for 2 bars; while 2nd couple half turn left hand twice, then stand for 4 bars; while 1st couple half turn left hand, then stand for 6 bars.
All end on their own side in the original order 1,2,3,4.

Music

- Suitable recording: Tom's Friends (Green Ginger: London 75th Anniversary).

Diagrams (music at the bottom)

Bar 1	Bar 5	Bar 9	Bar 13	Bar 17	Bar 25
Bar 29	Bar 33	Bar 37	Bar 41	Bar 43	Bar 45
Bar 47	Bar 49	Bar 55	Bar 57	Bar 58	Bar 63
Bar 65	Bar 67	Bar 69	Bar 71	Bar 73	Bar 77
Bar 81	Bar 85	Bar 89	Bar 93	End (phew!)	