Running the Goat

a dance in 8 figures

By Chris Brookes

A Battery Radio production

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In the 18th century, an intricate European "set dance" emigrated to the (then) British colony of Newfoundland.. There it settled unobtrusively in a remote fishing village, and during the following 200 years became forgotten in Europe and the rest of the world. By the end of the 20th century, the only place where the ancient dance could be found was in the tiny village of Harbour Deep.

A catastrophic collapse of the fishing industry forced residents to abandon the community in 2002. Without a sustainable economy, a village dies. Without dancers, can a dance live?

This feature uses the form of the 18th-century dance to trace 21st-century social and economic dislocation. Known as Running the Goat, it is danced in eight parts, or figures, and requires dancers to move through changing patterns and partners.

The name of each figure identifies the key movement of that part of the dance. Usually danced by four couples, it lasts for about 25 minutes, the length of this program.

Voices:
Anita Best (singer)
Mercedes Barry (dancer)
Cyril Whitten (retired fisherman)
Ned Hutchings, Jim Hamlyn (community organisers)
Tonya Kierley (dance instructor)

Written, recorded and produced by Chris Brookes.
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SOUND: *Dancers' voices "Can you see a dance on the radio? (laughter)*

VOICE: Running the Goat. A dance in eight figures.

BROOKES: For someone who has never seen, it, can you describe it?

DANCER: Well, it's one of those things... I would imagine, what climbing Mount Everest would feel like.

SOUND: *Brookes: "Okay!"*
Accordion music starts, dance begins.

DANCER Eight people, four couples. And there's been times when I get maybe a quarter, or halfway through it and I think "This is it. This is the heart-attack time!" And you can't swallow, and your heart is going mad, and the sweat is coming out of you.

It's just... there's a certain thing that people get inside of it, that I just don't get from the other dances. I don't want to get too carried away here, but it is kind of a spiritual experience, not just a physical one.

SOUND: *Dance stomp.*

1st Figure:

VOICE: First figure: Circle Round, Promenade.

SOUND: *Foghorn, dancer's feet*

BROOKES: A thick grey wall of fog promenades through the cliffs and shuffles round the harbour. Kind of hard to hear on the radio. Fog -- like fish -- is pretty silent. Except, they invented a voice for the fog: the foghorn. And for the fish? They invented a culture.

SOUND: *Foghorn, dancer's feet, singer humming*

SINGER: *(hums) "Okay, how about that?"*

BROOKES: Culture is a practical thing. It's about survival.

SINGER: *"Ready?" (hums)*

BROOKES: Once, Newfoundlanders sang songs like this to find their way.

SINGER: *(sings) From Bonavist' Cape to the Stinking Isles,*
The course is North full forty miles
When you must steer away Northeast
'Til Cape Freels, Gull Island bear Nor-nor-west...

SINGER: Sometimes songs were used as navigational aids. For people who couldn't really read charts and maps. And you wanted to be able to make the right turns to get around the reefs and rocks and stuff, you know.

BROOKES: So it's kind of like a sung map?

SINGER: Yeah. Oh yes, absolutely. So we used to sing our way around in the world, like the Australians had the 'songlines'. It's an interesting idea, to find your way around in the world by song.

(sings) Then Nor-nor-west thirty-three miles
Three leagues offshore lies Wadhams Isles
When of a rock you must take care
Two miles South-southeast from isles it bears.

BROOKES: Songs to find the fish, dances to celebrate them. This is the oldest European culture in North America -- here before the Plains Indian had the horse. And for five centuries it was all about fish.

SOUND: *(song stops)*

BROOKES: Then, thirteen years ago the cod stopped. 30,000 jobs disappeared, and people talked about economics. Now they talk about culture -- that delicate dance of survival.

2nd Figure:

VOICE: Second figure: Men Step Out.

SOUND: *Dance leader: "Men step out!"*
Dancers' feet
Kittiwakes (seabirds) calling.

FISHERMAN: There's a place called "The Dumpy". And then you go up, further up: "Old Terry."

SINGER: The way we defined our world was by naming it. like everybody defines their world by naming it.

FISHERMAN: "Little Hanover," and "Big Hanover."

SINGER: But the names now don't mean the same as they did. The fishing ground names don't mean the same because you can't catch any fish there. So what meaning do they have?

FISHERMAN: "The Smoker"

SINGER: You know, you can go to the place where the fishing ground is, but what meaning does the name have if you can't haul a fish up out of it?

FISHERMAN: "The Bag of Bread."

BROOKES: The surface of Motion Bay looks as bare as an empty dance floor. But not to the generations of fishermen who've danced on it.

SOUND: *Old make-and-break boat engine starts up*

FISHERMAN: Well, ah... I can, I can start in from the time you leave the harbour. And when...

DANCER: And when you, you start, you always try to keep it tight. Keep the elbows together and keep it tight. Like, the smaller the better, the tighter circle you have. So the music starts, and you circle round...

MUSIC: *Goat dance tune starts up*

FISHERMAN: The first place you'll come to is what we call "The Chapel Ground."

BROOKES: Um hmmm...

FISHERMAN: That's the first piece of ground.

BROOKES: How do you know when you're on Chapel... to me it's just the surface of the water. How do you know?

FISHERMAN: Yeah, well I know when I'm on the Chapel Ground, you go out with the chapel lined up, you know? The RC church?

BROOKES: Right...

FISHERMAN: And you go out with that lined up...

DANCER: It's always to the left, things always go to the left...

FISHERMAN: ...and then on Watch Hill here, is two hills comes together, you know?

DANCER: ...and it's circle round, circle back...

FISHERMAN: ..when you bring them two hills together, and the chapel lined up, you're on the Chapel Ground, eh?

DANCER: And then you dance on the spot. Just do a little step dance on the spot.

MUSIC: *Goat dance step moment*

FISHERMAN: Yeah. And you got about fifteen fathom of water there. That's a knob of ground, eh? I mean that's where the fish hang around, these knobs, you know...

DANCER: ...Swing your partner, circle back...

BROOKES: So if you don't know the marks...

FISHERMAN: If you don't know the marks, sir, you're not going to do nothing with it, no.

DANCER: Then there's a spin and a circle after each move. And each man, the men take their partner by the arm and just swing around.

MUSIC: *Goat dance swing moment*

FISHERMAN: There's a place there called the "Jars Rock"

DANCER: And then there's the "Cartwheel"...

FISHERMAN: ...and "Sculpin Rock"...

DANCER: ...and then it's "Through the Woods"...

FISHERMAN: ...and the "South'ard Part of The Rock", and the "Nor'ard Part of the Rock". There's ever so many knobs of ground there, you know?

DANCER: And then you turn and put your left hand in, and go the opposite way...

BROOKES: This is like a dictionary!

FISHERMAN: Oh, don't be talking! Oh, my dear! When you get out there, boy, and sometimes fish is scarce, you got to be right on that knob of ground to get fish. Anyone who don't know anything about fishing, they could anchor between these grounds and they wouldn't catch enough of fish to eat.

DANCER: Swing 'em round, and swing 'em back...

FISHERMAN: Did you ever hear tell of "The Madam?" She's here in the cliff. With an apron on.

DANCER: ...swing your partner...

BROOKES: The shape of a woman...

FISHERMAN: Yes.

BROOKES: ...in the, in the rock?

FISHERMAN: Yes. A white apron on her. What! And that's the mark for the "North Head." Half of her, and a hummit in over the cove, Maddox Cove.

BROOKES: Half of her?

FISHERMAN: Yeah.

BROOKES: Which half? The top half or bottom half?

FISHERMAN: Ah, the top half. Yeah. Oh yeah. She haves her pants on, you know. *(laughs)*

DANCER: Circle round and back. And then "Thread the Needle."

BROOKES: How old are these names, Cyril?

FISHERMAN: By god, they goes back a long ways. Long before my grandfather's time, I now that.

BROOKES: Is this knowledge -- this language, if you like -- is it going out, in recent years?

FISHERMAN: Yes, it is! Because, I mean, they're not fishing the ground now like they used to. You know, you're not allowed. You know, the fishery is closed since 1992, eh?

MUSIC: *(dance tune finishes)*

FISHERMAN: Yeah. I dreams about it now, that's all. Ha ha ha! Yeah.

SOUND: *seabirds calling*

BROOKES: You mean you see it in your dreams?

FISHERMAN: Yes! And I do be there, sometimes. Ha!

SOUND: *seabirds calling*

BROOKES: Some communities adapted their dance. Some couldn't.

3rd Figure:

VOICE: Third figure: Women Step Out, Cross Over.

BROOKES: This is one of the communities that couldn't.

SOUND: *Ferryboat horn.*

BROOKES: Harbour Deep began in the 17th century. i took my tape recorder there five years ago, when it was still alive.

FERRY CAPTAIN: We're about 5 miles out from Harbour Deep now. We'll round this turn and up into the bay.

BROOKES: Around that headland there?

CAPTAIN: Um hmmmm...

BROOKES: It was a three-hour ferry ride to get there. No road.

CAPTAIN: It'll take us about another 40 minutes...

SOUND: *(coughing)*

BROOKES: The community itself. It was Sunday.

SOUND: *"A great prophet has risen among us... Our processional hymn is number 255, This is the Day." (singing) This is the day, this is the day that the Lord has made, that the Lord has made, We will rejoice, we will rejoice and be glad in it...*

BROOKES: A decade earlier the little church would have been full. But listen to this recording and you'll hear just ten voices.

SOUND: *This is the day that the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it. This is the day, this is the day that the Lord has made...*

BROOKES: And outside of the church, no one was rejoicing. They were talking about leaving.

WOMAN: We're just packing now, we're getting ready to go on the ferry tomorrow.

BROOKES: Where are you going?

WOMAN: I'm going out to New Brunswick. Yeah, and, ah...

BROOKES: You been here all your life?

WOMAN: Yes. Yeah. *(sighs)* I've been here all my life

BROOKES: Has it changed a lot in the last few years?

WOMAN: Yes. Yeah. Years ago, you know everyone would be fishing here, and that made a lot of difference. But now that's all gone. The place is starting to get like, it's like it's getting lonelier somehow or other. You know? Everything is so still night-time, it'd give you the creeps, ha ha. There was a house there, there was a man living there but that house is closed up. And the man living next to me on the other side, he's leaving in September, going to Jackson's Arm. And there's not that many people around. And that makes it look lonely.

SOUND: *Goat dance tune, faint*

WOMAN: But here in Harbour Deep they done that Goat Dance. Yeah. They always done the Goat. Christmas and that, we had the dances. We always have a dance. We have socials in the school, or in people's porches. Oh yes! There used to be big porches, bigger than this, as big as my living room sometimes! They used to have big porches. They used to go round: "Are you coming to the dance tonight?" I would say "where's the dance?" "Oh, up in uncle Jim Randall's porch" or something like that! Then we'd all get together and have our dance. Yeah. *(chuckles)*

pause

Would you like to have a cup of tea? You said you'd like to have a cup of tea! I'll plug in the kettle and get you a cup of tea...

BROOKES: Thank you...

For four centuries, Harbour Deep danced to the rhythm of fish. When the fish stopped, the community did, too. The last residents left four years ago.

SOUND: *dance stops*

BROOKES: Harbour Deep disappeared from the map.

4th Figure:

VOICE: Fourth figure: Cartwheel.

SOUND: *Door being unlocked, swinging open*

BROOKES: The museum...

JIM HAMLYN: Yeah...

BROOKES: This community is still on its feet.

HAMLYN: This is a picture that was donated there a little while ago...

BROOKES: *(reading)* ...Petty Harbour 1898... as it was then..

HAMLYN: Yeah...

BROOKES: The only place you'll find a commercial cod fishery in Petty Harbour today is in the town museum, framed in photographs and recorded on tape.

HAMLYN: So we sat down and we interviewed the people and asked them, like "Tell us about fishing" and like, put that in our museum. Have it in book form so that people could sit and really get a sense of who our people are. Right?

BROOKES: Petty Harbour's survival strategy.

HAMLYN: My name is Jim Hamlyn, I'm on the Petty Harbour-Maddox Cove Development Corporation.

HUTCHINGS: My name is Nat Hutchings. I'm mayor of the community.

HAMLYN: For many people, I think there's been a great psychological change, you know. Your identity is tied to what you can produce, you know? And if you take that away, it's a big change.

HUTCHINGS: It's more like culture shock. I mean, your culture all your lifetime is the fishery, the fishery. I mean, you're eating and living and breathing the fishery. And all of a sudden that's gone. It's like a death. I mean, it's so total. And there's no getting that part back. So I mean, after awhile you've got to do something. And I believe that's what the community done. I'd say 99 percent of the community said: "I can't live like this. Our community got to be sustainable." The people in the community said: "Listen. I'm going to do something. I'm not going to fail."

HAMLYN: And the consensus was that people saw that tourism could be a way in which to create new employment, create new business opportunities, and help make the bridge to what I guess has become the new economy for us now, basically.

5th Figure:

VOICE: Fifth figure: Through the Woods.

SOUND: *shop atmosphere. Owner chatting with customer: "Many people come in and say 'We traveled across the island and been into numerous craft shops but this is the best one so far...(laughter)...'*

BROOKES: The new economy at work. This used to be Weir's General Store in Petty Harbour, selling groceries and canned goods to residents. Now it's The Olde Craft Store, offering crafts and souvenirs to tourists.

SOUND: *shop atmosphere "...still the old fashioned shop. The old general store, only the merchandise has changed..."*

BROOKES: If the town development corporation has its way, shops like this are just the beginning. Their 4-year 'Strategic Tourism Plan' predicts that if they can raise the funds and build the infrastructure, the average visitor would drop 25 dollars per visit on food, souvenirs and attractions. That could generate 3 million dollars a year, and 150 jobs.

SOUND: *paper drawing spread out*

BROOKES: This is the architect's plan here, is it?

HAMLYN: Yes. Basically a 4-year plan to put in place, basically, the infrastructure. You know, interactive history, a museum, restaurant, that you need in order to have people spend their money in our community.

BROOKES: It's a tourism industry that you're basing on the identity...

HUTCHINGS: ...of what we have now, basically. Just adding some infrastructure like boat tours, some little craft stores, probably restaurants, cafes, you know.

HAMLYN: Amenities, right? People want to see what you have, but they're consumers, too. Our philosophy has changed in that we've looked for new ways in order to maintain our community, and one of the things is the tourism industry.

6th Figure:

VOICE: Sixth figure: Couples Out Around.

SOUND: *Dance instructor on p.a.system: "Okay! Here's how it's going to go! For the next ten minutes you're going to get some crash course instruction on a dance called 'Running the Goat.'*

BROOKES: While the live community tools up a 4-year plan to catch tourists, the dead community's dance doppleganger is already reeling them in. Not, of course, in Harbour Deep -- the community's gone -- but in tourist entertainments elsewhere around the island. This prime catch of tourists is on the dance floor in Trinity Bay for a summer festival.

SOUND: *Dance instructor on p.a.system: "...and it's a dance that comes from Harbour Deep. And you're pretty lucky actually, because you're going to be Running the Goat tonight, and nobody in Harbour Deep is running the Goat because Harbour Deep doesn't exist anymore. So having said that, let's learn the dance!"*

(Musicians start to play Goat Dance tunes)

"...All join hands! And circle round!..."

DANCE INSTRUCTOR: The minute that a community has lost its living soul, everything is changed, everything is different. So you get great nostalgia now. I mean, people talk about... Harbour Deep is the buzz word now in Newfoundland. It's just one more fallen community, one more big headstone on the map of Newfoundland communities. So the dance is like a performing art presentation of what we perceive the image of Harbour Deep to be. Used to be.

SOUND: *p.a.system: "alright couple number two get ready, number four!..."*

INSTRUCTOR: So then Harbour Deep is part of that race of communities that's gone, and what have we got to show? Oh, we've got their dance! You know? We have the essence of Harbour Deep in a dance, in a little vial that I can take out every Wednesday night and go: "Look! Poof! Here's some pixie dust from Harbour Deep! Now for a moment, for 25 minutes, we're all going to be people from

Harbour Deep running the Goat." Its disgusting in a way, but completely inevitable and natural and good in another.

For visitors and for locals alike, to be able to dance in a choreographed piece of authentic... very loaded word there... 'authentic' Newfoundland dance and music, is the experience they're looking for. It is the shoehorn into the cultural experience. I can't tell you how many people leave the dance hall and say "You have made my stay!"

BROOKES: Teaching a dance like that to tourists... it's obviously different from a community which used to do it as its own dance.

INSTRUCTOR: Um hmmm. And I stopped doing the dance for a long time actually. Because I wasn't... I wasn't sure the ends justified the means. And the more I began to realise that tourism is eclipsing culture, and swallowing it up whole... sometimes it keeps me awake at night, believe it or not. It bothers me. But you can get all nationalistic about it and say, you know, "Newfoundland is not for sale. Go home filthy tourist maggots, we are not a cultural strip-mine. This is ours! Its not a souvenir!" And there's a lot of people who are like that. But then, if its Newfoundland's 'treasure' or not, its just dancing. So that's how I justify it.

SOUND: *Dance hall. Dance ends with applause*

7th Figure:

VOICE: Seventh figure: Thread the Needle.

HAMLYN: You know, there's been a lot of drastic changes. Almost to the sense that you've, in some ways, lost your soul. It's still a philosophical change. I've always taken the view that it's all about being able to adapt.

BROOKES: What do you say to critics who say that Newfoundland communities refocusing towards tourism is going to turn the place into a kind of folksy Disneyland?

HAMLYN: Well, there are skeptics. But the thing about it too is, do you just throw your hands up and say "that's the end of us as a people"? You know, have we been here 500 years for that?

HUTCHINGS: There's another way of looking at it. I mean, we had fish one time; we had employment. We got tourists now. We're fishers of people basically now rather than fishers of cod.

SOUND: *Foghorn, music, dancing feet.*

8th Figure:

VOICE: Eighth figure: The Whip.

SINGER: You know, there's certain linguistic things and certain place names, certain ways of doing things that were connected to fishing and to boats... it's just changing.

SOUND: *Foghorn, music, dancing feet. Singer's hum.*

SINGER: It's not the fault of tourism. It's just that... our lives here have changed really radically, and whether or not there were any tourists that would be the case. Because once the fish were gone, and people in the coastal communities were not fishing, then our lives changed.

SOUND: *Dancers' whoops, laughter*

SINGER: If you're attached to a certain thing, you regard it as a loss. But it is a natural kind of loss, in a way. I mean, it's like when someone dies.

SOUND: *Dancers' whoops*

SINGER: Well, everyone has to die. It's still really hard and sad for the people who miss that person, but change and alteration are the natural way of things.

SOUND: *Dancers finish, applaud.*

SINGER: It sounds like a horrible thing to say, in a way, but the tradition... it doesn't have its regular life. It just has a remembered life. And that would have happened whether tourists came or not.

SOUND: *Singer's hum repeats.*

END

Harbour Deep in its last days, 2001