

The early step dancing costume was developed in concurrence with the Celtic Revival as a response to the need for visible national identity. Dresses were handcrafted in the home and contained recognizable symbols of 'Irishness' such as shamrocks, knotwork and Kells-style animal ornament. This trend dominated into the mid 1990s.

Today's step dancing costume, by contrast, stresses the individual, looking outward to more global influences. Leopard print, flowers, sequins and geometric shapes have replaced the earlier motifs and generated a booming industry specializing in their production. The change represents a radical shift, not only in the physical appearance of the modern costume but also in its cultural ethos and has yet to be fully examined or explained.

As an academic subject, the Irish dance costume is often overlooked, resulting in very little field research and analysis on the topic. I aim to achieve the following: catalog and analyze the modern motifs and evolving dress forms; investigate the genesis of the new forms and motifs; record methods of design and production; and finally, discuss the relationship between the modern costume and new concepts of Irish Identity.

Irish Identity & the Modern Step Dancing Costume

An M. Phil in Irish Art History Thesis

