

# SIR ROGER DE COVERLEY

as played by Vivian Williams

transcribed by Kitty Steetle

The image shows a musical score for the tune 'Sir Roger de Coverley' in 9/8 time. It consists of three staves of music. The first staff starts with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 9/8 time signature. Above the notes are chord annotations: G, D, G, D, G, C, D. The second staff begins with a measure rest and continues with the melody, with chord annotations: G, C, G, D, G, C, G, G, C, D. The third staff also begins with a measure rest and continues with the melody, with chord annotations: G, Am, D, G, D, G, C, D. The music is written in a simple, folk-like style with eighth and sixteenth notes.

The tune, *Sir Roger de Coverley*<sup>1</sup>, is believed to date back to at least the 17th century, being published in John Playford's **The Dancing Master**, 9th Edition (London, 1695).<sup>2</sup> By 1730, this tune appears in America in James Alexander's personal collection as 'Young Roger'.<sup>3</sup> The dance associated with the tune survives today in America as The Virginia Reel, long claimed to be George Washington's favorite dance.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the most famous appearance of the Sir Roger de Coverley tune and dance is in Charles Dickens's book, **A Christmas Carol** (London, 1843), during Mr Fezziwig's Christmas party:

But the great effect of the evening came after the Roast and Boiled, when the fiddler (an artful dog, mind! The sort of man who knew his business better than you or I could have told it him!) struck up "Sir Roger de Coverley." Then old Fezziwig stood out to dance with Mrs. Fezziwig. Top couple, too; with a good stiff piece of work cut out for them; three or four and twenty pair of partners; people who were not to be trifled with; people who *would* dance, and had no notion of walking.<sup>5</sup>

Both tune, Sir Roger de Coverley, and dance are performed in the 1951 film, **A Christmas Carol**, starting at 26:40, or in the YouTube snip below.<sup>6</sup>

Sir Roger de Coverley is notably different from most Old-Time tunes in that it is in 9/8, triple meter, instead of the expected 4/4, duple meter. This has led some to believe it was originally Irish, but upon deeper investigation that appears to be unsubstantiated.<sup>7</sup>

Versions of Sir Roger de Coverley are played in Old Time jams, Irish Sessions, English Country Dances, and contradances all over North America and Europe.

—Kitty Steetle

Vivian and Phil Williams: <https://youtu.be/y4XB8g4gwLw>

Dance: <https://youtu.be/iye3JoD5LUo>

A Christmas Carol (1951): [https://youtu.be/NjwrSy\\_YI2Q](https://youtu.be/NjwrSy_YI2Q)

<sup>1</sup>The Haymakers' Jig is the Scottish name for the tune. The Haymakers' Jig also has a dance in Linscott's **Folk Songs of Old New England** (CT, 1939), p 83, but it is a different dance.

<sup>2</sup>The entire Dancing Master can be downloaded here: <https://imslp.org/work/144608>. 'Roger of Coverley' can be found with dance steps in the 9th edition on page 167.

<sup>3</sup>Van Winkle Keller, Kate and George A. Fogg. **Country Dances from Colonial New York; James Alexander's Notebook, 1730**. Boston, 2000, p 5, 42 – 43. James Alexander was born in Scotland in 1691 and moved to the Colonies in 1715, eventually becoming Attorney General for New York.

<sup>4</sup><https://www.auchitya.com/virginia-reel-a-romantic-couple-dance/>

<sup>5</sup>For Dickens's A Christmas Carol ebook go to: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/46/46-h/46-h.htm>

<sup>6</sup>Unfortunately, it does not appear in arguably the best **A Christmas Carol** film, **A Muppet Christmas Carol** (1992).

<sup>7</sup>[https://tunearch.org/wiki/Annotation:Sir\\_Roger\\_de\\_Coverley](https://tunearch.org/wiki/Annotation:Sir_Roger_de_Coverley) (I love me some old tunes!)