

TOTW Hjaltadans

Once in a great while you hear a piece that sends your spirit to a happy place. Such is Hjaltadans, or Hjalta Dance. Two legendary fiddlers got together who found a special kinship that promoted them to record a CD together – “Darol & Bruce: Lockdown Breakdown.” I first watched Darol Anger and Bruce Molsky playing Hjaltadans in a Facebook video posted by Bruce played live before an audience, where watching their interaction is half of the fun. They’re totally together and the low notes of Darol’s bass fiddle give it a symphonic sound. About midway they play an ending phrase over and over and then stop simultaneously, allow a beat, and then play again, totally in sync and to the delight of the listeners. Note the smiles on their faces as the audience reacts (captured via a screenshot of the video).



To my American ear, the tune has an exciting Scandinavian feel with a Celtic twist. Upon a query for the source, Bruce commented, “Ale Möller pieced Hjaltadans together from some old Shetland tunes that (I think) came to him through Aly Bain.” Aly Bain is Scottish and Ale Möller is Swedish. If Ale Möller “pieced together” the tune, it’s a daunting task to figure out where the first part comes from.

The version I’ve learned has 16 measures in the A part, but the melodic theme is, at first, ten measures, then it’s six measures. Its crooked feel comes within the first ten measures. The B part is twelve measures total, broken up with five measures, then those five measures repeated with a two-measure held note.

There is a fairly young group named Haltadans from the Shetland Islands whose band name comes from the tune. In [this delightful video](#) they play the second part fairly closely to the Hjaltadans I’ve learned. The first part isn’t played at all, so one still wonders about the original tune.

The tune title has a historic and mythological background. In this [Wikipedia article](#), we read:

“Haltadans, also known as Fairy Ring or Haltadans stone circle, is a [stone circle](#) on the island of [Fetlar](#) in [Shetland](#), Scotland. This site is a ring of 38 stones, of which 22 are still fixed in the soil, and it is 11 meters (37 ft) in diameter. Inside this is an earthen ring 7.9 meters (26 ft) in

diameter, with a 1.5 meters (5 ft) gap in the southwest side. In the center of the rings are two rectangular pillars.”

Further, according to [Jakob Jakobsen](#), “the name *Haltadans* means: ‘lame or limping dance’. This is a reference to the legend that the circle of stones was once a circle of dancing trolls and that the two rock pillars in the center were once a fiddler and his wife. They had fiddled and danced all night long, and, heedless of the time, were still fiddling and dancing when the sun rose and petrified them all.”

Another [article](#) includes the circle of stone description, plus a sound track with Aly Bain playing a different tune with Ale Möller and Bruce Molsky.

Following are links to the recordings I’ve found:

[Bruce Molsky and Darol Anger](#)

[Bruce Molsky and Ale Möller](#)

[Aly Bain, Ale Möller, Bruce Molsky](#)

[Haltadans](#)

[RANT](#) (B part slowly played)

Well, sometimes I pick an esoteric piece for TOTW, but hopefully you’ll enjoy this one and even give it a try.