

## **Lord of the Dance**

Sidney Carter, 1963

per the Barley Bree Irish trio, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wwdmqM3pc68>

I danced in the morning when the world was begun,  
And I danced in the moon and the stars and the sun,  
And I came down from heaven and I danced on the earth,  
At Bethlehem I had my birth.

Refrain

Dance, then, wherever you may be;  
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he.  
And I'll lead you all wherever you may be,  
And I'll lead you all in the dance, said he.

I danced for the scribe and the Pharisee,  
But they would not dance and they would not follow me;  
I danced for the fishermen, for James and John;  
They came to me and the dance went on.

Refrain

I danced on the sabbath when I cured the lame,  
The holy people said it was a shame;  
They whipped and they stripped and they hung me high;  
And they left me there on a cross to die.

Refrain

I danced on a Friday and the sky turned black;  
It's hard to dance with the devil on your back;  
They buried my body and they thought I'd gone,  
But I am the dance and I still go on.

Refrain

They cut me down and I leapt up high,  
I am the life that'll never, never die;  
'll live in you if you'll live in me;  
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord\\_of\\_the\\_Dance\\_\(hymn\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord_of_the_Dance_(hymn))

In writing the lyrics to "Lord of the Dance" in 1963, Sydney Carter was inspired partly by Jesus, but also partly by a statue of the Hindu God Shiva as Nataraja (Shiva's dancing pose) which sat on his desk,[3] and was partly intending simply to give tribute to Shaker music. He later stated, "I did not think the churches would like it at all. I thought many people would find it pretty far flown, probably heretical and anyway dubiously Christian. But in fact people did sing it and, unknown to me, it touched a chord ... Anyway, it's the sort of Christianity I believe in."

— Sydney Carter Obituary in 'The Telegraph', 2004  
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1456932/Sydney-Carter.html>

Sydney Carter wrote:

I see Christ as the incarnation of the piper who is calling us. He dances that shape and pattern which is at the heart of our reality. By Christ I mean not only Jesus; in other times and places, other planets, there may be other Lords of the Dance. But Jesus is the one I know of first and best. I sing of the dancing pattern in the life and words of Jesus.

Whether Jesus ever leaped in Galilee to the rhythm of a pipe or drum I do not know. We are told that David danced (and as an act of worship too), so it is not impossible. The fact that many Christians have regarded dancing as a bit ungodly (in a church, at any rate) does not mean that Jesus did.

The Shakers didn't. This sect flourished in the United States in the nineteenth century, but the first Shakers came from Manchester in England, where they were sometimes called the "Shaking Quakers". They hived off to America in 1774, under the leadership of Mother Anne. They established celibate communities - men at one end, women at the other; though they met for work and worship. Dancing, for them, was a spiritual activity. They also made furniture of a functional, lyrical simplicity. Even the cloaks and bonnets that the women wore were distinctly stylish, in a sober and forbidding way.

Their hymns were odd, but sometimes of great beauty: from one of these (Simple Gifts) I adapted this melody. I could have written another for the words of 'Lord of the Dance' (some people have), but this was so appropriate that it seemed a waste of time to do so. Also, I wanted to salute the Shakers.

Sometimes, for a change I sing the whole song in the present tense. 'I dance in the morning when the world is begun...'. It's worth a try.

— From Green Print for Song, Stainer & Bell (1974) and Lord of the Dance and other Songs and Poems, Stainer & Bell (2002)