

# Development Of Dance Through the Centuries

by Harold & Meredith Sears

## Long Ago---

- **Carole**, the root dance from which all court dances developed. It was a chain dance and perhaps dates back to the Minoan civilization in Crete, c. 1400--1200 B.C. There were two forms: linear and circular:
- **Farandole**, a linear chain dance characteristic of Mediterranean countries, which gave us figures -- dancers joined hands and walked or skipped, tracing a pattern or "figure."
- **Branle**, a circular or arc chain dance characteristic of more northern countries, which gave us rhythms and steps -- quicks and slows, jumps and hops, and the eight-beat phrase: slow, slow, quick, quick, slow.



## Early Middle Ages---

- **Estampie**, the first couple dance, arising out of the idea of *courtly love*. One couple broke from the chain and, still side-by-side, danced a few figures while the rest of the group looked on. Too, where the Carole had no focus, but milled amorphously, the Estampie had a front, a focus on the head of the hall (king, lord, duke . . .). This development gave rise to a dichotomy between folk dancing and court dancing.



## 15th Century---

Late Middle Ages France

- **French Basse Danse**, a processional dance, a number of couples, one behind the other, progressing around the circumference of the hall, in 3/4 time, with elaborate, rigidly stylized steps and arm and head movements. Characterized by opposite footwork and actions for the woman.
- **Tordion**, a jumping dance that led to the Galliard

Early Renaissance Italy

- **Italian Bassa Danza**, a slow and stately court dance. Here, we see the beginnings of rise and fall (called Aiere) on marble floors, rather than flat walking out of doors or on the rushes covering a castle floor. There was also

the use of contra-body position (called Maniera, ("mannerism") and épaulement in ballet).

- **Ballo**, a dance consisting of both slower rhythms and quicker, more peasant-like rhythms.

### 16th Century---

High Renaissance France & England; Queen Elizabeth I, Shakespeare.

- **Pavane**, a slow, simple, controlled processional or couple dance.
- **Measures**, a slow figure or formation dance
- **Galliard**, an athletic dance mainly for the man with the woman in relatively quiet admiration. It was the first symmetrical dance -- it led with each foot equally. For an example, listen to the 19th century aria 'La donna e mobile' from Verdi's *Rigoletto*.
- **Volta**, an athletic couple dance that involved regular lifts of the woman (scandalous -- one might glimpse her knees or more -- but Queen Elizabeth enjoyed it).
- **Almain**, meaning "German" dance, a peasant-like processional dance featuring an escort hand hold and consisting of three steps and a hop, repeated, and various simple figures.
- **Coranto**, a chain dance with regular one-foot hops and two-feet jumps.



### 17th Century---

Louis XIV (1638--1715) France and Stuart England.

- **Slow Courante**, derived from the Coranto but a couple dance rather than chain, formal rather than casual, slow and stately, smooth and composed, and "with great negligence." From now on, court dances must never look as though we are making an effort -- no jumps, no lifts. One or one-and-a-quarter inch heels and an upper-class habit of walking with turned-out toes became common. All this was a transition from an Italian Renaissance style to the French Baroque.





## 18th Century---

Western Europe, French Court, French Revolution (1789--1799), Georgian England, 1714--1830, Henry Fielding and Jane Austen.

- **Minuet**, a rigid, stylized, couple, processional, geometric pattern dance; the last dance in which we use same footwork rather than opposite. The five classical foot positions are formalized (first through fifth position). Where rise and fall had involved "rise above normal

and then sink to normal," in now involved "sink below normal, rise above, and then return to normal." The idea of not contra-body but contra-arm work became stylized. If the left foot were forward, then the right arm would be raised or otherwise prominent.

- **Passepied**, literally "pass the feet," a fast minuet.
- **Gavotte**, a medium to fast ballet. At the end, the lead man would kiss his partner and then all the women in the group, and the lead woman would so honor the men.
- **Bourree**, an easy-going square dance to 3/4 and 2/4 music.
- **Cotillon**, a lively square dance for four couples, one on each side of a square. In the nineteenth century, it acquired game-like components (e.g., musical chairs) with winners, losers, and prizes.
- **Gigue** = Jig, a lively dance for one, two, or more people featuring fast stamping footwork and a quiet torso.
- **Hornpipe**, an energetic dance that features stylized sailors' skills, such as climbing, rigging, and hauling anchor.



## 19th Century---

Regency England, 1795--1837, Industrial Revolution, Victorian Era, 1837--1901, Napoleonic Wars, 1803--1815.



- **Waltz**, "the greatest change in dance form and dancing manners that has happened in our history." The first appearance of closed position in polite society -- not hand in hand but arm around waist; not side by side but face to face; not focused on the king, dance leader, or on fellow dancers but focused on each other. The rapid rotation was dizzying, exhausting, and led to a loss of control. Where earlier 3/4 music had a strong first and second beat, waltz music had a

strong 1-beat, a weak 2, and a medium 3. It was hypnotic (think Strauss).

- **Boston**, a slower version of the waltz with feet parallel and heels touching the



floor. (In 1924, ISTD decreed that our feet should remain parallel -- no more "turnout." A rule that had lasted over 300 years was "repealed.")

- **Galop**, fast, lively, closed position, a forerunner to the polka.
- **Polka**, a jolly couple dance to 4/4 music that incorporates a little jump.
- **Quadrille**, a lively square dance for four couples.
- **Lancers**, a more stately square dance for four couples, containing military bows and salutes and deep curtsies.



## 20th Century---

Edwardian England, WWI, 1914--1918, WWII, 1939--1945, Queen Elizabeth II, 1952--present.

- **Two Step**, grew out of the nineteenth century galop and the polka, and at first was a vivacious marching dance with interpolated skips. There is no rise and fall, as in waltz.
- **One Step**, smooth, steady, walking rhythm in which the dancer walks on every other beat (a "slow" count) or runs on every beat (a "quick" count). It evolved out of the two step.
- **Tango**, an earthy, erotic, proud, and passionate dance with the look of a stylized duel, partners stalking each other in a restless prowling, bodies pressed together, intense eye contact, and legs thrusting in attack. Later, much of the flirtation, temptation, and maybe passion were taken out.
  - "Animal" dances like the **Turkey Trot** and **Bunny Hug** arose out of ragtime music. Vernon and Irene Castle showed that one could dance beautifully to ragtime. The Castles' presentations of the one step, two step, waltz, and tango were so popular that Vernon has been called the "father of modern dancing."



## English Ballroom Dancing---

- **Slow Waltz**, a slower form (~30 measures per minute) of the earlier Viennese Waltz (~60 m/m).
- **Slow Foxtrot**, a closed-position dance in 4/4 time, slow-quick-quick, with long gliding steps and more gradual rise and fall than in waltz. An especially striking feature of English Ballroom was the close contact at the hips and lower torso, allowing the man and woman to dance as one body, rather than two. Lead and follow became more precisely controlled. A new technique, the woman's heel turn allowed an easier turn on a single point. And these turns

need not be punctuated as in waltz -- forward, side, close -- with that closing step interrupting progress around the hall. A foxtrot turn is just as big but more flowing -- forward, side, back -- with the back step continuing the progress in an unbroken flow.

- **Quickstep**, a fast foxtrot with some ragtime charleston and the characteristic chasse. Mr. Alex Moore, one of the foremost teachers of English ballroom dance, has referred to the quickstep as, "a dance that can never grow stale, a dance that is unquestionably the most attractive expression of rhythm the world has ever known."
- **Tango**, a flat, walking dance with characteristic right-shoulder lead and a closing step that is a little behind.
- **Latin American**: Rumba, Paso Doble, Bolero, Samba, Mambo, Cha Cha, Merengue, & Salsa.
- **Swing**: Lindy, Jitterbug, Rock 'n' Roll, Jive, West Coast Swing, Hustle, Nightclub or Slow Two Step.



1920s---Henry Ford promotes square and round dancing in Detroit.

1930s & 40s---Lloyd Shaw promotes square and round dancing in Colorado Springs.

1950s---Printed "Dance Instructions," later to become cue sheets.

1960s---Round dances are still mostly memorized but

cueing was beginning to be used.

1970s--Cueing becomes popular.

Primarily based on *May I Have the Pleasure? The Story Of Popular Dancing*, by Belinda Quirey, Dance Books, Cecil Court, London, 1993 (orig., 1976)

