

BMC 26 - *Tickle My Toe* – Renaissance & Early Baroque Dances

In centuries far removed from our own, dancing was both an art and a pastime, calling for considerable agility, a good sense of rhythm, and at times a highly developed athletic awareness. It also served as an opportunity for lively social intercourse, as a late sixteenth-century German chronicle describes:

"After the pipers and players have been asked to play the dance, the dancer steps forward in a most elegant, polite, proud, and splendid manner, chooses a partner for whom he has a special liking among the girls and ladies present, and making his reverences, such as taking off his cap, kissing her hands, bending his knees, using friendly words and other similar ceremonies, invites her to have a lively, joyous and honest dance with him.

"When she has consented to dance, they both step forward, join hands, embrace, and kiss each other (sometimes even on mouth) and further give show of friendship with suitable words and gestures. Thereafter, when the dance itself is about to begin, they first perform the preliminary dance. This is rather solemn, and gives rise to much less improper noise and activity than the after-dance does. During the preliminary dance, those couples who are in love have a better chance to make conversation than during the after-dance, where everything is somewhat disorderly, and there is no lack of running, scrambling, pressing of hands, secret pushing, jumping, shouting, and other improper goings-on. When the dance is over, the dancer takes his partner back to her seat, and with the same reverence takes leave of her, or else stays, sitting on her lap and talking to her."

Illuminations in precious manuscripts such as *Le Roman de la Rose* and Jean de Waurin's *Chronique de l'Angleterre* sometimes depict dances, either indoors or out, in which the instrumentalists as well as the dancers are clearly visible. Musicians can also be seen in tapestries, engravings, woodcuts, and paintings, all of them yielding precious evidence of the types of instruments used, the number of performers, and the way in which they set about their task. From this abundant and eye-catching evidence we can deduce that there were no hard-and-fast rules: the softer-sounding instruments such as recorder and harp are sometimes portrayed accompanying a round-dance in a garden, while inside some resonant banqueting-hall the louder wind instruments (shawm and trombone) make the rafters ring.

The names of dances and their national permutations are numerous enough to deserve a full-length study, embracing music, philology, sociology and of course the dance itself. Many of these names occur time and time again in the kaleidoscopic sequence of dances heard on this disc, and in the hope that some explanation may enlighten the listener, brief accounts of the most famous of them now follow.

ALMAN or **ALLEMANDE**. The names of some dances indicate their probable place of origin, as sixteenth-century commentators make plain to us. Thomas Morley, in his *Plaine and Easie introduction to Practicall Musick*, compares the *Alman* to the *Galliard* by calling it "a more heavy dance, fitly representing the nature of the people whose name it carrieth"; while the *Orchesographie* of Thoirot Arbeau describes it as follows: "You will all dance together in duple time, moving forwards or (if you wish) backwards . . . when you have reached the end of the hall you can dance while turning around without letting go of your damsel, and the dancers who follow you will do the same."

BALLETTO. Since "Ballo" was the general Italian word for dance, "Balletto" probably started its existence as a simple diminutive. But quite early in its career it came to imply a brisk movement in four-four time, so widely accepted in the world of music that words were added to the melodies and the resulting little dances were sung as well as played.

BASSE DANSE. Arbeau, writing in 1589, said that the Basse Danse had been out of date for the past forty or fifty years, yet he expressed the hope that this dignified, three-in-a-bar dance would return to fashion "as being a type of dance full of virtue and decorum." In advising the dancer how to request a particular dance, Arbeau recommends that "if the tune of some particular ballad, which is set to a basse dance, please you more than another, you should tell the musicians how it begins."

BRANSLE. This was a group dance, as Arbeau describes: "When you begin a bransle, several others will join you, as many young men as damsels, and sometimes the damsel who is the last to arrive will take your left hand and it will thus become a round dance."

CORANTO. A duple-time dance whose characteristic feature was a springing from one foot and alighting on the other, performed in rapid and regular sequence. In his poem *Orchestra* (1596), Sir John Davies is clearly describing this dance form: *What shall I name those current traverses, That on a triple dactyl foot do run, Close by the ground, with sliding passages?*

GALLIARD. Based on a pattern of five steps, the *Galliard* underwent many changes in the Sixteenth Century but nevertheless maintained its brisk and lively character. As Arbeau said: "One must be lively and nimble to dance it because the movements, even when performed reasonably slowly, are light-hearted. And it must needs be slower for a man of large stature than for a small man, inasmuch as the tall one takes longer to execute his steps and move his feet backwards and forwards."

An early version of the *Galliard* permitted the couple to walk around the hall once or twice before the damsel (as Arbeau's young lady is usually translated) "went dancing away to the other end of the hall, and, once there, continued to dance upon the same spot. In the meanwhile, the dancer having followed her presented himself before her to perform a few passages, turning at will now to the right, now to the left. This done,

the damsel danced her way to the opposite end of the hall and her partner, dancing all the while, pursued her thither in order to execute more passages before her." A later version of the dance (the *Lyonnaise*) allowed a change of partners to take place, so that *"the less attractive damsels are given the opportunity of joining in the dance."*

HORNPIPE. Just as some dances are named after the country where they originated, or after the dance-step that gave them their life and character, so others hint at the name of an early instrument that might have been used to speed the dancers on their way. The hornpipe's name may thus refer to a primitive kind of wind instrument made from the horn of an animal. Ben Jonson, in *The Sad Shepherd* mentions *"the nimble hornpipe,"* and although its basic meter was changed from triple to duple as time went on, it remained a gay and ebullient dance, not without nautical associations.

PAVAN(E). The usual derivation is from "paduana," suggesting the Italian town of Padua as a possible place of origin, but this slow four-in-a-bar dance was known throughout Europe and even in parts of Asia at an early date. Basically simple and dignified, the steps have a swaying, graceful lilt that made them peculiarly suitable for processional dances. *"A cavalier may dance the pavan wearing his cloak and sword"* Arbeau tells us, *"and others, dressed in long gowns, can walk with decorum and measured gravity. On solemn feast days, the pavan is employed by kings, princes, and great noblemen to display themselves in their fine mantles and ceremonial robes."*

SARABAND. Some say the name comes from a dancer, Zarabanda; others affirm that the original word was Persian (ser-band). The dance began as a sensuous and lascivious affair, but was later toned down so that by the Sixteenth Century it was thought of as a slow dance in three-four time. It became well established in England during the Seventeenth Century.

Notes by DENIS STEVENS

Thoirot Arbeau 1519-1595 / John Blow 1649-1708 / William Brade 1560-1630 / William Byrd 1543-1623 / Girolamo Frescobaldi 1583-1643 / Don Carlo Gesualdo 1560-1613 / Anthony Holborne died 1602 / Matthew Locke 1630-1677 / Martin Peerson 1572-1650 / Martino Pesenti 1600-1647 / Henry Purcell 1659-1695 / Thomas Tomkins 1572-1656

THE JAYE CONSORT

Francis Baines, viols, percussion, shawm, bagpipes / Elizabeth Baines, violin, viol

Peter Vel, viol / John Isaacs, recorder, viol / Jane Ryan, viol, percussion / Desmond Dupré, lute

THE PHILIP JONES BRASS ENSEMBLE

Philip Jones and John Wilbraham, trumpets

Raymond Brown, Roger Bremmer and Raymond Premru, trombones

THE ACCADEMIA TRIO

Trevor Williams, violin / Joy Hall, cello / Harold Lester, harpsichord

HARPSICHORD SOLO: Harold Lester (harpsichord by Hugh Gough)

THE ACCADEMIA MONTEVERDIANA STRING ORCHESTRA

DENIS STEVENS conductor and musical director

Recording by the Accademia Monteverdiana.