

Burgundian Basse Danse

Sources

Brussels and Tholouze

Burgundian Basse Danses appear in a number of sources. The earliest of these are the manuscript in Bibliotheque Royale (Ms 9085), usually called "The Brussels Manuscript"; and the book by Michel Tholouze. These two appeared in the period 1480 - 1500, although dances from these works appeared in the flyleaf "Ballet de la Royne" in 1445, indicating that Basse Dances had been danced in Burgundy for approximately as long as they had been danced in Italy.

Moderne and Copeland

The next two important sources are the book from the press of Moderne, and Robert Copeland's "The manner of dauncynge bace daunces". Although the latter was published in England, it is a translation of a French text (unknown), and lists dances in the Burgundian style.

There is a difference between the early two sources and the later two sources in the naming of the "reprise" or "demarche" step. The early works call the step a demarche, while the later two books call it a reprise. Moderne's dance descriptions also vary significantly from those in Brussels, Tholouze, and Copeland. This suggests that the English Copeland manuscript is in fact closer in style to the two earlier Burgundian manuscripts than Moderne is.

Measures

Moderne's Basse Dance Measures

All of the Burgundian works call for a very rigid style of "regular" basse dances. These regular dances are made up of measures which are classified as "small", "medium", or "large", as well as "perfect" or "imperfect". Moderne gives us a fairly contradictory and illogical table, as follows:

	Perfect	Imperfect
Small	Rv Br SS D R Br	Rv Br SS D SS R Br
Medium	Rv Br SS DDD SS R Br	Rv Br SS D R Br
Large	Rv Br SS DDD SS R D SS R Br	Rv Br SS DDD R D R Br

Brussels Manuscript Basse Dance Measures

Brussels and Tholouze have a different set of measures, these are much more logical:

	Very Perfect	Perfect	Imperfect
Small	SS D SS RRR Br	SS D SS R Br	SS D RRR Br
Medium	SS DDD SS RRR Br	SS DDD SS R Br	SS DDD RRR Br
Large	SS DDDDD SS RRR Br	SS DDDDD SS R Br	SS DDDDD RRR Br

Note that the Brussels Manuscript does not explicitly name the measures as "small", "medium" or "large", although it is obvious from the choreographies that there are measures with one, three, or five double steps, and so I have categorised them this way myself.

The regular dances, which can be performed using measures from these tables) form about three quarters of the dances in these books. The rest of the dances in the books are irregular basse dances, as well as "basse dance mineur", which diverge from the standard "formula" (and are more interesting to dance).

Step Descriptions & Timing

S -- Single and D -- Double

The single and double steps used in the Burgundian Basse Danses are done as open steps, as opposed to the French and Italian styles of the period in which the steps are done as closed steps. That means, a single step is just a step forwards on the left foot, and a single right is done as a step forwards onto the right foot. This is similar to the "passi" of the 16th century Italian dances.

A double left is done in 6 beats as follows:

1-2	Step forwards on the left foot, rising into the balls of the feet.
3-4	Step forwards onto the right foot, staying up on the balls of the feet.
5-6	Step forwards onto the left foot, lowering back onto the heels.

Timing

Note that in the Burgundian dances, each double takes one bar of 6/4 time, and two singles are also done in one bar.

Left and Right foot

The manuscripts are not clear as to whether these dances should start on the left or on the right foot. Tholouze and Brussels make some mention that the first sequence of doubles should start on the left foot, but opinions vary on whether the opening reverance and bransle are done this way. Some dance groups do the entire set of Burgundian basse dances on opposite feet, i.e. the man starts the dance on the left foot, and the lady starts the dance on the right foot. There is really no "correct" or "incorrect" way to do this -- it is up to the individual dance group to set (or not set) a standard. I have therefore not included the foot after each of the dance steps -- singles are given as "S" rather than "SL" or "SR", etc.

Br -- Branle

Holding hands, the dancers take a single step away from each other without joining feet together, and then step back towards the partner, joining feet together again. Look towards your partner as you do this.

R -- Demarche

A Demarche is called for in the Burgundian Basse Danses of the early manuscripts (Toulouse and Brussels), in the place of a Reprise which occurred in the later manuscripts (Moderne). In some cases, the same dance was reprinted, with the Demarches replaced by Reprises. Toulouse & Brussels abbreviated the Demarche with an "r", which adds to the confusion.

A Demarche is done to the same time as a double. For the right foot demarche, step back on the right foot on the first beat. On the second beat, sway forwards, moving your weight onto the front (left) foot. On the third beat, sway backwards, moving your weight onto the back (right) foot. On the fourth beat, close feet, stepping backwards with the left foot.

Effectively, you will have taken a single step backwards to the same time as a double step backwards.

Rv -- Reverance

The jury is definitely still out on this step. It is either the same as a French reverance, or it is just another way of specifying a Demarche. Take your pick.

Regular and Irregular Basse Danes

There are approximately 50 regular basse dances in the Brussels and Tholouze Manuscripts, some appearing more than once, sometimes with different names and sometimes to different pieces of music. Once the various perfect/imperfect measures are learned, the regular dances themselves are trivial.

The irregular dances appear in most cases to be only slightly different to the regular dances. Some of these have a short “SS D R” or “SS D R D R B” measure included in them, while others diverge from the regular basse danse formula somewhat more radically. Here are a few examples.

Alençon

Rv Br	SS D R	
	SS DDD SS RRR Br	(Medium, Very Perfect)
	SS D SS RRR Br	(Small, Very Perfect)
	SS DDD SS RRR Br	(Medium, Very Perfect)

Casuelle La Nouvelle

Rv Br	SS DDDDD RRR Br	(Large, Imperfect)
	SS D SS RRR Br	(Small, Very Perfect)
	SS DDDDD RRR Br	(Large, Imperfect)
	SS D SS RRR Br	(Small, Very Perfect)
	SS DDD RRR Br	(Medium, Imperfect)

Le Rosin

Rv Br	SS D D D D D R R R	(Large, Imperfect)
	Br	
	SS D R D R Br	
	SS D D D D D R R R	(Large, Imperfect)
	Br	
	SS D R D R Br	
	SS D D D R R R Br	(Medium, Imperfect)

Orleans

Rv Br	SS D D D D D SS R R	(Large, Very Perfect)
	R Br	
	SS D D D R R R Br	(Medium, Imperfect)
	SS D SS R R R Br	(Small, Very Perfect)
	SS D D D R R R Br	(Medium, Imperfect)

La Danse de Cleves

This is an irregular basse danse, appearing in the Brussels Manuscript. It is a very unusual basse danse in that there are parts of the dance that do not simply go forwards (unlike every other basse danse except the basse danse mineur). There are also several possible reconstructions floating about, mostly due to the fact that part of the dance notation is missing from the manuscript. It is, however, fairly interesting and this is one of my favourites.

Part A Rv Br SS DDD SS D (retreating)

Part B The man does two singles forwards and a double backwards while the lady turns in place, as follows:

Man:	SS Forwards
	D Retreating
Lady:	SS turning to the right (half turn).
	D (completing the full turn to the right).

The roles are then reversed:

Man:	SS turning to the right (half turn).
	D (completing the full turn to the right).
Lady:	SS Forwards
	D Retreating

Part C Rv Br SS D forwards
D making a half turn in place
D forwards
SS
D making a half turn in place

Part D This is a repeat of Part B

Part E SS DDD Conge

Basse Danse Mineur

Basse danse mineur was a slightly different form of basse danse found in Burgundy (and nowhere else). No great study of basse danse mineur has been made, because nobody really knows what a Pas de Brabant is.

Cornazano equates the Pas de Brabant step of the Burgundian dances with the Saltarello step of the Italian dances. It is also possible that the Pas de Brabant step was done in a similar manner to that of a tourdion. I leave it up to the imagination of the reader -- listen to the music and see what you can fit in. Maybe someone will find out a definitive answer one day.

The other major difference that sets aside basse danse mineur from regular or irregular basse dances is that it never starts with a reverence, just a branle. This may seem like a minor difference -- but it must have been a great difference in the minds of the Burgundians.

Esperance de Bourbon

This dance appears in Tholouze and Brussels.

Pas de Brabant

A	6 Pas de brabant. 6 Pas de brabant	Both together Repeat
B	6 Pas de brabant 6 Pas de brabant	Man only. Lady only
C	4 Pas de brabant. 4 Pas de brabant	Both together Repeat

Basse Danse

Br SS DDD SS RRR Br	(Medium, Very Perfect)
SS D SS RRR Br	(Small, Very Perfect)
