

Bransles

Bransles are the simplest of the known renaissance dances, and a bransle is usually the first dance that is taught of any of the known medieval or renaissance dances.

Most bransles are circle dances, which are usually danced in a circle of alternating men and ladies (although this does not strictly matter). Some bransles are line dances, while others can be danced as either line or circle dances.

History

The word “bransle” comes from a French word meaning a side-to-side movement. Most of the steps in a bransle are from side to side.

There is one primary source for all of the bransles described in this book – this is the “Orchesography” of Thoinot Arbeau, published in France in 1589. You can find references to a translation of Orchesography available from Dover (by Mary Stuart Evans) in the bibliography provided with this dance book. Orchesography is the most fundamental primary dance source used for dances in the SCA, and it is a “must have” if you are going to do any period dance research.

There is also a facsimile edition of Orchesography available, although obviously unless you read French the translation will be easier to work from!

Social Setting

It is reasonably obvious from the description of the bransles in Orchesography, and from Arbeau’s status in society, that the bransles were dances done normally by the lower or middle classes in French society at the time (the upper classes were probably dancing pavaues, galliards, and perhaps some dances in the Italian style at the time).

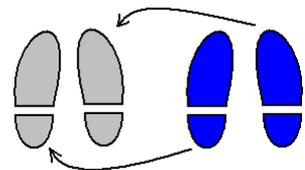
Timing

Generally, bransles are done in 4/4 time.

The Basic Steps

SL -- Single Left

Starting with feet closed (or wherever the feet ended up after the last step), step to the left with the left foot, and then join feet, stepping to the left with the right foot.

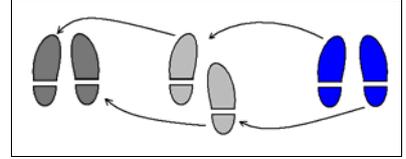


SR -- Single Right

Step to the right with the right foot, then join feet, stepping to the right with the left foot.

DL -- Double Left

Step to the left with the left foot, bring the right foot over near the left foot (either to the right of it and adjacent to it, or to the right and slightly behind it, or behind it while turning slightly at the waist). Then step to the left again with the left foot, and join feet, stepping to the left with the right foot.

**DR -- Double Right**

Step to the right with the right foot, bring the left foot over near the right foot (either to the left of it and adjacent to it, or to the left and slightly behind it, or behind it while turning slightly at the waist). Then step to the right again with the right foot, and join feet, stepping to the right with the left foot.

Two Basic Bransles: Bransle Double and Bransle Single

These bransles can be done in a line or in a circle. Partners or alternating genders are not required.

Bransle double

DL, DR, DL, DR, ...

The dance repeats to the end of the music.

**Bransle single
(Bransle simple)**

DL, SR, DL, SR, ...

The dance repeats to the end of the music.

These two dances are extremely basic, and are therefore not taught or danced much. They do in fact form part of a basic set of bransles, and are good warm up dances.

Either of the above two dances (or both of them) can be turned into a knot bransle. In a knot bransle, the dancers form a line. The dancer at the head of the line leads the other dancers around the hall, weaving around the hall and in and out of the line itself. This can cause the line of dance to get knotted around itself, which can take some straightening out. Dancers should try not to let the line break at any point, which can get harder and harder as the line gets more knotted.

Some More Bransle Steps

Occasionally you'll find that we ask you to do a single or double with a "cross". This just means that at the end of the step, you cross your foot in front of one knee as you finish. So, if you are doing a double to the left, you cross your right foot over in front of your left knee as you finish. See the picture on the right.

Below are the descriptions of the singles and doubles with a cross.



SLx -- Single Left Crossing

Step to the left with the left foot, then bring the right foot across in front of the left leg in a small kick. The right leg should be bent, and the right foot should pass about midway up the calf of the left leg.

SRx -- Single Right Crossing

Step to the right with the right foot, then bring the left foot across in front of the right leg in a small kick. The left leg should be bent, and the left foot should pass about midway up the calf of the right leg.

DLx -- Double Left Crossing

Step to the left with the left foot, then close feet, stepping to the left with the right foot. Step to the left again with the left foot, then bring the right foot across in front of the left leg in a small kick. The right leg should be bent, and the right foot should pass about midway up the calf of the left leg.

DRx -- Double Right Crossing

Step to the right with the right foot, then close feet, stepping to the right with the left foot. Step to the right again with the right foot, then bring the left foot across in front of the right leg in a small kick. The left leg should be bent, and the left foot should pass about midway up the calf of the right leg.

KL -- Kick Left

A kick left goes like this: Jump into the air very slightly, finishing with the left foot off the ground.

A kick right is just the opposite. Note that the picture shows that the dancer only comes very slightly off the ground with the front foot.



Cp -- Capriole

The picture shows part of a capriole. This is done by leaping into the air and passing your feet back and forwards past each other. Depending on how adept you're feeling, you can make 2, 3, 5, or even more passes.



A Basic Bransle Set: Double/Single/Gai/Burgundian

This bransle set, according to Arbeau, was the first dance done at any ball. The entire dance set can be done as a learning piece in a circle, or as a knot bransle set if the dancers are more experienced. Bransle single and bransle double have been described earlier.

Partners or alternating genders are not required for any of the dances in this set.

Bransle Gai:

KL KR KL KR pause

KR KL KR KL pause

The dance repeats to the end of the music. The dancers should move to the left while executing the kicks.

Burgundian Bransle (Bransle de Bourgogne):

DLx DRx DLx DRx

The dance repeats to the end of the music. The dancers should make the steps to the right smaller than the steps to the left, so that the entire line of dance continues to move to the left.

The entire bransle set (Single, Double, Gai, Burgundian) can be done as a set of dances done in a circle, a line bransle set, or a knot bransle set.



This picture, from a manuscript in Valencia, shows dancers performing a dance that could possibly have been a bransle, or a fore-runner to it.

Mimed Bransles

The mimed bransles form a simple four-bransle set. These dances are easy to learn, and introduce the more common bransle steps with a bit of interplay between the partners using steps unique to each dance, which makes for a fun set of dances. The dances are all circle dances for couples, the lady stands on the man's left.

Each dance starts with the circle holding hands for the introduction, and then dropping hands for the theme.

Washerwoman's Bransle (Bransle les Lavandieres)

Introduction

DL DR DL DR

Optionally, during the doubles left, partners can flirt with each other. During the doubles right, the men flirt with the ladies on their right (not their partner), while the ladies flirt with the man on their left.

Theme

Partners turn 90° and face each other.

Men SL SR

Wagging their fingers at the ladies in a scolding manner, the ladies stand with their hands on their hips.

Ladies SL SR

As above, wagging their fingers at the men.

All dancers turn and face the center again.

All: DL

During the double left the dancers clap their hands to the beat of the music.

DR

Double Right.

DL

Double Left, clapping as above.

KL KR KL Cp

Kick Left, Right, Left, and Jump, while turning in place over your left shoulder.

Pease Bransle (Branle des Pois)

Introduction

DL DR DL DR

Theme

Men: Jump

Jump left on both feet, landing next to their partner.

Ladies: Jump

Jump left on both feet, away from their partner.

Men: Jump Jump Jump

Jump left with three smaller jumps, again landing next to their partner.

Ladies:	Jump	Jump left on both feet, away from their partner.
Men:	Jump	Jump left on both feet, landing next to their partner.
Ladies:	Jump Jump Jump	Jump left with three smaller jumps, away from their partner.

Shoes Bransle (Clog Bransle, Bransle des Sabots)

Introduction DL DR DL DR

Theme

Men:	SL SR	Stamp 3 times with the right foot.
Ladies:	SL SR	Stamp 3 times with the right foot.

Horses Bransle (Bransle de Chevaux)

Introduction DL DR DL DR DL DR DL DR

This introduction is twice as long as the introduction for the other bransles in this set.

Theme

Men:	Paw Paw	Paw the ground twice with the right foot, imitating a horse.
	SR	
	DL	Turning over the left shoulder, across the front of their partner, ending to the left of the partner (in other words, the men rotate around the circle one place to the left). ¹
Ladies:	Paw Paw	Paw the ground twice with the right foot.
	SR DL	As above.

Repeat the theme.

Note that Arbeau actually says to do the dance with the man holding both of the lady's hands. I assume that the couples would be in a line facing each other to do this.

¹ Arbeau just says to turn over the shoulder, however this reconstruction is the one most popular in Lochac.

Mixed Bransles

These dances form a five bransle set. They are usually done in the order Cassandra-Pinagay-Charlotte-LaGuerre-Aridan. Arbeau refers to these as the Mixed Bransles of Champagne, while in Lochac they are known as the Cut Bransles.

The dances are best learned in the order that they are shown, and the order that they are danced in the set. They increase with complexity through the set, and the Aridan can take quite some time to master.

Cassandra

Part I DL DR DL DR

Part II DL DR SL DR (repeat)

Pinagay

Part I DL KL DL KL KR KL

Part II DL DR

Charlotte

Part I DL KL KR DR (repeat)

Part II DL KL KR
SR KL KR KL
SL KR KL KR
DR

This dance is more complicated than the first two, and takes a little bit more effort to learn. The key is to remember that each single is followed by three kicks, and the doubles are only ever followed by two kicks. Also, remember that after each single you do not change feet to start the kicks -- the best way to remember this is to not close the single completely, so that you are left with one foot slightly hanging in the air ready to start the kicks. After each double, you close the step and change feet as normal to begin the kicks.

La Guerre

This dance is actually easier than it looks, if you have the stamina to keep up with it. The steps alternate left-right-left-right, just like a large number of other simple dances. Remembering that is often the key to remembering the entire dance.

Part I

DL DR DL DR DL DR DL DR

The introduction to this dance is twice as long as the introduction to any of the other dances in this set.

Part II

DL DR

SL SR DL

SR SL DR

SL KL KR KL (Feet Together) Capriole

The only tricky part about this dance is that the entire theme is done at double speed. Think quickly, and remember double-double/single-single-double/single-single-double/single-kick-kick-kick-capriole.

To do a capriole, jump into the air, and waggle both feet around a bit (or ride a bicycle backwards is another way to do it). Land on the ground on both feet, with the left foot slightly forwards of the right foot.

Aridan

This dance is the hardest of the mixed bransles to learn. Remember that the introduction is quite short, and the theme is longer and repeats. Also remember that the theme is in three parts, a, b, and c.

Part I

DL KL KR KL (repeat)

Part II

a.	DL SR SL SR	Double left, three singles.
b.	DL KL KR	Double left, two kicks.
c.	DR Step L Close KR Step R KL	Double right, step close kick step kick. Or: double, shuffle kick step kick.

The entire theme then repeats (parts a, b, and c).

The correct way to do (c) is as follows: Double Right; step left, close, step left, kick right; step right, close, kick left. The bit after the double is sort of a truncated double left with a kick right at the end; followed by a single right with a kick left.

The Official Bransle

The official bransle (Bransle de l'Official, officers' bransle) is probably the most common dance in my part of the SCA, and one of the most popular. The dance is a circle dance for as many couples as will. The man stands to the left of the lady.

Part I DL DR DL DR²

Part II SL SL SL SL SL SL

KL KR KL (feet together)

At the end of this sequence, partners turn towards each other slightly, the lady turning to face the man. The lady leaps across the front of the man, assisted in her leap by the man who should guide her with his hands on her waist.

The entire dance repeats.³

Scottish Bransle

This is a circle or a line dance, for as many dancers as will. Partners or alternating genders are not required.

Part I DLx DRx SLx SRx

Repeat.

Part II DLx SRx SLx DRx

DLx SRx KR KL KR Jump and Capriole

The entire dance repeats until the music runs out.

² Arbeau gives these steps as doubles with small hops in between each step. The dance that is done throughout Lochac does not include the hops, although some dancers ornament the steps slightly with kicks at the end of each double. The singles should be hopped as well – however be careful to put a single hop at the end of each step of the singles, rather than bouncing around madly on one leg as I have seen some people do this. If your tendency is to bounce, then you're probably better off leaving the hops out all together.

³ Which way you do this depends on how your musicians play the tune.

Bransle of Brittany (Trihory)

This bransle is mentioned in passing in Orchesography, being a bransle that Arbeau learned when he was a student at Poitiers.

Part I

DL Spring Left, landing on both feet.

Part II

KL KR KL

The dance repeats from this point.

Arbeau states that "at the end of the trihory" the steps KR KL KR are done differently. Standing on the tips of your toes, swing your heels to the right, then to the left, and then swing to the right again at the same time raising your right foot. The music is the same whether the theme is done as a set of jumps or swings.

It would be open to interpretation as to whether these steps would be done only at the end of the dance, or at the end of each second repeat (being the end of the sequence of music that Arbeau has provided). Having tried the dance only briefly, I would believe that the alternate steps would work better if they were done at the end of each second repeat as there are no clues in the music as to where the end of the dance is.

Torch Bransle

Figure 1

The dance starts with a number of men on the floor, holding a lighted candle. Each of them dances through the hall using the following steps:

DLf DRf DLf DRf DLf DRf DLf DRf

(8 Doubles forwards, alternating Left and Right). The doubles are all done with a hop at the end.

Figure 2

At the end of Figure 1, the man should come and stop near a lady. He performs a short reverence and then dances towards her:

SLf SRf SLf SRf

(4 Singles, alternating Left and Right)

Repeat

Repeat the dance from the beginning, dancing together.

In the repeat of figure 2, use the last two of them to reverence and hand the candle over to your partner.

In the next repeat, the new holder of the candle dances off to find a new partner, and the dance can repeat from there ad infinitum.

Hay Bransle

This dance starts with any number of people in a line. Most of the recordings I have seem to be set up for 3 people, which is how I have seen it danced most often.

Figure 1

SL SR DL

SR SL DR

repeat

This is done using courante steps – hopping before each step of the single or double.

Figure 2

Play the B music as many times as necessary for the dancers to get through this section.

Using pavan doubles, make a hey until the everyone is back to their original places.

Notes

You can take hands or not during the hey, whichever you prefer. Arbeau doesn't say.

Other French Dances

Although most of the dances in Orchesography are bransles, Arbeau describes a number of dances that are not bransles.

These include the following types of dance:

- Pavanes
 - Galliards and Tourdions
 - Basse Danses
 - Courante
-

Music and Choreography

Arbeau in most cases does not give music for these dances (beyond a single line, or part of a single line), and in other cases does not give much in the way of choreography. For example, his description of the pavan only states that the dance has “two singles and a double forwards, and two singles and a double backwards”, while his description of the courante only gives the step types, and not any specific choreography.

Modern day reconstructors of these dances have tended to embellish these dance descriptions and invent choreographies for them. These choreographies are what have tended to become danced as common dances in the SCA, and these are described in this book.

Other Music

There are also many pieces of pavan, basse danse, courante, and galliard music published in period in various arrangements. There are a lot of choreographies that have been written specifically to match one or another piece of music. The books of Pierre Attaignant, Susato, and Praetorius are good sources to find music to fit such dances to – Praetorius in particular published an almost ridiculous number of arrangements of courante, galliard, and volte music that can be used for creating choreographies in period style.

Pavanes

The pavan is a slow, processional court dance. All pavanes have a common thread, that is they all have the same basic steps. The word pavan comes from "Padoanna", which is an ancient dance of Padua, in Italy. All pavanes are done in duple time.

Each pavan is commonly followed by a Galliard. The galliard for any pavan is often danced to the same tune as the pavan, but played at a much livelier pace, in triple time. Galliard tunes developed a character of their own during the time of Elizabeth I's reign (some of which I find too slow to be danceable).

Steps

The basic steps of all pavanes is a set of three steps: Single-Single-Double. This is either SL-SR-DL (a pavan set left), or SR-SL-DR (a pavan set right). Most steps done in a pavan are done going either forwards or backwards.



SL -- Single Left, moving forwards.

Step forwards on the left foot, then join feet, stepping forwards on the right foot.

SR -- Single Right, moving forwards.

Step forwards on the right foot, then join feet, stepping forwards on the left foot.

DL -- Double Left, moving forwards.

Step forwards on the left foot, then forwards on the right foot moving past the left foot, then forwards on the left foot, moving past the right foot, then join feet, stepping forwards on the right foot.

DR -- Double Right, moving forwards.

Step forwards on the right foot, then forwards on the left foot moving past the right foot, then forwards on the right foot, moving past the left foot, then join feet, stepping forwards on the left foot.

SLb/SRb -- Single Left/Right moving backwards

These steps are the same as the singles moving forwards, except that they are done backwards.

DLb/DRb -- Double Left, moving backwards.

These steps are the same as the doubles listed above, but the steps are done moving backwards.

In a pavan, a single takes two bars (left-together), and a double takes four bars (left-right-left-together).

Pavan Set

A “Pavan Set” is a combination of single-single-double, done moving either forwards or backwards. This is the basic step unit of the Pavan – all pavans are simply pavan sets done over and over again.

A Basic Pavan: The Known World Pavan

This is an SCA choreography set to the Pavan music (Belle Qui Tiens Ma Vie), in Arbeau’s Orchesography. It is one of the most common dances done in the SCA.

This is often called the “Carolingian Pavan”, or just “The Pavan”.

1 - 8	SL SR DL	Pavan set forwards
9 - 16	SR SL DR	Pavan set forwards
17 - 24	SL SR DL	Pavan set forwards
25 - 32	SRb SLb DRb	Pavan set backwards

At this point, the gentlemen kneel, and the ladies continue the dance in a full circle around the men, still holding hands.

33 - 40	SL SR DL	Moving half way around the man, to end up facing backwards down the line, and on the opposite side to where you started.
41 - 48	SR SL DR	Moving back into position.

At this point, the men rise, and dance around the ladies in the same way:

49 - 56	SL SR DL	Moving half way around the lady, to end up facing backwards down the line, and on the opposite side to where you started.
57 - 64	SR SL DR	Moving back into position.

The dance repeats as often as necessary to the end of the music.

In the Stomhold version of this dance the men do not kneel, and the couples drop hands during bars 33 - 64.

Galliards and Tourdions

The tourdion is a light, quick 15th century dance in 32 measures which usually follows a basse danse. It was a simple, purer form which developed into the galliard. The latter veiled the simpler tourdion steps in elaboration and decoration, but became an entity danced by itself. The quicker tourdion was performed with lower, faster kicks (*piéd en l'air*), while the slower galliard could allow higher kicks, for example the *greve* and the *piéd crosse*.

The Galliard and Tourdion are both done to six beats, and have similar steps. Here are the basic steps:

1.	kL	Hop into the air, and land on the right foot, with the left foot extended (like a KL in a Bransle).
2.	kR	
3.	kL	
4.	kR	
5.6.	Capriole	Pause slightly, then take a larger leap, landing on both feet with the left foot in front of the right foot. (PL).

The above sequence is called a "cinque pas" (five steps), and is repeated throughout the dance alternating with the following sequence, which is the same thing starting on the right foot.

- | | |
|------|----------|
| 1. | kR |
| 2. | kL |
| 3. | kR |
| 4. | kL |
| 5.6. | Capriole |
-

A common way of dancing the Tourdion after a Basse Danse is to dance 8 cinq pas travelling forwards, then 8 facing your partner, repeating until you run out of music or weet bix.

Galliards are done following a pavan. Often, each pavan music has a galliard piece following the same tune, but in 6/6 time.

There is theoretically some similarity between the galliard and tourdion, and the pas de brabant of the Burgundian basse dances, and the saltarelli of the 15th century Italian Balli.

Galliard Variations & More Complex Galliard Steps

To learn the endless variations of galliard figures, it is necessary to be conversant with the vocabulary from which they are named.

Abbreviations

k	Pied en l'air	low kick (front)
K	Greve	high kick (front)
Hk	Ruade (horsekick)	(back kick)
Ck	Ru de vache	cowkick (side kick)
Pc	Pied crouise	crossed kick (foot across other shin)
Bk	Campanello	bell kick (alternate pied en l'air/ruade on the same foot)
J	Saut majeur	high jump
jj	Saut moyen	medium jump
j	Petit saut	small jump
Cp	Capriole	jump, crossing feet in air
CS	Cadence	jump, followed by a Posture
P	Posture	walking pose (foot & hand on same side forward, other foot & hand back)
Mf	Marque talon	touch heel to ground
Mp	Marque pied	touch toe to ground
Fl	Fleuret	2 rapid alternate low kicks followed by a normal pace high kick (kL kR KL)
Cn	Canary	low kick, marque talon, then quick marque pied.
Sf	Fleuret Croise (L)	(L) sideways step followed by quick (R) crossed kick, then normal pace low (R) kick
En	Entretaille	Forwards travelling step slipping one foot beneath the other
Pj	Pied Joints	Join feet together

Notes

At the start of each step in a galliard there is a small leap (Petit saut or j), which is included as part of the step unless it specifically states otherwise. For example, to do a kL, make a small leap onto the right foot (j) at the same time as kicking the left foot forwards slightly in a low kick (kL).

In learning some galliards it is frequently easier to have a small chant or "mantra" to go with the galliard. This can be recited quickly while making the steps. For an example of this, see the "overfoot variation" on the next page, which can be quite difficult to learn, but is much easier with the mantra.

Five Step Galliard Figures

Each of these motions give rise to one or more galliard figures. They can be performed either moving forward, partners holding inner hands, for processing about the hall, or as a counterpassing variation if room is limited or expertise in elaborate steps is to be demonstrated.

Each of these galliard figures is shown starting on the left foot. In each case the second set of the figure should be repeated in the same way as the first set, reversing Right & Left.

1.	Cinq-pas (five step)	kL kR kL kR CSL
2.	Ruade-Entretaille	HkL KR HkL KR CSL. This is the French "bell-step" from Orchesography.
3.	Ru de Vache	CkL CkL CkL CkL CSL
4.	Pied Croise	PcL PcL PcR PcR CSR
5.	Campanello	BkL BkL BkL BkL CSR The Italian "Little Bell" step. Execute this pattern with partner's (L) sides opposed. Note: one Bk (L) = k & Hk in one beat.
6.	Fleuret	FIL FIR CSL
7.	Side-crossed Fleuret	SfL SfR CSL
8.	Over-foot variation	kL PcR HkL kR CSL mantra: "kick cross back kick change".

It is possible to choreograph your own galliard using specific patterns of galliard variations. This example I saw listed as the "Earl of Salisbury Galliard".

1.	(16 measures)	Cinq-pas counterpassing (twice)
2.	(16 measures)	A. Pied Croise. B. Cinq-pas counterpassing (once)
3.	(16 measures)	A. Overfoot variation B. Cinq-pas counterpassing (once)
4.	(16 measures)	A. Side-crossed fleuret B. Cinq-pas counterpassing (once)

Eleven Step Galliard Figures

Instead of dancing each 6 beat galliard measure as one sequence of 5 steps, and then reversing the steps for the next 6 beats, a galliard sequence can be derived by taking 2 measures of 6 beats each, and performing 11 steps in the 2 measures.

At the end of the first measure, instead of performing a cadence followed by a posture for 2 beats, each beat is used for a single step. The cadence and posture are done at the end of each second measure only. Therefore, 6 steps are done in the first measure, and 5 in the second measure for a total of 11 steps.

Some of these variations are simple extensions of the 5 step galliards. These are the easiest to perform, because the 5 step sequence is just extended for a further measure before the cadence:

-
- | | | |
|----|------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. | Onze-pas (eleven step) | kL kR kL kR kL kR kL kR kL kR CSL |
| 2. | Fleuret | FIL FIR FIL FIR CSL |
| 3. | Side crossed Fleuret | SfL SfR SfL SfR CSL |
-

Other eleven step galliards are more complex, being formed from larger combinations of the galliard steps:

-
- | | | |
|----|----------------------|---|
| 4. | (From Orchesography) | HkR KL HkL KL HkR KL HkL KR HkR
KL CSR
mantra: back front swing swing back
front swing kick swing kick change. |
| 5. | (From Orchesography) | HkR KL HkR KL PR KR PL KL HkL KL
CSR
mantra: back front back front down up
down up swing swing change. |
-

La Volta

This dance is basically a galliard variation, although it can contain other steps. The dance is for a single couple or as many couples as will.

The Steps

VSL -- Volta Step Left

The basic La Volta galliard figure is as follows:

1.	kl	Kick Left
2.	SL	Step Left
3, 4.	J	Large Leap
5.	Pj	Feet Together
6.		Pause

A right Volta step (VSR) begins with the right foot.

Vt -- The Volta Turn

1	kL	Kick Left
2	SL	Step Left
3 - 6	Leap and spin.	

How to do the Leap and Spin

Body Position

This is something best shown, not learned from a book, but here are some notes on how I do the leap and spin in the Volta:

Firstly, the man and lady must be standing close together – touching at the hips. The lady will need to be close enough to sit on the man's thigh.

This can be done with the lady on the man's left side (improper position), or the lady on the man's right side (proper position). Whether you do this proper or improper is up to you. Arbeau first describes the turn done improper, and then says it can also be done proper. The iconographic evidence from the period (paintings of couples dancing La Volta) show the dance being done in either stance, although this could be a matter of artistic license as much as anything else.

My recommendation (and this may not work for everyone) is that the turn works best done proper if the man is right-handed, and improper if the man is left-handed.

Hand holds

There are a couple of possible hand-holds. These are as follows:

- Arbeau says that the man holds the lady by the back, and by the busk point at the front of her gown. The lady places one arm across the man's back and holds his shoulder, and uses the other to steady her skirts. Of course this only works if the lady is wearing a gown that has a useful busk point.
- Where the lady is tall enough relative to the man (and the important thing is her body length relative to his, and that her arms are long enough), the lady puts her near-side arm across the man's shoulders, and brings her other arm across in front of the man's shoulders to hold her near side hand. In doing this she will put her weight onto the man's shoulders. The man will put his near side arm around the lady's waist, and places his hand on her hip. The man takes the lady's near side hand (now on his shoulder) in his other hand, and pulls down on it slightly to lock her into place.
- Where the lady is taller than the man (especially if there is a considerable height difference at the hips), then she can extend her left arm past the man's shoulders and take it with her right hand, across the front of his body. This will help her put more of her weight onto the man's shoulders, which makes the lift easier from the man's point of view.
- A shorter lady will need to place her near side hand on the man's near side shoulder, and use this to lift. Her other hand can be used to hold her skirts in place. This keeps the lady more upright but does require more lifting effort on the part of the man (with his leg), so really only works where the center of gravity is closer to the man. The lady should still take care to push down on the man's near side shoulder as she leaps and is lifted by him.
- Where the man is much taller and/or heavier than the lady, he may need to use his far side hand to help with the lift. He can do this by reaching across his body and placing this hand under her skirts as she leaps.

The hand hold that you use will normally be dictated by the height and weight difference between the man and the lady. Experiment with these different holds until you find one that works for you and your partner.

The idea behind the hand hold is to transfer as much weight as possible onto the man's shoulders during the spin. Physiologically, men are much better equipped to carry weight on their shoulders than they are on their hips relative to ladies.

The knee lift

The man basically at this point will be lifting the lady by his near side leg. I will describe this from the point of a right-handed man dancing in proper position – reverse “left” and “right” in the section below if you are dancing improper.

The man turns his right knee outwards, and lifts his right leg, so that the lady sits on his right thigh. The man makes sure that his weight is on his left leg after stepping forwards on to it – this then becomes the pivot point for the dancers as they complete the turn.

The lady leaps, and the man uses his arm, leg, and shoulders to lift her, and the couple spins.

The man should then turn through 270° keeping the couple balanced on his left leg while doing so.

Some points to note about the leap and spin:

The man should not bring his right leg up too quickly or else he will end up kicking the lady in the backside!. He should bring his leg up slowly underneath her and allow her to sit on it.

The man may need to use his left arm for balance – this is usually the case where the lady is heavier than the man.

All of the above takes a lot of practice – do this dance with a partner you are familiar with!

Height, weight, and balance

Depending on the relative height and centers of gravity of the man and lady, the man may need to bend his left leg more to get his right thigh up and under the lady. A tall man will need to bend his left knee quite a lot to get his right leg under a short lady.

A Basic Volta

The Sequence

A basic volta sequence is to do four volta steps forwards, then four volta turns. This is repeated until the end of the music.

Maeve's Coronation Volta

This volta was choreographed by Maeve ni Iaschata for the first Coronation in the Kingdom of Lochac. It is for 2 dancers, starting side by side.

1 – 4	Vt x 4	The man and the lady independently (i.e. Not in the turn position) do four volta turns. The man starts by hopping forwards and making a $\frac{3}{4}$ turn over his left shoulder to end in front of his starting position and facing right. The lady starts by hopping into the man's place and making a $\frac{3}{4}$ turn to face forwards. Then continue this 3 more times to end up back in place.
5	HkL kR HkR jL Cadenza	Galliard sequence: kick swing change swing change. End with a cadenza and taking positions for a volta turn.
6 – 9	Vt x 4	4 volta turns.
10	Vt	Dropping back to proper position, the man and lady independently do a volta turn, diagonally outwards away from each other.
11	Vt	Independently do a volta turn diagonally back in towards each other
12 – 15	Vt x 4	4 volta turns.
16	HkL kR HkR jL Cadenza	Repeat the earlier galliard sequence from bar 5.
17 – 32	Repeat	Repeat the entire dance.

Courantes

Courantes are another type of early period dance. Courantes are documented in Arbeau's Orchesography although there are many sources for Courante (or Coranto) music, and a few modern scholars have choreographed their own versions. One of these is presented here.

Steps

Courantes are danced with their own style of steps, being courante steps. These are singles and doubles done with hops in them.

All of the Courante steps can be done sideways (in which case the notation indicated will be used), or forwards (in which case the notation SLcf/DLcf/SRcf/DRcf will be used), or backwards (in which case the notation SLcb/SRcb/SRcb/DRcb will be used).

SLc -- Courante Single Left (2 beats)

1	JL	Preliminary hop, bringing your left foot into the air.
2	SL JR and close	Step on to your left foot. Slight hop on left foot, and bring your right foot up towards your left foot, landing with feet together.

DLc -- Courante Double Left (4 beats)

1	JL	Preliminary hop on your right foot.
2	SL JR SR	Step on to your left foot. Hop on your left foot. Step on to your right foot.
3	JL SL	Hop on your right foot. Step on to your left foot.
4	JR and close	Slight hop on your left foot, and bring your right foot up towards your left foot landing with feet together.

SRc/DRc -- Courante Single/Double Right

These steps are done in the same way as the Singles and Doubles Left, except with the feet reversed.

Rv -- Reverance

A simple French Reverance, as used for French Basse Danses and Bransles is used.

Courante a la Lochac

Dancers begin in a single line, with couples standing side by side.



Introduction

1 - 4 SLc SRc End by dropping hands.

Theme

In this section, the men and the ladies dance at the same time.

1 - 8	Men DLc DRc	The men perform a double left to the left side, then right to the right side.
1 - 8	Ladies DLcf DRcf	The ladies dance forwards with a double left then a double right, away from the men, to end up facing away from them.
9 - 12	Both SLc SRc	Both dance a single left then right side to side.
13 - 20	Men DLcf DRcf	The men dance forwards, to finish behind the ladies.
13 - 20	Ladies DLc DRc	While the men are dancing up behind them, the ladies dance side to side.
21 - 24	Men DLc	The men move to the ladies' left and finish facing the ladies' left.
21 - 24	Ladies	Do not move, look away from the men, to the right.
25 - 28	Men DRc	The men dance back around to the right, finishing to the ladies' right.
25 - 28	Ladies	Do not move, look away from the men, to the left.
25 - 28	Men	Do a half turn over your left shoulder to face the other way.

Repeat the above section, with the ladies acting in the way of the men, and the men acting in the way of the ladies, as follows:

29 - 36	Ladies DLc DRc	End this sequence with a half turn over your left shoulder to face the backs of the men.
29 - 36	Men DLcf DRcf	End this sequence with your backs to the ladies.
37 - 40	Both SLc SRc	Both dance a single left then right side to side.
41 - 48	Ladies DLcf DRcf	The ladies dance forwards, to finish behind the men.
41 - 48	Men DLc DRc	While the ladies are dancing up behind them, the men dance side to side.
49 - 52	Ladies DLc	The ladies move to the men's left.
49 - 52	Men	Do not move, look away from the ladies, to the right.
53 - 56	Ladies DRc	The ladies dance back around to the men's right.
53 - 56	Men	Turn to face the ladies, and reverance

French Basse Danse

The most easily accessible source for French Basse Danse material is the Orchesography of Thoinot Arbeau. There are a number of basse danse books and manuscripts, which give more information than Orchesographie.⁴

Arbeau gives the music for only one Basse Danse, being Jouyssance Vous Donneray. However, it does make the statement that Basse Dances fall into two main categories, being regular and irregular. Jouyssance Vous Donneray is a regular basse danse, Arbeau gives the steps for several of the irregular basse dances, the music can be obtained from various sources of the period.

Arbeau's distinction between a regular Basse Danse and an irregular one is that for a regular Basse Danse the main part of the dance (excluding the retour) contains 80 bars (20 quaternions). In each 4 bars (one quaternion) the dancers perform either a double, two singles, a Reprise, or a Branle. In the Basse Danse Jouyssance vous Donneray, there are 80 bars to the main part of the dance, and 48 to the retour, therefore it is a regular Basse Danse. Patience also has 80 bars, but Arbeau explains that this is an irregular Basse Danse anyway, without stating why.

Three of the irregular Basse Dances are shown here. These Basse Dances are given for interest's sake only. Arbeau states that they were rarely danced, and only dancers who wanted to show off their memory skills (and no doubt endurance) would request one of these dances at a ball.

Each of these dances (as well as Jouyssance) concludes with a Conge. This is a brief (1-beat reverance), done by facing in to your partner by swivelling your feet, and giving a quick nod of the head, also bending very briefly and slightly at the knees and the waist.

Confortez-moi

Rv Br
 SS D SS Rp Br
 SS D SS Rp Br
 SS DDD SS Rp Br
 SS D SS Rp Br
 Conge

Toute Frelerei

Rv Br
 SS D SS Rp Br
 SS DDD SS Rp Br
 Conge

⁴ Including Arena, "Ad suos ...", which I really must have a proper read of someday! I don't care much for his style of writing, however, which is a bit hard on someone whose cognitive science is 400 years out of date.

Patience Rv Br
 SS D Rp D SS Rp Br
 SS DDD Rp Br
 SS D SS Rp Br
 Conge

Basse Danse Steps

**SL/SR/DL/DR –
 Single/Double
 Left/Right** These steps are all done moving forwards in the same way as for a pavan. Where a SL is followed by a SR, the two steps are done together, in one flowing motion, and not as two separate steps. Two singles, or one double, are done to 4 bars, or one quaternion.

Rv -- Reverance The reverance for a Basse Danse is done to four bars. It is basically a longish bow to your partner, moving one foot back, and bending forwards at the waist.

Br – Branle Branle comes from a French word meaning to move from side to side. Here is how the Branle is done according to Arbeau:
 On the first bar, turn the body to the left.
 On the second bar, turn back to the right, glancing outwards at the spectators
 On the third bar, turn back out to the left
 On the fourth bar, turn back to the right, glancing towards your partner.
 The movements are done with the body only, keeping the feet together.

Rp -- Reprise A reprise in the French Basse Danse is done in four bars. There are several different versions of the reprise floating about, here is my interpretation of what Arbeau says:
 On the first bar, the dancers raise their right foot very slightly, and shake their feet as if shaking the snow off their boots.
 On the second bar, repeat the above with the right foot.
 On the third bar repeat the above, but this time with the left foot.
 On the fourth bar repeat the above with the right foot once again.

Jouyssance Vous Donneray

This is a more complex Basse Danse than some, and certainly more complex than the majority of the French and Burgundian dances shown here.

The dance consists of two parts, the main Basse Danse and a Retour. Each part concludes with a Conge, or brief (1 bar) reverance, done to a high point in the music.

The Basse Danse sequence is:

Rv Br			
SL SR	DL	Rp DL	Rp Br
SL SR	DL DR DL	Rp DL	Rp Br
SL SR	DL		Rp Br
Conge			

The Retour is:

Br	DL		Rp Br
SL SR	DL DR DL	Rp DL	Rp Br
Conge			

Laid out as above, the dance is a little easier to remember. The main dance sequence consists of Single-Single-Double-Reprise-Double-Reprise-Branle. If you can remember this, then starting with the Reverance and the initial Branle, the dance becomes this:

1. Dance sequence.
 2. Dance sequence with two extra doubles inserted.
 3. Dance sequence with a Reprise-Double removed.
 4. Conge.
 5. Double-Reprise-Branle sequence. (The last three bits of a dance sequence).
 6. Dance sequence with two extra doubles inserted. (The same as 2).
 7. Conge.
-

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 Danses 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 DanSES

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

Basse Danse

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