

Teaching Notes: France and Burgundy

The 15th and 16th Century dances of France and Burgundy are amongst the simplest of renaissance dances. I usually introduce dancers to these dances first because they are light and entertaining, simple to learn, and give a basic background in movement.

Introduction

Teaching Notes

Bransles

If I was running a course in renaissance dance, I would probably begin it using the bransles. The first few bransles are the easiest dances to learn.

Introducing these dances usually begins by teaching the basic steps. There are only a very few steps that you need to know in order to learn the basic repertoire of Arbeau's bransles, or the Burgundian basse danse.

Basic competence in these dances can usually be accomplished in one or two lessons, after which point the students can begin building a repertoire.

Even when these dances have been mastered they are useful warm-up exercises to begin a dance practice session with.

Repertoire

I have included a fair repertoire of bransles in this book. I begin with the simple bransles, and cover the mimed and mixed bransles as well.

I also include (lesson 4) a class on the pavan and galliard. I think that it would probably be useful to know a few bransles before beginning these dances, but learning them provides a useful break from bransles, bransles, and more bransles.

As usual, I have not extended this section to include a thorough repertoire of all of Arbeau's bransles. Arbeau includes a large repertoire of easily understood dances that can be taught in classes after the students have mastered what is in this book.

Arbeau and Arena

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.

Another less common source is Arena's book, although I haven't used it as a source for any of the dances here.

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).

Burgundian Basse Danse

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.

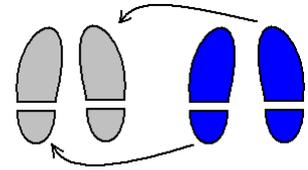
These manuscripts and books seem to indicate that Basse Danse was common at court and upper class occasions throughout mid 15th C Europe. Basse danse descriptions appear in England, Spain, and France as well.

I haven't covered any of the Basse Danses in this book but if you wanted to teach them then the repertiore is available in a number of places.

Lesson 1: 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.

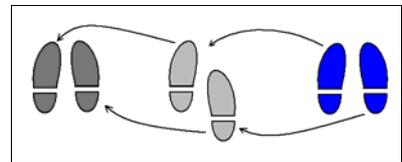


SR -- Single Right

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.

Bransles Single, Double

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.

Bransles Gai, de Bourgogne

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.



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.

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 DR

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.

Lesson 2: 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).
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 this 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.

Lesson 3: 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

Lesson 4: Pavan and Galliard

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

Each pavane is commonly followed by a Galliard. The galliard for any pavane is often danced to the same tune as the pavane, 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 pavane set left), or SR-SL-DR (a pavane set right). Most steps done in a pavane 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 pavane, 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.

Simple Galliards

The Galliard is done to six beats. 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	

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- | | | |
|------|----------|--|
| 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). |
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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.

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|------|----------|
| 1. | kR |
| 2. | kL |
| 3. | kR |
| 4. | kL |
| 5.6. | Capriole |
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To dance the basic galliard, just repeat the above step sequences to the end of the music.

Lesson 5: Bransles (Continued)

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 last of the cut bransles, and by far the hardest 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).

Other Lessons

There are a wide variety of other dances from France and Burgundy. Teaching these dances is just a matter of picking a theme for a dance practice, and finding the dances to go with it.

For example:

- Simple galliard variations, beginning with some 5 step variations and moving on to 11 step variations.
- Burgundian and French Basse Danse. I would normally begin with the Burgundian Basse Danse, as it makes a little more sense, but it does tend to get boring for experienced dancers, so you can teach Jouyessance Vous Donnerai as well.
- La Volta

Reconstructions of all of these dances are available in Del's Dance Book as well as in many other places.
