

WHAT IN THE WORLD ARE YOU DOING?

"Steal from one; it's plagiarism. Steal from many; it's research!" The inspiration for this article came from the incomparable Hugh Thurston, writing in the 1950s. To legitimize the endeavor, I have borrowed from others as well! By the way, most of the dances named here appear in the *Folk Dance Problem Solver* series. -Ron

WHAT IN THE WORLD ARE YOU DOING?

This most thorny of questions both unites and divides our international folk dance community. Fear not! No answers here! However, I will provide definitions and examples and let you decide. After all, it does not really matter what you dance, as long as you know.

Words change meaning over time, so this article uses words as the common dance literature uses them, with considerable editorial judgment to resolve contradictions.

FOLKLORIC DANCE:

This narrowest category includes those dances originally performed for metaphysical purposes, involving elaborate context such as special costumes and accoutrements, speeches and songs, secrecy, and ritual behavior. Other names for this category include primitive, ancient, peasant, rustic, village, country, ritual, aboriginal, tribal, or indigenous dance, adding unnecessary value judgments and nationalistic connotations.

Examples include wedding dances (*Minka*, *Hora Miresii*, *Lakodalmi Tanc*), farewell dances (*Mom Bar*), dances legitimizing physical contact (*Polster Tanc*), dances appeasing spirits such as old age (*Viejitos*) or ancestors (*This is July*), worship dances (*Arkan*, *Bolonchón*), pre-Lenten dances (*Carnavalito*), fertility rituals (*Gathering Peascods*), vocational dances (*Hasapiko*, *Culebra*, *Tanko Bushi*, *Machetes*), or weapons dances (*Zaporozhets*).

Obviously (to those who know them), some dances serve multiple purposes: many wedding dances are farewell dances, *Bolonchón* serves worship and courtship, and *Machetes* combines vocation and courtship.

Less obviously, some dances justify their placement in this category through fake-lore, rather than folklore! For instance, no basis exists for believing that the initial swaying of the Israeli *Hora* represents "the plight of the Jew in places where they were persecuted," (Harris, Pittman, and Waller, *Dance a While*, 1964) making *Hora* a recreation rather than a commemoration.

(continued on next page)

RECREATIONAL DANCE:

Add to **Folkloric Dance** the social dances of pre-industrial, usually agrarian societies to compile this category. Yes, some recreational dances evolved from folkloric dances, and research can transfer dances between these two categories unpredictably. In other words, if you forget the story of a folkloric dance, it becomes a recreational dance. If you rediscover the story and perform for the original purpose, it becomes a folkloric dance again. (If you rediscover the story without doing the dance, you become a dance historian!) Other names for this category include Social or Participatory Dance.

Examples include the true German *Volkstanz* "folk dance" (*Linzerpolka*, *Jaegermarsch*), ballroom and sequence dances (*Korobushka*, *Hesitation Waltz*, *Gay Gordons*), set dances (quadrilles and country dances), pre-1939 line and circle dances (*Hora*), play party games (*Brown-Eyed Mary*), and children's games (*Looby Lou*).

Popular and Elite Dances:

Let me assuage the erudite by discussing here the distinction between **Popular Dance** (the dance of the populace or lower classes) and **Elite Dance** (the dance of the upper classes, Court Dance, or Aristocratic Dance). For the purposes of international folk dancing, both Popular and Elite Dance fit neatly under **Recreational Dance** and provide a dimension to our enjoyment rather than a demarcation. Examples of Elite Dance include pre-1951 Scottish Country Dancing, which some believe derived from 18th century French Court Dance and thus cannot be low-class.

Popular v. Mass Dance:

Please do not confuse **Popular Dance** (spread by contagion) with **Mass Dance** (possibly of folk origin but spread by a point source such as a publishing house). While Mass Dance certainly qualifies as recreational and does appeal to the populace, it represents a "top-down" promulgation and therefore lacks that indefinable soul that many require from folk dancing. Further confusion arises through the definition of Popular Dance as "a dance executed to popular music" (Petrides,

"Folk Dance Terminology," in *Laografia* 5:7 (September 1988). Examples of Mass Dance include the "Novelty" dances: *Bunny Hop*, *Hokey Pokey*, *Limbo*, the *Bird Dance*, *Lambada*, *Macarena*, and most Country-Western Line Dances. Many folk dancers envision our folk dance movement as based on **Recreational Dance**, and some teachers and vendors call their Mass Dances "recreational" in order to increase their taxable fiefdoms among the soul-less.

ART DANCE:

These dances require special musculature, training, and vocabulary, belong not to the folk but to trained cadres, and possess graded levels of advancement based on skill. Some dancers feel that folk dance does not include these "professional" dances, where "professional" refers to the motive for either performance (paid dancing) or transmission (paid teaching). Others, on the basis that all **Art Dance** derived from folk origins, qualify it as folk dance. Other names for **Art Dance** include Worship or Theater Dance.

Examples include British step dances (*Highland Fling*), Andalusian *Flamenco* and the remarkably similar North Indian *Kathak* (thank you, Tatiana, for pointing this out), and classical theater dance such as found in Japan and Bali. We include also the less obvious ballet Character Dances (*Hopak*), modern dance with its derivative Israeli folk dances (*Kuma Echa*), tap dance with its *Clog* dance derivatives, and jazz dance with its Mass/Novelty dance derivatives (*Alley Cat*).

TRADITIONAL DANCES:

Here we include all the above: Folkloric, Recreational and Art Dance, excepting only Mass Dance. Why do we call this group "traditional?" Because "tradition" in this sense means "that's the way we've always done it" rather than "that's the best way." For example, many folk dance groups end their evenings with a waltz rather than a simple circle dance because "that's the way we've always ended our evenings," not because "that's the best dance" or "that dance was next."

As with **Recreational Dance**, some dancers envision our folk dance movement as based on **Traditional Dance**, especially if those dancers possess the skill or youth necessary to perform **Art Dance**! Those who feel that folk dance means **Non-Professional Dance** would not agree.

Let us discuss here the distinction between fixed and evolving **Traditional Dance**.

Fixed Traditional Dance:

Fixed Dance includes, for example, the many European recreational dances, fixed in form by documentation in the 18th and 19th centuries. **Fixed Dance** also includes **Art Dance**, which centuries ago developed codes followed religiously today. Each performance of a **Fixed Dance** attempts to

duplicate its prototype

or follow a code, even if the performance consists of an improvisational sequence of prototypical motifs. For example, performances of *Sauerlaender Quadrille Nr. 5* compete against the original document, and successful performance of *Highland Fling* follows the code set forth by the Board of Highland Dancing. Modifications occur but seldom become canonic and may even be regarded as decadent. For example, you may whoop at a certain point during the *Fling*, but that whoop will remain your individualistic variation. Whooping elsewhere may cost you points, and your extra whoop has small chance of becoming part of the code. When performed in different ethnic communities, ethnically unique versions do not exist, except as temporary modifications. For example, *Sauerlaender Quadrille Nr. 5* will remain a German dance, even when performed by Texans.

Evolving Traditional Dances:

Some **Traditional Dances** remain undocumented and require years of study under a master (*Tai Chi*) while others may exist in a culture that has lost catastrophically its teachers and documents (Armenia). **Evolving Dances** survive through memory and imitation, with each performance striving to

duplicate the previous performance

to a greater or lesser extent. Modifications accumulate, resulting in the "folk process" and in ethnically unique versions of a common antecedent. For example, the original, undocumented German *Herr Schmidt* evolved across the western world. Ethnically unique documented versions now occur in Mexico (*La Raspa*), Sweden (*Blekinge*), and other countries.

Traditional points to ponder:

► Some people confuse Evolving Dance, Traditional Dance, and even Folk Dance (whatever that is!) with **anonymous dance**, e.g., Chujoy and Manchester (*Dance Encyclopedia*, 1967). True, many undocumented dances lack a known choreographer, but so do some

documented dances. This "anonymous" parameter, while interesting to the dance historian, serves poorly the dance taxonomist.

► Tradition is a **moving target!** Non-traditional dances we do today will become traditional in the future, if they survive.

► We not only may have, but frequently have, both Fixed and Evolving **versions** of the same dance, especially in cultures where a memory traveled but a document or teacher did not. For example, compare fixed English country dances with their evolving derivative Australian bush dances (*Galopede*). Eventually, however, all surviving dances will trace back to a fixed prototype. Why? Because eventually, a student will find no living teacher and have to imitate a document. That student will then become the teacher of a (probably) **Fixed Dance** movement. For examples of this, see **Revival Dance**, below.

REVIVAL DANCE:

The 20th century has seen many dance revivals, perhaps in subconscious opposition to the dehumanizing effects of mechanization and urbanization or perhaps to give second-rate prima donnas a new chance at the stage and second-rate demigods a new populace to rule. Revivals of some forms of **Historical Dance**, such as Renaissance Dance, maintain fidelity to the documented originals, but most other revivals shifted from revived dances to devised dances.

Revived Dances:

Old books and manuscripts yield revived dances, occasionally aided by the memories of very old people. Initially, revisers provide well-researched and well-constructed revisions, priding themselves on accurate interpretation.

Devised Dances:

As the original corpus of material yields its treasures and adherents clamor for novelty, hordes of choreographers, too commercial, ignorant, lazy, or egotistical to master the literature, devise swarms of new dances "in the tradition." While some new dances augment the repertoire, hundreds more turn dance into no more than an exercise in memory.

Examples include *Gemeinschaftstanz* (community dance), Modern Western Square Dance, and most contemporary Country Dance. In these cases and others, new material supplants the old, replacing that indefinable **folklore of life and experience** with the shallow fake-lore of contrived effects and transitory, topical motifs.

Other examples occur in populations of displaced persons such as Jews and Armenians. Among Jews, insufficient documents and memory survived their Diaspora, so Israel created a folk dance tradition originally based on Modern Dance (Therese Meyers, "Dancing in a Biblical Land," *Dance Magazine*, January 1959). Armenia's Diaspora, however, occurred recently enough that displaced Armenians could build a new folk dance tradition somewhat resembling the old and influenced by (are you ready for this?) International Folk Dancing! For example, see *Armenian Hop*.

"So if they can create folk dances, why can't I?" You can! Just ignore completely the tens of thousands of traditional dances already in existence, ignore the fact that you will never know the culture like a native, ignore the sad truth that your students will ignore your disclaimers, and be sure to label your creation for what it is: non-ethnic devised dance based on your interpretation of ethnic motifs and set to music that you feel to be appropriate. Oh yes, be sure to ignore your conscience, too!

NATIONAL DANCE:

All the above categories contain dances invented or altered to serve political purposes. Aside from promulgating fake-lore, **National Dance** erroneously equates political, geographical, or even linguistic with ethnographic demarcations. This practice became rampant during the 1800s as Romantic Nationalism swept the world, inspired by the American and then French revolutions, toppling imperialism and colonialism, and replacing aristocracy with plutocracy. Other names for **National Dance** include Regional, Country, Peasant, Rustic, Village, Ritual, Tribal, and Vernacular Dance.

Examples include **Potpourri Dances** signifying national unity (*Jarabe Tapatio*, *Czech Beseda*, Venezuelan *Llanero*, Serbian *Srpkinja*), **Protocol Dance** signifying folk roots of nobility (Serbian *Srpkinja*, Hungarian *Csárdás*), and **Thanksgiving Dances** signifying divine favor (*Mayim*, *Jefferson and Liberty*). Here follow further examples:

Character Dance augments classical ballet with, among other material, **Traditional Dance** molded to compliment classical technique. The *Nutcracker Ballet* contains many examples (*Russian Dance*, *Scottish Dance*, *Spanish Dance*, *Arabian Dance*, *Chinese Dance*), and Anatol

Joukowsky enabled folk dancers unable to execute a *plié* to dance Grand Ballet (*Vrtielka*, *Horehronsky Czardash*, *Yablochko*, *Katia*, *Timonia*).

Most nations today fund **Folk Ballet** (*Folklórico* Dance, Stage Dance) to demonstrate the innate talents of their peasants, inventing or altering **Traditional Dance** to satisfy the political and artistic sensibilities of choreographers rather than the scholarly inquiry of ethnographers. Examples include exhibition medleys (*Serbian Medley #1*), ancient lineage dances (Aztec nonsense in Mexico and Pyrrhic extrapolations in Greece), and peasant fortitude dances (*Hopak*, *Partalos*, *Šopska petorka*).

Some countries mandate **Curriculum Dances** for schools to inculcate children in a national mythology. Examples include Romania (*Alunelul*) and Bulgaria (*Trûgnala Rumjana*).

Following the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the formation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, modern Turkey aimed, on the one hand, at suppressing or even erasing its Muslim-Ottoman identity from the collective memory of its population, with a rapid secularization and westernization reform program. On the other hand, the Turkish State also started a research program to revive the Central Asian roots of the Turks. [...] Turkish nationalism, like all other nationalisms, needed to construct its national cultural symbols and disseminate them within the popular strata.

From 1932 to 1950, Turkish Republicans supported the collection and practice by adults of rural Folkloric and Recreational Dance at localized, urban "People's Houses." In 1950, the Turkish *Demokrat Parti* closed the People's Houses, and large-scale urbanization carried the dances to population centers. There, directors standardized as "Turkish" the formerly local dances, costumes, and instrumentation. Few but the young now perform "Turkish Folk Dance" in Turkey. (from Arzu Öztürkmen, "Folk Dance and Nationalism in Turkey," in *17th Symposium of the study group on ethnochoreology 1992 proceedings*, Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation, Nafplion, 1994). Examples include *Karşılama* and

Ermeni Bar (Armenian Bar, renamed *Atabari* after Kemal Atatürk).

Festival Dances, for lack of a better name, occur as elders dance like children (*Seven Jumps*, *Pepper Dance*), while on the next stage children perform adult fertility rituals (*Maypole Dance*). Why? The eternal lure of make-believe? Medals awarded by festival judges? Whatever, this "Festival" bias destroys tradition more than other forms of **National Dance** because it eludes discovery more effectively. (Hey, you hadn't thought of it, had you?)

NEW NAMES FOR OLD!

As people realized in the 1970s how commercially devised and spiritually empty folk dancing had become, they left the movement to its cadre of self-styled experts and flocked to the revivals of Contra, Hungarian, Scandinavian, and other dance forms. In desperation, Folk Dance became Ethnic Dance (not to be confused with the failed 1950s academic discipline of that name), promoting equality among all ethnic groups. Ethnic Dance then became World Dance, since now we're not only all equal, we're all one! Contra embraced devised dances and became "Traditional Dance," confusing people endlessly. No name change, however, will hide the substantive shift away from significant folk context, and we are due now for dance revivals.

CONCLUSION:

International Folk Dancing has justifiably included materials from all these categories:

Folkloric

Recreational = Folkloric + Elite + Popular - Mass

Art

Traditional = Folkloric + Recreational + Art

Fixed and Evolving, anonymous or not

Revival & Historical

Revived and Devised

National

Potpourri, Protocol, Thanksgiving,

Character, Folk Ballet, Curriculum, Festival and also from the Mass Dance category.

I suggest that you dance what you enjoy, but know what you are dancing, and please call it

what it is! -- Ron