

The Use of Renaissance Dance in Shakespearean Productions: A Director's Guide

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Shakespearean productions are sometimes performed experimentally, with new ideas and fresh insights. However, many directors prefer to produce the Bard's work traditionally, with Renaissance costuming, swordplay, music and dancing. Traditional Shakespeare requires several production elements, namely, a director familiar with period styles in both acting and directing, a theatre or space with large playing areas, a talented costume designer, and a fight/dance choreographer with knowledge of period music, dance and swordplay.

Well funded, large theatres can usually afford to employ the personnel necessary for design, direction, music and choreography. However, most small theatres require their director to be designer, choreographer and director in one. What can the director of the smaller theatre do when confronted with traditional Shakespeare? Obviously, there has been much written about the literature, acting styles and even fight sequences of the period.

What of the Dances?

True, there are many sources to consult, John Playford, Arbeau's treatise, and Caroso to name several. The sources are difficult to locate and most only offer a sentence describing the dance, with no indication of how the steps are performed, beats or directional changes. (Dixon III/IV, 9) Unless the director

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is well versed in the different terminology of Renaissance dance, frustration can cause the director to create dances which are neither Shakespearean, nor traditionally Renaissance.

Theatre directors need their own guide to several dances that can be used in Shakespearean plays. The dances should be easy to teach and perform, and music guidelines should also be incorporated. These dances should be catered to particular plays, removing the directorial obstacle of deciding which dances to use, and should further the plot lines as well as present the costumes to their greatest glory.

This paper is intended to be a practical director's guide for using Renaissance music and dance within Shakespearean productions. Directors should feel free to adapt and change the dances to suit their needs. Each dance will be catered to a play and can be used in the portion indicated by the text. Four popularly produced plays will be used, and phrase and terminology will be kept simple. Dance terms will be used only when necessary.

Before any dance may begin, it is traditional to turn and "revere" your partner, with a honor or "reverence". The man steps back on his right leg, removes his hat with his right hand and transfers the hat to his left hand. The forward leg is held straight, the foot still on the floor, as the back leg bends and the man bows slightly from the waist. The man then kisses the right hand, before pushing off from the back leg, replacing the hat, and offering the woman the same hand kissed. (Arena) The motion should be during counts; step back, one, doff hat and bow, two, kiss hand and bring leg back to position on three, and don hat and offer hand on four. (Arbeau 67-68) The lady's reverence is somewhat simpler, she lowers her center of gravity by bending the knees, then gradually returning to beginning posture, kissing her left hand, and taking the gentleman's offered hand. The lady's reverence should take the four counts as well, breathe in on one, bend knees on two, up and kiss hand on three and take gentleman's hand on four. (Caroso 96) A beautiful reverence is flowing and graceful, never stiff or stilted. Both the lady's and gentleman's reverence should be done while looking at partner. The dancer should only look at the floor for the moment of deepest bowing, returning to an eye-contact as the knees straighten. (Dixon III/IV, 25) Remember that this is a rare time for a Renaissance couple to have before marriage, a moment alone to flirt without a chaperone!

There is some disagreement among sources concerning the lady's reverence and leg positioning. According to Caroso, the lady should move one leg out, behind the other, before the actual curtsey can begin. He also suggests that some ladies actually look as though they are "hens laying eggs", which is neither graceful nor desirable. (Caroso 141)

The Plays and The Dances

Much Ado About Nothing

Much Ado About Nothing has received renewed popularity with the release of the recent motion picture. The end of the romantic comedy offers this stage direction:

[Dance, all, Exeunt.] (Shakespeare V,iv,133)

The plot of the play leads to the denouement of celebration. The celebratory feel of the final moments of dialogue is leading to an upbeat dance that all may join. The English country dance, called "Gathering Peascods", is an upbeat dance that lends itself to couples dancing and the celebratory finale'. The dance is from the Playford's English Dancing Master, written in 1651. The piece is a round for as many couples as will, and if the cast is short of men actors, then ladies may partner with ladies. The round is done in common time signature. The feeling is active and happy, and the dance is performed vigorously. The first step is called a "slip-step" and is much like a gallop, and is performed by stepping out sideways in the direction indicated, then quickly replacing that foot with the other foot. For instance, a slip-step to the right would consist of stepping on right foot, hopping to the left, while the left foot replaces the right on the ground. (Dixon V,13) This should take one and one-half counts, and the right foot should then be in the air to step out again.

According to Playford, the indications for "Gathering Peascods" are as follows:

Hands-all, 8 slips L; all turn single. Hands-all, 8 slips back, single.

Men in a double, men's ring round L and fall back. Women, same.

Men in a double, clap, women the same while men fall back.

Men the same while women fall back, men turn single to place,
repeat, women first.

Partners side: turn single. Repeat.

As before, but women's ring first, etc. Arm R; turn single

Arm left; turn single,

As before, men's ring first, etc.

(Playford 1651)

"Gathering Peascods"

Reverence

Step One: All join hands in circle, and slip-step left 4 times. (4 counts)

Drop hands.

All turn one revolution over the left shoulder. (4 counts)

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Repeat slip step back to places, again holding hands (4 counts). Drop hands.

All turn left again. (4 counts)

Step Two: Men step forward into circle, right, left, right, together, and join hands. (4 counts)

Run to the left for two counts, still holding hands. (2 counts)

Men fall back to circle. (2 counts)

Women repeat men's circle, run, and fall back

Step Three: Men step forward into circle, right, left, right, together, clapping on last step. (4 counts)

Women step forward into circle, right, left, right, together, clapping on last step.

While women go forward, men fall back to places using same step and clap back. (4 counts)

While women go back, men go forward as before. (4 counts)

Women turn one time in place, men turn one time back to places. (4 counts)

Step Four: Repeat all of step three with women forward first. (16 counts)

Step Five: Turn towards partner. Walk towards the side of partner right, left, right, together. Partners should be looking at each other over their right shoulders. (4 counts)

Walk back to places, (4 counts), repeat to left shoulder, (4 counts), then back to places. (4 counts)

Repeat Step Four, then repeat Step Three.

Step Six: Dancers turn towards partner. Partners take right forearms and turn clockwise.

Other arm is in a upward arc toward the body. (4 counts)

All dancers turn individually, over their left shoulder. (4 counts)

Repeat arming grasping left forearm and turning counterclockwise. (4 counts)

All dancers turn individually, over their right shoulder. (4 counts)

Repeat Step Three, then repeat Step Four. Reverence.

As You Like It

The comedy *As You Like It* requires a dance at the end of the play. The Duke declares in Act V, Scene IV,

Proceed, proceed, we will begin these rites,

As we do trust, they'll end, in true delights.
[a dance, Exeunt]
(Shakespeare, V, iv, 203)

The English dance called "The Black Nag" is well suited to the court proceedings, as the dance is a jubilant celebration, while allowing relatively easy steps to be performed. This shows the costumes to their fullest extent and protects the costumes by preventing too much boisterous movement. (Playford 1670)

"The Black Nag" requires a step called the "hey", or the "chain" step, which can be confusing. The basic step is a walking step in which the dancer gives the right hand to the person approaching and changes places with that dancer, then the left hand is given to the next person approaching, changing places again. (Dixon V, 12) When the "hey" is on a straight line, such as it is in "The Black Nag", the dancer at the end of the line turns and again gives the hand which was last given. For instance, if the dancer at the end of the line gives his right hand last, he will turn around and again give the right hand, then the left, going up the chain. (Arbeau 167)

The dance uses many of the same elements as "Sellenger's Round." The elements are rearranged to fit "The Black Nag," but the 'slip steps', circling around partner with the right then the left arms clasped, and 'approaching partner and looking over right shoulders', remain the same. "The Black Nag" was first used in *The English Dancing Master* (Playford 1670), and offers this very general direction for the dance,

long ways, couples 3
lead up a double and back; repeat. 1st couple take hands
and go 4 slips up, 2nd and 3rd couple the same; all turn single.
3rd couple slip down, 2nd and 1st the same; all turn single.
Partner's side; repeat
1st man and 3rd woman change
corners, middles, all turn; repeat to places
partners arm R, arm L
gentlemen hey, ladies hey" (Playford, 1670)

This explanation gives no indication of beats, music or direction. However, "The Black Nag" can be simple to learn if the dance is described in detail. The dance begins with three couples in a line, facing down-stage, lady to gentlemen's right. The top couple is the couple directly down-stage, second couple is directly behind top couple, and third couple is directly behind the second. Any medium speed music in 4/4 time can be used. (counted one, two, three, FOUR, five, six, seven, EIGHT)

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“The Black Nag”

Reverence

Step One: All couples step forward right, left, right, together, couples still holding hands (1,2,3,4) towards downstage edge.

Couples step right, left, right, together back in place, couples still holding hands (5,6,7,8) towards upstage.

REPEAT last eight counts exactly.

Step Two: Top couple takes both hands, facing one another, and slip-steps (man with left foot first, woman with right) downstage. (1,2,3,4)

Second couple takes both hands and slip-steps, as top couple did on previous four count. (5,6,7,8)

Third couple takes both hands and slip-steps, as other couples did. (1,2,3,4)

All couples drop hands and turn over right shoulder, one revolution. (5,6,7,8)

Repeat all above, starting with third couple, this time slip to upstage.

Third couple will go first, then second, then top, all turn.

Step Three: Still facing each other, couples step left, right, left, touch right so that each dancer is looking at their partner over their right shoulder. (1,2,3,4)

Dancers should be side by side, ladies facing stage left, gentlemen stage right.

Step back right, left right, touch, back to places. (5,6,7,8)

Repeat Step Three to look over partner's left shoulder.

Step back right, left, right, touch, back to places.

Step Four: Couples still facing one another, top couple woman and third couple man change places, stomach to stomach. (1,2,3,4)

Top couple man and third couple woman change places, (5,6,7,8)

Second couple man and second couple woman change places, (1,2,3,4)

All turn over left shoulder. (5,6,7,8)

Step Five: Repeat, Step Four, starting with Top couple, then third, then middle. (16 counts)

Step Six: Couples face each other, all dancers take right forearms of partner with full turn to the right and back to places.

Other arm should curve upward in an arc behind dancer. (8 counts)

Couples facing, all dancers take left forearms of partner and turn to left.

Other arm should curve upward in an arc behind dancer. (8 counts)

Step Seven: Gentleman's hey; top man faces other two. (upstage)

Middle and last man face top man (downstage)

All weave in and out giving right hand then left to each other. As each man reaches the end of the line, (last man's place) turn and give the hand that was last given. In other words, if the last hand given before the turn was the left hand, turn and give the left hand again. (16 counts) (Arbeau 167)

See the paragraph describing the "hey", or consult the glossary in the appendix.

Step Eight: Ladies hey; same process as the gentleman's hey.

Step Nine: Repeat all steps from the beginning, with the first couple separating, walking around other couples and becoming the last couple. The second couple will then be the first, and the third will become the middle. Reverence

Romeo and Juliet

Popular in high schools and at practically every theatre in the country, *Romeo and Juliet* is produced quite often. In fact, the lovers will be encountered by most directors at least once in their career. One directorial problem is the dance in which Romeo and Juliet meet and converse. In Act I, Scene IV, Lord Capulet announces,

You are welcome, gentlemen! Come, musicians, play.

A hall! A Hall! give room, and foot it girls.

[Music plays, and they dance.]

(Shakespeare I, iv, 29)

The dances used are often secondary to the script, and are choreographed to look "renaissance", yet have no historical background at all. The "Hole in the Wall" is an English dance which provides for much flirting and some conversing. It even offers an chance for Romeo to "steal in" to Paris' place in the dance. The "steal" can create many comedic and clever directing opportunities which would not be possible in a simple choreographed dance.

Care should be taken when dancing "Hole In The Wall" or any other stately court dance with body positioning. Caroso states that the women should keep their palms facing toward their skirts, or place their hands on a pendant or such. He also states that some ladies hold palms out, looking as though they are maimed or deformed in some way. (Caroso 149) Likewise, the gentleman should always keep his body upright, not slumping, and place his free hand on his hip or behind his back.

"Hole In The Wall" begins with a line of couples, divided into couple A and couple B. Partners should face each other, and couple A should be further down stage than couple B. Couple B should be directly behind couple A, then another

couple A should be behind that couple and so on as far as the space on stage will allow. There can be several lines of couples on stage doing the same dance. Ladies should begin on gentleman's right. The music should be in 6/8 time counted one, two, three, four, five, six. The music should be much like a waltz-time, but the movements should not be obviously waltz like. Counts for the dances are beat in two, so the feeling of the dance is in 2/4 time. This means that each measure is really in 6/8 time, but the dancers should feel the music in twos, counting a "one" on the one count, and a "two" on the fourth count. In other words, the beating will go; ONE and TWO, and, a-ONE.

"Hole In The Wall" can also be done progressively. Progressive means that couple B travels down the hall (down-stage) through couple A during step four's turn. Couple B eventually sits out one full set (all four steps), and returning as a couple A. Meanwhile, couple A travels up the hall (up-stage) eventually sitting out a set and returning as couple B. The couple sitting out is considered "in the hole in the wall." This can be boring for the dancers, but can be a great time for dialogue between characters.

"Hole In The Wall"

Reverence

Step One: Couple A separates, walks around couple B (to the outside), then comes between couple B and back to places. (8 counts)

While couple A walks around, couple B should come together, facing and fingertips touching. (4 counts)

Couple B should then separate and step back into places as couple A comes between. (4 counts) The entire process should take only 8 counts.

(1-and-a-2-and-a-3-and-a-4-and-a-5-and-a-6-and-a-7-and-a-8-and-a)

Step Two: Couple B separates, walks around couple A (to the outside), then comes between couple A and back to places. (8 counts)

While couple B walks around, couple A should come together, facing and fingertips touching. (4 counts)

Couple A should then separate and step back into places as couple B comes between. (4 counts)

The entire process should take only 8 full, slow counts.

Step Three: Woman from Couple A and man from couple B change places, stomach to stomach. (4 counts)

Man from Couple A and woman from couple B change places, stomach to stomach. (4 counts)

Step Four: All four take hands to form circle. (6 counts)

Circle half way around to return to original places (6 counts)

All turn over left shoulder slowly (2 counts)
Reverence (1-and-a-2-and-a)
Repeat the process until music has finished.

During Step One of "Hole In The Wall", 'stealing' can be done while either couple is passing outside of the other. A gentleman should simply place himself in position to partner the woman he wishes to dance with. For instance, if Paris and Juliet are couple A, couple A will separate, walk around couple B and pass between them, then return to their original places. Romeo has only to replace Paris by being in Paris' original spot when Juliet returns. Paris has no recourse but to retreat, and the conversation between Romeo and Juliet may ensue. Provided the interaction takes place in a clever manner, the audience can be treated to a wonderful moment in theatre through the dance.

A Midsummer Night's Dream

A Midsummer Night's Dream is a fun, fantastical Shakespearean comedy. The play requires singing and dancing, which is done by the 'fairies' in the story. The queen of the fairies, Titania, declares;

First, rehearse your song by rote,
To each word a warbling note
Hand in hand with fairy grace
We will sing and bless this place.
[song and dance.]
(Shakespeare V, iv, 27)

The "Sellenger's Round" is an English country dance from the *Playford Ball* that is performed by as many couples as the stage or playing space will accommodate. The round is perfect for the play, and any upbeat music in 4/4 time can be used. The dance begins with couples in a circle with all holding hands. Couples can be guy-girl, girl-girl according to the cast the director has. Source is the *Playford Ball*, fourth edition.

"Sellenger's Round"

Fast Reverence during introductory music.

Step One: All hold hands in a circle and gallop or slip step to the left for 8 counts

On the count of 8 jump together with both feet. (step left and immediately replace left foot with right with little hop, like a gallop.)

Step Two: Still Holding hands, gallop to right for 8 counts, jumping together on eight.

Chorus: Still holding hands, facing center of circle.

Step in with left foot, and bring right foot in to meet left (count 1 and 2).
(this step is called a single)

Step in with right foot, and bring left foot in to meet right (count 3 and 4).

Step out with left foot then right, then left, jump, both feet together (count 5,6,7,8). (this step is called a double) (Dixon III/IV, 9)

Drop hands on eight.

Face partner, step left (1), bring right foot in (2), step right (3), and bring left foot in. (4) Turn to the left, (5,6,7,8) and face into circle.

Repeat all of chorus again.

Step Three: Not holding hands, step into center of circle, Left, right, left, together. (1,2,3,4)

Step out from center of circle, right, left, right, together. (5,6,7,8)

Repeat above going into circle and out of circle. (8 counts).

Chorus: Take hands again and repeat chorus exactly.

Step Four: After turning for the final 5,6,7,8 of chorus, face partner.

Step left, right, left, and feet together. (1,2,3,4) (double) (dancer should now be at sides of partner, looking at partner over their right shoulder)

Step right, left, right and feet together away from partner. (5,6,7,8)

Repeat to look over left shoulders, then 5,6,7,8 away from partner.

Chorus: Take hands again and repeat chorus exactly.

Step Five: After turning for the final 5,6,7,8 of chorus, face partner.

Offer right arm to partner and walk around each other for 7 steps and close.

Offer left arm to partner and walk around each other for 7 steps and close.

Arms should make contact, forearm to forearm, with other arm curved up and back.

Chorus: Repeat chorus exactly.

Step Six: Repeat Step three exactly.

Chorus: Repeat chorus exactly. Repeat from beginning until music ends, then reverence.

It should be noted that the “singles” (step, step together) and “doubles” (step, step, step, together) change to a different form during the mid to late 1600’s. The steps change to a “balance”. The “balance” is very much like a modern day “pony” step, consisting of a step right, step left, step right quickly, like a hop. The feeling is a three count, but the movement is done in two. (hop one and two, with a hop on the one, the “and”, and the two). (Dixon V, 11) The “balance” step is often performed in the country dances, while the “single” and “double” is utilized more in the stately court dances. Director’s discretion can

determine whether to use the “balance”, or the “single”, according to the play, audience and mood he or she is creating. The “balance” is energetic and fun, while the “single” and “double” can be very regal and is wonderful for showing courtly costumes.

Notes are often made, in the sources, concerning the deportment of Dancers. This includes how a gentleman and a lady should act while preparing to dance, as well as deportment during the dances themselves. These notes can be extremely specific, and describe details of actions for everything from controlling the train of a dress to how to greet royalty at the ball. These actions become less important in the theatrical world, but should be noted for accuracy in the manners and customs of the period. The director should choose which, if any, customs he or she wishes to keep in the world of traditional Shakespeare. Some references can be useful in simple logistics of costumes and swords. For instance, how the actor can control his mantle, or cape, while dancing. Careful instructions are give to throw the mantle over the left shoulder before the beginning of the dance. (Caroso 134) There are also notes concerning gloves, which should be always removed prior to dancing, and the sword, which should be worn at all times. Only a few customs are presented here, and a director should consult *Nobilita di Dame*,² for a more exhaustive treatise on conduct and deportment. (Caroso 134-150)

In conclusion, dance and music are an important part of traditional Shakespeare. Traditional dances of the period can add excitement and authenticity to each production, and provide opportunities for character and plot development. The dances can also allow costume designers a “runway” for their work, as court dances were originally designed to show the court member’s finery. Finally the dances can provide the needed local color to a theatrical production, combining music with movement in a period setting.

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