Chapter 3

Dance From the Middle Ages Through the Renaissance

# Overview

Dance in the Middle Ages expanded in a variety of ways. In the church dance was part of the mystery, miracle, and morality plays. Knights, ladies, and peasants all danced to celebrate both religious and secular events. Dance became an accomplishment of nobility and an amusement of the court. The dancing master emerged, who taught dance instruction and etiquette as the standard of training for gentle men and women.

In the Renaissance, dance was part of social gatherings, court functions, and entertainments. Choral and couple folk and court dances continued to be popular. As part of the growing number of dances, the two-part suite of the pavane and galliard presented a contrast between basse and haute dances. During this period, couple dances gained in popularity over choral dances. At court, dance sections became part of the lavish banquets, masked entertainments, and interludes in a variety of entertainment.

# Activities and Assignments

These activities are also available for students in the web resource.

## Activity 1. Dance Themes of the Middle Ages

**Part I:** Research and choreograph a one-minute dance selected from the following themes:

* Midsummer night’s eve dance
* Dance of death (dance macabre)
* Dance epidemic cure or tarantella
* Bergamasco (shepherd’s hey)
* A May or maypole dance
* The cushion dance

**Part II:** Students in the audience will observe a dance and write a one-page response. The response should include the following:

* Choreographer’s intent to communicate the type or theme of the dance
* Identification of steps of movement themes that illustrated the theme
* Characterization and dramatization of the theme
* Appropriate accompaniment, costumes, or prop elements used
* Allover impression of the work

**Part III:** Compare and contrast your choreographic work to the one you selected to write about in a one-page comparison using the prompts in the previous list.

## Activity 2. Comparing Dances and Dance Designs

Your class will work in groups. Each group learns two dances from the list under the heading The Dances. The groups that perform the two dances should discuss and write a group report that addresses the topics listed under the headings Writing About the Dances and Writing About the Dancers. Sources for each of the dances are available from the following web links.

**Online Music Sources**Search engine with MP3s of a variety of dances.  
<http://sca.uwaterloo.ca/Music/>

**SCA Dance Database: Eric’s SCA Dance and Music Page**<http://sca.uwaterloo.ca/~praetzel/sca-music.html>

### Renaissance Dance Sources

**Carole and farandole**This is a reconstructed version of a carole called a carole royale:  
[www.pbm.com/~lindahl/del/sections/sca\_inventions4.html](http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/del/sections/sca_inventions4.html)

### Basse danse and the branle

**Basse Danse Steps**[www.pbm.com/~lindahl/almond/basse/steps.html](http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/almond/basse/steps.html)  
<https://www.loc.gov/collections/dance-instruction-manuals-from-1490-to-1920/articles-and-essays/western-social-dance-an-overview-of-the-collection/burgundian-dance-in-the-late-middle-ages/>  
Go to the next page on Renaissance dance, which includes video clips.

Ballroom etiquette (bows) from Arbeau  
Branles  
Galliard  
Pavane  
Branles  
[www.themiddleages.net/life/dances.html](http://www.themiddleages.net/life/dances.html)  
(On this site the dance is spelled “bransle.”)

### Pavane and Galliard

**Pavane**[www.themiddleages.net/life/dances.html](http://www.themiddleages.net/life/dances.html)

**Galliard**<http://sca.uwaterloo.ca/~praetzel/Del/www.sca.org.au/del/ddb/sections/16th_c_italian_dance.html>

**How to Perform the Galliard**[www.pbm.com/~lindahl/del/sections/16th\_c\_italian\_dance26.html](http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/del/sections/16th_c_italian_dance26.html)

### Writing About the Dances

Using the dance classifications from chapter 3 as a starting place, compare and contrast the two dances in the sequence you have selected.

* Time signature of the dance
* Quality of the dance
* High (haute)
* Low (basse)
* Choral
* Couple

Continue the comparison to include specifics to describe dance:

* Type of movements or steps (in more detail than described in previous list)
* Relationships and formations (in more detail than described in previous list)
* Dance structure (e.g., AB, ABA, and so on)
* Dance type (in more detail than described in previous list)
* Dance accompaniment: self-accompaniment and musical accompaniment
* Attire, costuming, and other accoutrements
* Performing space, time of day, and occasion

### Writing About the Dancers

Who would have performed the dance? (peasant or noble)

Where did they perform the dance? (outside or inside)

Why did they perform the dance? (social, amusement, or as part of entertainment)

## Activity 3. Prerequisites for Dancers

Domenico’s treatise *De Arte saltandi et choreas ducendi* divides dance into components that focus on movements of the body, steps, and qualities.

A student of Domenico of Piacenza, Ebreo expanded the meaning of the six prerequisites and wrote about dance to make a clear distinction between folk dance and art with an aesthetic.

The following are the six prerequisites for dancers:

1. Keep time with the music.
2. Remember the steps.
3. Have a sense of space and the floor pattern.
4. Sway (or keep the body lifted).
5. Have body coordination.
6. Move gracefully.

In a one-page journal entry or response paper, analyze how important these prerequisites are for dancers today. Then write your own list of six prerequisites as they relate to postmodern dance or modern ballet.

# Web Links

Medieval life  
[www.medieval-life-and-times.info/medieval-life/](http://www.medieval-life-and-times.info/medieval-life/)

Medieval chivalry  
[www.medieval-life.net/chivalry.htm](http://www.medieval-life.net/chivalry.htm)

*Danse Macabre*<http://fantastic.library.cornell.edu/dance.php>

Dance dramas  
[www.theatrehistory.com/medieval/mysteries001.html](http://www.theatrehistory.com/medieval/mysteries001.html)

Burgundian dance manuscript  
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/dihtml/diessay1.html>

Medieval dance  
<http://middlegate.atlantia.sca.org/Library/MedievalDanceforVillageIdiots.pdf>

Kingdom of Atlantia  
<http://moas.atlantia.sca.org/wsnlinks/index.php?action=displaycat&catid=295>  
Provides links to instructions for performing dances.

SCA collection of dance cheat sheets  
[www.pbm.com/~lindahl/dance/The\_Cheat\_Sheets.html](http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/dance/The_Cheat_Sheets.html)

Dances from *Orchesography*[www.pbm.com/~lindahl/del](http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/del)

Italian Renaissance dances: steps  
<http://www.stgeorgenorth.org/resources>  
Scroll down to “Pastimes and Pleasure” and select “Dance Step Descriptions.”

Early dance circle  
[www.earlydancecircle.co.uk/resources/dance-through-history/early-dance-at-a-glance](http://www.earlydancecircle.co.uk/resources/dance-through-history/early-dance-at-a-glance)

National Resource Centre for Historical Dance  
<http://www.earlydancecircle.co.uk/resources/the-national-resource-centre-for-historical-dance/>  
Click on the PDF link located under the heading “The Current Catalogue of the NRCHD.” Includes dance, dress, music, and social history and manners (including theater history).

Renaissance dance: primary sources and music  
[www.rendance.org](http://www.rendance.org)

Renaissance dance reconstruction and study  
[www.pbm.com/~lindahl/articles/dance\_sources.html](http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/articles/dance_sources.html)

Medieval music: the Internet Renaissance Band  
[www.curtisclark.org/emusic/medieval.html](http://www.curtisclark.org/emusic/medieval.html)

Renaissance music: the Internet Renaissance Band  
[www.curtisclark.org/emusic/renaissa.html](http://www.curtisclark.org/emusic/renaissa.html)

Medieval and Renaissance instruments  
[www.music.iastate.edu/antiqua/instrumt.html](http://www.music.iastate.edu/antiqua/instrumt.html)

The history of costume  
[www.siue.edu/COSTUMES//history.html](http://www.siue.edu/COSTUMES//history.html)  
Scroll down to the century and country and people you want to survey.

# Review Questions

1. What was society like during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance?
2. Who were the dancers and other contributors to dance during this period?
3. What were the dances, music, and other arts that supported dance during this period?
4. What were the significant dances, ballets, and dance literature of the period?

# Vocabulary

baccuber

balli

ballo

banquets

basse danse

bergamasco

branle

carole

chivalry

commedia dell’arte

court dances

Court of Love

cushion or kissing dance

dance mania or dance epidemics

dance of death

Dark Ages

Ebreo, Guglielmo

Elizabeth I of England

estampie

farandole

Feast of Fools

feudal system

galliard

gleeman and gleemaiden

Gothic architecture

Harlequin

hey

intermedio

jongleurs

knights

mascarades

May dances

Middle Ages

midsummer or St. John’s Eve

minstrels

Morris dance

mummery

mystery, miracle, and morality plays

pavane

Renaissance

Romanesque architecture

roundel

saltarello

sword dances

tarantella

troubadours

two-part suite

Vitruvius

volta