

### **On Common Ground 3: John Playford and the English Dancing Master, 1651**

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#### **DUBREIL'S CONTRE DANCES**

Jørgen Schou-Pedersen

As we know, English longway dances gained some popularity in France during the late 17th and early 18th century. As we learn from the Dezais 1712 collection<sup>1</sup> – in fact already from Lorin in the mid 1680's<sup>2</sup> – French dancing masters were inspired by the English dances and created their own variety of them. Another French dancing master, Jean Pierre Dubreil, formerly of the Paris Opéra, created in 1718 a number of dances for the court of Kurfürst Maximilian II. Emanuel of Bavaria.<sup>3</sup> The dances are set to music by Ernst Ludwig, Landgraf von Hessen. The source consists of sixteen dances, of which three are couple dances. The remaining thirteen are country dances one is of the cotillion type and one is of a unique form. Eleven dances are progressive longway dances, nine of which are done in two-couple minor sets, one in three-couple minor set and one with circular progression. In 1730 Dubreil published another set of dances consisting of a couple dance followed by a two-couple minor progressive longway dance.<sup>4</sup> The dance with circular progression, called “La Florentine” had been chosen for the workshop.

The music for “La Florentine” is in compound duple meter, notated in six eights rather than six fourth indicating a quick tempo, like that of a gigue, common in French country dancing. The tune consists of a four-bar phrase repeated followed by an eight-bar phrase, of which the last four bars are similar to that of the first phrase. The eight-bar phrase is also repeated.

To begin the process of reconstruction one should first look at the notation and spot the most important problems of the track. At the first plate the partners end back to back, but the starting position in plate two show them face to face. That leaves us with a decision to be taken: whether they should turn around at the end of the first strain or wait till the beginning of the second strain. Furthermore, they end a little to the side of their starting position in the first plate, but in plate two they are nevertheless back where they started.

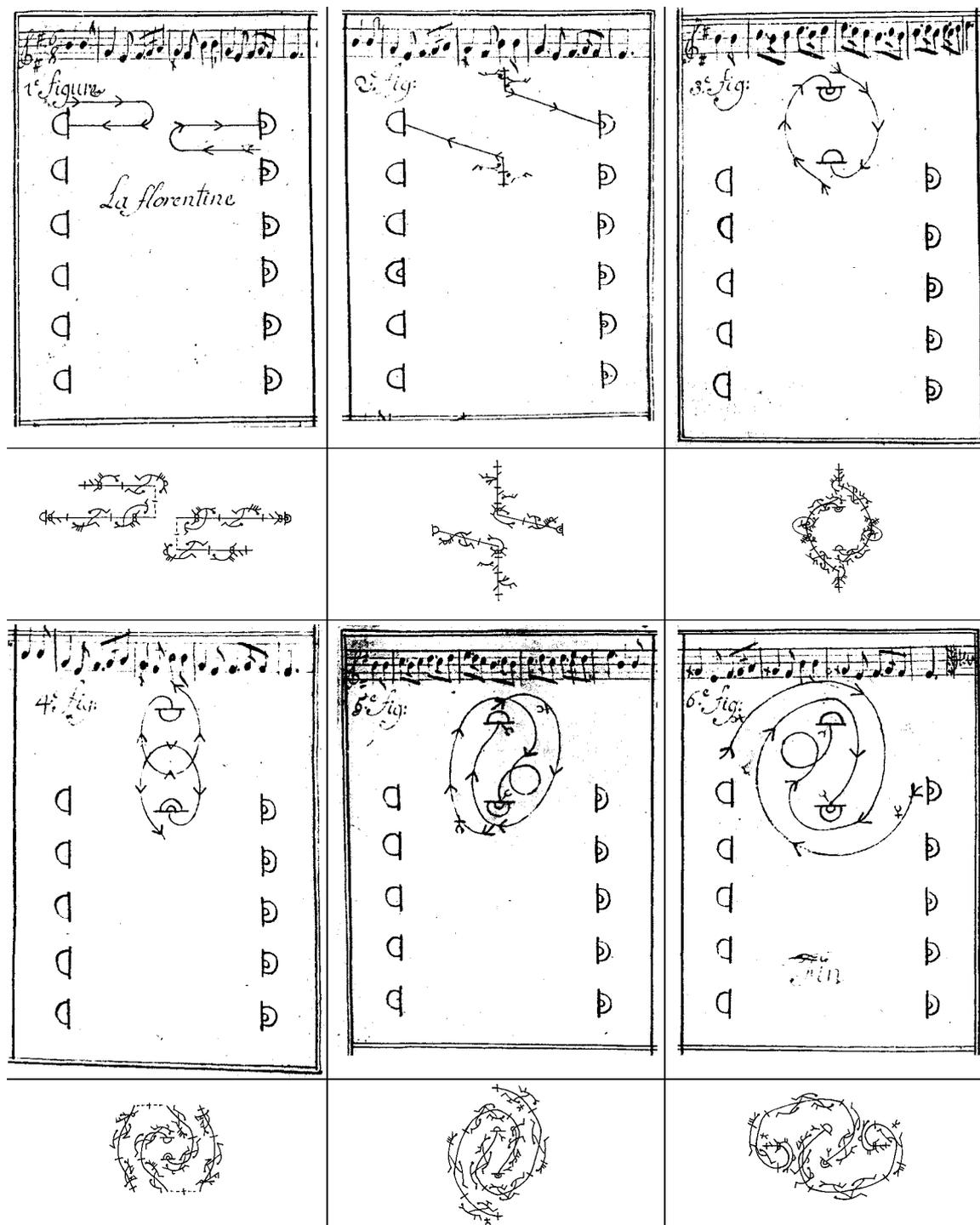
On plate six the dancers are shown turning each other one and a quarter times ending in their *own* lines, that is, the man in the men's line, the lady in the lady's line having made no progression at all. It is hard to imagine, how the dance could continue from there, so I've assumed this to be an error. They should probably only turn three quarters and end in the opposite lines, as customary in dances with circular progression.

There is only a very limited number of figures you can do with only two people. What they do in “La Florentine” is nothing else than to go three and a half times round each other, anticlockwise. But in the first four plates the dancers end facing in different directions. By the end of plate one the dancers end back to back, with the result that when more couples are dancing they will face their former partner. By the end of the second plate, all the men face each other in a circle while the ladies face out; by the end of the third plate they face in opposite directions, so the ladies meet in the middle. Not until the end of plate four the partners end a dance phrase facing each other. Having met at last they perform a happy little sequence together in plates five and six.

A very important category of problems in reconstruction are steps as they are not notated. Four different source groups have been explored to approach the problem: French notated country dances before 1730, the French couple dances, notated French country dances after 1730, and the German sources.

Most important in the first group of sources are the collections that seem to have been inspiration for Dubreil: Feüillet's Recueil de Contredances from 1706<sup>5</sup> and 1707<sup>6</sup> and Dezais'

Recueil de Nouvelles Contredances dating 1712.<sup>1</sup> Feüllet gives some general outlines: Movements straight forwards and back were done with the pas de gavotte, sideways movements with chassées and curved movements with *either* demi-contretemps *or* pas de bourrées. This last piece of information is important since it makes it clear that even in France there



**Figure 1. Jean Pierre Dubreil: La Florentine, Darmstadt 1718**

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would be a choice of different steps depending on individual taste. Furthermore, Feüillet tells us that it is good to end a dance phrase with a jump on both feet. Stationary steps like pas de rigaudon, balancés, little sauts in place and rarer movements like pirouettes, reverences and stamps are all notated in full Beauchamp-Feüillet notation.

We could compare this information to the dance phrases notated by André Lorin in the mid-1680's.<sup>2</sup> We should remember, that these dances are more than thirty years before Dubreil. Lorin has very varied step sequences and several step types within a single dance phrase. Series of pas de bourrées sometimes open a dance phrase, but they are usually followed by some sort of hopping movement leading to the end of the phrase. Series of pas sautées equivalent to Feüillet's demi-contretemps are only found in a single dance in this collection. There is no pas de gavotte as we usually know it, since the contretemps doesn't seem to have been an established step-unit in Lorin's time. However, there are dance phrases that end with a step sequence similar to the pas de gavotte: One pas sauté followed by a pas simple and a coupé assemblé.

The second group of sources explored is the French couple dances notated in the Beauchamp-Feüillet notation system. Several of these dances may be associated with country dancing in terms of music or character, but as a starting point I had restricted myself to the ones, in which the word contredanse is mentioned. Two of these, the "Contre-dance à deux" from the Feüillet 1704 collection<sup>7</sup> and "La Contredance" from the Gaudreau collection c.1713<sup>8</sup> are both theatrical dances, using a varied step repertoire of which some steps are not even found in ballroom dances, so therefore they were omitted. Then only three dances were left: "La Contredance" from the Feüillet 1700 collection of ballroom dances,<sup>9</sup> "Les contrefaiseurs Contre-Danse" from the 1702 annual collection<sup>10</sup> and "La Conty contre danse" from the Descan manuscript,<sup>11</sup> undated, but probably dating shortly after 1710.

The step repertoire in these three dances does not differ remarkable from that of other ballroom dances. Pas de bourrée in various forms, contretemps and pas de gavotte are frequently found. We do not see any series of demi-contretemps, but these occur in the two-couple country dance of the cotillon type called "Le Cotillon" from 1705.<sup>12</sup> Two of the three dances include glissades, a step which have not been found in any French country dance sources until Magny 1765.<sup>13</sup> All of the three dances include the pas de sissonne, which is a common step in the couple dance repertoire, also found in the Lorin manuscript, but then not again in country dance sources until Malpied mentions it around 1780,<sup>14</sup> sixty years after Dubreil and a century after Lorin. This does not necessarily mean that these steps could not occur in Dubreil's dances. His dances were choreographed for the court, for people who would have taken dance lessons and who would be familiar with the step repertoire of the French couple dances.

We are very lucky to have in one of Dubreil's country dances "La Bavaroise Contre danse" a fine example of two plates of country dance steps in full Beauchamp-Feüillet notation. As far as I know this is the only example of step sequences in a progressive longway notated in the Beauchamp-Feüillet notation and they have been a key to my reconstruction work.

Dubreil's dance "La Musette" shows a short change-of-places sequence which consists of first one bar ending sideways left, then two bars both ending sideways right and a fourth bar that ends facing partner. This figure occurs in more of Dubreil's dances as "La Vandangeuse" from 1730. In this dance he makes it clear, that partners should end in each other's places. The possible steps for this sequence puzzled me for some time because I knew Feüillet's strict rule of chassées in sideways motions. It was only when I realized that

the first plate of “La Bavaroise Contre danse” would look exactly the same if it was notated in simplified notation, that I concluded, that this is most likely the step sequence that would have been used in “La Musette” and “La Vandangeuse”. If we did not have this example in full notation we could not know which steps to use for this sequence, since the coupé to point in the first bar does not occur in any country dance sources and thus would not be considered. A very similar step sequence occurs in a well known country dance like couple dance choreographed for the stage, Pécour’s “l’Allemande” from 1702.<sup>15</sup>

Likewise, plates seven and eight of another of Dubreil’s dances: “La Palatine Contre danse” is probably meant to be danced with the same step sequence as the one in the second plate of “La Bavaroise Contre danse”. A step sequence almost identical to this one also occurs in “l’Allemande”. The sequence even occurs in other couple dances associated with country dancing.

One may wonder how many interesting step sequences could be hidden behind the simplified notation.

The third group of sources, the French country dance sources after 1730 proved to be of less interest, since they almost all deal with the cotillion type of dances only. But these sources confirm that almost the same step repertoire as mentioned by Feüillet remained in use. Most remarkable is that the pas de bourrée is not in use in the cotillions.

The fourth group of sources, the German sources should also be considered since Dubreil worked in Bavaria and since several of his dances seem to have a German flavour not found in the French dances. But unfortunately I have found no sources till Lang 1762<sup>16</sup> and Petersen 1768<sup>17</sup> that provide any useful information about steps used in country dancing and by then fashion had changed dramatically.

The country dances by Dubreil provides us with information, which can be used in our understanding of early 18<sup>th</sup> century country dancing as not necessarily always very different in style from the couple dances used in the ballroom. Therefore I think that the couple dances with their varied step repertoire should be taken into account when we reconstruct or recreate those of the country dances that have been danced by the highest social classes.

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