

THE ESTAMPIE

Arrangements of value as a resource for teachers and performers.

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Before the French basse dance of the late 15th century, with its *simples*, *doubles*, *reprises* and *branle/congie* steps, and its putative shape of forward progression interrupted by moments of no forward progression, ...

before the Italian *bassadanzas* and *balli*, with more sophisticated spatial patterns, rhythms, and movements of the body, ...

before the melodic lines of the Italian *balli*, and the singularly unmelodic and puzzling tenors of the French *basse dances*, ...

we have The *Estampies*.

I refer specifically to the music in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, (f.fr.844), popular with nearly all early music practitioners; and to the less popular, less familiar music, in the British Library in London, (Harley 978).

These pieces have been identified as *Estampie* music.

In the case of the French source material, each of 8 pieces is numbered and headed *Estampie*.

In the case of the English material, while there is no such clear announcement, they have been recognised by musicologists as dance music, which is claimed by some to be that of *Estampies*.

So the music is recognised as instrumental dance music. But of footwork, spatial pattern, and style of the dance there is no information.

What, then, can we do about dancing to it?

I will tell you what I do; And why.

This ended the 'Paper'. The remainder of the time was spent discussing and showing, with the aid of volunteers from the audience:–

ESTAMPIE DOUBLE

Melusine Wood's arrangement to the music in BL Harley 978 as understood from transcriptions, originally those in *Early English Harmony*, Vol I, Wooldridge (1887) and Vol II, Hughes (1913)

and

LA QUINTE ESTAMPIE REALE

My own arrangement, to one of the pieces of music in Paris BN f.fr.844, as I understand it from the interpretations nowadays available in print, and in sound recordings.

The dances were selected to show how such simple arrangements can be of use as teaching aids, and also to suggest them, or their kind, as suitable material for inclusion in a performance of historical dance in which the mediaeval period is to be featured.

In place of this practical session the following is offered as a record of the underlying intent.

Melusine Wood's Estampie Double arrangement is no more than:

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| First Phrase | a <i>double</i> forwards and a <i>double</i> back, repeated; |
| Second Phrase | two <i>simples</i> , to L and to R, followed by a <i>double</i> forward; then two <i>simples</i> to R and to L followed by a <i>double</i> back; |
| Third Phrase | a repeat of First Phrase. |

There is little here to strain the memory. Teacher and students alike may concern themselves with technique, a manner of walking in 1-step and 3-step units (*simples* and *doubles*), to a simple ground plan; and presentation, based on good posture. Aspects of this include making a good start, well timed and confidently executed, and a good finish; absence of mannerisms; a togetherness with one's fellow dancer/s; a courteous but commanding contact with the audience.

These are qualities fundamental to dance in all the periods that historical dance covers.

My own Estampie V arrangement

Provides, and provided here, the opportunity to explain the basic Estampie pattern of a series of *puncta* with open and closed endings. It also shows how a more sophisticated spatial pattern can be made, matching the musical pattern, but still relying only on *simples* and *doubles* taken to different directions.

It lends itself to artistic licence, using a repeat of the music to widen it into a dance for a number of couples in column formation. (Nothing in the original document, so far as I know, indicates a repeat of the whole, but some of the dance bands who have recorded it have elected play a repeat.)

Finally a quotation was read from a 13th century writer, advising a young girl on how she may divert the attentions of an unwelcome suitor, without giving offence.

“If any man address you and pay his court, do not be shy in your manner or rude. Defend yourself with agreeable repartee; and if his conversation annoys you, ask him something new: Which ladies are the fairer, the Gascons or the English, or which are the more courteous, truer and better? And if he says : The Gascons, reply boldly : Sir, save your honour, the ladies of England are fairer than those of any other land. And if he says to you: The English, reply: May it not displease you, sir, the Gascons are fairer; and make it the subject of a debate and summon to you the other companions to judge whether your dispute is right or wrong.”

Amanieu de Sescas, late 13th C, according to T. F. Crane, *Italian Social Customs of the 16th Century*, which deals extensively also with social customs in the preceding centuries.

The extended Estampie V arrangement lends itself to an illustration of this. The first couple represent the young girl and her unwelcome suitor. The others are invited in by her in the course of the dance, and in joining they arrange it so that the young girl is now dancing with a different partner.