

The Development of French Basse Danse

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The main lines of the development of French basse danse were laid down more than twenty years ago by Daniel Hertz in a fundamental paper in *Annales Musicologiques* (Hertz 1964). Despite his informative appendixes, and the collation of all 15th-century documentary sources by Frederick Crane (1968), it has remained difficult to gain an adequate impression of the character of the dances in any one source, and this has hampered appreciation of the stages whereby the overall development proceeded. A recent paper (Wilson 1983) attempted to overcome this difficulty by presenting a frequency table of **mesures** for a particular manuscript, together with other statistics chosen to shed light on its character. Amongst other things this showed up a major discrepancy between the theoretical account of basse danse forms given in the treatise at the start of the manuscript and the actual dances contained in the collection which followed.

The success of this method of analysis has encouraged its application to the remaining sources for the French style of basse danse, to allow detailed comparison of their contents and the identification of differences between them. Nine sources are reviewed here, including two from England and one from Italy; but Spanish sources are excluded, and so are the **basse danze** of Domenico and his school.

NB The standard abbreviations for basse danse steps are as follows:

R = reverence; **b** = branle; **s** = single (**simple**); **d** = double; **r** = reprise (**desmarche**). (The distinction between **R** and **r** is often ignored by the original sources, however.)

The Sources

1. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds français 5699 (cited below as Paris 5699).

See Sachs (1937), 313-14; Crane (1968), 21-3.

The steps of 7 dances are noted on the reverse of the first flyleaf of a copy of the *Geste des nobles François* belonging to Jean d'Orléans, Comte d'Angoulême. It is plausibly conjectured that he made these notes at Nancy in 1445.

Only one of the dances is a basse danse in the accepted sense, having no leaps and being organised in **mesures** that are recognisably similar to those in later basses dances. This is the **Basse danse de Bourgogne**:

sss dddd sss (all to the right) rrr b
sss d sss (all to the right) rrr b

Compared with later basses dances this has two peculiarities: the singles come in groups of three instead of two, and those that follow the doubles are made to the side.

2. Bruxelles, Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, MS 9085 (cited below as Brussels 9085).

See Closson (1912); Jackman (1964); Crane (1968); 3-12.

A collection of 58 dances, with music, is preceded by a treatise describing how basses dances should be danced. In 1523 the manuscript was in the library of Marguerite of Austria, regent of the Netherlands. It is a careful page-by-page copy, no longer complete, of a lost original, from

which the collection printed by Toulouze (No. 3 below) is also derived. The lost original must be dated between c. 1445 and 1496; this copy has most recently been assigned to c. 1470 (Crane 1968) and to the period 1495-1501 (Hertz 1964).

The collection comprises (a) 52 dances with tunes noted in even breves, for one of which no steps are given; (b) 4 dances with tunes in mensural notation, one of which appears not to be really a basse danse; and (c) two dances in mixed notation, in which a section in **pas de Breban** is followed by a basse danse done to a tune in even breves.

The 51 conventional basses dances were analysed in a previous paper (Wilson 1983) and the figures presented there will not now be repeated. A comparison between these figures and those of Toulouze's book is made below.

Of the dances in mensural notation all have peculiarities. **Beaulte de Castile** is for three dancers, is not made up of conventional **mesures** ending with **b**, and the whole dance concludes with **ss d**. **La danse de Cleves** incorporates some simple floor patterns, replaces the normal **r** with a **d^r** (= **double desmarchant**), and has **mesures** with no concluding **b**. **La danse de Ravestain** is incomplete. **La franchoise nouvelle** looks more like a normal basse danse, but it is in virtually 16th-century style, with its three pairs of singles in the first **mesure**, and the combination of **rdr** (or equivalent) with **ddd** in the second.

ss ddd ss d^r ss d d^r b
ss ddd d^r d d^r b
ss d d^r b

The two dances in mixed notation are evidently **basses dances mineurs**. The basse danse sections appear to be composed of **mesures** of conventional form,

ss ddd ss rrr b
ss d ss rrr b
ss ddd r b
ss d r b,

though in **Roti bouilly ioyeux** the sequence has become garbled.

3. Sensuit lart et instruction de bien dancier (Paris, no date) (cited below as Toulouze).

See Scholderer (1936); Jackman (1964); Crane (1968), 26-7

This is the earliest known printed book on dancing and survives in a single copy at the Royal College of Physicians, London. The printer/publisher was Michel Toulouze, and the date of publication 1496 or a year or two earlier. The 48 dances, with music, are preceded by a treatise effectively identical with that in **Brussels 9085**.

In addition to the two **basses dances mineurs** and the unorthodox **Beaulte de Castile** described above, there are 45 basses dances of conventional form. Five of these are not in **Brussels 9085** and 13 others have been given choreographies that are significantly different. (Conversely, 11 of those in **Brussels 9085** are not in **Toulouze**.) More than half of the dances contain obvious printers' errors in the sequences of steps; the correct readings are either self-evident or can be restored by reference to the Brussels manuscript. These corrections

are assumed in the analysis below. More speculatively, two dances with defective choreographies, **Ioieusement** and **La basine**, have been completed by repetition of preceding **mesures**; the resulting restorations are highly probable, but not completely certain.

Unfortunately not all the errors can be put right with any degree of confidence; where more than one solution is possible, there may be no sure way of picking the right one. It would be tendentious to choose the most orthodox solution, yet misleading to leave a certain error uncorrected. What we have done, therefore, is to make any such corrections only tentatively; this results in a number of alternative totals in the tables below: thus 28/30 should be read as meaning '28 certainly, plus another two possibly, depending on how you read the evidence'.

a. Number of different choreographies: 28/30

b. Number of steps in each dance (counting **ss** as one step only:

steps	18	27	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39
Number of dances	1	1	4	2	5	2	3	1	4	1	1	3
	40	42	43	44	46	48	62					
	1	5	0/1	4/5	3	2	1					

The short dance **Le ioyeulx espoir**, with only 18 steps, was probably completed by a **recoupe** or **retour**, called **demie** in **Toulouse** (Hertz 1964, 303). Apart from this, the dances fall into very much the same range as those in **Brussels 9085**, with only minor variations.

c. Number of **mesures** in each dance:

4 mesures in 24 dances	
5	14
3	4
6	3

When compared with **Brussels 9085**, **Toulouse** shows a greater preference for 4 or 5 **mesures**. A number of dances have had their choreographies reworked: where **Brussels 9085** has 3 **mesures**, **Toulouse** has 4, and where **Brussels 9085** has 6, **Toulouse** has 5.

d. Sequence of **mesures**:

abab	in 8/10 dances
abac	7
ababc	7
abcb	6
ababa	5/6
abc	3
ababab	2
abcd	1/3
aba	1
abcbc	1
abcacb	0/1

The prevalence of printers' errors makes it difficult to be sure in each case what was intended. An instance is **Ma souerayne**, which even after correction of the third **measure** for a presumed error, displays the sequence **abcd**. Such a sequence would be unthinkable in **Brussels 9085**, but this dance is not found there. If the 39-note tune is correct, there is no simple adjustment of the steps which will make the choreography conform. This suggests that this may be an example of the type of choreography in which all the **mesures** are deliberately made different. If so, it is then possible that **La rochele** and **Le hault et bas** also had the sequence **abcd**, though their choreographies are easily (and probably correctly) emended to agree with those in **Brussels 9085**.

Apart from this innovation (if true), there is little difference between the two sources in the pattern of their **mesures**.

e. Types of **measure**:

ss	ddd	rrr	b	occurs	40/45	times
ss	d	rrr	b		28/33	
ss	ddd	ss	rrr	b	27/30	
ss	d	ss	rrr	b	24/28	
ss	dddd	rrr	b		22/24	
ss	dddd	ss	rrr	b	14	
ss	d	r	d	r	b	14
ss	d	r	d	r	b	8
ss	d	r	d	r	b	3
ss	d	r	b		2	

The only **measure** in **Brussels 9085** not found here is the least common of all (**ss d r d ss rrr b**). There are, however, some changes in the order of popularity; the most striking is that **ss d rrr b** has virtually changed places with **ss d r d r b** in the list, just as it sometimes does in the actual dances. Thus, the variation **r d r** for **rrr** is found in both sources, but is a lot less common in **Toulouse**.

In **Brussels 9085** there seemed to be a general rule, broken only in **Joieusement** and possibly **Passe rose**, that if the first **measure** of a dance is imperfect, then all are imperfect. **Toulouse** adds at least two more exceptions (**Le languis** and **Ma Mie**), besides others more probably attributable to printers' errors.

4. Salisbury, Wilts., Cathedral Library (cited below as **Salisbury**).

See Hertz (1964), *Appendix IV*; Crane (1968), 24-5.

The titles and steps of 20 basses dances (plus 6 duplications) are written with various other entries on both sides of the first paper flyleaf of a copy of Johannes Balbus de Janua, **Catholicon** (Venice, 1497). The flyleaf is part of the original binding and was presumably clean at the time it was bound in.

The titles are mostly French and there are seven concordances with **Brussels 9085** and **Toulouse**. The dances fall into three main categories: (a) 7 dances in the style of **Brussels 9085** and **Toulouse**, loosely based on a pattern of alternating **mesures**; (b) 7 short dances of two or three **mesures** and only 18-24 steps, including a version of **Le ioyeulx espoir**, which like that dance were presumably completed by a **moitié** or **retour**;

(c) 6 longer dances in which each of up to eight **mesures** is different from all the rest.

There is no music and no statement of the number of notes in the missing tune, but internal checks of scribal accuracy are provided by the four dances recorded more than once in the manuscript. Out of four versions of **Filles a marier** no more than two agree, and these two differ (perhaps deliberately) from the version common to **Brussels 9085** and **Toulouse**. Similarly in **La haute de bourgone** the fifth **measure** is perfect in one version (probably incorrectly), but imperfect in the other. By contrast, however both **La basse dance de Spayn** and **Le petit rouen** are given twice without significant variation.

Despite the discrepancies noted, and one or two obvious careless mistakes, there are some unorthodox features in the **Salisbury** dances which are not to be explained as errors:

- (i) No dance begins with **R**. Instead of the usual **R b** there is either **bb** (or **b** or **dd** in error) or else **ff**. The meaning of **ff** is unknown, but is probably an alternative designation of **bb**; in all the dances that are given twice one version uses **bb** while the other uses **ff**.

(ii) Some of the **mesures** end with **bb** instead of simply **b**. They occur exclusively in the longer dances, with the obvious intention of furnishing another point of difference to add still further to the variety of the **mesures**.

a. Number of different choreographies: 20.

In other words no choreography is repeated.

b. Number of steps in each dance (counting **ss** as one step only:

steps	18	19	20	24	26	28	32	36	40	42	45	46
number of dances	2	1	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	2
	47	58	69									
	1	1	1									

c. Number of **mesures** in each dance:

4 mesures in 8 dances	
3	4
2	3
5	3
7	1
8	1

d. Sequences of **mesures**:

abc	in 4 dances
ab	3
abab	3
abcde	3
aabc	1
abac	1
abca	1
abcb	1
abcd	1
abcdefg	1
abcdefgh	1

For the first time (in **La Fraunces**) a **measure** is repeated with no other intervening. This becomes quite common later in the 16th-century. The fashion for dances composed of **mesures** that are all different, on the other hand, is virtually limited to this source.

e. Types of **measure**:

ss ddd	rrr	b	occurs	11 times
ss d	r	b		8/10
ss ddd ss	rrr	b		8
ss d ss	rrr	b		8
ss dddd ss	rrr	b		7
ss dddd	rrr	b		6
ss dddd ss	rrr	bb		4
ss d	rrr	b		4
ss ddd ss	rrr	bb		3
ss ddd	r	b		3
ss dddd	rrr	b		2
ss ddd ss	r d r	b		2
ss d ss	rrr	bb		2
ss d ss	r d r	b		2
ss d	r d r	b		2
ss dddd ss	r d r	b		1
ss dddd	r d r	b		1
ss ddd	rrr	bb		1
ss ddd	r d r	b		1
ss dd	rr	b		1
ss d	rrr	bb		1

Two further types (**ss d b** and **d r b**) are probably defective versions of **ss d r b**. If this is accepted, there are still 21 types of **measure** in 20 dances; variety is the obvious intention, especially in constructing the longer dances.

The presence of **mesures** containing even numbers of doubles or reprises cannot easily be attributed to scribal error. In **La princes**, for example, the **ddd** in the first **measure** reappear in a similar position in the third; this makes a simple mistake unlikely, even though such a sequence is bound to leave the dancer on what would normally be regarded as the wrong foot. This is avoided in the second **measure** of **Joyvs asspor**, where **dd** is followed by **rr**. It would be convenient to assume an error for **ddd rrr** or **d rrr**, but pairs of doubles or reprises are so out of place in a normal basse danse that such an error becomes extremely improbable. We are left having to suppose either a misunderstanding by the writer (eg in copying somebody else's notes) or else a deliberate innovation.

Some further points may be noted.

By comparison with **Brussels 9085** and **Toulouze, ss d r b** has a very much higher position in the table. The single **r** is in any case commoner, being now used with **ddd** as well as **d**.

There is also more variety in the use of **r d r**, which follows not only **d** but also **ddd** and **dddd**, both in perfect and in imperfect **mesures**.

5. Torino, Archivi Biscaretti, Mazzo 4, No. 14 (cited below as **Stribaldi**).

See *Meyer (1894)*.

The titles and steps of 54 basses dances are written on a parchment roll in order of length, followed by three **moytes (moitiés)**. The roll is signed and dated: Stribaldi scripsit anno 1517, die 26 decembris.

The titles are mostly French and there are 13 concordances with *Arena* and the *Moderne* print, besides other dances where the title agrees but the steps differ. One choreography is incomplete, but can be restored with certainty, because the total number of steps is known, and one of the other two alternatives already occurs elsewhere in the list. There are several places where the steps seem obviously to be garbled; these have been corrected (see **e** below).

a. Number of different choreographies: 20.

b. Number of steps in each dance (counting **ss** as one step only):

steps	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	28
number of dances	1	3	7	14	6	9	6	7	1

All the dances would have been completed by a **moitié** of 12 steps.

c. Number of **mesures** in each dance:

3 mesures in 36/39 dances	
4	10
2	5

The **moitié** would have added a further two or three **mesures** to each dance.

d. Sequence of **mesures**:

abc	in 27/30 dances
aba	9
aaba	9
ab	5
abcb	1

The sequence aaba is seen for the first time; this is to become quite common.

e. Types of **mesure**:

ss d	ss r b	occurs	51/57 times
ss d ss r d	ss r b		25
ss ddd	ss r b		22
ss ddd	r b		17/20
ss d r d	r b		10
ss d	r b		8/11
ss d r d	ss r b		7
ss ddd r d	r b		6/7
ss ddd ss r d	ss r b		5
ss d ss r d	r b		1/2
ss d r d ss d	r b		0/1

Three **mesures** given in the manuscript are rejected as being fairly obvious errors. These are as follows:

ss r	ss r b
ss d ss r b	r b
ss r	ss d b

It is probable (though less certain) that the **measure** at the bottom of the main table should really read: **ss drd rdr b**.

The structure of the basse danse **measure** has undergone a change. Instead of being divided into two parts separated by an optional pair of singles, it can now be split into three by two such pairs of singles. Groups of **rrr** no longer occur, and **r b** invariably occupies the final section of the **mesures**. The variation **r d r** is still favoured, and it is the **r d** which this begins that now makes up the middle section of the **measure** when this is present. The tendency for the **measure** to become fragmented in this way makes structural analysis somewhat hazardous, or even inappropriate; and the correction of errors may also seem tendentious. We believe nevertheless that the basic sequences of singles-doubles-reprise-branle, however much varied or elaborated, was not abandoned and that apparent exceptions require emendation.

The three **moitiés** are made up from similar **mesures**, except that the first **measure** of each replaces the initial **ss** with **b**. The third **moitié**, as given, has only 11 steps, but this is due to omission of a **d** in the final **measure**, as shown by the second **moitié** in **Moderne**.

6. R. Coplande, 'The Maner of dauncynge of bace daunces', appendix to A. Barclay, The introductory to wryte and to pronounce Frenche (London, 1521) (cited below as Coplande)

See *Furnivall (1871); Dolmetsch (1949); Hartz (1964), 306-9.*

The unique copy of this book published by Coplande is in the Bodleian Library, Oxford (*Douce B.507*). It contains a treatise based on that of **Brussels 9085** and **Toulouse** and the names and steps of seven dances.

Two of the dances occur in **Brussels 9085** and **Toulouse**; the remainder are short dances of 18-23 steps, but without the innovations just noted in **Stribaldi**.

a. Number of different choreographies: 7

b. Number of steps in each dance (counting **ss** as one step only):

Steps	18	20	22	23	32	40
Number of dances	1	1	2	1	1	1

c. Number of **mesures** in each dance:

4 mesures in	4 dances
3	2
2	1

d. Sequence of **mesures**:

abac	in 2 dances
ab	1
aba	1
abc	1
abca	1
abcd	1

e. Types of **measure**:

ss ddd	ss rrr	b	occurs	4 times
ss ddd	r b			4
ss d	ss r b			4
ss ddd	rrr b			3
ss d	ss rrr b			3
ss d	r b			3
ss dddd	ss rrr b			2
ss d	rrr b			1

These types fall within the range found in **Salisbury**, though without **Salisbury's** peculiarities.

7. Anthonius Arena Solerensis Provincialis, 'Ad suos compagniones studiantes... (Lyon, 1529) (cited below as Arena)

See *Hartz (1964), Appendix III*

A poem of 943 couplets in macaronic Latin describes how to perform the steps of the basse danse and elaborates on dance-floor etiquette. This tongue-in-cheek treatise (**facetiae**) is followed by the steps for:

- (i) the **basse danse commune**,
- (ii) 31 **basses danses qui ne sont pas communes**, only used on special occasions.

The latter group was expanded to 58 in a new edition, also published in 1529.

Arena's book went through at least 45 printings up to 1760, as a popular literary curiosity. The earliest printing is not the best. Hartz transcribed the dances from the 1533 edition. We have followed Hartz's readings except where the steps given are insufficient to make up the total stated in the title; for these we have followed a reprint of 1648 in Cambridge University Library, which for these dances (though not all others) gives a plausible text.

The following analysis is of the **basses danses pas communes**, with data for the basse danse **commune** noted separately.

a. Number of different choreographies: 30

b. Number of steps in each dance (counting **ss** as one step only):

steps	14	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
number of dances	1	1	1	1	7	11	4/5	10/11
	23	24	25	28				
	3	16	1	1				

The basse danse **commune** has 20 steps.

c. Number of **mesures** in each dance:

3 mesures in	22 dances (+ commune)
4	22
2	14

d. Sequences of **mesures**:

abc	in 18 dances (+ commune)
ab	14
aaba	10
abcb	8
aba	4
abcd	3
aabc	1

e. Types of **mesure**:

ss d	ss r b	occurs 63 times
ss d ss r d	ss r b	29
ss ddd	ss r b	24
ss d	r b	19 (+ commune)
ss ddd	r b	18
ss ddd ss r d	ss r b	11
ss d	r d ss r b	8
ss d	r d r b	4/5 (+ commune)
ss ddd	r d ss r b	3
ss d r d	r d r b	1
ss ddd	r d r b	(commune only)
ss	r d r b	0/1

The final **mesure** of the table looks like an error for **ss d r d r b**: to make this correction would, however, entail amending the total number of steps in the dance (**Mes amourettes**) from 21 to 22; this is far from impossible.

The types of **mesures** are very similar to those in **Stribaldi** and the order of frequency is nearly identical.

8. S'ensuyvent plusieurs Basses danses tant Communes que Incommunes: comme on pourra veoyr cy dedans (no place, no date) (cited below as Moderne).

See *Lesure* (1955)

The printer/publisher is thought to be Jacques Moderne, who worked in Lyon. If so, the date of publication is between 1529 and 1538. The work survives in a single copy at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (*Coll. Rothschild, VI-3 bis-66, No. 19*).

A treatise, based on that of **Brussels 9085** and **Toulouse** and partially brought up to date, is followed by the titles and steps of 35 basses danses **communes** and 139 basses danses **incommunes** (with a further 11 duplications), plus two versions of the **residu** (= **moitié** or **retour**). Among the dances that are duplicated, five are identical in both places, but seven are given in differing versions. It is not clear if these are genuine variants, to accommodate versions of the tune of different length, or if they simply indicate the prevalence of errors in this source. There is no doubt that printers' errors do exist: the steps of the basse danse **commune** are given four times, but only two of the versions agree. In 19 out of 103 individual choreographies there are anomalies suggesting that the text is garbled; not all of these can be corrected with any certainty (see further below).

a. Number of different choreographies: **commune** + 60/66

b. Number of steps in each dance (counting **ss** as one step only):

steps	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
number of dances	4	2	6	12/15	15/18	14/16	20/22
	22	23	24	25	26	29	
	15/19	19/26	24/29	2/5	1	2	

The 35 basses danses **communes** have 20 steps.

All the dances would have been completed by a **residu** of 12 steps.

c. Number of **mesures** in each dance:

3 mesures in	95 dances (+ 35 communes)
4	28
2	23/24
5	2

The **residu** would have added a further 2 or 3 **mesures** to each dance.

d. Sequence of **mesures**:

abc	in 72 dances (+ 35 communes)
ab	23/24
aba	17
aaba	13
abcb	8
aab	4
abcd	4
abb	2
abca	2
aabaa	2
abaa	1

Repetition of **mesures** (with no other intervening) occurs much more freely, being no longer limited to the first **mesure** or to the beginning of the dance.

e. Types of **mesure**:

ss d	ss r b	occurs 138/140 times
ss d	r b	46/48 (+ 35 communes)
ss d	r d r b	25/29 (+ 35 communes)
ss d ss r d	ss r b	57/58
ss ddd	r d r b	20/22 (+ 35 communes)
ss ddd	ss r b	51/52
ss ddd	r b	39
ss d	r d ss r b	31/35
ss ddd ss r d	ss r b	16/17
ss ddd	r d ss r b	15/17
ss d ss r d	r b	3/4
ss ddd ss r d	r b	1
ss d r d ss r d	ss r b	0/1

Printers' errors make these figures somewhat imprecise.

The errors are of two kinds: omissions, and substitution of wrong letters. When the initial **ss** or final **b** is left out, the mistake is obvious and can be rectified with confidence. Omissions in the middle of the **mesure**, by contrast, are either undetectable or susceptible of more than one correction. The commonest substitution appears to be **b** in place of **d** part-way through the **mesure**: this leaves the isolated phrase **ss r b** masquerading as an unorthodox independent **mesure**; but an alternative interpretation would be that **d** has dropped out from the conventional **mesure ss d r b**.

These uncertainties affect all the figures presented above (a-e). The more plausible alternatives have been taken into account and are responsible for a number of alternative totals.

The repertoire of **mesures** is similar to that in **Stribaldi** and **Arena**, but the order in the table has been influenced by the inclusion of 35 basses danses **communes**.

The **residus**, unlike those in **Arena** and **Arbeau**, begin with **R** in place of the usual **b**.

9. Th.Arbeau, Orchesographie... (Langres, 1589)
Cited below as **Arbeau**).

See *Sutton* (1967)

Thoinot Arbeau was the anagrammatic pseudonym of Jehan Tabourot, canon of Langres, whose instruction-manual of contemporary dance also included four examples of basse danse, despite the fact that this was a kind of dance that had dropped out of favour forty or fifty years before. The four dances given by Arbeau appear in identical form either in **Arena** (a work from which he also quotes) or in **Moderne**. As a source for the structure of the basse danse, as opposed to the steps and music, he adds nothing to those sources, and nothing will be gained by tabulating his data separately.

Discussion

We have now reviewed the structure of at least 318 basse dances, some of which have been recorded in as many as three different versions — not counting those dances too unorthodox for classification. Between them they have displayed 35 different types of *mesure*, besides others assumed to be derived from printers' and copyists' errors. Amid so much variety it is relevant to ask what features of the basse danse remain constant throughout its development.

We can say that the French or Burgundian style of basse danse is composed of not less than two *mesures*, to which the later examples add a *retour* or *moitié* of two or three *mesures* not specific to the particular dance. Each *mesure* consists of a sequence of singles, doubles, reprises and branles, more or less in that order but subject to such variation and elaboration that the basic underlying pattern is sometimes all but obscured. Each *mesure* does nevertheless normally begin with two singles and end with one (or rarely two) branles. With one exception singles are always found in pairs; and with two exceptions doubles and reprises occur in odd numbers. The first *mesure* of the dance is prefixed by **R b** or some equivalent.

Most other features are subject to considerable variation. The written sources have been presented in approximate chronological order to aid perception of changes taking place over a period of time, but we must be careful to make allowance for regional variation also.

The first reference to the basse danse by that name appears to be in *La Danza de la Muerte*, a Spanish poem of the late 14th or early 15th century (*Sachs 1937*). The earliest recorded choreography will be that of Domenico's bassa danza *Dannes*, if Gallo is correct in assigning it the approximate, if conjectural, date of 1435 (*Gallo 1979*). The earliest known choreography in the French style is that of *Basse dance de Bourgogne in Paris 3699* (No. 1, above), which is attributed plausibly (though not with certainty) to 1445.

For the French basse danse the remainder of the 15th century is represented principally by the parallel sources *Brussels 9085* and *Toulouse* (Nos 2 and 3, above). Although in their present form these collections were both written down or printed about 1495, there is no doubt that they contain material assembled over a period of time. This is shown, for example, by the fact that although they are copied from the same original, they differ in a number of places where there have been subsequent alterations or additions. In fact it is possible to distinguish four layers of material, presumably corresponding to successive phases in the collection of the dances.

- (i) The nucleus of the whole collection is the treatise. It is possible that this is not fully representative of its age, if it is the doctrinaire pronouncement of the dancing-master of a single court; yet it is reasonable to assume that any dances originally associated with it did in fact conform to the classification it put forward.
- (ii) It follows that those dances which do not conform to the treatise were added later, in response to a taste for greater variety, whether this was due to contacts with the practice of other courts or reflected a general development in the structure of the basse danse as time went on. The features principally concerned are the addition of a preliminary phrase *ss d r* at the beginning of a *mesure*, and the replacement of *rrr* by the variation *r d r*.
- (iii) There are 13 dances common to both sources in which the music is the same in both but the steps are different. Many explanations are possible, but the simplest hypothesis is that one source preserves the

original versions throughout, while the other has introduced more up-to-date alternatives. If so, it is *Toulouse* which maintains a closer correspondence with the dances in groups (i) and (ii) and *Brussels 9085* that appears to be innovating, though the difference is only in the frequency of certain features, not in their presence and total absence. The features in question are the more frequent use of the variation *r d r* and a greater preference for sequences of 3 or 6 *mesures* in place of 4 or 5.

- (iv) Finally, there are 16 dances that are unique to just one of the two sources. Some instances are likely to be because *Brussels 9085* is missing certain pages, but most are likely to be late additions to the collection. This applies especially to the dances whose music is in mensural notation and to those with features more familiar from the 16th century such as *Le ioyeulx espoyr*.

It is not possible on present knowledge to assign even conventional dates to these postulated phases, though some of the dances in group (iv) may perhaps belong to the last decade of the century.

Analysis of the development of basse danse structure may now begin with the sequence of steps within the *mesure*.

Reverence. The first *mesure* of every dance is prefixed by **R b**, except in *Salisbury* which substitutes **bb** or **ff**. It is possible that the writer of *Salisbury* was drawing upon two sources, one using each of the two alternatives.

Singles. The early *Basse dance de Bourgogne*, like other dances in the same source, contains groups of three singles. Musically these are evidently triplets, equal in combined length to one double and providing a pleasing variation of rhythm in the dance. They have the effect, however, of leaving the dancer on the wrong foot, unless balanced by a second set of three singles later in the *mesure*. (This is so whether the singles are done with alternate feet or with the same foot three times in succession.) In other words such a *mesure*, if conventional in other respects, has inevitably to be 'perfect'. The freedom to include one, two or three pairs of singles in later basse dances, according to preference or need, is dependent on their occurrence always in pairs that leave the leading foot unchanged.

Singles do indeed occur in pairs henceforth. One pair is obligatory at the beginning of each *mesure*. Further singles may be inserted, if wished, later in the *mesure* according to two alternative schemes.

- (i) The earlier of these allows a pair of singles between the doubles and the reprises to divide the *mesure* in half. These are the singles that, when present, cause the *mesure* to be termed 'perfect'. This scheme continues as the norm until *Salisbury* is also found in *Coplande*.
- (ii) In the later scheme the *mesure* may be divided into three portions, with one pair of singles following the doubles, and another splitting the reprise section (*r d r*) after the *d*. *Mesures* may now have one, two or three pairs of singles, and if there are two, the second pair may be found in either of the two available positions. It is no longer appropriate to describe *mesures* as perfect or imperfect, as there are now four alternatives. This scheme is seen for the first time in the form described in *Stribaldi* and is normal thereafter apart from *Coplande*. It is also anticipated in the first *mesure* of *La franchoise nouvelle* (phase iv of *Brussels 9085*), but with a slight difference, in that the third pair of singles precedes rather than follows the single *d* in the reprise section.

Three pairs of singles are also to be found in the extended **mesures** of **Brussels 9085** and **Toulouse**, but these arise from the addition of an extra phrase (ss d r) to an otherwise normal **measure**, not from the insertion of extra singles into it.

Doubles. Groups of **dd** and **dddd** are found in two dances in **Salisbury**; if authentic, they provide further evidence of an apparent desire to be different at all costs. Apart from these, all doubles are found in odd numbers only: **d**, **ddd** or **dddd**. Groups of **dddd** occur only in the 15th-century sources and **Coplande**; they are not found in the new-style basse danse that comes in with **Stribaldi**. The variation **d r d** occurs very rarely in 16th-century dances in combination with **r d r** to give maximum occasion for the alternation of doubles and reprises.

Reprises. In **Salisbury** once again there is a dance containing **rr**. With this exception, reprises are found always in groups of **rrr** or **r**. Up to the end of the 15th century the single **r** is found only rarely and then almost invariably in the phrase **ss d r**, whether this is in the main part of the **measure** or precedes it. In the **basse danse mineur Roti bouly ioyeux** a single **r** occurs with **ddd**, and this recurs in **Salisbury** and is repeated in **Coplande**, though both these sources also use **rrr**. **Stribaldi** and the later 16th-century sources, however, drop **rrr** completely, using only the single **r** or the variation **r d r**.

This variation is already present in **Toulouse** and to a greater extent in **Brussels 9085**. In the 16th-century sources apart from **Coplande** **r d r** completely replaces **rrr**; it is also divided into two sections by optional pairs of singles, as already described. The second half of the **measure** now consists of two short phrases (ss) **r d** and (ss) **r b**, the first of which may or may not be present. Our analysis of this structure as a variation on **rrr** is valid historically but need not have been apparent to those who danced basse danses in the 16th-century.

Branles. Except in **Salisbury**, branles (or congés) are only found singly.

We may now consider the dance as a whole.

Number of steps. A distinction must be made between those dances that are complete in themselves and those to be followed by a **moitié** or **retour**.

In the first category the dances in **Brussels 9085** have 28-59 steps. In the second category the dances in **Stribaldi**, **Arena** and **Moderne** have 14-29 steps, all but a few having 24 steps or fewer. This strongly suggests that a **moitié** may be inferred, even when it is not mentioned, for dances with fewer than 25 steps. In **Toulouse** there is just one short dance (**Le ioyeux espoir**) and it is surely significant that its somewhat cryptic heading makes reference to a **demie**. In **Salisbury** there are 7 short dances, with no mention of a **moitié**; but with the precedent of **Le ioyeux espoir**, and the same dance recurring in **Salisbury** itself, it is arguable that a **moitié** is to be understood. The same would apply to the five short dances in **Coplande**.

Moitiés. Three versions of the **moitié** are given by **Stribaldi**; two of these are repeated by **Moderne**; one by **Arena** and **Arbeau**. In order of frequency they are as follows:

b d r b ss ddd r d r b
b d r b ss d r b ss d r b
b ddd r b ss ddd r b

All are of the same length and are therefore interchangeable. Which **moitié** was used on any particular occasion

was presumably a matter of local custom or agreement at the time.

Sequence of mesures. In **Brussels 9085** and **Toulouse** the basic pattern is for two **mesures** of different type to alternate with each other. Into this pattern a single **measure** of a third type may be inserted, either in place of one of the others or in addition to them; this may be placed at the beginning, in the middle of the dance, or at the end. In the basic couplet the first **measure** is usually (though not always) the longer, either having more doubles or a second pair of singles, or both. No **measure** of one type is repeated without one of a different type intervening, and no dance contains **mesures** of more than three types except for **Ma souerayne** in **Toulouse**.

There are obvious advantages in limiting the number of types of **measure** and in arranging them in a more or less regular manner, especially if the local repertoire contains a good number of dances. Those advantages are boldly thrown away in 6 of the dances in **Salisbury** which, like **Ma souerayne**, have all **mesures** different from every other. This is clearly deliberate, not to say defiant, in its demands on the memory of the dancer — not only in remembering the sequence of steps, but especially in remembering where in that sequence he now happens to be.

Mesures repeated without one of another type intervening are first seen in **Salisbury**, become more common in **Stribaldi** and commoner still in **Moderne**. A good many dances in the 16th-century sources, whether they have repeated **mesures** or not, are in the form of a sandwich: usually one or two **mesures** with one **d** are set either side of a single **measure** with **ddd**. The weight, if we may call it that, has thus been transferred from the beginning of each of a series of couplets to a position near or just after the centre of the dance as a whole.

To sum up:

While there are large groups of dances that are distinctly 15th-century or 16th-century in character, as found in **Brussels 9085** and **Toulouse** or in **Stribaldi**, **Arena** and **Moderne** respectively, the transition from one to the other was achieved gradually, with different features being adopted in succession until a new style has been formed. The variation **r d r** was already present in the 15th-century style and apparently increasing in popularity. Its separation into two parts by an optional pair of singles is anticipated in a late addition to **Brussels 9085**, though not again seen until **Stribaldi**. The shortening of the main part of the dance and its continuation by a **moitié** of standard form seems to make its first appearance in **Toulouse** and to be gaining ground in **Salisbury**. These elements all come together in **Stribaldi**, where new patterns in the sequence of **mesures** signal the total disappearance of the older style of dance, which had still formed a major part of **Salisbury** and was now to recur only in the conservative **Coplande**. There are nevertheless indications that the new synthesis has only recently been achieved: **Stribaldi** contains as many as three alternative **moitiés** and although the step-sequence of the basse danse **commune** is present among the rest, it is not picked out by that name. This ultimate simplification of basse danse multiplicity appears first in **Arena**.

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