

ORCHESOGRAPHY

THOINOT ARBEAU

Translated by
MARY STEWART EVANS

With a new Introduction and Notes by
JULIA SUTTON

And a new Labanotation section by
MIREILLE BACKER
and
JULIA SUTTON

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ARBEAU

If you are assured of the good graces of another damsel in the company you should take her and leave the discourteous one after apologising for having importuned her. Still, there are many who would not endure it so patiently; but it is better to speak gently than with rancour, and thereby gain the reputation for kindness and good humour and allow her own behaviour to brand her as haughty and unworthy of the honour you have paid her.

CAPRIOL

Here we are, then, standing at the end of the hall. The musicians begin to play a basse dance, what movements do we lead off with?

ARBEAU

The first movement is the *révérence*,²⁹ indicated by a capital R, the second movement is the *branle*,³⁰ indicated by a b. The third kind of movement comprises two *simples*,³¹ indicated by ss. The fourth movement is the *double*, indicated by d, and the fifth movement is the *reprise*,³² indicated by a small r.

CAPRIOL

Are these all the steps required to dance a common or regular basse dance?

ARBEAU

There are no other kinds of movement in the basse dance, nor in the *retour*³³ of the basse dance, although these are repeated several times.

CAPRIOL

What do you mean by this *retour* of the basse dance?

ARBEAU

The complete basse dance contains three parts. The first is called the basse dance, the second is called the *retour* of the basse dance and the third and last part is called the tordion. I have written them down in a memorandum for you to learn by heart.

MEMORANDUM OF THE MOVEMENTS FOR THE BASSE DANCE

R b ss d r d r b ss ddd r d
r b ss d r b c

CAPRIOL

What does the letter c that you have placed at the end mean?

ARBEAU

It represents the *congé*³⁴ which you must take of the damsel. You bow, still

holding her by the hand, and return her to the place from which you started the dance in order to commence the second part or *retour* of the basse dance.

MEMORANDUM OF MOVEMENTS FOR THE *RETOUR* OF THE

BASSE DANCE

b d r b ss ddd r d r b c

The final letter signifies the *cong * as before and there is no capital R at the beginning of the *retour* because it is begun without the *r v rence*, which is deferred this time until after the *cong * and made before commencing the *tordion*.

CAPRIOL

Explain to me separately and in detail the gestures and movements signified by the letters in the memorandum.

ARBEAU

The *r v rence*, the first gesture and movement, occupies four tabor rhythms accompanied by four bars of the tune on the flute.^a In view of the fact that all dances begin with the left foot, Anthony Arena was of the opinion that the *r v rence* should be made with the left foot; however in the end he seems to leave the matter in doubt, saying thus:

*Bragardi certant et adhuc sub judice lis est
De quali gamba sit facienda salus.*³⁵

As for myself, I hold with my teacher, under whom I formerly studied at Poitiers,^b that it should be done with the right foot.^c In this way one is enabled to turn towards the damsel and throw her a courteous glance.

Reuerence



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CAPRIOL

The *branle* follows the *révérence*, how should it be performed?

ARBEAU

Arena calls the *branle* the *congedium*, and I think he has done so because from the gesture of the dancer it appears as if he were about to finish and take leave of the damsel, although in fact he proceeds with the steps and movements as set down in the memorandum.

The said *branle* is performed, in four tabor rhythms which accompany four bars of the melody on the flute, by keeping the heels together and turning the body gently to the left for the first bar; then to the right, glancing modestly the while at the spectators, for the second bar; then again to the left for the third. And for the fourth bar, to the right again with a discreetly tender sidelong glance at the damsel.



CAPRIOL

Two *simples* follow the *branle*, how should they be done?

ARBEAU

You will take one step forward with the left foot for the first bar, then bring the right foot up beside the left for the second bar, then you will advance with the right foot for the third bar. And at the fourth bar and tabor rhythm you will bring the left foot up beside the right with the heels together, and thus the movement of two *simples* will be completed. And you must be careful not to take strides that suggest you wish to measure the length of the hall, as the damsel who is your partner cannot with decency take such long steps.

Arena, and others of his school, performed the *simple* with the same foot, bringing the left foot beside the right foot for the first bar and then advancing with the left foot again.³⁶ And doing likewise with the right foot. But I remember my teacher at Poitiers improved upon this, saying it was more seemly to finish the two *simples* with the feet together than with one foot in front of the other.

CAPRIOL

This appears sound reasoning to me and I shall be guided by your views. Let us now proceed to the *double*, how should this be performed?

ARBEAU

The *double* occupies four bars and tabor rhythms. In the first bar one must advance a step with the left foot, in the second bar a step with the right foot, while in the third one must advance with the left foot again. And in the fourth bar, the right foot must be placed beside the left with the heels together. Thus in four bars the *double* is completed. And if there are two *doubles* the succeeding one is done contrariwise to the first, by advancing the right foot first, then the left and again the right, and in the fourth bar the left foot must be placed beside the right with heels together. Thus in eight bars two *doubles* are accomplished. And to execute yet a third *double* the left foot must be advanced, then the right, then the left, and to conclude both heels brought together as in the first *double*. Thus the three *doubles* are completed in twelve bars and tabor rhythms.

CAPRIOL

It still remains for me to learn how a *reprise* is executed.

ARBEAU

The movement called *reprise* usually precedes the *branle*, and sometimes the *double*, and occupies four bars like all the other movements. You will perform it by moving the knees gently from side to side, or the feet, or the toes only, as if your feet were trembling.

To wit; on the first bar with the toes of the right foot, then again the toes of the said right foot on the second bar, then the toes of the left foot on the third bar, and the toes of the said right foot on the fourth bar. And in these four movements the *reprise* is accomplished and the dancer is ready to perform the *branle* or the other movements which follow.^a

CAPRIOL

I have noticed that in good society they usually begin the dancing with a *branle*.⁸⁶ Tell me how these should be danced.

THE DOUBLE BRANLE

ARBEAU

Since you already know how to dance the pavan and the basse dance it will be easy for you to dance branles in the same duple time, and you should understand that the branle is danced by moving sideways and not forward. To begin with, in what is called the double branle⁸⁷ you will perform one *double* to the left and then one *double* to the right; you are well aware that a *double* consists of three steps and a *pieds joints*. To perform these sideways, you will assume a proper bearing after the *révérence* of salutation, and, while keeping the right foot firmly in position, throw your left foot out to the side which will make a *pieds largis* for the first bar. Then for the second bar, keep the left foot firmly in position, bringing the right foot near to the left which will make a *pieds largis* that is almost a *pieds joints*. For the third bar, keep the right foot firm and throw the left foot out to the side which will make a *pieds largis*, and for the fourth bar keep the left foot firm and bring the right foot close to it which will make a *pieds joints*. These four steps, made in four bars or tabor rhythms, we shall call a *double à gauche*, and you will do the same in the opposite direction for a *double à droite*. Namely, while keeping the left foot firmly in position you will throw the right foot out to the side, which will make a *pieds largis* for the fifth bar. Then for the sixth bar keep the right foot firm and bring the left foot near to the right, which will make a *pieds largis* that is almost a *pieds joints*. For the seventh bar, while keeping the left foot fast, you will throw the right foot out to the side, which will make a *pieds largis*. Finally, for the eighth bar, you will keep the right foot fast and bring the left foot close to it, which will make a *pieds joints*, and these last four steps we call *double à droite*. And thus, in these eight steps and bars the double branle will be accomplished as you will see in the tabulation, and you will repeat from the beginning making a *double à gauche* and then a *double à droite*.

CAPRIOL

I hear Master Guillaume with his violin down in your little room. Give me the tabulation for a double branle and I will practise it to see if I perform it aright.

ARBEAU

This is most timely, let us go down and make him play his violin. All musicians are in the habit of opening the dancing at a festival by a double branle which they call the common branle, and afterwards they play the single branle and the gay branle and at the end the branles of Burgundy, which some people call branles of Champagne. The order of these four varieties of branle is determined by the three different groups taking part in a dance; the elderly who dance the double and the single branle sedately, the young married folk who dance the gay branle and the youngest of all, like yourself, who nimbly trip the branles of Burgundy. And every dancer acquits himself to the best of his ability, each according to his years and his degree of skill.



TABULATION FOR DANCING DOUBLE BRANLES

Melody of a
double branle

Movements for dancing
the double branle

Pied gauche largi

Pied droit approché⁸⁸

Pied gauche largi

Pied droit joint

These four steps make
a *double à gauche*

Pied droit largi

Pied gauche approché⁸⁹

Pied droit largi

Pied gauche joint

These four steps make
a *double à droite*

CAPRIOL

This double branle is very easy to dance, but it seems to me that the dancers never move from one place, inasmuch as they make four steps to the left which they cancel by another four steps to the right.

ARBEAU

To obviate that they make the *double à droite* shorter and thus they gradually move towards the left. In some places, instead of the *double à droite*, they make a *reprise* or a *branle*.^a

CAPRIOL

I like branles because a number of persons can enjoy them together.

ARBEAU

When you commence a branle several others will join you, as many young men as do damsels, and sometimes the damsel who is the last to arrive will take your left hand and it will thus become a round dance.

CAPRIOL

Does he who leads the dance always remain in the front when it is not a round dance?

ARBEAU

Yes, usually, because another dancer and his damsel would not care to

usurp his place, albeit that other were a renowned nobleman of whom none would care to fall foul.

CAPRIOL

What place should he take who wishes to join in the dancing?

ARBEAU

He should place himself at the tail end, holding his damsel by his right hand, or else, if agreeable to the others, find a place among those who are dancing."

CAPRIOL

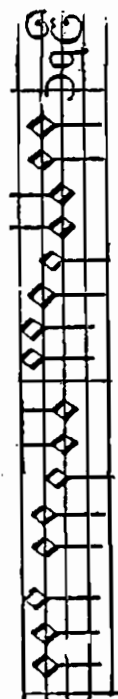
Do I make no divisions in dancing these branles?

ARBEAU

It has always been held that the more sedately and slowly double branles were danced the better. All the same, it is not improper to make a *pied en l'air gauche* on the first minim of the seventh bar, and on the second minim of the seventh bar a *pied en l'air droit*. And on the first minim of the eighth and last bar a *pied en l'air gauche* in readiness to resume and repeat from the beginning, holding the said *pied en l'air gauche* through the last minim beat.

Continuation of the melody for a double branle

Movements divided as described above



Pied gauche largi

Pied droit approché

Pied gauche largi

Pied droit joint

Pied droit largi

Pied gauche approché

Pied en l'air gauche

Pied en l'air droit

Pied en l'air gauche

Pause

These four steps make a *double à gauche*

These five steps make a divided *double à droite*

CAPRIOL

Are there no other divisions made in double branles?

ARBEAU

Young men of exceptional agility make divisions at their pleasure but I advise you to dance them soberly.

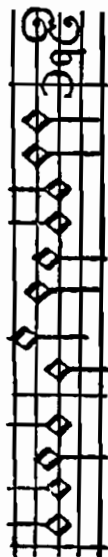
THE SINGLE BRANLE

You will dance the single branle to the same duple time and with the same steps as those I have just described for the double branle, making a *double* to the left to commence with. But here is where they differ, instead of following the above with a *double à droite* you will perform a *simple* only, by making a *pied largi* with the right foot and to conclude a *pied joint* with the left foot. In this *simple* you may divide the four minims into three *pieds en l'air* and one rest, as we have just explained in reference to the double branle.

TABULATION OF THE SINGLE BRANLE

Melody of a single branle

Movements for dancing the single branle



Pied gauche largi

Pied droit approché

Pied gauche largi

Pied droit joint

Pied droit largi


Pied gauche joint

These four steps make
a *double à gauche*

These two steps make
a *simple à droite*

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Movements divided as in the double branle



<i>Pied gauche largi</i>	}	These four steps make a <i>double à gauche</i>
<i>Pied droit approché</i>		
<i>Pied gauche largi</i>		
<i>Pied droit joint</i>		
<i>Pied en l'air gauche</i>	}	These three steps make a <i>simple à droite</i>
<i>Pied en l'air droit</i>		
<i>Pied en l'air gauche</i>		
Pause		

THE GAY BRANLE

After the single branle comes the gay branle which you will dance to the left only, with four steps and a pause in two bars of triple time.^a To do this, step sideways on the left foot, and, as it receives your weight, make a *piéd en l'air droit* for the first step on the first minim. Then bring the right foot close to the left and make a *piéd en l'air gauche* for the second step on the second minim. Then, step sideways on the left foot, and, as it receives your weight, make a *piéd en l'air droit* for the third step on the third minim. Then bring the said right foot close to the left and make a *piéd en l'air gauche*, and hold this position, preparatory to repeat from the beginning, during the two minim beats which are equivalent to two rests or a pause. And if you meet with any semi-breves⁹⁰ in the tabulation think of them as divided into two minims each to suit the steps proper to the gay branle.

Melody of the
Gay branle

Movements suitable for dancing this branle



Pied en l'air droit

Pied en l'air gauche

Pied en l'air droit

Pied en l'air gauche

Pause

Pied en l'air droit

Pied en l'air gauche

Pied en l'air droit

Pied en l'air gauche

Pause

Pied en l'air droit

Pied en l'air gauche

Pied en l'air droit

Pied en l'air gauche

Pause

Pied en l'air droit

Pied en l'air gauche

Pied en l'air droit

Pied en l'air gauche

Pause

CAPRIOL

This branle is not called gay for nothing because it looks to me as if one foot is always in the air. But proceed and tell me of the dance which you call the branle of Burgundy.

THE BURGUNDIAN BRANLE

ARBEAU

After the gay branle the musicians play the Burgundian branle, which is danced in duple time first to one side and then to the other, to a lighter, livelier beat. There is no difference in the steps except that, instead of the *pieds joints*, one makes *grèves* or *pieds en l'air* for the fourth and eighth steps.

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TABULATION OF THE BURGUNDIAN BRANLE

Melody of the
Burgundian
branle^a

Movements suitable for dancing the Burgundian
branle



- Pied gauche largi*
- Pied droit approché*
- Pied gauche largi*
- Grève droite or pied en l'air*
- Pied droit largi*
- Pied gauche approché*
- Pied droit largi*
- Grève gauche or pied en l'air*

These four steps make
a *double à gauche*

These four steps make
a *double à droite*

and you will continue thus by repeating from the beginning

THE BRANLE OF HAUT BARROIS^b

There is another kind of branle called the Haut Barrois,⁹¹ which is danced like the double branle or the Burgundian branle. But there is a difference, because in this branle the shoulders and arms, as well as the feet, must be made to move with the *petits sauts* to a light, vivacious duple time. To dance it you will proceed thus:— spring sideways off both feet, moving towards the left, and alight *pied largi gauche*. Then spring sideways off both feet again, moving towards the left, and alight *pied droit approché*. Then spring sideways to the left off both feet again and alight *pied largi gauche*. Then spring sideways off both feet, moving to the left, and alight *pieds joints*, or else upon the left foot followed by a *grève droite* or *pied en l'air droite*; and thus the *double à gauche* will be completed. You will do the same in the opposite direction, towards the right, to execute a *double à droite*. And if the tune of the Haut Barrois is like the single branle, you will divide the

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two penultimate bars to perform the simple. This branle is danced by lackeys and serving wenches, and sometimes by young men and damsels of gentle birth in a masquerade, disguised as peasants and shepherds, or for a lark among themselves at some private gathering. The foregoing tabulation for the double or single branle should suffice you, but I might give you one arranged to the tune of a branle of Montierandal.⁹²

CAPRIOL

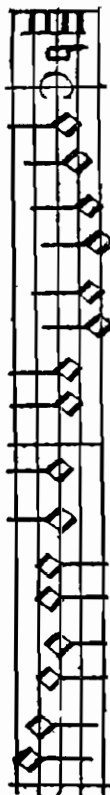
This branle seems to me to be more rousing than those preceding it and would be the very dance to keep one warm in the winter. Since you have begun to give me tabulations, pray let me have one for this particular branle.

ARBEAU

TABULATION OF THE HAUT BARROIS BRANLE

Melody of an
Haut Barrois
branle

Movements for dancing the Haut Barrois



Pied gauche largi
Petit saut
Pied droite approché
Petit saut
Pied gauche largi
Petit saut
Pieds joints
Petit saut

These four steps make
a *double à gauche*

Pied droit largi
Petit saut
Pied gauche approché
Petit saut
Pied droit largi
Petit saut
Pieds joints
Petit saut

These four steps make
a *double à droite*

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and you will continue thus by repeating it from the beginning.

The various branles noted above represent the source from whence are derived certain other branles composed of a combination of *doubles*, *simples*, *pieds en l'air*, *pieds joints* and *sauts*, sometimes varied by the insertion of miscellaneous bars, in slow or quick time, as it pleases the composers or inventors.^a The musicians call them mixed branles⁹³ of Champagne, and, with a view to orderly classification, these branles have been arranged in numbered series. Our musicians in Langres play ten in succession which they call mixed branles of Champagne; they play another number in sequence known as Camp branles and yet others they have named branles of Hainaut and branles of Avignon. And, as fresh compositions and novelties appear, so they devise new series and bestow upon them what names they wish.

CAPRIOL

Give me the tabulation of all these suites.

ARBEAU

I shall not give you any tabulations but will leave you to memorize them yourself under the guidance of the master musicians or from your companions. And when you are proficient enough to wish to dance them at some festival you will ask the musicians for the suite you require by name and they will play it for you. In the meanwhile, I will warn you that if you aspire to dance these branles well you must know the tunes by heart and sing them in your head with the violin.

CAPRIOL

Give me the tabulation of at least two or three, because, in this way, it will be easier for me to understand the others.

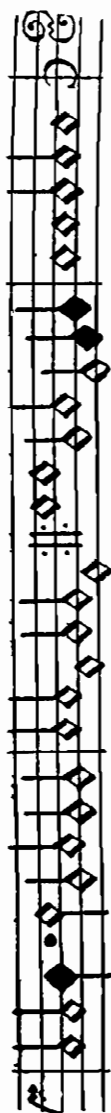
ARBEAU

Very well, here are the tabulations for the branles of Cassandra and Pinagay, first and second in the suite of the mixed branles of Champagne, which are danced in duple time, lightly and without *sauts*, (as are also those of Camp, Hainaut, and Avignon). Or you may dance them like the branles of Haut Barrois with little springs.

TABULATION OF THE MIXED BRANLE CALLED
CASSANDRA

Melody of the
mixed branle
called
Cassandra

Movements suitable for dancing the mixed
branle called Cassandra



Pied gauche largi
Pied droit approché

Pied gauche largi
Pieds joints

Pied droit largi

Pied gauche approché

Pied droit largi
Pieds joints

Pied gauche largi
Pied droit approché

Pied gauche largi
Pieds joints

Pied droit largi

Pied gauche approché

Pied droit largi

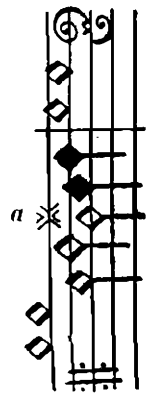
Pieds joints

These four steps make
a *double à gauche*

These four steps make
a *double à droite*

These four steps make
a *double à gauche*

These four steps make
a *double à droite*



Pied gauche largi
Pieds joints
Pied droit largi


Pied gauche approché
Pied droit largi
Pieds joints

These two steps make a *simple à gauche*
 These four steps make a *double à droite*

TABULATION OF THE BRANLE CALLED PINAGAY

Melody of the branle
called Pinagay

Movements for dancing the branle called
Pinagay



Pied gauche largi
Pied droit approché
Pied gauche largi
Pieds joints

Pied en l'air gauche

Pied gauche largi
Pied droit approché
Pied gauche largi
Pieds joints

These four steps make a *double à gauche*
 These four steps make a *double à gauche*

Pied en l'air gauche
Pied en l'air droit
Pied en l'air gauche
Pied largi gauche
Pied droit approché
Pied largi gauche
Pieds joints

These four steps make
a *double à gauche*

Pied largi droit
Pied gauche approché
Pied largi droit
Pieds joints

These four steps make
a *double à droite*

CAPRIOL

I believe you know all the movements of the mixed branles.

ARBEAU

When I first came to live in this town of Langres people talked only of dancing and masquerades and gaiety. We had Master Claudin, who played exquisitely upon several instruments and made us eager to practise. But for some time now I have met with nothing but sorrow and it has made me old and dull. In those days of yore we danced, among other mixed branles, the branle of war, the branles of Aridan and of Charlotte and an infinity of others.

CAPRIOL

How were these branles you mention danced?

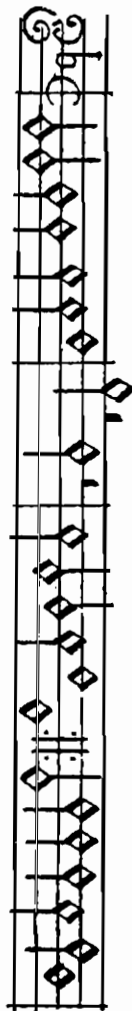
ARBEAU

You will see by their tabulations.

TABULATION OF THE MIXED BRANLE, CHARLOTTE

Melody of the
mixed branle
Charlotte

The correct movements for dancing this branle



Pied largi gauche

Pied droit approché

Pied largi gauche

Pieds joints

Pied en l'air gauche

Pied en l'air droit

Pied largi droit

Pied gauche approché

Pied largi droit

Pieds joints

Pied largi gauche

Pied droit approché

Pied largi gauche

Pieds joints

These four steps make
a *double à gauche*

These four steps make
a *double à droite*

These four steps make
a *double à gauche*

ORCHESOGRAPHY

Pied en l'air gauche
Pied en l'air droit
Pied largi droit
Pied gauche approché } These two steps make
a simple à droite
Pied en l'air gauche
Pied en l'air droit
Pied en l'air gauche
Pied largi gauche
Pied droit approché } These two steps make
a simple à gauche
Pied en l'air droit
Pied en l'air gauche
Pied en l'air droit
Pied largi droit
Pied gauche approché
Pied largi droit
Pieds joints } These four steps make
a double à droite

and continue by repeating as at the beginning. Note that if you wish to dance this like the Haut Barrois you must make *petits sauts* or leave some of the minim beats empty.