

**Gavotte.** A French dance, probably of folk origin, dating from the sixteenth century or earlier, the *gavotte* is still performed in folk versions in several areas of France today. The *gavotte* developed in the sixteenth century into a popular court dance and continued to be performed as both a social and a theatrical dance through the nineteenth century.

Michael Praetorius states in *Terpsichore* (1612) that the dance originated with the peasants of Gavotte, in the Alpine region near Gap in southeastern France. An alternate derivation of the term is from the central French-dialect word *gavaud*, meaning “bent leg,” a feature of one of the *gavotte* steps included in Thoinot Arbeau's description of the dance. According to Arbeau's *Orchésographie* (1588), the *gavotte* was similar to the double *branle*, a social dance performed by a number of couples in a circle. Like the double *branle* it was in duple meter with four- and eight-bar phrases, but the addition of hops to the double steps gave it a lively character. The *gavotte branles* differed from the ordinary *branles* in at least two other ways: steps from the *galliarde* were interspersed into the doubles sequences, and each couple in turn danced alone in the middle of the circle, after which they kissed all the other dancers.

During the first third of the seventeenth century the *branle* suite became standardized, normally consisting of five different *branles* followed by a single *gavotte*. Numerous collections of dance music confirm that the *gavotte*, as part of the *branle* suite, was danced at most of the important courts of northern Europe throughout the century. In Pierre Rameau's *Le maître à danser* (1725) the *branle* suite was said to have been danced at the opening of formal court balls during the reign of Louis XIV (at least until the 1680s—it is clear that Rameau is not describing contemporary practice). Unfortunately, few choreographic descriptions of the seventeenth-century *branle/gavotte* survive. According to De Lauze in *Apologie de la danse* (1623), the dance was so well known that a description of the steps and actions was unnecessary. (He does mention that at least three different *gavottes* were still being danced, and that significant regional variants existed.) Marin Mersenne's description in *Harmonie universelle* (1636) is quite similar to Arbeau's, adding some further details about the “solo” section of the dance.

Toward the end of the seventeenth century a new type of *gavotte*, not connected to the *branle* suite, coexisted with the older *branle/gavotte*. These individual *gavottes* first appeared in the ballets and operas of Jean-Baptiste Lully; at least thirty-seven are found in his theatrical works between the years 1653 and 1687. The pieces, usually in binary form (two repeated strains of music), retain the duple meter and four-bar phrases of the earlier *gavotte*. In addition, they are characterized by a distinctive rhythmic structure in which the melody begins halfway through the bar, usually with two upbeats:

These twenty-nine surviving *gavottes* and *gavotte*-type dances can be divided into three categories based on step vocabulary and number of dancers. (Like all “French” dances of this period, each *gavotte* has a unique floor pattern and step sequence and was intended to be danced to specific music.) The theatrical dance, usually for one or two men or women, included difficult steps and was sometimes in a much slower tempo. The social dance (*danse à deux*) was performed at court or at other formal balls. Although these dances use a large step vocabulary, they can usually be distinguished from other Baroque dance types by their frequent use of the *assemblée* to create short, well-defined dance phrases. The *assemblée* is often preceded by a *contretemps de gavotte*, a step combination that functions as a choreographic cadential pattern. The third type of *gavotte* choreography is a much simpler dance for two or more couples, in which only a few step-units, other than the cadential pattern referred to above, are used. Examples of this type, “Le Cotillon” (1705) and “Le Gavotte du Roi” (1716), may be remnants of the *branle/gavotte* tradition. Although Raoul-Auger Feuillet refers to a “*pas de gavotte*” in his 1706 *contredanse* treatise, neither he nor other contemporary writers define this step. A description does appear in Jossion's *Traité* (1763) that is similar to the cadential pattern mentioned earlier.

The *gavotte* continued to be danced in the theater even after it was no longer popular as a social dance. The composer Jean-Philippe Rameau used it more than any other dance type in his stage

works (1733–1764), and danced *gavottes* were also included in works by Gluck and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. In late eighteenth-century England, a *menuet* and *gavotte* were often danced as entr'acte entertainment, and both dance types were still being performed at the Paris Opera as late as 1817.

Through much of the nineteenth century the term *gavotte* seems to have been synonymous with the “Gavotte de Vestris,” a theatrical duet by the famed dancer Gaetano Vestris first performed in the 1760s or 1770s. Although no notation or description of the original dance survives, several nineteenth-century versions do exist in verbal descriptions, dance notations, or both. The music is still in duple meter with four- and eight-bar phrases; however, the characteristic rhythmic pattern beginning in the middle of the bar is no longer present. Although similarities of steps and spatial patterns exist among these versions the differences between them are great enough, particularly in the level of difficulty, that it might be more accurate to speak of “Gavotte de Vestris” interpretations rather than a single dance. A late-nineteenth-century version of the “Gavotte de Vestris” by Giraudet is for two couples, with considerable simplification of the steps and an alteration of the dance/music relationships.

A number of different folk dances called *gavottes* are still performed today in France, particularly in Basse-Bretagne. Examples include the Gavotte de Pont-Aven, the Gavotte de Quimper, and the Gavotte des Montagnes. These dances encompass a great variety of steps, floor patterns, and other performance traditions.

See also **Ballet Technique, History of**, article on **French Court Dance**; and **Social Dance**, article on **Court and Social Dance before 1800**.

## Bibliography

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Carol G. Marsh

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