

**Passepiéd.** A French dance dating from the sixteenth century or earlier, the *passepiéd* was first mentioned in 1548, by Noël de Fail, who describes it as a court dance of Brittany. Thoinot Arbeau, in his *Orchésographie* (1588), also refers to the *trihory*, or *passepiéd*, as a type of *branle* danced in Brittany. Arbeau's example, in duple meter, uses *branle* step variations that are repeated throughout the dance. Several *passepiéd* settings, also in duple meter, appear in Michael Praetorius's 1612 collection of dance music, *Terpsichore*.

As is the case with several other dance types (such as the *galliard* and the *courante*), no apparent relationship exists between the Renaissance version and the late seventeenth-century court and theatrical dance of the same name. The Baroque *passepiéd* is set to music in triple meter, usually with a 3/8 time signature and an eighth-note upbeat. The dance shares the step vocabulary of the *menuet*, one step-unit requiring two bars of music, but has a faster tempo.

There are at least twenty-one extant *passepiéd* choreographies in Feuillet notation. Twelve are of French provenance, seven are English, and the remaining two are from German and Spanish treatises. Although French operas and ballets from Jean-Baptiste Lully to Jean-Philippe Rameau frequently include *passepiéd* music, none of the surviving choreographies is theatrical in style, and all but one are for a single couple. The *passepiéd* frequently occurs as part of a “dance suite,” a set of two or more contrasting dance types performed consecutively without a pause. Because of its lighthearted character, the dance is more often found at the end of such suites.

The six *passepiéd*s by Guillaume-Louis Pecour share certain characteristics also found to some extent in other dances of this type: floor patterns in which the partners move parallel to each other rather than in the more usual symmetrical shapes, a limited step vocabulary, and the use of hemiola—a shift in rhythmic stress—in the music. The parallel floor patterns are either circular, with the couple holding inside hands, or rectilinear. One or both of these patterns also appear in dances by Raoul-Auger Feuillet and Claude Ballou but in none of the English *passepiéd*s.

*Passepiéd* music is usually in binary form, with strains of eight, twelve, or sixteen bars. However, the French dances are considerably more irregular, with strains of four to twenty-two bars. A hemiola often occurs near the end of the second strain. (See example 1.) Pecour's “La Bretagne” (1704) is typical.

A folk dance called *passepiéd* is still performed in parts of France today, but any conclusions about the earlier versions of the *passepiéd* drawn from this dance can only be regarded as speculative.

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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