

Bourrée. The term *bourrée* (also spelled *bouree*) usually refers to a type of aristocratic court dance and music popular in France and other European countries during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. French folk dances called *bourees* have also been known from the Renaissance to modern times.

Several writers of French dictionaries (Furetière, 1701; Richelet, 1732; Compan, 1787) mention that the *bouree* was believed to come from the French province of Auvergne. It probably came from provincial regions to the French court in the middle or late sixteenth century. Its reception must have been favorable, for by the early seventeenth century the elegant royal *ballets de cour* included dance *entrées* entitled *bouree* (for example, in *Le Ballet de la Délivrance de Renaud*, 1617).

The *bouree* was one of several dance types—including *menuet*, *passepied*, *gavotte*, *sarabande*, *loure*, *rigaudon*, and others—that were refined and changed to suit aristocratic taste by artists working under the French king Louis XIV (reigned 1653–1715). It became a joyful, gay courtship dance for a couple, full of confidence and the enjoyment of life. The dancers, moving with a graceful and strongly centered carriage, used swiftly flowing steps to form a variety of floor patterns in the geometric figures common to French court dancing of the period. There was less ornamentation and subtle footwork than in many of the other popular court dances. The tempo was fast for the time (1/2 = 80–92 M.M. in a time signature of 2 or [tempus imperfectum cum prolatione imperfecta diminution-2]). The music is in duple meter on all levels and has a quarter-note upbeat, with many phrases four or eight bars in length; a syncopation is also common in the music.

Many different steps were used in *bourees*, but the most common was the *pas de bouree*, a step-unit performed to one measure of music. It consists of a *demicoupe* (a step with *plié* and *élevé*) followed by two *pas marchées* (two plain steps without change of elevation). The *pas de bouree* could begin on either foot (giving right-left-right or left-right-left) and thus was useful whenever a change of leading foot was desired. The third of the three steps was sometimes taken with a tiny leap (*demi-jeté*) for added liveliness. A form of the *pas de bouree* is still used today in ballet, and varieties of it occur in many folk dances.

Bouree entrées occurred frequently in French Baroque ballets and operas. The team of composer Jean-Baptiste Lully and choreographer Pierre Beauchamp, created many *bourees* and other dance *entrées* in their theatrical works from the 1650s until Lully's death in 1687. The *bouree* continued to be a popular *entrée* until the mid-eighteenth century, appearing in the works of French composers such as André Campra, Marc-Antoine Charpentier, André Cardinal Destouches, Jean-Féry Rebel, and Jean-Philippe Rameau. The chief choreographer and ballet master at the Paris Opera from 1687 to 1729 was Guillaume-Louis Pecour, and fourteen of his *bourees* have survived in choreographic notation. Included are three for the theater, originally danced by such illustrious performers as Marie-Thérèse Subligny, Mademoiselle Guiot, Claude Ballon, and François Dumoulin.

During the same period (c.1650–1750) the *bouree* was also well loved as a social dance at court. It was popular both as a piece for one couple dancing alone (*danse à deux*) and, from about the 1680s, as a *contredanse*, with several couples dancing at once. The *danses à deux* were through-composed pieces performed by one couple at formal ceremonial balls while the assembled court watched. *Contredanses* often followed the *danses à deux* and were easier to perform, since a continually repeating four-bar step formula was used and the figures were less complex.

Many *bourees* survive in choreographic notation. In addition to numerous *contredanses*, there are thirty theatrical and social dances, composed by choreographers residing both in France (Pecour, Raoul-Auger Feuillet, Jacques Dezais, and Ballon) and in England (Mister Isaac, Anthony L'Abbé, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau). “La Bourée d'Achille,” by Pecour, was one of the best-loved social dances and is still enjoyed today in beginning classes on French court dancing. The thirty *bourees* range in technique

from very easy to extremely difficult. Two anonymous pieces that probably date from before 1700 use generally rounded figures, and almost all step-units are *pas de bourrée*. The early eighteenth-century *bourrées* contain angular, more complex geometrical figures and a great variety of step-units, with *bourrée* step accounting for less than half of them.

The characteristic phrase structure and rhythms of *bourrée* music were exploited by Baroque composers of many countries. *Bourrées* appear often in keyboard and orchestral suites, coming after the more traditional overture, *allemande*, and *courante*, but before the *gigue*, or *giga*. Many reflect the joyful quality of the dance, although the well-known theorist and composer Johannes Mattheson wrote in 1739 that “their quality is primarily contentedness and pleasantness; at the same time they have an unconcerned or relaxed quality; they are a little careless, comfortable, and yet not disagreeable” (*Der vollkommene Capellmeister*, p. 225). *Bourées* may be found in the music of Johann Caspar, Ferdinand Fischer, Johann Kreiger, Nicolas-Antoine Lebègue, Jean-Henri d'Anglebert, Henry Purcell, and Johann Sebastian Bach. The *bourrée* continued to be used by composers of the later eighteenth century but as a topic for development within the course of a larger work such as a symphony, rather than a separate piece entitled *Bourrée*. An example is the opening of Mozart's Symphony in G Minor, no. 40 (K. 550), which is *bourrée*-like.

Little is known of the history of the *bourrée* as folk dance, but, according to Claudie Marcel-Dubois (1949), in the mid-twentieth century various dances of that name were still being performed in French provincial regions such as Bourbonnais, Berry, Marche, Limousin, Velay, Morvan, Charolais, Languedoc, Angoumois, Jura, and Savoy.

[For related discussion, see **Ballet Technique, History of**, article on **French Court Dance**.]

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