

# BULGARIAN FOLK DANCES

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**T**HE round dance, or '*horo*' as it is called, is the most typical form of public entertainment for the peasants of Bulgaria. On festive days and on holidays it draws old and young to the village green. It is only in summer, when work in the fields is at its peak, that dancing in the public places is infrequent, but the lads and lasses find time even then to have a bit of dancing when they are resting from their labours, particularly if one among them plays any kind of an instrument.

Bulgarian folk dances are chiefly community dances. The *horos* are danced in open or closed circles, in a chain, or in small groups. In the typical round dances, when many people join in, the line of the circle is broken.

"Led" *horos* are headed by a leader, or *horobodets*, as he is called in Bulgarian. Only the best of dancers join in right next to or near him. Very young girls and children join in at the tail end of these *horos*, to learn the steps. But there are "led" *horos* in which the end, or tail, winds and turns with great dexterity. In this case a skilled *horobodets* takes charge of that end too, to turn and wind it in and out. In some villages the best dancers always place themselves in the centre of the circle, and two ends, or tails, are formed on either side of them. When the dancing grows fast and furious the dancers at both

ends drop out, to let the true dancers show their skill.

*Rod* dances are danced by a small number of dancers, forwards and backwards, to the right and left, but more or less on one and the same spot. During the dance, the dancers keep to a strictly limited space. The steps of these *Horos* are the most intricate and tiring, and they are danced by selected dancers. The leader of the column orders the changes of steps. They take a "walk" for a rest, a change to calm steps, in the rhythm of the *Horo* being danced. Then the steps grow fast and small again. In the Radomir region and in East Bulgaria certain *Horos* are danced in a circle but the dancers do not hold hands; they dance in a row, one next to or after the other placing their hands at their backs or waving kerchiefs over their heads. The dancers hold hands in different ways in the different dances: sometimes they simply hold hands, sometimes hands are placed on the neighbours' waistband, or are crossed, front or back, sometimes they are placed on the neighbour's shoulder, and sometimes *Horos* are danced arm in arm. When hands are simply held, they are swung backwards and forwards, more or less energetically, according to the faster or slower beat of the dance. When the dancers get very close together arms are raised from elbow up. Hands and arms have the greatest freedom of movement, however, in the

*Ruchenista* which is danced by solo dancers or couples.

Bulgarian folk dances are not voluptuous. There is no wriggling of the body. With the exception of the movements of arms and hands, slight quivers of the shoulders, slight bows, with the head or from the waist, which are typical of certain of the women's ritual dances, it is the legs and feet which play the

principal part in the dance. The men's feet which look so clumsy in their home-made sandals, and leggings dance small steps at a dizzy speed, so quickly indeed that they are barely perceptible. Sometimes the step is danced on the whole sole of the foot, sometimes on the toe or heel, some are swung and some glided, some are spring-like, some like scissors, there are hops and leaps and crouching springs. The latter are particularly typical of men's dances. In mixed *Horos*, when the dance is at its height, the men begin to make crouching springs separately or together, egging each other or with cries of "hop, hop!"



The first requirement of good dancing is lightness. The women always dance more quietly than the men, with restraint and dignity. It is not considered seemly for them to make crouching springs, as the men do.

The well-known and original wealth of exceptionally varied and complex Bulgarian rhythms finds expression in the *horo* tunes and steps.

A whole series of ordinary *horos* are danced to a 2/4 time. Some of them begin lightly with simple steps forward and backward, left and right, then gradually the steps grow smaller and faster, growing more and more complicated, until the dance reaches its height, then it goes gradually back to the first steps as the music leads to give the dancers a rest.

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*Little lass so small and tiny,  
When you trip the horo, horo,  
Who weaves all the cloth for you?*

*Why, uncle dear, Ivan, Ivan,  
I just trip the horo, horo  
Mother weaves the cloth for me.*

Variations of the *Paidushko horo*, one of the liveliest Bulgarian dances, are danced to a two-beat rhythm, with a lengthened second step in

a 5/16 time. Its limping steps are typical of this dance. The so-called *crooked horo* is danced in the *Paidushko* rhythm; here the two

leaders, at the head and the tail of the dance, wind first one, then the other end of it in a spiral, then keep it at one spot for a moment, and unwind it again.

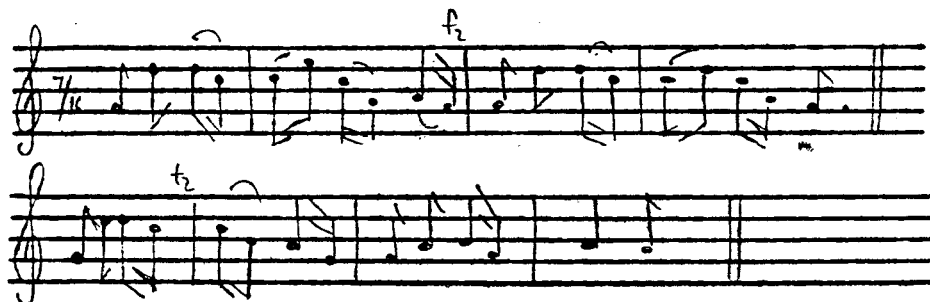
These *Paidushko horos* take us into the sphere of the so-called "Bulgarian rhythms" in

forming which the lengthened time—longer by half its value than the usual time—takes part. An ordinary time contains two primary values the lengthened time contains three,..... The component times is hemiolic, 2:3. The five primary values of the *Paidushko* bar are grouped in one common and one lengthened time.



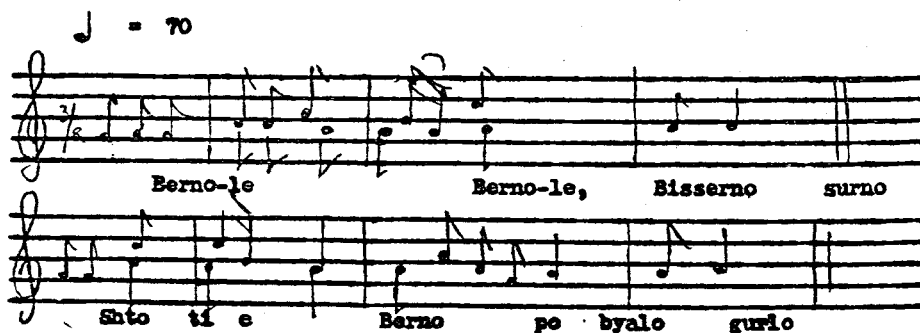
The seven primary values of the *Ruchenitsa*, danced as a solo or in couples are grouped in three component times, two common and one lengthened: 7/16 — = —

an asymmetrical three-beat bar. The basic step is a triple one, the third step being half as long again as each of the first two.



A number of dances are danced to the *Ruchenitsa* rhythm under the most different names at a very fast tempo—M. M. =380-520.

*Horos* in symmetrical three-beat rhythm are danced only in Central, Western and South-western Bulgaria at moderate to very fast tempos.



The *Horo* known as *Povurtulchitsa*, *Radomisko* or *Samokovsko* is danced to a 9/16 bar - an

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asymmetrical four-beat bar. It is danced as follows: in the first bar—four steps to the left, in the 2nd, 3rd and 4th bars—twelve steps to the right, four steps to a bar:



*Horos* in this rhythm are danced in a moderate to very fast tempo. The best known *horo* danced to a very fast tempo in a 9/16 time is *Doicho's horo*. The *horos* are swung smoothly in a circle. The choreographic phrase has four bars. In the first bar, a hop on the left foot, three steps forward; the second bar—a hop on the right foot, three steps to the right; the third bar—a hop on the left foot, three steps back; the fourth bar, a hop on the right foot; three steps to the left.

The Bulgarian's love of *horo* dancing is reflected in his folk songs. The folk singer enthusiastically praises the qualities of individual *horo* dancers. The son of Damyan the *horo*-leader is well-known; his dancing was so temperamental that his sandals flew right up into the sky. In a song sung in the Sredna Gora region, the maiden Mit-Mitana begins leading the *horo* and arouses such admiration with her dancing that the cattle fences fall to pieces, and the roads are crowded with people who want to see her dancing the *horo* and leading it.

Bulgarian traditions of dancing are rich in carnival games too, and in a number of customs accompanied by singing and dancing. In certain villages the carnival games have a definitely marked dance character and the dances of a group or groups of people taking part in them are fully co-ordinated. In other villages the carnival games are not organised, but nevertheless have a definite choreographic form. The costumes of the chief dressed-up figures are

most varied. Each region has a definite costume for each figure, which is entirely different from those of other regions.

The carnival games in Bulgaria are markedly theatrical in character. Ritual ploughing and sowing have been preserved in many places, and in some villages of East Bulgaria it is done three times in the day at definite times in three different parts of the village.

In the last thirty years a certain tendency for modern dances to displace the folk *Horos* and dances, in the villages as well as in the town, has been observed. Much, however, is now being done to preserve and maintain our traditions of folk dancing. The brilliant festivals of folk dancing, held in villages and county and district towns, prove this, and it is at these festivals that the groups which compete in the national reviews of amateur folk dancers come to the fore. The Ministry of Culture and the mass organisations arrange special courses to train leaders for the amateur groups of folk dancing that are now so popular. These leaders are trained to make a thorough study of local original folk dancing. The wealth of material obtained from these studies serves as the foundation of their practical work.

Amateur groups are formed in many villages, and a large number of dancers, old and young alike, join them. Their dances, simple and unaffected, are imbued with the primitive freshness of life lived in close contact with nature, and this is their great charm. The most

striking examples of this type of folk dance ensemble are the ones in the village of Hlevenne, Lovech county (in North Bulgaria) and the Yane Sandansky group in the town of Gotse Delchev (South-west Bulgaria). Their work is in direct contact with living local tradition, goes hand in hand with it and is the most natural continuation of this tradition.

The professional dance companies of the People's Army, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Labour Corps were born of this impetu-

ous amateur activity. But it is the State Folk Song and Dance Company, headed by the composer Philip Koutev, which is the culmination of this movement. This company mainly recreates folk songs and dances, but does so in a highly artistic manner, preserving all their primitive charm with extraordinary freshness. This is the secret of the exceptional success achieved by the State Company in the last few years in France, England, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, Syria, the Lebanon, Yugoslavia and elsewhere.