

# GRAPEVINE

Volume 14 Number 2, December 2002



Grapevine is the newsletter of the Perth International Folk Dance Group. The Group meets Monday evenings at **St Margarets Church Hall in Nedlands (Cnr Tyrell and Elizabeth)**. The evenings begin at 7:00pm with a 90 minute dance lesson, followed by general dancing until late. For further information please call John ((08) 9427 4258 (wk) or Martin (9445 2072).

## Introduction

**Martin Williams**

In this issue, the second *Grapevine* for the year, we cover some news from Palenque's recent trip to the Balkans and a feature a follow up article from Laurel on branlés which she introduced in the last *Grapevine* after her trip to Limoux in France.

As the year draws to a close it's time to think about the successes of 2002 and to plan for 2003. A new Committee; some new dances to learn, particularly from Palenque after her recent trip to Romania and Bulgaria; and another visit from André van der Plas, who will be back in Perth for the week-end 12/13 July next year. Lots of good things to look forward to in 2003 I hope!

From me and from all of the Committee I'd like to wish you Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year



## Group Events Summer 2002-3

The **Annual General Meeting** is scheduled for – Monday, 2 December 8.30pm, St Margaret's Hall.

**Party season**    Ț   ≅   Θ f ι κ   ᾱ χ δ ε Ț   –

**Saturday** wind-up Christmas party: Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> December, 9:30am – 12.30pm

**Monday** wind-up Christmas party: Monday 16<sup>th</sup> December, 7pm – 10pm

All are welcome to both parties. Easy party dances will be taught at both events. Please bring a plate of finger food to share and BYO drinks.

**Teaching** There will be no dance classes or sessions over the Christmas period, with classes

recommencing Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> January and Monday 13<sup>th</sup> January.

**There will be a \$2 night on Monday 6 January**

## Teachers

December: Laurel on Saturdays; Palenque on Mondays,... though at the party on Mon 16 Dec all teachers may teach a dance or two. See draft list of teachers for 2003 on page 4.

## Keeping in Touch

**Martin Williams**

One of the great things about travelling the world these days is that if you want to you can always keep in touch via email. There seem to be Internet Cafes everywhere. Palenque recently had a holiday in Romania and Bulgaria and later joined Eve to continue travelling around Turkey, and yes we had an early email from northern Romania giving the weather details in Vatra Dornei and proving how small the world is as she had bumped into Perth muso Peter Keelan outside the Opera house in central Bucarest!

Her first email focused on the decorative wooden houses, the amazingly painted orthodox churches, the autumn colours and the dependence on horse and cart for travel away from the cities, the decorated wells, the ubiquitous cows, and the haystacks styled as in Monet's paintings. And of course we also heard of the 11 dances learned in the first few days, which was purpose of that part of the trip!!

We next heard from Palenque from Turkey -- the story continues ----

## Hý agaýn all

**Palenque**

Please excuse some funny spellýng and punctuatýon ýn thýs emayl as ý have just dýscovered that the Turkýsh keyboard ýs a být dýfferent to the Englýsh one. I cannot fýnd commas and they have thýs ý letter that doesnit have a dot on top ýn place of the normal ý that does exýst only ýt ýs here: i.

Anyway ý am ýn a small town called Mardýn that ýs somewhere south of Dýyarbýkýr ýn the east of Turkey. The town ýs on the sýde of a hýll and has amazýng terraces of old houses made of honey coloured stone accordýng to the guýdebook and

maybe ýt looks lýke thýs sometýmes but when we arrýved at 5pm today and ýt started to raýn ýt was not so apparent. There are staýrways headýng zýgzag up and down the hýll wýth a few major roads goýng parallel to the hýllsýde and an old castle on top of the hýll that ýs fenced off wýth barbed wýre and is used as a mýlýtary ýnstillatýon according to the guy in the net cafe. We left Sanlýurfa - or 'Glorýous Urfa' thýs mornýng.

Havýng had a wonderful couple of nýghts there - the fýrst nýght was wýth a tour we had taken from Cappadocýa (the amazýng eroded landscape of volcanýc area ýn whých there are numerous towns and relýgýous sýtes wýth many lýttle churches all buýlt ýnto - or rather tunneled out of the soft rock. Unfortunately the excavatýon of buýldýngs obvýously weakens the rock and there are many places where the old multýstorey rooms ýn a rock face has fallen away to leave many half rooms exposed) to get us to Nemrut and Sanlýurfa. We decýded to jump shýp from the tour ýn Sanlýurfa because we had not had as much týme as we expected there and ýt was a nýce cýty. The second nýght we stayed ýn a much more frýendly 'otel' as they are known here and we were ýnvýted to dýnner by a medýcal student we had met on the street who wanted to practýce hýs englýsh. He showed us some of the hýstorýc sýtes ýn Urfa. When he was showýng us a mosque (or camý pronounced jarmee whých always makes me thýnk of pyjamas) ýn partýcular we managed to pýck up another guy wantýng to practýce Englýsh too - and he soon became frýends wýth the fýrst guy and we all had dýnner together wýth many other non-Englýsh speakýng frýends. They were both Kurdýsh as were all the frýends and apparently 90% of thýs regýon. We had a lot of polýtýcal dýscussýon about Kurdýsh people and they obvýously saw much ýnjustýce ýn the sýtuatýon and cared deeply. For example the brother of one of the frýends had been kýlled as a guerýlla fýghter and another student had been locked up for 4 months and thrown out of the unýversýty for wantýng to be able to learn Kurdýsh language. Another frýend was a musýc student and we had wonderful concert of saz (a long-stemmed strýng ýnstrument) and sýngýng of Kurdýsh songs. It beýng Sunday - earlýer ýn the day we had heard much drummýng and saw some men dancýng at a weddýng celebratýon in a park.

Tomorrow we go to see some fantastýcally old ruýn (the hýstory and layers of ýt are almost mýnd-bogglýng all around here) that ýs proposed to be flooded ýn Turkey's next major dam of the Týgrýs. Apparently the Brýtýsh government backed the

project (although funding has now been withdrawn with the dam half built) whých many people object to goýng ahead. We thought we better see ýt before ýt is submerged for good. Also saw Ataturk dam the other day - býg but not very excýtýng because for securýty reasons you're not allowed anywhere near the wall - you can look at the downstream sýde from a few hundred metres away that ýs all! Anyway, I have poked my nose ýnto a couple of other ýnternet cafes ýn Turkey but they always seem to be full of cýgarette smoke and there has always been somethýng else to do anyhow. Today ýt was a relýef to fýnd thýs one relatývely unsmokey - although now that some men are startýng to turn up the smoke level ýs startýng to rýse. It has been great that the buses ýn Turkey - that are pretty relýable - are offýcýally smoke-free although occassýonally the drýver stýll lýghts up! - but thýs can mean longer journeys cos they have to stop for smokos.

Thýnkýng back a být (I may as well fýnýsh my hour on thýs machýne) we spent a day ýn Istanbul before headýng off to Gallýpolý on a tour by a professor who has specýalýsed ýn Gallýppolý and the events there of World War 1 - whých was really ýnterestýng - he knew everythýng there was to know about the events and related the whole thýng as we went about the sýtes - and he had read a lot of the dýarýes of Australýans and others who had been there. It was really remarkable and movýng - ýt was horrýble to hear that very same nýght (about 2 days late I thýnk) of the terrýble bombýng ýn Balý and even worse the Australýan government and Bush response - after such a movýng message of the stupýdýty of war!

Back to more happy thýngs - we have met so many people here ýn Turkey who are very frýendly and keen to help. There have been a few mýnor unpleasant ýncýdents but ýn general the welcomýng and hospýtable nature of so many people makes up for ýt. Several Kurds we met yesterday ýnsýsted that they were more frýendly and egalýtarýan than the Turks or Arabs - and certáynly there was no evýdence of a motýve to sell somethýng behýnd theýr frýendlýness, where there has often been ýn other sýtuatýons - even ýf ýt only began that way and the frýendlýness and hospýtalýty contýnued even once they realýse there wýll be no sale!

Well, týme ýs up, so I'll see some of you after the 3rd November.

**Palenque**

## What is a Branlé?

by Laurel de Vietri

Probably derived from the verb 'branler' (to oscillate), the term *branlé* describes the French chain dances of the Renaissance. The term has appeared since the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century when it was used to describe one of the steps of the *basse danse* ( a slow gliding dance danced by several couples in procession) of France documented in *The Brussels Manuscript* in 1470 as 'lateral displacement or oscillation of the body' and also in *L'Arte et instruction de bien danser* by Michel Toulouse 1495 as a step which should 'start with the left foot and end with the right and is called *branlé* because one does it by swaying from one foot onto the other'. It was later described as a dance by Antonius Arena in 1520 in *Ad suos compagnones studentes*, Thoinot Arbeau in 1588 in *Orchésographie*, Jean Nicot in his *dictionnaire* in 1660, Samuel Pepys' diaries of 1662, F de Lauze in *Apologie de la danse* in 1623. It evolved over this time period, enjoying escalating popularity as either the opening or closing dance of the grand balls, to become more complicated while retaining the same fundamental and durable form. We know from Rameau (1725) and Pepys that all levels of nobility, including kings and queens, danced *branlés* in their courts. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century in the court of Louis XIV, the *branlé* continued to be danced although it did not have the same prestige as earlier on.

## In the Countryside

As a dance of the ruling classes, the *branlé* was well documented and we know comparatively little about its existence in the countryside of France. We do know of some traditional dances of the same logic described by the above authors, that is, dances in open or closed chains, usually left moving, with come-and-go trajectories. Some of these dances retain these days the chain form, others are now danced in couples or have incorporated elements of other dances like the *contredanse* and *bourree*. Dances like *branlé d'Ecueillé*, *branlé d'Ossau*, *branlé d'Arbéost* possibly formed part of a repertoire of ancient *branlés* danced by peasants, as do *branlé du Quercy*, *branlé de Bresse*, *branlé à six* and *branlé de Cosnay* which show influences of other dances.

We find in the diverse dances known as *ronds* or *rondes* and the *laridès* (*ridées*), *an dros* (*en dros*) and *hanter dros* of the Morbihan similarities to the ancient *branlé double* and *branlé simple* steps. In the dances called *sauts* of the Basco-Béarnais we see a link to the *branlés coupés* and *branlés morgues*

described by Arbeau. Musically, the *sauts Basques* seem to stem from the *branlé des sabots* (Attaignat) and *branlé gai* (Phalèse). And finally, the *contrepas roussillonnais* and the *ancient sardane catalane* are very similar to the *branlés* described by Arena, that is, as simple repetitions of long and short steps. In the terminology of the Renaissance, the short step is a succession of doubles, the long step a combination of two simples and a double.

We must be careful, however, not to assume that the *branlé* was a popular dance amongst peasants as opposed to other dances of the same époque like the *basse danse*, *pavane* and *allemande* which are known as court dances. The *branlé* was known throughout Europe as a dance of the aristocracy since the middle ages and links to traditional dances have been made mainly because of their open or closed chain form resembling the *branlé*. This does not give one authorisation to state that the *branlé* was a dance representative of rural communities of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The above- mentioned authors described dances from their own society – dances of the dominant society, the upper class, the cultured. Arbeau does mention that some more vigorous *branlés* were practised by the chambermaids and manservants.

## Names of the Dances

The word *branlé* is French and is used by Arena, like his predecessors to describe a step of the *basse danse*. He was the first to describe the *branlé simple* and *branlé double*, fundamental forms of chain dances appearing at the end of 15<sup>th</sup> century. Arbeau describes suites of *branlés* including the *branlé double* and *branlé simple*, the *branlé gai* and the *branlé de Bourgogne*. He also describes the *branlé de Champagne*, *branlé de Poitou*, *trihory de Bretagne*, *branlé du Haut-Barrois*, *branlés d'Ecosse*, *branlé des chevaux*. In English, we see the translations of these dances as using the word *bransle* or *brawl*. Hence we have the double and single bransles, the gay bransle, the Burgundy bransle. We also come across the horses brawl, the war brawl and the clogs brawl and the Maltese brawl.

## Branlés Today

Because Arbeau's dances were so well documented we can see them danced today in the same form under the same names. We also see folk dances which have arisen from the Renaissance court dances and spread into other European countries and even modern *branlés* created by folkloric groups like *Au Gré des*

Vents (Alsace) in France today. *Branlés* are very much alive in France today and form part of the repertoire of the *bal folk* (folk ball).

Alsace boasts a richness of *branlés*, *courantes*, *waltzes of asymmetric rhythms* and *sarabands*, which some would like to believe have always been danced there by the common people but no-one has any evidence or record of these dances being witnessed at these early times. Today at the Alsatian ball we dance, for example, the Branlé Gai, L'Homme qui Marche, Maitre de Maison (danced often to a medieval song), Branlé Tais toi, branlés asymétriques, Branlé des Bergers, Le Valet Rusé, the *branlé double* called Ouvre-moi amongst other types of dances. Most of these can be recognised by their typical leftward displacement, a rhythmic swinging of the arms, sometimes a turn or a stamp or a subtle lift or point of the working foot, along with combinations of double and single *branlé* steps

The Branlés de la Vallée d'Ossau in Béarn are amongst the most subtly difficult *branlés* practised today in France. They have a huge following of dancers who attend workshops trying to attain the grace and skill necessary to perform these dances of elevation and suspended steps properly.

In Brittany we see another legacy of the ancient branlé. The *branlé double*, for example, which became widespread over Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, has given rise to the An dro, Pilé Menu, Rond de St Vincent, rond Paludier and others danced in Brittany today. In the family of *branlés simples*, we now have Hanter dro, Jymnaska, and ridées of 6 and 8 counts. The family of *gavottes* of Brittany (including Kost er c'hoat, Dans Fisel, Gavotte de Pont Aven, Suite Gavotte des Montagnes) have come from the Trihory (tri c'hoari), Renaissance *branlé* typically of Basse Bretagne. The Renaissance *branlé gai* has given rise to Danse Plinn, Danse Léon, danse Treger and la Maraîchine.

Perhaps this information answers some questions about French dances of today. The question "what is a branlé?" is frequently asked, as is the question "why do so many French dances go to the left?" Hopefully, readers will have an understanding also of the place of the branlé in French society in the 15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries as a dance of nobility, and an understanding that with the Revivalist movement in folk dancing in Europe, it has become a dance for everyone, even Australians!

## References

- Yves Guilcher - « La Danse Traditionnelle en France »  
Yves Le Blanc - « Tro Breizh »  
Didier Lhotte - « Danses Traditionnelles d'Alsace »  
Antonius Arena - « A ses Compagnons Etudiantes »  
Madeleine Inglehearn - « 15th Century dances from Burgundy and Italy »  
Janelyn of Fenmere - "Stepping on our Toes – some background on Branlés"  
Wendy Hilton - "Dance of Court and Theater – The by French Noble Style 1690-1725"  
L'Atelier de la Danse Populaire - « Le Livre des Chansons à Danser »

## Preliminary Teaching Programme for 2003

The preliminary list of dance teachers for Monday's in 2003 is:

January	Palenque
February	Eve
March	Sara
April	John
May	Eve
June	Palenque
July	John
August	Laurel
September	Sara
October	Palenque
November	Laurel
December	John

Subject to change

