

From Coranto to Courante

Ann Kent

Introduction

This paper discusses the change in dance style that occurred during the seventeenth century, as exemplified by the Courante.

I wish to thank the members of Greensleeves for demonstrating the dances at the conference and to acknowledge that the musical input is the work of Paul Kent.

The dancers first of all showed the forms of Courante danced at the beginning of the century, and at the end of the century; and then I went on to explore some ideas of what happened in between.

The Courante

Coranto, courante, corant, curant, corrente: these are different words and spellings from different documents and different countries. One should not assume that the different spellings necessarily relate to differences in the dance. For example, the spelling *courante* is used throughout the century in French sources whatever form the dance takes. Nevertheless, for convenience of identification I shall use different words in the following discussion. In making comparisons between the various examples I shall focus on the *pas de courante*, which is the principal travelling step and thus the equivalent of the double in Renaissance dance.

Coranto 1590 - 1610

At the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries, the Courante dance steps are described by Arbeau¹ and by Negri.²

My first example is a social dance, 'La Boesme', taken from *Instruction Pour Dancer*, believed to have been written in the first decade of the seventeenth century.³ It is danced to the music of the same title from Praetorius's *Terpsichore*.⁴ The principal step used is quoted as a *pas de courante*, but there is no description of how it was executed, so I have drawn on that given by Arbeau. His step takes two bars of compound duple music. 'La Boesme' is a lively dance for four couples and each person in turn does each figure. (A greatly shortened version of this dance was demonstrated.)

The second example from the beginning of the seventeenth century is Negri's 'Corrente' (1602). This is an energetic couple dance where partners are exchanged. Negri indicates the liveliness by advising

the gentleman to remove his sword and cloak before he takes the lady into this dance. He also says that the lady may opt to do less energetic steps and gives alternatives. As in the first dance, this *pas de courante* is done to a compound duple rhythm. (In the short choreography shown, the first lady matched the man's steps, while the second lady took the easier options.)

Courante 1700

At the other end of the seventeenth century the Courante is a slow and stately dance. The step description is drawn from Rameau (1725).⁵ A *pas de courante* is made up of a *coupé* and a *demi coupé* or *demi jeté*, and it is danced to a slow triple metre.

This step was shown in a couple dance taken from Taubert (1717),⁶ where the two dancers perform a simple choreography in mirror image.

This *pas de courante* was also used in country dances, an example of which is *Lady Mary's Courante*, which comes from *The Dancing Master Vol 2* (1728).⁷ Here it is specified that 'This Dance should be done with the Courante Step if the Company can do it.'

It has been shown that there were two very different dance styles at the two ends of the seventeenth century both called Courante.

What, however, was being danced in the middle decades of the century?

Corant 1630

Chronologically, after Arbeau and Negri, one should look at the work of De Lauze (1623).⁸ However, as all dance scholars of this period know, his descriptions are fraught with ambiguities and no music is given, making it extremely difficult to define the form of his Courante steps.

Instead of discussing De Lauze, I offer for consideration a *pas de courante* derived from a scribbling found in MS Rawlinson 864, one of the Inns of Court manuscripts and dated circa 1630.⁹ This manuscript has two Corants with diagrams and accompanying step descriptions.

What I have taken as the *pas de courante* is written as:

A hop and a chace, with a hop and a lene.

This may be interpreted as having footings of:

hop, step, cut, step, hop, step and slide.

Like the earlier Coranto step, this requires two bars of 6/4 music.

There is an alternative version of this step in which a 'wind' is substituted for the first 'hop'. This winding step is usually used to turn a corner.

'A hop and a chace, with a hop and a lene': could this *pas de courante* be what De Lauze means by a *pas chassé* and a *pas porté*? This, he says, is the step combination used by the lady throughout the 'Courante Reglée'.

To put this step in context, a realization of one of the Corants from the manuscript was shown. I judge this to be a man's enchainment, if only because it finishes with two capers.

Curant 1659

An instruction book for gentlemen written by Johann Georg Pasch in 1659, has recently been found and published.¹⁰ The dance element of this book is written in the form of lessons, which are short enchainments for the practice of steps and style. Two sections are entitled 'Curant'. There is no description of how to perform the steps, but the words *cupe* and *pas* are frequently used, and I have taken this step combination for comparison with other examples of the *pas de*

courante. Music is included in the book, and interestingly it is neither in the 6/4 rhythm of the earlier Courantes, nor the 3/2 rhythm of the eighteenth century, but in 3/4, with the *pas de courante* taking 2 bars.

To give a feel for the style of this Courante, the demonstration showed a combination of the various elements of the lessons.

Comparison between the different *pas de courante*

Are all these different *pas de courante* related to each other?

Did they exist side by side?

With reference to the second question, Anne Daye's discourse on the use of dance steps in the seventeenth century, given at the Playford conference in 2001,¹¹ illustrated the overlapping of old and new dance styles. Also, Meredith Little in her entry on the Courante in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music*,¹² describes the continued use of the early Corrente musical form well into the eighteenth century, concurrently with that of the slow Courante.

The table below shows the footings of the different steps in their various musical timings.

TABLE 1: Elements of the *pas de courante*

[6/4 x 2 bars]	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
'La Boesme' (Instruction)	Step		Hop	Step		Hop	Step			Assemblé		Hop
Corrente (Negri)	Step		Cut	Step		Hop	Step			Cadenza		Hop
Corant (Ms.Rawl.864)	Step		Cut	Step		Hop	Step			Slide		Hop
[3/4 x 2 bars]	1	2	3				1	2	3			
Curant (Pasch)	Step			Slide			Step					
[3/2 x 1 bar]	1			2				3				
Courante (Taubert)	Step			Slide			Bend	Jeté				Bend
Lady Mary's Courante (Young)	Step			Slide			Bend	Jeté				Bend

Yet how long does it take to dance each of these different *pas de courante*?

TABLE 2
Metronome markings, and steps per minute

	Metronome	Steps per minute
'La Boesme'	92	23
Corrente	96	24
Corant	88	22
Pasch	48	24
Taubert	66	22
'Lady Mary's Courante'	75	25

The table above shows the tempi used in these same dances. The different musical rhythms are found to have a remarkably similar number of steps per minute.

Thus it is that the early Coranto/Corrente are seen as lively because their *pas de courante* have more than twice the footings of the later steps, even though a *pas de courante* in itself takes a similar length of time in each dance.

To illustrate these points, the lecture concluded with a short demonstration of all the previously discussed *pas de courante* danced together to one piece of music.

References

- 1 Thoinot Arbeau, *Orchésographie* (Langres, 1589; translated by Mary Stewart Evans, ed. Julia Sutton, New York: Dover, 1967).
- 2 Cesare Negri, *Le Gratie d'Amore* (Milan, 1602; facsimile reprint, Bologna: Forni, 1970).
- 3 *Instruction pour dancer les dances cy après nommez* (Freiburg: „fa-gisis“, 2000).
- 4 Michael Praetorius, *Terpsichore* (Wolfenbüttel, 1612; ed. Günther Oberst, Gesamtausgabe der Musikalischen Werke von Michael Praetorius, XV, Wolfenbüttel, 1960).
- 5 Pierre Rameau, *Le Maître à danser* (Paris, 1725; facsimile edition, New York: Broude Brothers, 1968).
- 6 Gottfried Taubert, *Rechtschaffener Tanzmeister* (Leipzig, 1717).
- 7 John Young, (ed.) *The Dancing Master : Vol. the Second* (London, 1728).
- 8 François De Lauze, *Apologie de la Danse* (1623; facsimile reprint, Geneva: Minkoff, 1977).
- 9 Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson D 864, 'The First Corant'.
- 10 Johann Georg Pasch, *Anleitung sich bei grossen Herrn Höfen und andern beliebt zu machen* (Osnabrück, 1659; ed. Uwe Schlottermüller, Freiburg: „fa-gisis“, 2000).
- 11 Anne Daye, 'Taking the measure of dance steps 1650-1700, through the publications of John Playford', *John Playford and The English Dancing Master 1651*, 13-20 (Dolmetsch Historical Dance Society, 2001).
- 12 Meredith Little & Suzanne Cusick, 'Courante', *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. VI, 602-6 (London, 2001).