

Some History and Background for Macedonian folk dances

(These notes were excerpted from the Dunav folk dance site in Israel. Some additional notes to nine dances were made by John Pappas)

Arap (Zajko Kokarajko)

Zajko Kokarajko is the most popular tune among recreational folkdancers for this classic dance from Macedonia.

Bajrace (Zensko Berance) [Kostur, Greek Macedonia]

Bajrace or Zensko Berance is woman's dance from the western part of the Kostur area in what is now Greek Macedonia. It has an unusual rhythm - 12/8, 12/16/ or 18/16 depending on who you ask. Originally called Bajrace, the name of this dance was later changed to Zensko Berance by Pece Atanasovski. Zensko means woman's, and Berance comes from the word Berat, which is a major city in Albania. So it means "Like a dance from Berat" or "The Berat Dance".

Berovka [Berovo, Macedonia]

Berovka takes its name from the town of Berovo in eastern Macedonia. According to Mihailo Dimoski, Stanimir Visinski, and Elsie Dunin in their book Makedonski Narodni Plesovi, the dance was learned from a group of women from the village of Rusino, near Berovo, at a festival in Skopje, 1948.

It is also danced in the area of Pehčavo and Delčevo. It's a women's dance, danced in an open circle or line with the leader on the right end.

Chesto [Thrace, Greece, Bulgaria]

This is a challenging dance from the Romilia Region, next to the Bulgarian border. It was probably brought by Greeks to Greece who were expelled from Bulgaria after the first world war. In Greece it is known by the name of Tsestos.

Čoček [Macedonia, Kosovo, South Serbia]

Cocek is a musical genre and dance that emerged during the early 19th century. Popularized by Ottoman military bands, it is a variation of an old 3-measure dance-form related to the Hasapiko or Kasapsko oro. Today it is found in many parts of the Balkans and dance under a variety of names. The spelling "cocek" is actually derived from Serbian. Macedonians use chocek. In Bulgaria, it is written as kyuchek or kyutchek. Cocek like the Rom people was scattered across the Balkans, mostly throughout Bulgaria, Serbia, Republic of Macedonia and Romania. It was handed down the generations, preserved mostly by Rom minorities and was largely practiced at village weddings and banquets.

Folk dancers in North America first encountered Cocek as "Razgranjala Jorgovana", "Bre Devojče and "Oj Coko, Coko", Serbian town dances from Prizren and Priština in Kosovo. These dances were named after the songs that accompanied them.

The Serbian researchers, Danica and Ljubica Janković described these and many other variations when they published their eight dance volumes in the 1930's and 40's.

Čoček is especially popular among the Moslem Rom and Albanian populations of Kosovo, South Serbia and the Republic of Macedonia. When Tanec first came to America in 1956, they performed Cocek as a Moslem woman's dance, "Kupurlika" from Titov Veles.

In Serbia, "čoček" refers mainly to dances in 9/16, "Karsilama" style, made famous by the opera "Koštana" by Petar Konjović in 1931. Koštana was a Gypsy woman from Vranje famous for dancing the "Čoček". In fact, the opera named after her finishes in a rousing 9/16 "Čoček".

In Greece, the term is not used but a similar style of music is found in the dances, "Tsifteteli" and "Karsilama", still popular today in Northern Greece especially during Apokreas (Mardi Gras or Carnival). Rom musicians living in areas of the former Yugoslavia have broadened the term to include variations in 4/4, 7/8, as well as 9/16. Many but not all of the 4/4 tunes are suitable for the dance.

Devetorka [Macedonia]

Devetorka is a basic Macedonian dance in 9/8 music (for the dancer: QQQS or 12-12-12-123). Although the dance is popular all over the Balkans, there is no common name that it is known by. It usually goes by

the name of the song that accompanies the dance. A popular name in the 1960s was Shareni Chorapi (multi-colored socks), a popular song of the times. A popular name in Bulgaria is Svadbarsko Horo (wedding dance), which means that it is danced at weddings. Even the name Devetorka (nine) is somewhat meaningless, for it takes more than nine steps to complete the dance. Maybe, originally nine dancers danced the dance! Perhaps the best name is Povarnato, to 'return'.

Eleno Mome [Bulgaria]

Eleno Mome is a Bulgarian dance with unclear regional roots that has become popular in other countries as well. While it's only a best guess, the dance seems to have originated in the north and today it is danced all over Bulgaria. Macedonian bands in the USA of the 1940s – 1960s era called this dance Tsiganskoto (the Gypsy dance).

According to Joe Graziozi, the Greek version is found mostly in the northern parts of the province of Macedonia from Florina-Kastoria in the west to Drama in the east. Interestingly, it is not danced in Greek Thrace nor among the Greeks of Bulgaria who resettled throughout Macedonia and Thessaly in the 1920s but is primarily associated with the (former) Slavic Macedonian villages of these regions. It has become a standard among most dance troupes throughout the country. There are numerous recordings, all instrumental, performed by local bands throughout Macedonia, from brass to zourna to gaida to lyra & dahare.

Gurga Pere [East Macedonia]

Gurga Pere is a 9/8 measure melody from east Macedonia, very similar to the Bulgarian Daicovo. Coincidentally, the dance also looks a lot like the Bulgarian Daicovo. We think Daicovo, like a lot of other dances, traveled to another country, changed its name, and took out dual citizenship.

Jovano Jovanke [Macedonia]

Jovano Jovanke is a popular lesnoto (pravoto) from Macedonia.

Kasapsko Oro [Macedonia, Greece, Bulgaria, worldwide]

The dance comes from Byzantine times and is named after the butcher's guild (kasapi). It is undoubtedly the dance that is the easiest to grasp and the most universal.

Kokonjeste [Serbia]

The background material for Kokonjeste was written by Dennis Boxell, based partially on Dick Crum's "Nama" notes.

Kokonješte or Kokonješće is one of the "classic" dances of Yugoslavia. It was a favorite of turn-of-the-century ballrooms as well as village churchyards; by 1900 it had attained sufficient popularity among Serbs living in the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Vojvodina) that by the 1920's it had been transplanted to the U.S. and Canada by immigrants from that area.

Its name is a Romanian word meaning "in the style of a young nobleman", giving credence to the idea that the dance was introduced via the upper-class ballroom. Also, many famous musicians of the time were of Romanian origin, and these musicians definitely had a large impact on the dance music of Serbia at the time.

Many different tunes were composed for Kokonješte. Both Čukaričko Kolo and Zaječarka are forms of Kokonješte. Čukaricko Kokonješte was named after Čukarica, a district in the city of Belgrade, along the Sava river, that was renowned early in the century for its racetrack. Zaječarka was named after the town of Zaječar in Eastern Serbia.

The most famous Kokonješte is Arapsko Kokonjeste (literally "Arabian"). This is the tune that has lived on among Serbian-American musicians to the present day although you will be hard pressed to find it danced any more, especially among new immigrants.

The many dances of this family are based on a simple symmetrical pattern of four measures to the right and four measures to the left. These four-measure-pattern dances were very popular in Serbia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and were precursors to the Kokonješte. Several examples would be Dunje Ranke, Divna Divna, Ti Momo, and Potam Povam to name a few.

In the early 1900's it became fashionable to "double" the steps in Kokoješte, a phenomenon which, based on the Serbian concept of a step,* resulted in a six-step pattern and a logically derived new name, "U Šest koraka" (in six steps). Other embellishments were added to the new style, such as hops, subtle bounces and

others, and the resultant highly improvised dance has come to be referred to as U Šest, even when some of the variations might not total six steps. While there are endless melodies today for U Šest, the melody "Moravac" became so famous that it is now a synonym for U Šest in the vocabulary of most Serbs. The Kokonješte of yesteryear has now evolved over time to become the new national dance of Serbia, Moravac or U Šest" and rare is the Serb who cannot dance it.

* Serbian concept of a step (korak: "A shift of weight onto a given foot plus whatever follow-up movement of the other foot. For example, seven quick running steps to the right would be four Serbian "koraks" 1) R-L , 2) R-L, 3) R-L, 4) R. Now add two "Three steps" in place LRL (5) and RLR (6). Repeat in opposite direction and you have "six steps to the right and six steps to the left", the "missing link" from Kokonješte to U Šest.

Kopacka [Delcevo, Macedonia]

According to Atanas Kolarovski, when Kopacka was first introduced to Tanec by the village dancers, the original name was Sitnata (the little one). Tanec changed the name to Kopacka and the dance subsequently became so famous that the villagers adopted this name of Kopacka for both the dance and the name of their group, to remind everyone from whence this dance originally came.

Kopanica {Sopluk & Trakia, Bulgaria}

by Yves Moreau

Kopanica is a common name for a type of lively folk dance in Western Bulgaria in 11/16 meter (QQSQQ) counted here as 1-2, 1-2, 1-2-3, 1-2, 1-2. The name is derived from the verb "kopam" which means to "dig" or to "hoe" and probably refers to the sharp kick-like down and up motions often found in the dance.

The term Kopanica seems to be especially used in the Sopluk (Sop) region of West Bulgaria, which includes the towns of Sofia, Pernik, Radomir and Kyustendil. Common names are: Sopska Kopanica, Graovska Kopanica, Divotinka Kopanica (from village of Divotino) etc. There is even a village named Kopanica not far from the town of Pernik!

The term Kopanica is also found in Western Thrace and Sredna Gora regions East of Sofia (Ihtiman, Panagjuriste, Pazardzik) and even as far East as Plovdiv. In Western Thrace, dances in 11/8 meter are often called Krivo (or Krivata), a term which means "crooked" or "uneven" and may also refer to dances in other complex uneven meters such as 13/16 (Krivo Sadovsko), 15/16 (Bucimis) etc. The Kopanica or Krivo dances are usually multi-figured and danced in lines or open circles with dancers holding on to each others' belts (za pojas or na kolan).

Many musicians and musical arrangers have also composed tunes called "kopanica" which may or may not have a specific dance connected with the melody; the purpose being mostly to show off creative talent and musicianship.

Folk dancers are often confused by trying to figure out the difference between Kopanica and Gankino Horo, as these dances are both in 11/8 meter. Gankino (Ganka's dance) seems to be used mostly in Northern Bulgaria (NW and North Central). The basic Gankino Horo is a three-measure dance using the step structure also common in the dances: Dunavsko (Danubian Pravo), Povarnoto (also known as Devetorka in Macedonia) and Eleno Mome. The famous Bulgarian accordionist Boris Karlov had many Gankino tunes in his repertoire.

Dances in 11/16 similar to Kopanica or Gankino can also be found in Macedonia using other names (Sedenka, Pletenica, Skopsko etc.). The famous East Macedonian dance Kopacka (2/4) is also derived from "kopam" (to dig).

Lesnoto [Macedonia]

A popular lesnoto (pravoto) from Macedonia.

Levendikos [Greek Macedonia]

This Levendikos is from Florina, in Greek Macedonia. The Levendiko, from the region of Florina in Greek Macedonia, is also called Lytos in Greek, but the original name and the most commonly heard in the Florina region is the Macedonian (Slavic) name Puscheno. Many Macedonian-Americans call this dance Boufsko.

Makedonsko Devojce [Macedonia]

Makedonsko Devojce is a Macedonian song composed by Jonce Hristovski (also the author of Ako Umram). It's one of the most popular tunes for dancing Lesnoto

Memede [Macedonia]

Memede is also known as Toska Memede. It's a basic dance with great music.

Na Khelav Na Gilvav [Rom, Macedonia]

Music for Indijski Cocek.

Narodno Oro [Macedonia, Bulgaria]

Another simple Macedonian dance. It starts out slowly but the dance doesn't change as the music speeds up. It is danced across a wide area in the Balkans and simply means "folk dance" or "people's dance".

Paidushko [Trakia, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Turkey, Greece]

Payduska, Paidushko, Baidushka, Baiduskino, etc. is a family of dances usually danced to 5/16 or 5/8 (Q S) rhythm and found in a large area spanning Serbia, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Greece, and beyond. It is the classic "aksak" (Turkish for limping) dance and rhythm. Its various forms reflect local preferences. Yes, they also dance it in Turkey. The Turks brought it from Skopje. Strangely enough, for all its immense popularity and diffusion, the derivation of its name is still a mystery. It has no other meaning in Bulgarian or Macedonian other than the name of a dance called Paidushka.

Pusteno [Macedonia, Greek Macedonia]

Pusteno (also: Poustseno) is a Macedonian dance from the Levendikos, Bajrace family. Pusteno is from the Kastoria/Kostur region of Greek Macedonia but is considered a Macedonian dance by most folk dancers. Joe Graziosi provided this background information:

In the Florina region the Puscheno/Pushteno a/k/a Levendikos or Litos are the same dance. The Levendiko is also called Lytos in Greek, but the original name and the most commonly heard in the Florina region is the Macedonian (Slavic) name Puscheno.

There are numerous tunes for the dance, both instrumental and sung. Within the Florina region the term Beranche or Beratche refers usually to a tune or style of Puscheno, often slower or heavier, so it can also be called Teshko or even Starsko. This last name, meaning old, is often employed as a term of respect for the older generation that would more often lead the dance.

The steps are the same except in the Albanian Christian (Arvanites) villages of the region (e.g. Flambouron/Negovani) where the Beratche or Beratis is a two measure dance based on the motif of a Sta Dhio step. The inhabitants of the villages Alona/ Armnesko, Akritas/Buf and Kratero/Rakovo have the reputation of being among the best dancers for the Puscheno.

In the village of Alona/ Armnesko it can refer to a separate melody (called Gherondikos in Greek), which starts quite slow and evolves into a Puscheno. Among the Florina population, which is of Albanian origin (as in the village Flambouro/Negovani) the Beratche, etc. is danced differently - here with a two-measure phrase. The usual three measure phrase Puscheno which is also danced by them, is considered a Macedonian dance while their two measure Beratche they consider their own.

Also, in the region of Lake Prespa the Puscheno is danced differently than the rest of Florina. Here, the dance starts with a full weighted step on the right foot whereas elsewhere it starts with a lift or touch of the right foot on the same beat, making for a very different feel. A close listen to most Puscheno or Beratche recordings from Greek Macedonia will show that the most common meter is 16/8 - 2223223; sometimes it can be heard in a meter of 15 or 17; more rarely in 12 - but in each case the grouped pulses are the same: slower, quick.slow, quick.

The further south one goes, towards and beyond Kastoria/Kostur, the more the three measure dance is replaced by a two measure dance, but here the dance starts with a full weighted step on the first beat of each measure (e.g. Zhensko Bairatche), whereas in the Greco-Albanian villages of Florina, the first beat starts with a lift or touch. Local variants also exist in the Vlach village of Vlasti/Blatse and among the Greek villages of Voion (e.g., the dance Lontzia) in Kozani County. Many Macedonian-Americans call this dance Boufsko, sometimes Kondoropsko, and probably a lot of other names. After all, it is a nice dance and everybody wants to call it their own.

Rakija i cigari [Macedonia]

Rakija i cigari (Rakija and cigarettes) is a modern Macedonian song by composer Chris Bajmakovich, performed by Balkan Cabaret, with lead vocals by Mary Sherhart. It's great for dancing Indijski Cocek.

Ratevka [Macedonia]

Ratevka, a classic folk dance from eastern Macedonia, has been introduced by many teachers.

Raspukala Šar Planina (Lesnoto/Pravoto)[Macedonia]

Thanks to Dennis Boxell for sharing his knowledge.

Raspukala Šar Planina is a modern rendition of an old song from Kavadarci about what happens to three shepherds on the Šar Planina mountain range just NW of Skopje. It has become one of the "classic" tunes for the dance Lesnoto/Pravoto.

The original version was sung by Makedonka Nedeva from Kavadarci in 1936 and published in 1964 in Soborski Narodni Pesni by Vasil Hadjimanov. Somewhat later, the rendition on page one was made by Radio Skopje that made the song popular throughout Macedonia. The original words vary slightly from the modern version. In the original, the mountain "poured or spread out" and "took under" the three shepherds. And instead of a wife, the first shepherd has a lover who mourns until noon. Again, it is the mother who mourns "as long as she lives".

Sadilo Mome [Skopje, Macedonia]

A classic Macedonian dance from the Skopje region.

Sedenka [Macedonia]

Sedenka is a (very advanced) Shope dance from eastern Macedonia.

Sine moj [Macedonia]

Sine moj (My Son/Son of Mine) is a Macedonian song sung by Pepi Baftirovski, who died in 2008 from liver cancer.

Pepi Baftirovski was a native of Lerin (Florina) in the Greek-Macedonian region who later moved to Skopje, Macedonia. He was one of the most beloved singers and interpreters of Macedonian songs. He was famed not only in Macedonia but also in the surrounding countries, such as Serbia, Bulgaria, and wherever Macedonian music is popular.

Strumicka Petorka [Macedonia]

Strumicka Petorka is a dance in the Macedonian style arranged by Bora Gajicki and inspired by a recording of the same name composed by Nikola Stefanov released on a Zagreb-based Jugoton LP. The piece is named either after the eastern Macedonian town of Strumica or the Struma River, which winds through Pirin and eastern Vardar Macedonia.

Bora Gajicki's own Borino Orchestra recorded a cover of the Aleksandric recording, and it is one of these two recordings that are best known to international folk dancers and enthusiasts of Balkan music.

The music and dance are sometimes mistakenly classified as "Serbian" because the first widely available commercial recording happened to be by Dragan Aleksandric's orchestra, with Vilko Sedlar as the clarinetist, on an LP titled "Narodna Kola" (folk circle dances). Likewise, the cover of this piece and the arrangement of the dance were by a Serbian dancer Bora Gajicki. Nonetheless, the music was composed by a Macedonian, and the dance movements and styling is typically Macedonian.

Many if not most recordings of folk music in the Yugoslavia before its break-up were released either on the Zagreb, Croatia-based Jugoton or the Belgrade, Serbia-based RTB (Radio Television Belgrade). However, their place of production did not mean that all such music were either Croatian or Serbian. Pece Atanasovski, the best known Macedonian gajda (bagpipe) player released his recordings on both Jugoton and RTB, but his music (and dancing) is distinctly Macedonian and typical of his home village of Dolneni near Prilep Macedonia.

Many thanks to John Kuo for the background information about this music.

Teshko Oro [Macedonia]

Also spelled Tesko, the teshkoto is the ultimate male dance and probably with the most historical significance. It was the signature dance of the Tanec ensemble and wowed audiences all over the USA when first performed in the 1950s. To my knowledge, it has never been danced by women. Some versions take up to 10 minutes. When it starts out, it is extremely slow and requires a lot of control.

Tik [Pontian Greek, Greek Macedonia]

Tik ("upright") is the most common Pontian dance, found all over Pontos. Tik can be danced to different rhythms of music. This non-traditional version is in 5/8 rhythm. When danced to fast music, the dance is called Tik Tromachtou (Jumping Tik).

Tresenica [South Macedonia]

Tresenica is a "shaking" dance from the rural Mariovo region in southern Macedonia.

Triti Pati [Trakia, Bulgaria, Greece]

Triti Pati is a dance from the Trakia region in Bulgaria. Like many other Trakian dances, it's also danced in the Thracian region of Greece. It translates into "three times".

Usti Usti Baba [Rom, Macedonia]

Usti Usti Baba is a Rom wedding song from the southern region of Macedonia. It's about a young bride who tries to awaken her father on the morning of her wedding day.

"Get up, get up father, the in-laws are at the door to collect our little girl!" And someone calls: "Open the gates! Let in the wedding guests! Adorn the bride! And give the groom something to drink!"

This version of Usti Usti Baba is sung by Slavica Pavlovic & Jovanka Ivanovskaa. The music is great for Cocek.

Vrni Se Vrni [Macedonia]

Vrni Se Vrni is a love song from Macedonia. The dance is one of Atanas Kolarovski's early dances.

Zensko [Macedonia]

Zensko Za Raka is a women's dance from Macedonia. Ljupco Manevski uses this same music for Navestinsko Za Raka; the dance is very similar.