

Scandinavian Dancers of Vancouver

Les Lanciers

Brief historical points of interest:

"Contradances", originally 4 couple squares, were first danced in France in the early 1800's, where they were very popular; the French "contradance" became the English "country dance" the name of which has nothing to do with dances done "in the country", as quadrilles were originally made as entertainments for the court and were done by special performance companies. People thought they looked like fun to do, and wanted to learn some for social dances, so many were made, often with 5 or 6 different parts, all over Europe.

Music for these quadrilles was often especially composed (with classical composers hiding behind pseudonyms so as to not sully their pure reputations), but many quadrilles were also done to medleys of tunes popular at the time, which could be from folksongs or popular operas. The current Danish version of Lanciers includes opera music by composers from Italy, Germany, England, and Poland and an old English folk tune.

"The Lancers Quadrille" was first danced in Ireland at a big ball in 1817, and of all the old European quadrilles, has stood the test of time best. (The name "lancers" refers to military men carrying long sidearm swords.) The quadrille has been done with anywhere from 2 to 16 couples, and has even been performed on horseback. There has always been a dispute between supporters of Hart (a Welsh dance master), and supporters of Duval (an Irish dance master) about who "invented" the dance originally. Both their versions use the same music and were written down about the same time, but the patterns are a little different. The Danish version is closest to Hart's version, but it would appear that each new dance master that described the dance throughout Europe added his own variations and special touches so one cannot really ever say that there is a "right" way to do this dance. After it's initial popularity, the dance fairly quickly faded out, but then came back with a vengeance around 1850, after travels to America and Paris. It was performed for Napoleon in 1856, and became all the rage all over Europe; versions of it are found in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Germany, Holland and the British Isles. The Danish version was first described in a letter in 1860, and only Denmark has an unbroken tradition of dancing it socially since that time. Today, Lanciers is still danced in Denmark in folk dance groups of course, but also in high schools, in dance schools and evening classes, in the military colleges, at the court and also at private events. Just recently, at a big public "Viennese Ball" in Copenhagen all 1400 people attending danced the Lanciers in its entirety no less than three times during the evening! The use of the 8 bar introduction is peculiarly Danish, and has resulted in little "extra" figures tacked on in some of the parts to use up extra music that results as the introductions become incorporated into the music and are played again later during the dance.

An interesting aside: in the display case in the ballroom at Craigdarroch Castle in Victoria, old dance cards from the late nineteenth century show The Lancers was often danced.

Position and Pattern:

All five figures start with the couple with their backs to the music (or otherwise designated as "couple 1") doing the pattern, then progresses to the opposite couple, then to the couple on the right of couple 1 and finally to the couple on the left of couple 1. In order for more people to be dancing at once, it is now common for some figures to be done by 2 couples at a time. Each part of the dance begins with 8 bars of intro music, during which we acknowledge our partners informally.

Steps: All steps start with the right foot for men and women, unless otherwise designated:

1. Chassé and two walks (1C2W): starting on your right foot, do one two-step and then walk 2 steps; an informal "nod" bow is usually done on the last walking step.

2: Three chassés and two walks (3C2W): is commonly used as a traveling step: starting right, do three two-steps and walk two with the "nod" on the last walk.

3: Balancé: with weight first on the OUTSIDE foot (i.e. the one away from your partner), step onto the inside foot, bring the other foot over, taking weight briefly onto it, and then step on the first foot (i.e. inside foot) again with full weight, for a total of three steps; the pattern is then repeated with the opposite feet: step, cross, step on first foot; step, cross, step on other feet.

Bows: Nodding bows on the last walking step are done to your opposite and to your partner at every opportunity, but there is also a more formal LONG BOW (LB) done often throughout the dance on four counts: step onto your LEFT foot, bring the right foot in to close and take weight on it as well; then bow (men) or curtsy (women) and rise: Left, Right, Down, Up (LRDU); occasionally the bow is also done on the reverse feet: RLDU .

TUR 1: La Dorset

A: Couple 1 (C1) and C2 move towards each other and nod (1C2W)

C1 and C2 return backing (1C2W)

C1 and C2 go into the centre again and turn clockwise (CW) once, holding right hands at shoulder level (R in R) with 3C2W, ending at home

B: Couple 1 (C1) and C2 cross the set, with C2 opening, or arching, and C1 passing through with 2C; the men then turn the ladies with a courtesy turn with 1C2W

This repeats to return home, but with C1 opening and allowing C2 to pass through.

C: Everyone does a long bow (LB) to their corner (LRDU), and then a second long bow also to their corner, with reverse feet (RLDU)

With L in L at shoulder height, do one CCW turn with corner, using 3C2W, to return home.

The dance repeats with couples 3 and 4, then couples 1 and 2 again, and finally couples 3 and 4 again.

NB The position with the higher number is the couple that opens or arches first on part B (position 2 and 4)

TUR 2: La Victoria

A: C1 and C2 go into the centre, hand in hand, and nod to opposite with 1C2W

Return backing up with 1C2W

M1 and M2 stay in place and using the joined hands bring their ladies to stand in front of them, facing out of the circle, with, ending in a bow

B: Staying facing each other, M1 and L1 and M2 and L2 cross to other side of each other with 1C2W to the RIGHT, and with a short nod on the last walking step, facing a little towards each other on the ends.

Repeat with the opposite footwork, 1 C2W to the left.

With R in R with partner, do one CW turn with 3C2W, ending beside each person's CORNER to form two facing rows.

C: Holding hands within the lines, the lines go forward with 1C2W and return backing with 1C2W

Everyone finds his or her own partner and with a two hand hold returns home turning CW with 3C2W

The dance repeats with couples 3 and 4, then 1 and 2, then 3 and 4.

TUR 3: Les Moulinets

A: L2 goes to centre with 1C2W

M1 goes to join her with 1C2W

They do a long bow to each other (LRDU)

Stepping out on their RIGHT and collecting left, they do a long bow to their own, ending up in the square at home (RLDU), while the other 2 couples also do the LRDU

B: All 4 ladies form a thumb wrap RH star and do 2C to their opposite

Opposite does a courtesy turn with 2C

Star reforms and continues home with 2C

Partner turns with 2C

Dance repeats with L1 starting, then L4, then L3 (one way to remember whose turn it is, is to think of it as the lady opposite man 1, then the lady opposite man 2, then the lady opposite man 3, then the lady opposite man 4)

TUR 4: Les Visites

A: C1 goes to couple on their right with 1C2W, and both couples do a long bow (LRDU). C1 continues to their opposite couple, 1C2W, and both couples do a long bow here also (LRDU)

B: Facing couples do crossovers, ladies in front and to the left, gents to the right, with 1C2W; do 2 balancés to end ; repeat to return on opposite feet and do 2 balancés here also. All this is done without changing the direction you are facing.

C: C1 and C2 (leading and opposite couples) do a R and L through with a courtesy turn to change places with 3C2W, and the same to return home. (Don't rush this: use 2C to cross and 1 C2W to turn)

The dance repeats with couple 2 leading, then 3, then 4

TUR 5: Les Lanciers

A: Everyone faces their corner and starting L in L and with LEFT feet, chain 4 in a zigzag way with 4C; this moves QUICKLY! When you meet your partner on the opposite side, take R in R and turn a half turn to face the other way with 4W; here you have lots of time; do a long bow to your partner (LRDU), and quickly turn to face corner again.

Continue chain to return home, and repeat the 4W to get by partner to be at home, and do long bow (LRDU) to partner

B: There will then be three long chords during which, in succession and very smartly:

1. Leading couple turns as a couple to face out of square
2. Couple closest to man falls in behind
3. Couple closest to lady falls in behind
4. Remaining couple stays exactly where they are

All the ladies are on the RIGHT of the men

C: Lines do crossovers, with lady passing IN FRONT of the man 1 C2W

All do two balancés, starting towards each other

Crossover to return home, and do two balancés, again towards partner to start. (Use logical foot for the direction you are going)

D: M1 and L1 lead each their lines, starting turning to outside, down to the end with 4C, and return up the middle, home again with 4C, ending up in facing lines.

E: Hand in hand with hands at shoulder height, the lines go forward and back with 1C2W there and 1C2W back. With a two-hand hold with your partner, turn CW to go home with 3C2W

F: Immediately, all four men make a thumb wrap LH star, and with their right arms around their ladies' waists, turn the mill one quarter turn with each chassé, to turn the mill TWICE around with 8C.

The dance repeats with couple 2 turning on the first long chord in part B, then couple 3 turns first, and finally couple 4 turns first.

Source: Jørgensen, Claus. *Ska' Vi Danse: Les Lanciers*. Copenhagen : Edition Wilhelm Hansen, 1980.

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