

Slavonsko Kolo

Origin: Croatia

Record: (a) KF-7221, Kad zaigra pusta Slavonia! (LP), has several excellent recordings by Slavonian village groups.

(b) Woodlands W-6805-B, Slavonsko kolo, is a recording of a stage arrangement of the dance choreographed by Zvonimir Ljevakovic and performed by the Joža Vlahović Ensemble (later to become the Croatian State Ensemble) in 1948. It is well known among U.S. and Canadian folk dancers.

Formation: Closed circle of dancers, no partners, in front basket position: join hands with the second person over on either side, R arm over, L arm under. In former times, the men and women danced in separate halves of the circle; nowadays they mix freely.

Source: Dick Crum

Note: The Slavonian kolo is danced in all parts of Slavonia, the rich agricultural plainland of eastern Croatia, Yugoslavia. It is an archaic dance containing elements which many dance scholars believe date back to the pre-Slavic period of Balkan history (vocal accompaniment, alternating singing and dancing, and its almost total dissimilarity from circle dances of other Slavic peoples).

Among the Slavonians themselves the dance is known simply as kolo. The term Slavonsko kolo is generally used outside of Slavonia by folklorists, musicians and choreographers to avoid confusion, since elsewhere in Yugoslavia the word kolo is a generic term for any circle or chain dance. Other Slavonian dances have quite specific names (Kalendara, Mista, Drhtavac, etc.), but when a native asks a musician to play simply kolo for him, the dance described here is the one he wants.

So deeply ingrained is the kolo in the life of the Slavonian villager, that the word itself has taken on a broader, extended meaning: it is used to refer to the whole social event that centers around the dance. When a Slavonian says, "Idem u kolo" ('I'm going to the kolo'), he means that he is going to attend the social gathering in which the kolo plays a central role; singing, drinking and gossiping are other features of the kolo in this sense, and a person might very well "go to the kolo" and not dance at all!

An important feature of the Slavonian kolo is the chanting or singing of improvised verses known as poskoćice. These are usually humorous, and often satirical or sarcastic. Sometimes the poskoćice are directed toward musicians, sweethearts, relatives or other local personages. Often they are biting, but the person at whose expense they are recited must 'grin and bear it'; he or she is powerless in the face of an old tradition according to which no one has right of retaliation for anything stated about him in the kolo (unless in the form of a retort in poskoćica verse!). Sometimes the young men or musicians improvise off-color poskoćice, and the women pretend they don't hear them. In a sense, the kolo becomes a sort of town meeting where the social life of the whole village is reflected in verse.

Usually the kolo is danced on a grassy area, a road or in front of someone's house. At carnival time young people go from house to house and dance a little in front of each. At harvest time and at weddings it is danced in people's homes or courtyards.

Style:

Meter: 2/4

No introduction

THE DANCE

The Slavonian kolo has three "figures":

DRMEŠ: Moving gradually L (CW around) ŠETNJA (SHET-nyah, 'strolling'): Slow walking. steps L (CW around) ŠARANJE (SHAH-rahn-yeh, 'fancy steps'): Moving toward the center and back out again

Though the figures are usually done in the above order, the exact duration of each figure is nonfixed; the point of transition from one figure to the next is determined by the lead singer and the length of the songs and poskočice that accompany the figures.

DRMEŠ :

This is the "basic" movement of the dance; it is done to instrumental accompaniment. In some villages poskočice may be chanted along with the instrumental music during this figure.

Meas. Ct.

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|---|---|--|
| 1 | 1 | Side step with L ft to L, flexing knee slightly |
| | & | Rise onto ball of L ft, closing R ft beside L ft; |
| | 2 | Come down sharply on both heels together, knees stiff; |
| | & | Come down again on both heels together, knees stiff. |
| 2 | 1 | Come down again on both heels together, flexing knees slightly; |
| | & | Rise onto ball of R ft as L ft moves slightly to L not far off the ground; |
| | 2 | With feet now apart, come down on both heels sharply, knees stiff; |
| | & | Come down again on both heels apart, knees stiff. |

(Meas 3) (Same as Meas 1, except that L ft is already out to L, so ct. 1 actually becomes: Feet still apart, come down on both heels with emphasis, flexing knees slightly; then continue as in Meas 1, etc.)

Styling during the Drmeš figure varies from village to village and from individual dancer to individual dancer. Sometimes the dancers seem to dance "inside their shoes", covering very little ground in their leftward movement (almost in place), and weight shifts are hardly perceptible except for the subtle rhythmic bobbing of the body. In other cases style is more lively -- the lowering of the heels is practically audible and the dancers rise high onto their toes. The latter style is especially common in stage arrangements of the dance.

Dancers continue the Drmeš movements moving gradually L until a lead singer breaks into the melody and begins to sing a verse, thus initiating the Šetnja figure. The soloist may interrupt the music at absolutely any point he/she wishes, though in most cases this occurs after the end of a musical phrase.

ŠETNJA:

As the lead singer (usually a woman) begins the verse of her song, the instrumental accompaniment stops abruptly. Dancers also pause, then join in singing with the lead singer on the second or third bar of her song. As they begin singing, they also begin the following walking movements:

Meas. Ct.

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|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | Side step with L ft to L (very slightly diag bkwd/L); |
| | 2 | Step R ft across in front of L ft (2). |

A variation of this is a grapevine, the R ft alternating front and back during the crossing movements:

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|---|---|------------------------------------|
| 1 | 1 | Side step with L ft to L; |
| | 2 | Step R ft across in front of L ft. |
| 2 | 1 | Side step with L ft to L; |
| | 2 | Step R ft across in back of L ft. |

Movement to the L during the Šetnja figure is more pronounced than in the Drmeš, and there is a gentle swaying effect as the weight is shifted from one foot to the other. There is no vertical movement of the body. (In stage adaptations of this dance, the Šetnja figure is often highly stylized into broad, rapidly moving "buzz" steps.)

As soon as the song ends, the musicians resume playing and the dancers proceed to the Šaranje figure.

ŠARANJE

These 'fancy steps' have a number of variations:

Variation A

Meas Ct.

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|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | 'Fall' onto L ft with accent, L knee slightly flexed; |
| | & | Immediately spring off ground; |
| | 2 | Land on R ft beside L ft, R knee stiff; |
| | & | Land on L ft beside R ft, L knee stiff; |
| 2 | | Same pattern as in Meas 1 but with reverse footwork. |

The above movements are done on the whole foot, stressing heels. The upper body is bent slightly forward. The movements may be done moving forward toward the center, or in place (see below).

Variation B

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|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | Step onto L ft, flexing L knee slightly; |
| | 2 | Hop or simply lift on L ft, bringing R ft fwd in air either straight fwd or across in front of L leg (R knee is almost straight, but relaxed in a natural, slight curve). |
| 2 | | Same pattern as in Meas 1 but with reverse footwork. |

It is during the Šaranje figure that the poskočice are usually chanted, either scanned a fifth above the tonic of the particular key the music is being played in or shouted in a very high, nonspecific tone. Typically, dancers move toward the center with Variation A, as the poskočica is sung or chanted; then, the poskočica finished, they move backward with Variation B, widening the circle out to its original circumference. When they arrive at their original places, they proceed immediately into the Drmeš figure. Sometimes only one segment of the circle (usually led by the lead -singer) moves toward the center, while the rest of the dancers do Variation A in place. If the poskočica is extra long, the dancers may move into the center as far as is comfortable and then, if necessary, continue doing Variation A in place until the poskočica is finished. Occasionally dancers do step-hops (Variation B) as they move forward, instead of Variation A.

The men sometimes do further fancy variations during this figure; for example:

Variation C (Men only)

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|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | Leap onto L ft fwd, flinging R ft out to side, R knee bent; |
| | 2 | Step onto R ft in front of L ft; |
| | & | Step L ft in its place. |
| 2 | | Same pattern as in Meas 1 but with reverse footwork. |

Variation D (Men only)

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|---|---|---|
| 1 | | Same as Meas 1 of Variation C. |
| 2 | 1 | Leap onto R ft slightly R, flinging L ft out to side low; |
| | 2 | Hop R ft in place, simultaneously clicking L heel against R heel. |