

Kokonješte

By Dennis Boxell

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 Roumanian 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 Kokonješte (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 "Thee 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 Kokonjeste to U Šest.

Dance notes

Dance notes archive Kokonjeste Ripna Maca Uzicka Carlama Vranjanka

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