

Gankino, Kopanitsa & more in 11/16

By Richard Unciano

The Gankino (pronounced gahn-kee-noh), Kopanitsa (pronounced koh-pah-nee-tsah), and other dances in 11/16 meter range from the very basic to the foot-tangling complex and from slow to "warp speed." The family of Bulgarian dances in 11/16 meter appears to have the largest variety of steps, figures, tempos, rhythms, etc. of all the dances in uneven or odd meters. Much can be done when there are eleven sixteenth notes per measure of music.

So, what does it sound like? Where is the beat? In Gankino or Kopanitsa, the heavy beat or stress is put in the middle, somewhat like a kind of syncopation, as that is where the "extra" or "odd" note is grouped. The best way to describe the "feel" of the Gankino/ Kopanitsa rhythm within the 11/16 meter is to count from 1 to 5 with a quick hiccup on number 3. Timing- or rhythm-wise, it would be quick-quick-slow-quick-quick (with two sixteenth-note beats per quick and three per slow or 2-2-3-2-2 = 11).

Generally, Bulgarians divide dances in 11-16 into three groups or types: Gankinatas, Kopanitsas, and Krivatas. There are also numerous dances in 11/16 that are unique unto themselves, often totally dissimilar and unrelated. The most widespread group is Gankinata, literally, "the Gankino," from the girl's name "Ganka." Originally from northern Bulgaria, it is now often danced in the western or Shope region and occasionally in the central region of Thrace. The speed or tempo of a Gankino horo may range from slow to moderately fast, and does not change (stays steady). While there are several similar basic step patterns or figures, the most common by far is the three-measure one where two measures are danced to the right and the third to the left. This also is the pattern familiar to folk dancers in the United States.

As in many other Bulgarian dances, each individual dancer in the line freely and spontaneously improvises on the basic pattern. For instance, instead of a step and together at the end of the second measure (and/or the third), a dancer might do a step and then a foot slap (plesni) or a jump apart and then jump together (hlopchi). Versions with "called" variations and/or variations that differ markedly in step, direction, and/or number of measures are infrequent, but one example is Sukovitata from Vratsa county. Gankino horo is almost always mixed (male and female) and may

use either a regular hand-hold (hands joined and held low in a "V" position) or a belt-hold (grasping neighbors' belts with right arm under neighbor's left). Interestingly, another dance family, usually identified or designated as Samokovsko horo, has exactly the same step sequence, but is in 9/8 meter.

Kopanitsas are danced done mainly in western Bulgaria, or the Shope-Graov ethnographic region, and vary in speed from moderate to "hang-onto-your-hat" fast. They also are found with less frequency in Thrace, but rarely at the super-fast tempos. Also, the speed can change several times from moderate to fast and back to moderate, either gradually or suddenly, especially in western Bulgaria. There is no one specific Kopanitsa pattern or figure, but a multitude, with the majority having a large number of variations and a lot of those being fairly intricate. Not surprisingly, most kopanitsas are caled, that is, the steps or step sequences are changed only by command, and all use a belt-hold. While the majority are done only by men, there are many for women only; only a few are danced in mixed lines. The title translates as "little digging (dance)," which refers to spading, hoeing, and scooping kinds of movements.

The dances in the third major 11/16 dance group, Krivatas, are done only in Thrace or central Bulgaria. All are danced at a moderate tempo. There are numerous basic Krivo horo patterns, almost all short and simple. Step improvisation or variation is minimal. Krivos may be mixed, for men only, for women only, or mixed in the middle but segregated at both ends, and use either a regular hand-hold or a belt-hold. They are led, snaked, and zigzagged about, hence then name "the crooked."

Then there are the unique, individual 11/16 meter dances. The Shope Lampa Lampa has the longest patern: 12 measures. The Thracian Pletenitsata and Zimno horo also are long, each with 8-measure patterns. Two others, Glavanishko horo and Na Povrushtanki, are notable for unusual, almost awkward, movement combinations. The northern Krepkata and Treperenka both have many direction changes and different kinds of leg movements. For a Dobrudzhan dance (Dobrudzha is in Bulgaria's northeast), Drankalivata is uncharacteristically "light" with several hops in the pattern. It's enough to boggle the mind and fire up the feet!

Music Definitions

Meter: The grouping in which a succession of rhythmic pulses or beats is organized into regular patterns in time, notated as measures, and indicated by a meter signature at the beginning of a work. For example, 11/16.

Rhythm: The controlled movement of sounds and silences across time; the temporal quality of sound. For example, quick-quick-slow-quick-quick (QSQSQ or 2-2-3-2-2 = 11).