

# THE DRUM AND THE DANCE

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Thoinot Arbeau, Canon of Langres, was sixty-nine years old when he wrote his *Orchésographie*, published in 1589. It is not clear why he undertook such a work at this age, although speculation ties it to the reintroduction of religious dances by the Church of France at around the same time. The *Orchésographie* is cohesive and achieves its purpose of detailing Renaissance dances, but Arbeau apparently did not consider that it would ever be published, as it was found “among a batch of old papers destined for the dust heap.”<sup>1</sup> He considered a work on astronomy to be his important contribution to learning while he thought of *Orchésographie* as “scribblings to kill time.”<sup>2</sup>



Fig. 1. Anonymous woodcut,  
*Nine daies wonder*.

These “scribblings to kill time” are the most important surviving treatise that details the connection between the drum and the dance. The drum—in the form of the side drum and then the tabor—is actually discussed before any dances, further highlighting their importance. There follows a detailed record of the ballroom dances from that period, knowledge of which was considered an important part of the education of any young man.<sup>3</sup> It is written, as many treatises at the time were, as a conversation between the teacher and a pupil, with the pupil asking questions and the teacher responding. After answering a few questions about the side drum, Arbeau discusses the tabor, a vital instrument in the dance.

The tabor was the most common form of drum in Renaissance Europe. There was no standard dimension for this instrument; the diameter was sometimes greater than the depth and sometimes less. Typically, it had a head on the top and bottom, with one snare strung across the top head. Arbeau remark that “twisted threads are placed on the skin extremities” suggests that in France the tabor may have had snares across both heads.<sup>4</sup> In France and Spain

today, the tabor has a snare only on the bottom head, with no extant evidence to indicate at what time the other snare was eliminated.

Heads were constructed of sheepskin or calfskin and attached in a variety of ways to the drum. In the medieval period the head was attached with a flesh hoop. A flesh hoop was created by laying rope, wire, or any like material around the edge of the head. The drumhead was then stitched over this material and rope was run through the edge of the head around this hoop to create a more firm attachment.<sup>5</sup> This may have been the method used to create the drum depicted in *Nine Daies Wonder*, an anonymous woodcut of Will Kemp, Shakespeare’s clown, dancing a jig from London to Norwich to win a bet, all while accompanied by his taborer, Thomas Slye (see Figure 1). The evidence from this woodcut is inconclusive as to the method used to secure the heads. The best evidence from the period is from more detailed depictions of the side drum, an instrument of larger dimensions than the tabor but similar in many respects. *The Triumph of Maximillian*, a series of famous woodcuts commissioned by Maximilian the Great, Holy Roman Emperor from 1508-1519, shows drums with tension cords passing through the fleshhoop (see Figure 2).



Fig. 2. Albrecht Altdorfer, *Triumph of Maximilian*

A more secure method was developed later in the 1500s through the use of a counterhoop: a hoop, usually made of wood, that was laid over the fleshhoop. Cords were then run through the counterhoop to tension the drum. One of the first clear depictions of the use of counterhoops in conjunction with flesh hoops can be found in the illustration of the Antwerp city drummer, Pierson la Hues, from 1581, in which he plays a side drum (see Figure 3).<sup>6</sup>

When played without the pipe, the tabor was held in one hand and struck with the other. There is little evidence

to suggest it was ever played with two sticks. Usually the drum and pipe were played at the same time, with the drum slung over one shoulder, and later over one arm.<sup>7</sup> The pipe had three holes, one each for the thumb, index, and middle fingers. This gave the player enough notes to play most melodies requiring a diatonic scale. The player could also over-blow to use the register beginning on an octave above the fundamental. Most of the tunes from this period extend no further than a twelfth, well within the range of a pipe. Jeremy Montagu points out that, even though the player performs on both the pipe and tabor, he is called a taborer rather than a piper, a practice that continues today and speaks to the overriding importance of the drum over the pipe in the dance.<sup>8</sup>

This brings us back to the *Orchésographie*. Arbeau states that the tabor is sometimes called a half symphony, with *symphonia* in Greek meaning harmony. He says that it blends with other musical instruments, adding “charm” and serving as a bass.<sup>9</sup> Arbeau is speaking literally here, for with the inclusion of snares, or his previously mentioned “twisted threads,” its pitch is rendered indeterminate, allowing it to blend with any pitch.<sup>10</sup> This is a crucial point, because it allows the drum to function rhythmically as well as harmonically when paired with the pipe.



Fig. 3. Gillis Congnet, *Pierson La Hues*.

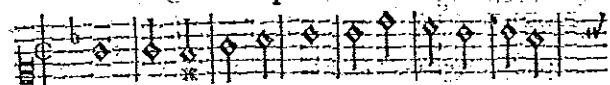
In turning to dances, Arbeau first offers a detailed explanation of the Basse Dance, after which he presents a Pavane, which his student, Capriol, asks that he put down on paper. Arbeau says he will, so that it will be “reinstated, to replace the lascivious, shameless ones introduced in their stead.”<sup>11</sup> Arbeau’s Pavane is in five parts: four vocal parts and one for tabor. Arbeau’s *Orchésographie* includes the first drum parts to be notated, and are exceptional in that regard. The part for this Pavane, and a Basse Dance included later, are unique in that they are representative of what must literally be hundreds of parts from the period, many of which were never written down, but passed on from player to player by rote. This simple percussion part is seen in Example 1; it is the one constant part that holds together the entire musical fabric. This underscores what are perhaps Arbeau’s most important points; the drum is the foundation of the dance, and it needs to provide simple patterns so the dancers are able to follow.<sup>12</sup>

DE THOINOT ARBEAV. 30  
poutueu que sçachiez par cœur ce que ie vous en ay donné par  
escriit cy dessus:

Pauane à quatre parties: avec les mesures  
& battemens du tambour,

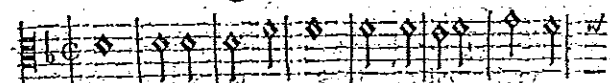


Superius



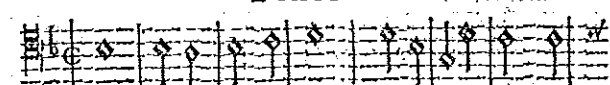
bel le qui tiens ma vi e cap tiue dans tes

Contra tenor.



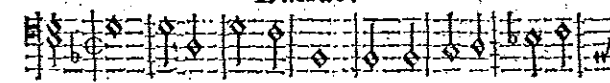
bel le qui tiens ma vi e cap tiue dans tes

Tenor



bel le qui tiens ma vi e cap tiue dans tes

Bassus.



bel le qui tiens ma vi e cap tiue dans tes

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Example 1. Arbeaus’ *Orchésographie*, p. 60-64.

Arbeau describes the pavane as an Italian dance from the sixteenth century, processional in nature and typically used in masquerades and as a prelude to balls. It is danced before the basse dance and is—at least in Arbeau’s eyes—easy, requiring only two *simples* [single steps] and a *double* [a pair of steps] forward, then two *simples* and a *double* backward.<sup>13</sup> Early examples of the pavane are found in Joan Ambrosio Dalza’s *Intabulatura de lauto libro quarto* of 1508. Arbeau wishes people to be familiar with this dance, as it was popular during his lifetime, rising quickly to become a favorite across Europe; its popularity fell just as quickly, its low point coming near the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>14</sup>

The rise and subsequent development of drums in the Renaissance is due to their importance in music making, particularly in many types of dances. Their involvement would have been crucial to keeping the dancers in step, as well as providing a steady beat for the other instruments. It is ironic that, in light of this importance, there are so few notated examples of what was played. But this is also symptomatic of the rote style in which drums rhythms of the time were passed on, one that is still used today. The tabor, primarily because of its size, was still in use throughout the Baroque as a folk instrument, especially in France, where in Provence it is still in use today.<sup>15</sup>

## Kihle: *The Drum and the Dance*--

### --NOTES--

<sup>1</sup> Thoinot Arbeau, *Orchésographie* [1589] trans. Mary Stewart Evans (New York: Kamin Dance Publishers, 1948), 6.

<sup>2</sup> Arbeau, 7.

<sup>3</sup> Arbeau, 5.

<sup>4</sup> James Blades, *Percussion Instruments and Their History* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1970), 208.

<sup>5</sup> Blades, 207.

<sup>6</sup> Jeremy Montagu, *Timpani and Percussion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 37.

<sup>7</sup> Jeremy Montagu, *Timpani and Percussion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 23.

<sup>8</sup> Montagu, 23-24.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>10</sup> Blades, 209.

<sup>11</sup> Arbeau, 59.

<sup>12</sup> Arbeau, *Orchésographie*, 67.

<sup>13</sup> Arbeau, *Orchésographie*, 57.

<sup>14</sup> Lawrence H. Moe, "Pavana," *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 639.

<sup>15</sup> Montagu, 91.

### MESSIAH--

from that number, accompanied by about the same number of instruments; this could be considered a large group of performers at that time. The huge performing forces so familiar today were ushered in by the work's performance in the Handel Commemoration of 1784, marking the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the composer's death.

Finally, there is that old tradition of standing during the Hallelujah chorus; one can still encounter this in places and times very distant from the England during Handel's life. It is thought that the tradition began at the London premiere, when King George II stood at the beginning of the movement; protocol required that when the king stood, everyone present must stand. People have long speculated on why the king may have stood for the Hallelujah chorus. The explanation favored by choral conductors and worshipful audiences is that the king was so moved by the music that he felt compelled to stand. Others have suggested that the king arrived so late to the performance that he entered at the beginning of this movement, causing everyone to stand at his entrance. Some have speculated that the king was overcome with a sudden attack of the gout and had to stand, or that he simply needed to stretch his legs—which is not out of the question, since the movement comes well after an hour of music. Whatever the reason, there is something marvelous about an unwritten tradition that has been passed down over the centuries; so, don't forget to stand!

I wish you the joys of the Handel season, whether you experience it as a participant or an audience member!

### VENUE PROJECT--

schools, retirement communities, and such. In Colorado, outreach includes a geographical component as well. One story that illustrates this point is actually set in Cheyenne, WY, but serves to show the value of reaching out.

Rose Marie Terada scheduled the Colorado Recorder Orchestra to perform in Cheyenne last spring on the King of Glory Lutheran Church's Concert Series that music minister Stephen Hoffman plans each year. The distance seemed great for some orchestra members in the Denver-Boulder metro area, and the audience seemed small by Front Range standards, but the "payoff" came when Rosi received an invitation for the next season. Dr. Hoffman explained that, as a result of the concert last spring, he'd been approached by community members about starting a recorder ensemble so that they could also take part in music making. He gladly obliged.

One obstacle to outreach in different parts of the state is how to locate a performance venue. A corollary is to find a local contact person who would help with booking and promotion. EMC hopes to help in this area.

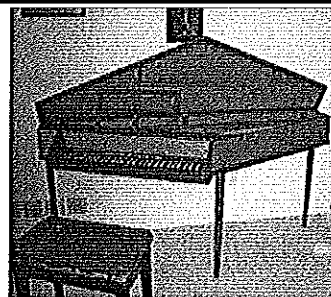
EMC's president, Dan Seger, is undertaking a project to identify venues state-wide that are suitable for early music. The venues may be civic spaces, religious buildings, grange halls, libraries, or any space that would fit a performing ensemble—solo to chamber orchestra. The goal is to post the findings on the EMC website for all to use.

To get started, Dan wants to hear from you. If you know of or have performed in a favorable venue anywhere around the state, please send him an e-mail ([president@earlymusiccolorado.org](mailto:president@earlymusiccolorado.org)) and tell him about it. You may also send USPS to 4669 Gordon Drive, Boulder, CO 80305. Please include a contact person's name and information, if you know it. If you don't know it, give him the name of the venue anyway and he will follow up.

Volunteers to help with follow up are cheerfully encouraged to make themselves known. We hope that this evolving resource becomes a valuable tool in spreading the joys of early music to more people in more places.

### FOR SALE

Large showcase  
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from the legacy of Tom  
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walnut trimmed red alder  
case, keyboard ebony/holly;  
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excellent condition; weighs  
less than 60 lbs. 72.75 x 28 inches; includes bench, carrying case w/ shoulder strap and tool kit. **\$6,350.**



Contact Mark Smith-Poelz: [smithpoelz@msn.com](mailto:smithpoelz@msn.com) or 303-530-5601.