

B3 LESNOTO (Pravoto)  
Macedonia (Yugoslavia)

The sisters Ljubica and Danica Janković, pioneers in the collection of Yugoslav folk dances, were the first to use the Macedonian word *lesnoto* (LESS-noh-toh, "light" or "easy" dance) as a generic term for the vast category of line dances having a pattern of "3 steps right and 1 step left".\* They learned the name, along with several *lesnoto*-type dances, in Belgrade in 1934 from a group of migrant workers (*pečalbari*) belonging to the Mijak tribe of western Macedonia.

The Janković sisters' use of the term was later perpetuated by dance scholars and choreographers during the surge of interest in the folk arts of Yugoslavia in the 1940's and '50's. Today *lesnoto* has become a standard, handy term of reference for this important family of dances.\*\*

Taken in this generic sense, *lesnoto* is the single most widespread dance in Macedonia. At village gatherings, groups of women spontaneously move with 3 walking steps R and 1 L to the accompaniment of their own singing while, some distance away, a line of men performs a tense, higher-energy form of the same pattern to the skirl of the *surla* (a loud double-reed instrument) and the beat of the *tapan* (a rugged goatskin drum). At a disco party in a modern Skopje high-rise apartment, urbanites dance *lesnoto* in tight, mixed lines several times in an evening to a variety of popular recordings.

Dances performed at critical points in rituals such as old-style village weddings are often of the common *lesnoto* pattern, but are rendered "special" by such parameters as a fixed place in the ritual sequence, specific music, special paraphernalia and traditionally prescribed roles for the participants.

*Lesnoto*-type dances are found in different rhythms (S-S, S-Q-Q, S-Q-S, etc.), meters (2/4, 7/8, 8/8, 11/8, etc.) and tempos (slow, fast, accelerating). The NAMA *Lesnoto* Medley is made up of songs in one of the most common patterns: a slow-quick-quick rhythm conventionally notated in 7/8 and played in a slow tempo:

Dancer's beats (counts):	1	2	3
Rhythm:	S	Q	Q
7/8 notation:	♩.	♩	♩

\* *Lesnoto* is thus the Macedonian representative of a widespread family of 3-measure dances found particularly in Europe and the Middle East (French *Branle simple*, Greek fast *Hasápikos*, Syrian-Lebanese *Dabke*, Romanian *Sîrba*, Central European girls' ring dances, the song-dances of the Faeroe Islands in the North Atlantic, etc. Cf. *Hora*, dance A7 in this syllabus).

\*\* Outside of professional dance circles, *lesnoto* is not the only (nor even the most common) name for this dance type. Macedonians usually call it *pravoto* or *ramnoto* (both meaning "direct" or "straight"), *za ramo* ("by the shoulders"), or even *teško* ("heavy", the antonym of *lesno*, applied to a slow, deliberate style). Often the dance is referred to by the name of a popular song to which it is done. In Bulgaria the 7/8 or 8/8 slow *lesno* is sometimes called simply *Makedonsko horo*.

## LESNOTO (Continued)

This rhythm is called the "Macedonian seven" (*makedonska sedmorka*), the pattern most North American folk dancers associate with the name *Lesnoto*. In modern Macedonia, new songs are composed in this rhythm almost daily, broadcast over radio and TV, and played and danced repeatedly at coffee houses. They become "hits" in much the same way country & western songs do in the U.S. The songs in the NAMA *Lesnoto* Medley are selected from "Macedonia's greatest hits", spanning two decades and including *Bitola*, which, at this writing, has been near the top of the listings for almost 15 years.

**Formation:** Open circle or line; in former times M and W danced in separate lines or in a single line with M together at the R end and W together at the L end. W joined hands at shoulder height ("W" position) while M placed arms on or around shoulders, or grasped armholes of neighbors' vests, etc. Nowadays, especially in towns and among the younger generation, the sexes mix freely in the line and the "W" and shoulder positions are used indiscriminately. The leader usually flourishes a handkerchief or (in villages) an ornamental cord which he uses to signal special figures (see Variations 4 and 5 below).

MEAS	PATTERN
	Dance may begin with any measure of music.
	<u>Variation 1 - Basic style</u>
1	Facing diag R of ctr and moving in LOD: step Rft fwd (1); step Lft fwd (2); hold (3). (A common alternative pattern for this meas is: facing ctr, step Rft sdwd R [1]; step Lft behind Rft [2]; hold [3].)
2	Facing ctr, step Rft sdwd R (1); touch Lft beside or fwd of Rft or raise Lft low off floor (W's style); raise L leg fwd with L knee bent as much or as little as dancer wishes (M's style) (2); hold (3).
3	Facing ctr, very short step with Lft sdwd L (natives sometimes do this step in other directions: in place beside Rft, or fwd twd ctr, or bkwd away from ctr, or even facing diag R of ctr moving in LOD) (1); touch Rft beside or fwd of Lft or raise Rft low off floor (W's style); raise R leg fwd with R knee bent as much as dancer wishes (M's style) (2); hold (3).
	<u>Variation 2 - Basic style with delayed weight shifts</u>
1	Facing diag R of ctr and moving in LOD: step Rft fwd (1); place Lft flat on floor fwd beyond Rft, pressing firmly as if stepping but actually only sharing wt momentarily with Rft (2); without moving Lft from this position, shift full wt onto Lft (3). (A common alternative pattern for this meas is: facing ctr, step Rft sdwd R [1]; place ball of Lft on floor behind Rft, pressing firmly as if stepping but actually only sharing wt momentarily with Rft [2]; without moving Lft from this position, shift wt onto Lft [3].)
2-3	Same as meas 2-3 of Variation 1.

(Continued)

## LESNOTO (Continued)

### Variation 3 - Bouncing style with high knee (M only)

- 1 Facing diag R of ctr and moving in LOD: step Rft fwd with slight flex of R knee (1); *žukče* on Rft, bringing Lft fwd with knee bent as much as 90° (2); step Lft fwd (3).
- 2 Face ctr, step Rft sdwd R with slight flex of R knee (1); bounce on Rft (either flat-footed with flex of R knee or by means of a *žukče* on ball of Rft), raising bent (90°) L leg fwd into the following position: L thigh horizontal (parallel to floor), L lower leg angled to R (across in front of R leg), L ankle relaxed (no effort to point L toe in a particular direction) (2); again bounce on Rft, keeping L leg in the position just described (3).
- 3 Reverse the mov'ts of meas 2 of this variation.

Note: Variation 3 has become standardized among Macedonian stage-performance groups as the basic men's step for *Lesnoto*. Most non-professional dancers would not care to sustain this style to the exclusion of other more spontaneous forms.

### Variation 4 - Turn (M only; see LEADER'S FIGURES below)

- 1 Using ftwk of meas 1 of Variation 1, 2 or 3, leader releases hold of neighbor and makes a single CW turn moving in LOD. Hand positions during this turn vary, but a typical position is: L arm bent up in back (not necessarily touching body), R arm bent up in front, with R hand at about the level of L shldr.
- 2-3 Having finished the turn, leader rejoins with neighbor and proceeds to dance meas 2-3 of Variation 1, 2 or 3.

### Variation 5 - Knee-bends (M only; see LEADER'S FIGURES below)

- 1 Mov'ts of meas 1 of Variation 1, 2, 3 or 4.
- 2 Without a preliminary jump, go into a smooth, deep knee-bend (squat) facing ctr, wt on both ft, knees either together or apart (1); rise halfway, with wt on Rft, extending Lft a bit fwd (2); hold (3).
- 3 Same as meas 2 of this variation, but rising on Lft on ct 2, with Rft extended.

LEADER'S FIGURES: In a natural, non-staged context, the leader is usually the only person who performs turns, knee-bends, kneeling figures, etc., although it is not rare for the dancer next to him and even the next two or three down the line to participate in such figures along with him. In some cases (a short line, for example) all the dancers might do knee-bends together, sometimes disregarding the 3-measure pattern and doing many knee-bends in a row.

SEQUENCE: The above five variations are examples of the many ways of dancing a slow *Lesno*, and are not intended as a "sequence". Individual Macedonians mix and interchange elements from any of the above movements and add others of their own, depending on local style traditions, age, sex and momentary mood.