

then release hands and join hands with the new girl in front.

5-8 Repeat meas 1-4 with new girl.

1-8 (rptd) Repeat meas 1-4 with each of the two remaining girls, finishing with own partner in original position.

*Figure IX: The Knot*

All join hands and circle to R for eight steps. Then, only boy No. 1 and girl No. 4 release hands, all others keep hands joined. Boy No. 1 stands still. Girl No. 4 leads the line around the boy until all are wound around him. Then boy No. 1 leads line out underneath the joined hands of the dancers around him toward and under the arch formed by the joined hands of couple No. 4. He may lead back into a circle and finish with a bow or lead the dancers off the stage.

## TARANTELLA

The tarantella (Tah-rahn-tel'la) comes from southern Italy. Anyone who has ever heard anything of Italian dances has heard of the tarantella. The name is known because of many descriptions which have appeared in books, and because its music has been used by so many composers. Still, our information on how to dance the tarantella is very limited, particularly since it does not have a set pattern, but is composed of a number of figures in any order dictated by the mood of the dancers. Many people have stylized tarantellas, putting several of the basic steps together; all are created dances and not traditional. One can see the real tarantella in this country only if a group of old Italian people get together and dance it. They will take little steps, clap, turn, and become quite exhilarated by the gay and fast music; it is simple but real and one gets the feeling of wanting to join them.

In pursuing the study of the tarantella, one is discouraged at the lack of information on the actual steps of the dance, but one is fascinated by its long history. Movements of the tarantella are depicted on old Greek vases, drawings of the dance are on the walls of the ruins of Pompeii, and reference to it was made by dance masters of many different periods in history.

A popular legend has it that the tarantella comes from the jumping that doctors once ordered for those bitten by the tarantula spider. There was considerable discussion on this topic at the Venice Congress and Folk Festival in September 1949, but the consensus of opinion seemed to be that the dance had no relation to the bite of the spider and that the confusion might have come from the similarity of names.

There is another charming legend regarding the tar-

antella of Sorrento—the Sorrentina. It tells that the mermaids, half women and half fish, were humiliated and piqued because the famous Ulysses did not respond to their songs [having lashed himself to the mast of his ship and put wax in the ears of his sailors to remove temptation]. They asked the Graces to teach them something very effective that could help them conquer the King of Ithaca through his eyesight. The Graces, it is said, perhaps for the fun of it, created the Sorrentina, which of course the mermaids could not dance, not having legs. It was thus that the girls of Sorrento and Capri learned the gay and graceful dance.

It is not really known where the name tarantella came from, except that it might be from Taranto, a city in Le Puglie where dancing was always a favorite pastime even at the time the ancient Greeks settled there. The tarantella appears with its present name only in the last four or five centuries; earlier it was referred to as Lucia, Sfessania, Villanella, and by other names.

It seems that the tarantella underwent some changes and acquired the use of castanets when it was fused with the fandango, which appeared in Italy with the domination of southern Italy by the Spaniards in the fifteenth century.

There is an interesting reference to the tarantella in an almanac of the year 1891, which is reported by Anton Giulio Bragaglia in his article in the December 1949 issue of *Ricreazione*. It says: "Let us take ourselves to Italy, to this cradle of choreography and of all the arts. To the sound of castanets and of tambourines and to the music of mandolins the vivacious tarantella jumps and designs voluptuous movements in Taranto and in Calabria, and also in Le Puglie and in Naples. Its steps and its evolutions, the pauses of the two dancers dramatize flirtation, jealousy, disdain, pleasure, regret, all the expressions of that great poem of the heart which is called love!"

Although its origin is lost in the past and clothed in legend, the tarantella became a favorite pastime in every part of southern Italy, acquiring through the centuries special characteristics in different regions. Following are some of the differences as pointed out in several publications on [the] folk arts of Italy by the Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro of Rome.

### *The Tarantella in Puglia*

The distinguishing characteristic in Puglia is the shyness of the woman, who dances mostly with her head bent and eyes to the ground; and even in the liveliest part of the dance she is always dignified and reserved. The instruments used are the accordion, castanets, and tambourine.



*Ballet Basques de Biarritz, Oldara*

The man invites the girl to dance by dancing around her while playing his castanets and singing to her. She is slow to accept but finally starts by keeping time with the music. She holds her hands on her hips or holds the ends of her apron; then she starts dancing, moving around very little and carefully avoiding the advances of the man.

He later unfolds his handkerchief and waves it while dancing. The most stirring moment comes when she takes the other end of the handkerchief, thus giving her approval to his suit, much to the delight of friends who surround them shouting words of encouragement and clapping their hands in time with the music.

In Puglia and in other localities, the tarantella is often danced by one couple while the others form a circle around them. When the woman is tired she will fall back in the circle and the man will invite another partner, or some other man may start dancing inside the circle, indicating to the other that his turn is over.

#### *The Tarantella in Calabria*

Here again the dance does not have a definite pattern; it is the actions and movements of the body that give it its character. The motions are both elastic and robust, typical of the people of that mountainous region. The man bends toward the girl with hands at

shoulder level, snapping his fingers; his knees are slightly bent and his attitude has an air both of respect and boastfulness.

The woman faces him. She is always graceful and does not move around much, but imitates his steps as he takes long strides, making wide circles around her. She lifts her skirt a modest bit in front. She also may take the two ends of the kerchief which she wears on her head or around her neck and pull it from side to side in time with the music. Occasionally they will touch shoulders and turn with faces looking in opposite directions.

#### *The Tarantella in Sicily*

For the Sicilian people, who love gaiety and mimicry, every festivity, public or private, was and often still is a pretext to get a group of friends together, rapidly improvise an orchestra, and dance the tarantella. They dance at home or in the public squares, just a few couples or many, adapting the figures to the number of dancers.

The Sicilian tarantella is full of movement and abandon, expressing the joy of being alive. Yet its actions and movements are never immodest, for that would not be tolerated by the chaste habits of La Conca



d'Oro, the golden basin, so-called because of the many orange groves which abound in the region.

At weddings the tarantella is part of the ceremony, for when the bride is taken to the groom's home, together with her many gifts and her trousseau, the guests immediately dance the tarantella in honor of the newlyweds.

The dance starts with each man holding his partner by the hand and moving forward; this is followed by many figures to which the popular sentiment attributes such meanings as: greetings to the lady, discord, flight, reconciliation, and the kiss of peacemaking. The Sicilians do not generally use castanets or tambourines while dancing, their sole accompaniment being the rhythmic beating of the hands.

#### *The Tarantella in Campania (Naples and Sorrento)*

The difference which is most remarkable about the tarantella as it is danced in Naples and Sorrento is the attitude of the woman. Here she is more free, more sure of herself; she dances with her head up, proud of her appearance, flashing her sparkling eyes and abandoning herself to the joy of the dance.

Old records show that in this area oftentimes girls danced the tarantella together, at times three girls, one playing the tambourine while the others danced, changing places as one got tired. Occasionally the girls used a long ribbon or sash which was held loosely by the ends to make graceful patterns.

Then again, as in other regions of southern Italy, the tarantella is danced by couples who do the steps as they please and as the mood moves them. But for the purpose of performances in Naples and in Sorrento, many tarantella figures have been arranged in stylized patterns, particularly for the benefit of tourists.

In Sorrento, where the tarantella is a bit different from the one in Naples, a certain Gioacchino Napolitano (who came from Nola, east of Naples, in the 19th century and domiciled himself in Sorrento) arranged and regulated the Sorrentina (tarantella of Sorrento). He then formed the first group of tarantella dancers; and recently his son Edoardo, a barber, still directed the group, which is composed of workers from the countryside. They use every available instrument—mandolin, guitar, tambourine, whistle, castanets—making a very lively ensemble which always reaps long and loud applause at performances.

Most tarantellas are written in lively 6/8 meter—*tempo vivace*. The beating of tambourines, clapping of hands, snapping of fingers or playing of large castanets is in time with the main beat of the music, once or twice to the measure.

The instruments used, as mentioned before, are the goatskin bagpipes, especially in the mountains, the ac-

ordion, which is extensively used even though it is of recent introduction. The tambourines are sometimes very large, particularly in Sicily, where they are used by the musicians, not by the dancers. In Naples, where the dancers use them, they are often decorated with multicolored ribbons about three quarters of a yard long to create a festive mood.

The dance is composed of a series of figures, each in turn composed of many different types of little jumping steps. Each measure of the music is for two steps. Since the dance has a continuous jumping motion, it is quite strenuous and often older people and the less energetic ones just accent the beat rather than perform the actual jump.

Following are some of the favorite steps and figures which can be varied and used in any order desired:

#### *Steps*

1. Hop twice on left foot, with right foot pointing forward and touching the ground (one beat), repeat on right foot, then on left and right again several times, generally until the end of the musical phrase.
2. Hop on left foot and with right pointing to the left (in front of left foot), then on second hop point to the right with right foot. This can be done for half the musical phrase, then repeat, hopping on right foot pointing with left.
3. Hop on left foot, lifting right foot in front of left knee and extend to right; repeat several times, then on other foot. This figure is done only by men.
4. The following step is also done only by men. Alternating feet, hop on one foot and kick forward with the other leg high enough to clap hands under bent knee. The man does this figure while moving around the girl. His agility is judged by the height he can lift his legs.
5. The men of Calabria favor this step. Move around in any direction by jumping on the ball of the left foot and keeping the right foot forward with the heel touching the ground, just enough to keep in equilibrium. The person's weight is always on the foot behind; position of feet may alternate. The hands are held at uneven heights while snapping fingers. Body bent slightly forward.

#### *Figures*

1. The man moves around the girl while she claps or beats the tambourine and vice-versa.
2. Partners touch shoulder to shoulder, leaning a little on each other with body turned in opposite directions; they turn with running steps, moving either backward or forward in a little circle of their own. Sometimes their faces are turned away from each other; sometimes they look at each other while turn-

- ing. Their hands are on their hips or held high with fingers snapping.
3. Holding right arm around each other's waist, right hips touching, free arm bent up and hand about head level—turn forward with small running steps to the end of the musical phrase, then reverse the position of the arms and run in opposite direction.
  4. La Morra is a game favored by men on the farms. It consists of two or more men extending the right hand forward and down with a certain number of fingers extended while another guesses the total number. This motion is used as a dance figure. The partners stand about four feet apart, lunging forward with the right knee bent; they flick their tambourines smartly, imitating the motion of La Morra. In the meantime they come closer and closer, leading with the right foot and pushing with the left.
  5. The girl pirouettes by herself, holding skirt or apron while the boy dances around her, often with step number four, described above.



Elba Farabegoli Gurzau. Photo by Pacita T. Cruz

### SICILIAN TARANTELLA

Dance description as modified by Elba F. Gurzau  
Record: RCA 442-0208

Formation: Two couples, partners facing each other, ~~diag. Several sets can form a double line, M on one side, W on other. W hold tambourines in R hands.~~

Steps and Styling: Run, skip, buzz (wt on R ft, push with L). ~~The dance is done with a light walking or skipping step, moving fast, with much noise from tambourines and lots of flirtation.~~

#### Pattern

##### Introduction

16 cts ~~Each dancer facing person in front, men snap fingers at shldr level, women shake tambourines.~~

#### PART I, Step kick

16 cts Both men and women step on R ft and small kick with L ft; then step on L and kick with R (8 kicks).

#### PART II - Forward and Back—4 times

32 cts Each person walks fwd twd person in front, keeping a little to the L until R shldr are near. Hit tambourine (men clap) (4 cts). Back (4 cts). Fwd and back again, keeping a bit to the R until L shldr are near, clap. Repeat both R and L shldr.

#### PART III Elbow turn with partner

32 cts M 1 and W 1 hook R elbows, turn CW back to place. M 2 and W 2 do same. Couple 1

*in 8 running steps*

repeat with L elbow, Couple 2 repeat with L elbow.

#### PART IV. Shoulder turn

32 cts Couple 1 go fwd, put R shldr adjacent and turn CW 4 cts and back to place. Couple 2 repeat. Couple 1 do same with L shldr adjacent. Couple 2 repeat.

#### PART V All 4 elbow turn

16 cts All 4 dancers dance fwd, put L elbows tog, hand on hip or held shldr level and walk 7 steps CCW, hit tambourine and reverse dir (tn CCW), walk 8 more steps CW with R elbows to center.

#### PART VI All 4 hold L hands together high

16 cts All four walk CCW holding L hands tog up high, 7 steps, hit tambourine, and turn on 8th ct. Reverse, walk 8 steps CW back to orig pos.

#### MUSIC STARTS OVER AT THIS POINT

##### Girls pivot

16 cts W pivot CW with a buzz step; M bend low, snap fingers and pretend to turn W by brushing edge of skirt.

#### REPEAT ENTIRE DANCE

On third repeat, girls twirl, step-kick and end with dancers facing each other. Put R arm around waists, turn 16 counts, reverse, L arm around waists, other arm held high, shake tam-

*do shldr  
14 8  
running steps  
SEE  
ORDER  
SHEET*



bourine. End in open pos with W at R side of M, shout "ah" on last beat. (Optional: solo double turns on counts 14, 15, 16 before reversing.)

### TARANTELLA MONTEVERGINE

This description of the Tarantella Montevergine (Mon-teh-VER-gee-neh)<sup>1</sup> is by Rod LaFarge. I collected the steps for this dance by attending an endless procession of fiestas held by various Montevergine societies in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut. I would like to extend special thanks to members of these societies, who were so helpful in persuading old time fiesta dancers to demonstrate their favorite steps and figures, and who helped me through the difficulties of the dialect.

Music: The fiesta celebrants dance many steps and figures to almost any tarantella music, but the recording we recommend fits the following set routine: Very fast—"Cinderella Tarantella," RCA No. 25-0127; Special—"Montevergine Tarantella" (flip side, "Graziella Mazurka")

Position: Two couples facing, lady on the right of the man (own partner).

Steps: A light running step on the ball of the foot except where otherwise specified.<sup>2</sup>

#### Pattern

*Figure 1:* Join hands, shoulder level, and circle to the right with a shuffle step (16 counts). Repeat going left.

*Chorus:* Face own partner and perform 4 (leaping) pas de basque steps starting with a leap on the left foot swinging right over left<sup>3</sup> and snapping fingers with upraised arms swaying from side to side. (Castanets are often used instead of the finger snapping.) Now, without actually touching partners enclose each other with outstretched, encircling arms; in this position they turn together (clockwise) with four fast walking steps.<sup>4</sup> This "don't touch them" embrace is called "sorellina" (little sister). Turn singly (clockwise) out of each other's embrace, raising arms overhead. Repeat all with opposite partner. Total 32 counts.

*Figure 2:* Right-hand moulinet. 16 counts. Repeat left-handed.

#### Chorus

*Figure 3:* Link right elbow with own partner, turn once around together clockwise. Reach behind the other man's back and, linking left elbow with opposite partner, turn counterclockwise. Repeat all. Now turn own partner with right elbow once more, then all turn singly clockwise. Total 32 counts.

#### Chorus

*Figure 4:* Facing opposite partners, the men back the ladies until the men can pass back to back (as in dos à dos). The ladies then walk forward, the men backwards, the couples thus exchanging places. 8 counts. Face own partner and repeat manoeuvre. Repeat all. Total 32 counts. The polka step is used in this figure and the arms are raised overhead, swaying from side to side with much finger snapping.

#### Chorus

*Figure 5:* Join inside hands with partner. Couple 2 (the couple facing the music) raise joined hands to form an arch, both couples walk forward, exchanging places, couple one passing under the arch. Retaining handholds, turn around, man walks backwards, lady forward, facing other couple again. 8 counts. Repeat with couple 1 raising the arch. Repeat all. Total 32 counts.

#### Chorus

*Figure 6:* The two men, who are in a diagonal position, join right hands and exchange places, with three steps and pull on count 4, then without releasing hands exchange places three more times, 16 counts, ending with right hands joined. The ladies join right hand under the arch, exchange places twice without releasing hands. Still with right hands joined, the ladies reach over the men's right hands and join left hands with partner and the whole formation revolves clockwise with four chassé steps. Release hands and turn singly.

#### Chorus

#### Figures at a glance

*Fig 1* All four circle R (16) and L (16)

#### Chorus

*Fig 2* Moulinet moving CW 16, then CCW 16

#### Chorus

*Fig 3* Elbow Swing R and L

#### Chorus

*Fig 4* Shuttle dos à dos starting with opposite partner

#### Chorus

*Fig 5* Couples arches

#### Chorus

*Fig 6* Exchange places and chassé

#### Chorus

<sup>1</sup> Montevergine, which means Mount of the Virgin, is a tiny village with a breathtaking view which can be reached by the famous Amalfi Drive going Southeast from Naples. It has a sanctuary built in the year 1119.

<sup>2</sup> LaFarge describes a grapevine step, but I think a light running step more Italian.

<sup>3</sup> It is more of a leap; on one description it was called "Calcio di cavallo," which means horse's kick.

<sup>4</sup> A bouncing chassé step is often used, says Rod LaFarge.