

# Baroque Dance in British Communities

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**Abstract:** Baroque dance is an important cultural and artistic treasure of France, serving the French upper class and nobles during the Louis XIV period. It was later introduced to Europe and the British court by Charles II. Today, baroque dances are still visible in London's community dance. This essay introduces the cultural background of French baroque dance in British community dance through field survey in two community centers in London, and combs the risk assessment, method application and guidance of dance anthropology in this field survey brought thinking.

**Keywords:** dance anthropology, baroque dance, field survey, community dance

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## 1. Introduction

There are several main reasons for studying Baroque dance in British communities using dance anthropological methods: first of all, based on the close relationship between Baroque dance and classical ballet, and as a highly stylized dance form that served the upper nobility during the Louis XIV (Figure 1) period, Baroque dance has certain research value. Secondly, after surveys, email inquiries and field visits, the author found that Baroque dance (Figure 2) occupies a place in London's community dances, which gave me a thought on the research question: Why French Baroque dance was taught in London; What makes people of different identities and backgrounds choose to study Baroque dance in London over other dances; How they learn Baroque dance; What is the cultural background of the teacher who teaches Baroque dance in London. This essay focuses on the significance of community dance, and makes a detailed analysis and combing of the field investigation of two community dance. Finally, a detailed analysis and interpretation of the Baroque dance symbol system is made.



Figure 1. Louis XIV



Figure 2. Baroque dance

## 2. French Baroque dance and community dance

### 2.1 French Baroque dance

The tradition of French cultural history tends to designate the late Renaissance as the beginning of the Baroque, while court dance is regarded as a typical representative of French Baroque dance literature. In 661, Louis founded the Royal Academy of Dance. The Academy was responsible for designing a notation system (first published by Raoul Auger Feuillet in his book *Chorégraphie* in 1700)[1], to make it easier for dance masters to absorb new dance styles and learn new dances. It has become common practice to publish new dances of each season in this notation for performance at court balls and other grand occasions. In 2004, Barbara Sparti edited the manuscript of Ercole Santucci's 1614 manual. Depending on the style in which they excelled, Italian dance masters were described as "French" or "Italian" [2]. Baroque dance is the traditional name for the dance style that originated in the 17th century and dominated until the French Revolution in the 18th century. Baroque dance was the precursor to classical ballet, established and developed at the court of Louis XIV (1643-1715) in France, becoming what we now call the "dance of the Baroque period" (*Consort de Dance Baroque*). French court dance is both an avant-garde expression of art and a "ritual" in the anthropological sense: it itself represents a reaffirmation of some political force, a discovery and exploration of knowledge, and a new form of artistic expression [3]. In the 17th century, dance had not only important social significance, but also political significance.



Figure 3. French Baroque dance

### 2.2 Community art and community dance

Community art originated in the mid-1960s[4] when artists began to turn their art in the direction of equality and social justice. At the same time, some activists are beginning to recognize the power of organizing and empowering communities to advocate for civil rights. A large number of actors, writers, and painters created art for the public, which promoted economic development during the Great Depression. Since then, community-based art has flourished around the world.

Community dance is a relatively common activity in some European countries. It is an organized event that generally involves municipalities, cultural centers, schools, art groups and other institutions, aimed at all. It is a way for citizens of different ages, abilities, classes, races, religions and nationalities to recognize the art of dance and express themselves through dance. Community dance creates an opportunity for people to have a high-quality dance experience wherever they are. Dance participants or trainees do not necessarily consider Baroque dance as a professional dance, the course is more of entertainment and leisure. Most importantly, they are more connected in the dance community. Everyone has an equal opportunity to participate in learning. Community dance builds a stronger community, and the connection to this activity can be done through weekly classes or performance projects. If there is an end goal, the results will be more impressive, as the motivation of the participants increases and the idea of presenting and sharing with the public enriches the experience. Essentially, community dance focuses not only on the performer's tangible body dance, but also on what community artist Martha Bowles calls "invisible dance" [5]. It happens as artists and community members work together, become friends, and talk about life. In community dance, everyone has equal opportunities to participate, apply and learn, and everyone involved can find a way to approach dance, which is the value and meaning that community dance brings.

## 3. Fieldwork risk assessment

First, the author established the time frame for the fieldwork, the first month as a preparatory phase, which determined the direction of research and the historical background of the research object, the selection of the location of the fieldwork, and the risk assessment of the ethical guidelines for the fieldwork. In view of the guidelines of dance anthropology, the risk assessment includes: familiarity with the ethics promulgated by the ethnic/dance species [6], understanding the scope of the informed consent of the subject of the study prior to field work, and anticipating possible difficulties in advance. Among them, the common practice of obtaining consent is to be a "gatekeeper" through research [7]. In the Baroque dance

community, it is clear that their teacher, Phillipa, became the "gatekeeper" of the fieldwork. But sometimes an individual's consent doesn't always indicate the consent of others, and researchers should also seek the consent of others directly to ensure that their participation is actually free of discomfort [8]. In this survey, with the consent of the teacher Phillipa, and the opinions of all the students were asked on the spot, it is gratifying that people from different cultural backgrounds are very willing to cooperate with my fieldwork, which also includes the photo and video shooting during the fieldwork process, as well as the interviewee's right to informed consent to the recording during the interview, to ensure that consent is based on understanding. Throughout the Baroque field risk assessment, they fully understood and agreed.

## Action Plan & Methodology

Use participatory observations to help build rapport (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2011)	Researchers begin to understand their culture as insiders (Williams, 1997)	Choose the most effective technology in given situation	Using everyday conversation as an interview technique (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2011)
Use of pure observation, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and mail access	Be cautious about investigating the reliability of information within the scope of its research projects.	Use of different techniques with different strengths and limitations allows for the cross validation of conclusion by comparing them using data collected in different ways (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2011)	Enhancing representativeness: sampling in participant observation (Davies, 2008)
Enhancing the quality of data collection and analysis	Record observations in field notes in chronological order	Use visual methods including photos	Record language and action via video for later analysis (Davies, 2008)

Figure 4. Fieldwork methods

## 4. Field investigation of Baroque dance

From the second to the fourth month, the author started fieldwork, and after a field trip to 7 community dance centre in the UK, the author chose two places to conduct fieldwork: one was st. John's community centre in London, opened in 1997. Another survey site is in Cecil Sharp House in London (see Figure 5), which opened in 2008. The two community dance centers have been open for a long time compared to other community centers and both have long-term stable audiences. At the Community Dance Center, the author do it in a participatory, observing, visiting, and documenting way. Throughout the process, investigator involvement is essential because investigators need to be "insiders" to understand and familiarize themselves with the students of the community dance center. The survey was also conducted using semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and e-mails. At the same time, the way notes and video recordings are recorded (where allowed) is also essential. The fifth to sixth months is the time for me to collect survey data for formal analysis, evaluation and conclusion.

**St. John the Divine Community Center,  
London  
Weekly classes, 1997-**



**Cecil Sharp House, London  
Monthly classes, 2008 -**

Figure 5. Photographed at St John's Community Centre and Cecil Sharp Community in London



Figure 6. Taken at st John's Community Dance Centre in London: Baroque Dance Class

Teachers often tell students in class about the history of Baroque dance, the dance style, and the issues that need to be paid attention to when dancing. In the classroom, the double dance form (see Figure 6) is basically adopted in groups of two people, with men on the left and women on the right, forming a complete formation from front to back. At the beginning and end of the dance, two people in each group salute each other. In the process of dancing, always pay attention to the symmetry of the entire formation. In each lesson, the teacher starts from the most basic Baroque dance step practice, and then to the hand position practice, and gradually begins to dance with the music after warming up. This is for those who do not have a lot of experience in dance, what the teacher teaches in the classroom is suitable for everyone. The trainees seemed to have found a way to interact with the dance in the study of Baroque dance. The author observed that everyone in the class enjoyed the process so much that they seemed to build a sense of confidence in the dance. Here, everyone has equal opportunities to participate, apply and learn, and Baroque seems to have fulfilled its value as a community dance.

## 5. Baroque dance symbol system

Through fieldwork in the field, it was found that a significant dance feature of baroque dance was that it had its own unique symbology (see Figure 7). Any set of Baroque dance formations learned in the course retains complete symmetry and is extremely aesthetically pleasing. Through visits to Baroque dance teachers at community dance centers and in-depth research, it was found that an important aspect of the development of French Baroque dance was the invention of the dance symbol system, which was originally conceived as a method that allowed the aristocratic class to learn fashionable dance. With the use of this way of dancing, French court dance began to spread to all parts of the world. The most common form of Baroque social dance is the duo dance, which is performed by a man and a woman at a time. Unlike the Renaissance duet, which can be viewed from multiple angles, the Baroque duo was designed to be viewed from the top of the hall, where the highest-ranking people performed their viewings. Although Pierre Beauchamp, the court dance master of King Louis XIV, was commissioned to create a dance symbol, Raoul-Auger Feuillet first released the system in 1700 [9]. In *Chorégraphie*, 1713, Fayette recorded the five positions of the feet, changes in body direction and hundreds of dance steps, as well as the positions of the legs and arms [10]. Fayette's notation is based on pamphlet drawings that trace dance patterns (see Figure 7). Steps are represented by symbols written on the right or left side of the booklet. The bar lines in the dance score correspond to the bar lines in the score, and they are printed at the top of the page. There are more than 350 existing notations of baroque dances. Although there are many subtle variations of these steps, at least 20 different types of dances are marked, and their names are familiar in the dance suites of Baroque composers.

Baroque dance steps are characterized by controlled, clear and fast footwork, all of which can be done effortlessly. At the same time, baroque dances are very precise in the movement of the arms. One arm remains sideways at hip level, while the other arm spirals up and inward from the elbow. In doing so, the movement of the arm to the front foot is reversed. When shifting the center of gravity and performing the movement of the other arm, the circled arm goes down to hip level, while the other arm continues to circle upwards, with the head following the raised arm Move slightly. Other arm gestures include a quick wrist turn for large jumps.

During the Baroque era, French fashion and taste dominated much of European society. Courts in other countries generally favored French dance and often hired French dance masters. Complex dances are documented and disseminated

through a new symbolic dance symbol system designed by Pierre Beauchamp or Raoul Feuillet [11]. Louis XIV died in 1715 and helped create dances that lasted most of the 18th century. The nobility continued to dance at court entertainment, but an increasing number of professional dancers performed aristocratic dances. Theatrical dance developed into one of the most exquisite arts of the 18th century, a tradition that continues to this day in ballet.

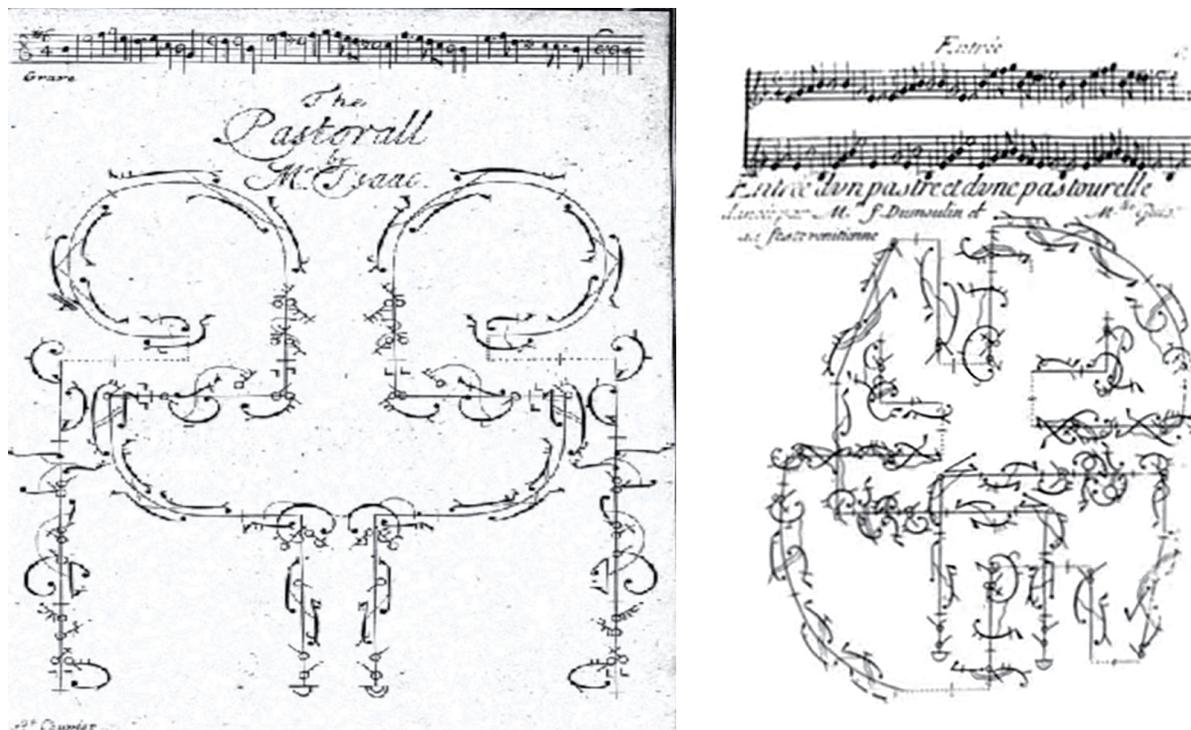


Figure 7. Baroque dance symbology

## 6. Conclusion

Dance is a sequence of nonverbal body movements of human behavior that includes purposeful, conscious, rhythmic, and cultural patterns. Unlike ordinary kinesthetic activities, this movement has inherent "aesthetic" values and symbolic potential. Dance anthropology spans cultural studies anthropology, gender, the body, medical anthropology, music, politics, and religion, and its cross-cultural perspective makes dance studies more scientific. In 1960, Gertrude Prokosch Kurath published the seminal *Panorama of Dance Ethnology* (Panorama"), which led to the establishment of dance ethnology as a formal part of the discipline of anthropology. Unlike other ethnology, dance ethnology must use the body to study and explore, starting from the human body, using different methods to collect data to carry out field work is the most basic method of dance anthropology [13]. Applying the anthropological approach of dance to a six-month fieldwork of Baroque dance in London, England, the actual data and qualitative analysis are under the framework of anthropology, and there are several aspects worth exploring: First of all, it is the inheritance and protection of Baroque dance. So far, Baroque dance has companies and organizations all over the world, with more than 10 Baroque dance communities in the UK alone. The teachers who taught the Baroque were among the few inheritors of Baroque dance, who retained the most basic characteristics of the Baroque tradition and did not change much on this basis. In a way, this also allows the Baroque traditional dance to be preserved. Second, the significance of baroque dance as a community dance is that community dance creates an opportunity for people to have a high-quality dance experience no matter where they are. It is a way for citizens of different ages, abilities, classes, races, religions and nationalities to recognize the art of dance and express themselves through dance, promoting internal communication between people in communities. At the same time, the characteristics of Baroque dance make non-professional dance more acceptable and learnable, which has become a way of life that allows non-professional dancers to be closer to dance. Third, through field research, Baroque dance has a wide range of research value, including the close relationship between Baroque dance and classical ballet, the relationship with politics and power, the symbol system of Baroque dance, and the connection with community dance in contemporary times, which provides a new perspective for the anthropology of Baroque dance.

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