

# IN SEARCH OF "HRVACKI"

By John Filcich  
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My encounter with "Hrvacki" was with a book "Kastavstina: Structure of native life and customs written in the local dialect." Kastav is a walled town on a small mountain is the center of the hilly area up-hill from Rijeka. Kastavstina refers to the whole area.

The author was Ivan (Ivo) Jardas from Marcelji who detailed the life-style and customs of the earlier decades of the twentieth century, in some cases up to World War II. One chapter is "Kastavski Tanci," dancing in the Kastav area. Here is my translation (explanatory comments in parenthesis are mine).

"With all the hardships and torments in their lives, the people nevertheless were enthusiastic about dancing. At one time they would dance Sunday afternoons from "Bele Nedeja" ('White Sunday', the first Sunday in October, a festival when the new wines were brought out) to Advent (four weeks preceding Christmas), from St. Steven's (December 26th) to Ash Wednesday to 'Majevice' (the first Sunday in May). Then again on Corpus Cristi, St. Peter's (Sts. Peter and Paul, June 29th) and St. Rok (August 16th).

Those were the customary times for the dances, but often the young men and girls could toil all day and in the evening, dance. In the wintertime they would haul out baskets of soil on their shoulders from a 'dolac' (a round crater-like large "hole" later terraced for gardening). There is no harder work than carrying this soil. Despite that, after supper, they danced all evening .

At one time they danced the most enthusiastically when the music was played on the 'sopile' (two oboe-like wind instruments) or the 'mih' (bagpipe). They danced the pojka, vajser, mazurka, šotiš, and "hrvacki" (polka, waltz, mazurka, schottische, and the "Hrvacki"). Of all the dances the nicest one was Hrvacki. The older people didn't want to dance anything but Hrvacki. This Kastav (version of) Hrvacki can be described in four figures.

I. First, the man and woman take right hands and the left hands are placed on their own hips. The joined hands are held high and in that position they step-hop several times forward, several times backward, right and left.

II. Then the man takes the woman by one finger and lifts her hand above her head. He step-hops in place, his left hand he holds at his waist, and with his right hand turns the woman. The woman spins in place like a top.

III. Then the man takes the woman, holding her with both hands on the waist, and he turns her right and left while stamping his feet with all his might. Sometimes at this point someone will sing out:

'Obmi ju, obmi, kako kolo na vodi!'                      Turn her, turn, like ripples in the water!  
'Kako cu ju obmut, kad se ne da ni ganut'              How can I turn her when she won't even budge!

IV. In the fourth figure of this dance the man releases the woman. With his hands on his hips he dances in place, stamps and hops so that his hat bobbles up and down. The woman also places her hands on her hips and dances around the man in the style and character of a woman.

Then the man may again take the woman and both turn, or he may turn her by the finger, whatever he wishes. The figures need not be danced in any special order.

In the entire dance can be seen the strength and vigor of the man and the graceful feminine qualities and style of the woman. The older people are really aroused when they hear the musicians start to play.

There was a time when there wasn't an old man who would not at least at Mardi Gras dance "Hrvacki" 'for a turnip'. That is known, when the sopile would play. Younger people don't know "Hrvacki," and the older generation is gone. If there is an older person around that person will not dance it, since the sopile play no more.\*

In such a way our beautiful "Hrvacki" died out. The younger people know the waltz, polka, šotiš, and mazurka, but "Hrvacki" is not known by anyone anymore. No more are heard the sounds of the sopile and mih. And these they dance no more, as they don't know our old dances."

\*The button accordion, called the 'triestinka', possibly the source being the city of Trieste, began replacing the sopile early in the 20th century. In another chapter, Jardas relates how the older people cursed and rebelled against this new instrument. They would not dance to it! They would only dance to sopile music! There has been a revival of these and other folk instruments, as well as other facets of "folklor" such as costumes and the dances, mostly for performances by organized groups, and hopefully for preservation. The tamburitza, on the other hand never lost its use and popularity both in the homeland and abroad. "Use it or lose it" as the saying goes.

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Book: "Grobnički Lustrini" (Songs, dances and children's games from the Grobnik area near Rijeka) by Alenka Juretić, Jelenje 2004, and video tape of repertoire of Zvir.

Recorded music for Hrvacko and other regional dances courtesy of Zvir.

Information about the dance by Ivo Jardas in his book "Kastavstina" (Zbomik 3 Ivan Matetic Ronjgov), Rijeka, 1994.

Ivan Ivancan Tstarski Narodni Plesovi (Istrian Folk Dances), Institut za Narodnu Umjetnost, Zagreb, 1963 ("Hrvatski," page 211).

Nedeljko Karabaic: Muzicki Folklor Hrvatskog Primorja I Istre (Musical Folklore of the Croatian Littoral and Istria), Rijeka, 1956 (Page 94)

Stjepan Sremac: No. 20 of "Narodna Umjetnost (Folk Art), Zagreb, 1983 "O hrvatskom tancu, drmešu, čardašu i porijeklu drmeša (On Hrvatski Tanac, the drmeš, czardas, and the origin of the drmeš). (Pages 57-74).

VIDEO filmed by the Folklore Institute, Zagreb of elderly couples dancing Hrvacki in Bribir, near Novi Vinodolski, in 1981 and the KUD folklore group "Ilija Dorčić" of Novi Vinodolski dancing their choreographed Hrvacki in 1981.