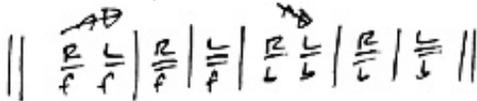


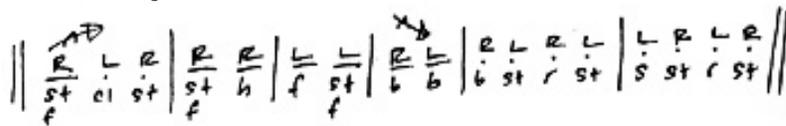
Pravo Trakijsko Horo Bulgaria

Many of the most common folk dances belong to a single family, whose basic step provides an ancient and archetypal template for many of the simple dances in our repertoire. In their basic form these are village dances, unarranged and unchoreographed, which everyone knows how to do and which are the main staple of dancing at weddings, feast days and other celebrations. They all share the basic three-measure pattern, and each has its own characteristics of style and variations. These variations, added to the basic form by performing groups, urban dance styles and the improvisation of good dancers, make each one more easily distinguishable as a separate dance. The Bulgarian **Pravo Trakijsko Horo**, for example, dances three measures into the circle, and then three measures out of the circle, with more elaborate variations based on individual improvisation.

Pravo Trakijsko Horo basic:



Pravo Trakijsko Horo variation:



From "Simple Dances: Where Do They Come From, Where Do They Lead?"
by Laura Shannon <laura@dance.demon.co.uk>

Some Thoughts on Circle Dance Notation

by Andy Bettis <andyb@isltd.insignia.com>

The basic symbol used for circle dance notation consists of a capital letter above one or more lower case letters, with one or more horizontal lines separating them (like a mathematical fraction) and a combination of small half circle and arrow over the top. This describes one step of the dance. Several step symbols may be grouped within brackets or vertical lines to show repeated sections, and there will often be some extra text describing arm positions, extra details, etc. Starting at the top, the half circle represents the dancer's 'nose' and indicates in which direction the body is facing - upwards is towards the centre of the circle. The arrow shows in which direction the dance is moving, like the 'nose' upwards is towards the centre. Usually there will only be a nose and/or arrow at the start and when the body position or direction change, rather than being repeated for each step.

The capital letter indicates the foot that is active, L for left, R for right or RL for both together. If both feet are doing different things it is usual to show the one that is taking the body weight and add a comment describing what the other one is doing.

The separating line is the part that varies the most between different people, I use it to indicate the tempo of the step. One line means normal speed, two means faster, three means faster still. With such little detail available I will normally add an explanation of how the speeds relate, for example in Lesnoto a fast step is two beats and a slow one is three. Some teachers also use a dot after the line to show one-and-a-half beats, while many others just use one line all the time and write the tempo of the steps under the symbols.

The bottom part, the lower case letter(s), show what the active foot is doing. Some commonly used ones include:

f - step forward
b - step back
xf - step across in front of the standing leg
xb - step across behind the standing leg
st - stamp the foot
t - touch the ground with the foot, but don't put weight on it
tp - tap the ground
h - touch the heel to the ground
cl - close the foot to the standing foot
j - jump

Obviously this list can be extended as required, and often it is necessary to explain what each one actually means - 't' could be touch, tap, toe or something else entirely.

A common addition to this step symbol is a spot or (in my case) downward-pointing triangle to indicate a 'rest' beat where nothing happens.

The step symbols are then grouped into sequences with brackets or vertical lines to show where they repeat, and a number to show how many times they are done. Sometimes two vertical lines are drawn either side of a sequence to indicate that it is repeated, like the musical coda symbol. With a dance that has a more elaborate pattern each step sequence may be given a letter and the overall pattern shown separately, e.g. for Horehronsky Csardas:

(A A B A B A) x 2 (C C B C B C) x 2 (repeat entire sequence)

What this system of notation is best suited to is jotting down a dance after you have learned it but before it is 'in your bones'. The process of breaking down a dance into parts and individual steps is a very good way of ensuring that you actually know what you are doing with your feet, and, in my humble opinion, is an essential initial preparation for passing it on to others. Having a quick shorthand method of getting steps onto paper is a great help with this, and having written the sequence down it is easy to spot missing beats or three steps with the same foot! It can also be invaluable when a dance is requested that has drifted to the back of the mind over time, and a quick reminder is needed to get you started.

The most obvious shortcoming of the system is that it only describes the feet and the body direction. Imagine just seeing a teacher's feet and head and trying to learn a dance that way! The way the body moves, the style of the movements, how sharp or flowing, bouncy or smooth, long or short each step is becomes lost in the brevity of the notation. Of course you can add notes and descriptions to each dance, sequence and step to make things clearer but the more you learn about a dance the longer and longer these additions become until they can completely swamp the original 'quick' step symbols.

And this is what has happened to my own notes. I now write out my dance descriptions as descriptions, with no notation symbols at all, especially for notes that I hand out to people. (See my 'Confessions of a Reluctant Choreographer' for an example of my step note style.) Writing out the sequences as if I am talking to somebody helps me to remember more of the details and to stress the most important parts, which are often not the simple steps. It also encourages me to describe how I dance the dance rather than trying to say how 'the' dance is done.

A method of using the best of both worlds is used by Laura Shannon in her dance notes. The steps are described in words down the centre of the sheet with the notation symbols down the left side, so that each step symbol lines up with the words describing it more fully.