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List of Some International Folk Dances

Bon Odori (Japan)



Bon Odori (盆踊り), meaning simply Bon dance is a style of dancing performed during Obon. Originally a Nenbutsu folk dance to welcome the spirits of the dead, the style of celebration varies in many aspects from region to region. Each region has a local dance, as well as different music. The music can be songs specifically pertinent to the spiritual message of Obon, or local min'yo folk songs. Consequently, the Bon dance will look and sound different from region to region. Hokkaidō is known for a folk-song known as "Soran Bushi." The song "Tokyo Ondo" takes its namesake from the capital of Japan. "Gujo Odori" in Gujō, Gifu prefecture is famous for all night dancing. "Gōshū Ondo" is a folk song from Shiga prefecture. Residents of the Kansai area will recognize the famous "Kawachi ondo." Tokushima in Shikoku is very famous for its "Awa Odori," or "fool's dance," and in the far south, one can hear the "Ohara Bushi" of Kagoshima.

The way in which the dance is performed is also different in each region, though the typical Bon dance involves people lining up in a circle around a high wooden scaffold made especially for the festival called a yagura. The yagura is usually also the bandstand for the musicians and singers of the Obon music. Some dances proceed clockwise, and some dances proceed counter-clockwise around the yagura. Some dances reverse during the dance, though most do not. At times, people face the yagura and move towards and away from it. Still some dances, such as the Kagoshima Ohara dance, and the Tokushima Awa Odori, simply proceed in a straight line through the streets of the town.

There are other ways in which a regional Bon dance can vary. Some dances involve the use of different kinds of fans, others involve the use of small towels called tenugui which may have colorful designs. Some require the use of small wooden clappers, or "kachi-kachi" during the dance. The "Hanagasa Odori" of Yamagata is performed with a straw hat that has been decorated with flowers.

To celebrate O-Bon in Okinawa, the eisa drum dance is performed instead.

Pungmul (Korea)



Pungmul ([ˈpʰuːŋmul] poong-muul) is a Korean folk music tradition that includes drumming, dancing, and singing. Most performances are outside, with tens of players, all in constant motion. Pungmul is rooted in the dure (collective labor) farming culture. It was originally played as part of farm work, on rural holidays, at other village community-building events, and in shamanistic rituals. Today it has expanded in meaning and is also used in political protest and as a performing art form.

Older scholars often describe this tradition as nongak ([ˈnoŋak] nong-ahk), a term meaning "farmers' music" whose usage arose during the colonial era (1910–45). The Cultural Heritage Administration of South Korea uses this term in designating the folk tradition as an Important Intangible Cultural Property. Opposition from performers and scholars toward its usage grew in the 1980s because colonial authorities attempted to limit the activity to farmers in order to suppress its use and meaning among the colonized. It is also known by many synonymous names throughout the peninsula.

Drumming is the central element of pungmul. Each group is led by a kkwaenggwari (small handheld gong) player, and includes at least one person playing janggu (hourglass drum), buk (barrel drum), and jing (gong). Wind instruments (t'aepyongso, also known as hojeok, senap, or nalari, and nabal) sometimes play along with the drummers.

Following the drummers are dancers, who often play the sogo (a tiny drum that makes almost no sound) and tend to have more elaborate—even acrobatic—choreography. Finally, japsaek (actors) dressed as caricatures of traditional village roles wander around to engage spectators, blurring the boundary between performers and audience. Minyo (folksongs) and chants are sometimes included in pungmul, and audience members enthusiastically sing and dance along. Most minyo are set to drum beats in one of a few jangdan (rhythmic patterns) that are common to pungmul, sanjo, p'ansori, and other traditional Korean musical genres.

Pungmul performers wear a variety of colorful costumes. A flowery version of the Buddhist kkokkal is the most common head-dress. Advanced performers sometimes wear sangmo, which are hats with long ribbon attached to them that players can spin and flip in intricate patterns by moving their heads.

Dragon Dance (China)



Dragon dance (simplified Chinese: 舞龙; traditional Chinese: 舞龍; pinyin: wǔ lóng) is a form of traditional dance and performance in Chinese culture. Like the lion dance it is most often seen in festive celebrations. Many Chinese people often use the term "Descendants of the Dragon" (龍的傳人 or 龙的传人, lóng de chuán rén) as a sign of ethnic identity, as part of a trend started in the 1970s. Another derivation is from (農的傳人) i.e. the descendants of Shennong, the legendary first king of the Chinese people who taught them agriculture, law and medicine, the foundations of civilization.

In the dance, a team of people carry the dragon — which is an image of the Chinese dragon — on poles. A dragon can be composed of up to 50 people.[1] The dance team does mimic the supposed movements of this river spirit in a sinuous, undulating manner. The movements in a performance traditionally symbolise historical roles of dragons demonstrating power and dignity. The dragon dance is a highlight of Chinese New Year celebrations held worldwide in Chinatowns around the world.[citation needed]

Dragons are believed to bring good luck to people, which is reflected in their qualities that include great power, dignity, fertility, wisdom and auspiciousness. The appearance of a dragon is both frightening and bold but it has a benevolent disposition, and so eventually became an emblem to represent imperial authority.

Jarabe Tapatío (Mexico)



The Jarabe Tapatío dance in its standardized form was first choreographed by the Mexican, in the early twentieth century to celebrate a government-sponsored fiesta that commemorated the successful end of the Mexican Revolution.

Since then, it has become a folk dance popular throughout Mexico and the Southwestern United States. It serves as a symbol of the national pride and honor of the Mexican people.

The dance tells the story of love and courtship. It can be performed either by a couple or a group of couples. A charro, dressed in the traditional charro suit, a three-piece suit composed of a vest, jacket, and pants bearing silver buttons down the seam, makes initial courtship gestures to la china (wearing the traditional China Poblana outfit). It looks almost like a mariachi band's attire. They flirt throughout the beginning of the dance, during which time the man attempts to woo the woman with his zapateado (stamping and tapping) and his machismo. Just as he has impressed the woman, he becomes drunk with glory, and is shooed away as a borracho (an inebriate), but ultimately, he succeeds in conquering the china, throwing his hat to the ground and kicking his leg over his partner's head as she bends down to pick it up. The two do a triumphant march to a military tune called a diana, and the dance ends with a romantic turn or the couple hiding their faces behind the man's sombrero in a feigned kiss.

The dance was further popularized by Anna Pavlova who created a staged version in pointe shoes, and was showered with hats by her adoring Mexican audiences. In 1924, Secretary of Education José Vasconcelos proclaimed the jarabe tapatio to be Mexico’s national dance and decreed that it would be taught throughout the Mexican public school system as a symbol of Mexican identity, designed to supersede any local dance traditions and bind together the ethnically diverse population.

Bomba (Puerto Rico)



Bomba is one of the traditional musical styles of Puerto Rico.It is a largely African-derived music. The rhythm and beat are played by a set of floor drums, cuá and a maraca.Dance is an integral part of the music: the dancers move their bodies to every beat of the drum, making bomba a very energetic and rich dance.

Bomba is described to be a challenge/connection between the drummer and the dancer. The dancer produces a series of gestures to which the primo o subidor drummer provides a synchronized beat. Thus, it is the drummer who attempts to follow the dancer and not the other way around. The dancer must be in great physical shape and the challenge usually continues until either the dancer discontinues.

The main instruments used in bomba style music are one or two lower pitch floor drums used to create a base rhythm called buleadores, and a higher pitch drum called primo or subidor which accentuates the beat with improvised patterns. Other instruments used are the palitos or cuá, which are sticks that are struck against any, usually wooden, surface. A single large maraca usually completes the sound of bomba, though a güiro has commonly been used in orchestral arrangements.Both of these last two instruments have origins in the Taino culture of the Caribbean Basin.