AMERICAN INDIAN DANCE STEPS

BY

BESSIE EVANS and MAY G. EVANS

of the Peabody Conservatory of Music

Introduction by

FREDERICK WEBB HODGE

ILLUSTRATED IN COLOR
BY POYEGE, SAN ILDEFONSO INDIAN

New York

A. S. BARNES AND COMPANY · INCORPORATED

1931

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To

POYEGE and his wife TAN-TA

of San Ildefonso Pueblo, New Mexico

In appreciation of their friendship

and their coöperation

CONTENTS

CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

I. ORIGINAL PAINTINGS IN COLOR,
by Poyege, San Ildefonso Indian:

II. OUTLINE FIGURES OF THE DANCE,
drawn by J. Maxwell Miller under the supervision of the authors:

II. OUTLINE FIGURES OF THE DANCE—*continued*

INTRODUCTION

I WELCOME the opportunity to express a word of apology for certain preconceived ideas that impressed themselves on my mind when, two or three years ago, the announcement was made that the authors of this book were to present an interpretation of the dance steps of some of the Southwestern Indians before the American Ethnological Society. I do not know whether it was due to my own ignorance or to the modesty of the authors in not making their studies more widely known that I gained the impression that what they had to offer would probably be little more than the overdone and misleading impersonation of "Indian" dance movements one so often sees.

I was therefore not alone among those overjoyed by the depth of the study made by the authors, the highly commendable way in which the dance steps were reproduced by Miss Bessie Evans and the verbal interpretations were presented by her sister, Miss May G. Evans. I recall how greatly I had wished that some of my dancing Zuñi Indian friends could have been present and that I could have heard their enthusiastic and generous *Hish hinina!* "Verily the same!", which echoes a deeper sense of appreciation than the words would seem to picture.

Study of the music of our Indian tribes in a thoroughly scientific way has long been in progress, and many have been the adaptations of Indian songs to suit the demands of the white man's ear, often of appealing beauty

even if the Indians from whom the themes were derived might fail to recognize them. But in the prosecution of these studies, which include those of the music of Indian dances, a phase of the native culture seems to have been completely neglected until our authors undertook the task of recording and of analyzing it with the graphic and highly successful results of which we are now privileged to obtain a glimpse.

As the reader will observe, the dance steps herein presented offer only a mere hint of the possibilities which the subject affords, for there are still many tribes which have preserved, with characteristic conservatism, at least some of their dances of old. The scientific results which further investigation is bound to yield can well be imagined, for the relation between the actual step and the dance as a component part of a dramaturgic performance, the interrelations of rhythm, the very language which Indian dance steps seem to utter, all promise such a rich store of knowledge that no one can predict at this juncture how far-reaching the study may prove to be.

Therefore let it be hoped that the field which has now been so successfully entered may be further explored and that the importance of the research may inspire the means for extending the investigation.

F. W. HODGE.

Museum of the American Indian
New York City

FOREWORD

THE FOLLOWING STUDY of American Indian dance is concerned chiefly with elements of the art observed in certain Pueblo tribes of New Mexico—especially those of San Ildefonso, Tesuque, Santa Clara, Cochiti, and Santo Domingo. When, therefore, some phases of the dance are described as "characteristics of the Indian," it should be borne in mind by the reader that they are characteristics observed at least in the Pueblos mentioned. Since it is highly probable, however, that many of the characteristics noted are typical of Indian dance-art in general, it is hoped that the present brief treatment of the subject, representing work in its initial stage, will prove suggestive to students wishing to make more extended research in the future.

The greater part of the material was first presented by the authors, on their return East from the Indian regions, in the form of lecture-recitals at the AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY, the PEABODY CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC, and YALE UNIVERSITY. Acknowledgment of valued favors through which the work was facilitated is made to these institutions; also to the MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN (Heye Foundation) and the MUSEUM OF NEW MEXICO; and, in particular, to the following persons: PROFESSOR GEORGE PIERCE BAKER, MR. JOHN PEABODY HARRINGTON, DR. GEORGE HERZOG, DR. EDGAR L. HEWETT, MR. FREDERICK W. HODGE, MR. J. MAXWELL MILLER, DR. NELS C. NELSON, MR. T. HARMON PARKHURST, MISS HELEN H. ROBERTS, MRS. GEORGE H. VAN STONE,

and DR. CLARK WISSLER. Especially is it desired to acknowledge the courtesy of many talented Indians, whose product is described herein.

Transcription and analysis of steps and dances are by Bessie Evans; description and commentary are by May G. Evans.

THE AUTHORS

Let them praise his name in the dance.

PSALM 149

PART ONE

"A MERE JUMPING up and down to the monotonous beat of a crudely fashioned drum."

In some such manner as this is the casual observer prone to dismiss the subject of American Indian dance-art; regarding it as a quite simple affair and devoid of special appeal or significance. As a matter of fact, it is far more than this. Even the briefest study of the technique and the style of Indian dancing discloses that its steps are varied and often difficult of execution, and that its mood and manner are highly expressive of a peculiar, native genius. It discloses also that the rhythms are diverse, complicated, and marked by frequent change. And, more than all this, it discloses that Indian dance-art is *basically different* from other forms. It is this basic difference, this distinctive expression of racial character, that makes the study of Indian dance and its accompanying song at once baffling and fascinating.

It has always been difficult for the white man to bridge the distance between himself and the North American Indian. This is due partly of course to the naturally great depth of the chasm between primitive man and civilized man; and partly also to the seeming impossibility of breaking down or penetrating the reserve of the Indian. His personality, indeed, is as baffling as his dance-art. So true an expression, however, of his inner self does this art appear to be, so keen is the flash of revelation it brings, that in it the soul of the Indian seems to be laid bare in a greater measure than in any other phase of his

personal activity. In his dance and song he is caught, as it were, off his guard.

It is, then, important—even urgent—that this significant American folk-art be preserved and safeguarded. Safeguarded especially from the standardizing hand of the white man; from the tragic deterioration that has been wrought in many other phases of Indian life and product. Happily, the Indian's dance and song have thus far proved to a great extent immune from the blight of the commonplace. Signs are not lacking, however, that they, too, are threatened.

There is, therefore, no time to lose. Dances of all the tribes should be accurately recorded as soon as possible, for fear that in the not distant future they may become altogether extinct; or at least may share a fate similar to that of most of the Indian music now heard on the concert stage—native melody so diluted by the admixture of vocal, instrumental, and harmonic elements supplied by the white musician, as to be virtually denatured. Such use of folk-music has, of course, its rightful and important place in the art of the cultured composer or performer. Its effects are, indeed, often beautiful and inspiring in the case of the free employment of Indian thematic material —however much it may tend to obscure the traditions of authentic native music.

The purely musical element of the Indian's composite art of dance and song has fared better at the hands of scholars than has the element of body movement. Hundreds, thousands, of native tunes of tribes in many parts of the country have been recorded by musicians specially fitted for the task. The melodies have been transcribed by them in as accurate a form as present musical notation permits. Supplementing the work, phonograph records have been made at first hand, by means of which not only the melodic content but the tone-quality and the style have been reproduced with absolute fidelity.

Thus a great body of pure, authentic Indian song has been preserved in permanent form. The world's debt of gratitude to these single-hearted musicians becomes the greater in view of the seemingly inevitable passing of the aboriginal American.

It is to be hoped that laborers in the field of Indian research will ultimately be moved to do as much in the case of Indian dance-art. Hitherto, efforts in this direction have been confined chiefly to the ritualistic, the symbolic, the musical, and the dramatic elements of Indian ceremonial; in which phases profound and detailed research has been made by eminent scholars.

It must be admitted that it is not easy to convey adequately by word, tune, diagram, or picture, the indefinable but distinctive mood of a dance. These aids can, nevertheless, do much to enable the student to assemble the various parts into a form that has a fair degree of fidelity to the original. Something more vivid, more dynamic, however, is needed in order to inform the substance with the spirit. There are qualities in the ceremonial dances of the Red Man that must be personally seen and heard and felt; for of them is born the elusive charm that defies analysis or description. This is true of the dance-art of any race; but especially of one so removed in thought and culture as a primitive people like the American aborigines.

Supplementing personal observation and abstract study, mechanical means are now available—or at least are rapidly being developed—that are capable of providing a very fair substitute for actual first-hand performance. Such little as has already been accomplished in this direction by moving-picture drama is at least highly suggestive of the possibilities. And this, notwithstanding the fleeting and fragmentary glimpses thus far afforded by films that are usually so speeded up that the dancers in them seem bent chiefly on scurrying out of the picture with indecent haste. With a proper application, however, of modern

inventions for the synchronization of movement, sound, line, and color, it should soon be possible to reproduce Indian dances in complete and permanent form. With the aid also of "slow-motion photography" the technique of the art could be analyzed and thus made available to students everywhere.

It may be objected—on good ground—that there is a very real obstacle in the way of accurate and complete recording of the ceremonials. That obstacle is the Indian's own distrust—also on good ground!—of the attitude of the white man. There is no denying the strength of this argument. Personal observation has afforded many illustrations of both sides of the case.

An instance in point: A conservative Indian of New Mexico consented to dance a secular dance of his tribe; but he flatly refused to show the steps of a beautiful ceremonial dance. Nor would he for a long while give any reason for the refusal. At last, after much persuasion, he said, through an interpreter, "It is because you will tell *lies* about me." His fear—a fear that probably lurks in many another Indian heart—was evidently that he would be misrepresented at Washington.

Another instance: At an impressive Pueblo ceremonial the white folk who had been graciously allowed to attend were informed that it was not permitted to take photographs of this particular dance. Undaunted, several in the group levelled their cameras at the dancers. No fewer than five times did the Indian Governor of the Pueblo have to leave his post in the choir to remonstrate with the recalcitrant guests. "But I got four snap-shots all the same!" gleefully whispered one of the women to her companions.

Yet another instance: A curious, staring crowd of white men and women were gathered around a dignified chief, one of a group of Indians that had been taken on tour for a demonstration of Indian life and art. Suddenly one of the white women leaned forward and, in much the manner of a reporter inter-

viewing a foreign visitor, said affably to the Indian chief: "And how do you like our country?" *Our* country!

Yes, lack of sympathy and of understanding on the part of the white race has, indeed, created obstacles to research. But not insuperable ones. Despite much of the Indian's experience with white folk—experience of their broken faith, of their misinterpretation of motive, of their assumption of lofty superiority as "discoverers" of America—the native good-will of the Red Man makes him still amenable to considerate treatment. Once convinced of the sincerity and friendliness and common sense of a white acquaintance, the patient aboriginal (man or woman) is generous in coöperation—as many students of Indian life can attest.

That the Indian's own attitude toward dancing is one of remarkable earnestness is manifest to the student at the outset. For example—

The Indian takes his dancing *disinterestedly*. He does not dance to earn his living; or to win applause on the stage—he is not working for curtain calls.

He takes his dancing *heroically*. And this, even to the point of self-sacrifice for a principle. "The Government may send its troops to shoot us down; but we will *not* cease our dancing," was the answer when the United States Government some years ago tried to put a stop to Indian ceremonies (as cited to the authors by Ernest Thompson Seton, who was present when the order was first issued to one of the tribes of the Southwest).

He takes his dancing *responsibly*. Night after night preceding a tribal ceremonial can the rumble of drum accompaniment be heard, making its way in sombre, muffled tones from the seclusion of the meeting-place where those chosen for the forthcoming performance are assembled. There, every step, every tone, every drum-beat, every syllable, is rehearsed diligently, lest there

be a flaw of omission or commission in a ceremony designed to honor and propitiate, not offend, the spirit-powers.

And he takes his dancing *reverently*. Anyone who, like the present writers, has been granted the rare privilege of attending an all-night dance-ritual in a Pueblo Indian *kiva* (the sacred ceremonial underground chamber of secret tribal councils, devotions, and rehearsals, where commonly the profane foot of white man or woman dare not tread); anyone who has noted there the absorbed, the rapt, expression on the faces of the dancers; anyone who has felt there the rhythm of movement and song and inexorable drum-beat, that seems to make the hard ground throb with the throbbing of the dancers, and cry out with their cry that rain be sent to a thirsty land—anyone who has been responsive to all these things can but realize that in the dance the Indian finds a channel not only for the outlet of his esthetic nature but for the inflow of spiritual power.

Though in his own worship the white man has seen fit to retain other fine arts—music, poetry, painting, sculpture, architecture—he has lost the dance-art from the service of the church (except as it may be said to linger in the processional). For centuries he has been reading reverently in the Psalms the admonition: "Let them praise his name in the dance"; but he has left it to primitive man to give heed. Not left it, though, without some little interference; for civilization has been slow to perceive that every man must be permitted to approach the things of the spirit—whether of art or of religion—by the path that is familiar and beautiful to *his* feet.

PART TWO

BESIDES THE STEPS used in the complete dances or sections of dances described later, in Part Three, some characteristic Indian dance steps are herein analyzed. A few of these steps are compared, very briefly, with dance steps of some other races or nations; including that most highly developed and elaborate dance-art of the white race—the ballet, or "toe-dancing," of (notably) Italy, France, and Russia; and, through widespread adoption, of other European countries and the United States. The ballet form, in the niceties of its crystallized, traditional technique and of its exquisite though often artificial movements, probably offers the most striking contrast of all to the more natural expression of Indian dance-art—a case of the cultured *versus* the primitive. Since, owing to the limitations of the human frame, only a moderate number of movements are possible to it, whatever the race or the condition, there will, naturally, be found points of similarity even in these two extremes. And more especially so because of the fact that the orthodox ballet bears, in line, posture, and movement, unmistakable evidence that it too had its remote origin in a freer, more natural "out-door" style of dance—that of the ancient Greeks.

It is by no means the object, in this short, fragmentary treatise, to do more than barely touch on such comparisons and analogies; and that, merely by way of suggesting that this phase of the subject might possibly prove worthy of research in the future. The present brief—even hasty—excursion into so large and uncultivated a field can do no more than break ground at a single

point. Even this slight jaunt, however, serves to show that Indian dancing is a distinctive and highly specialized form.

The three principal varieties of dancing have been concisely defined by Ethel L. Urlin (*Dancing, Ancient and Modern*) as: "(1) Dancing in which the legs are chiefly made use of, prevailing in Europe generally, and finding its most pronounced form in the orthodox ballet. (2) Dancing in which the arms and hands are chiefly used, carried to high perfection by the Javanese and also in Japan. (3) Dancing in which the muscles of the body play the chief part, as seen in Africa and Western Asia."

These elements are found also in combination in many dance-forms. In Spanish dancing, for example, arms, hands, head, torso, legs, and feet are strikingly in evidence; not to speak of very characteristic facial expression.

To none of the forms described does the dancing of the North American Indian, man or woman, seem specifically to belong. There are points of similarity, yes; but withal there is found in the dance-art of the Indian a mode that is peculiar to him. The chief element in the dancing of the tribes observed consists in foot and leg movements. Arm and hand movements are made in moderation, and at times are but a reflex action of the foot rhythms. The torso is for the greater part quiet, but relaxed. There is no change of facial expression. Exceptions to the foregoing generalizations were noted chiefly in the case of dances in which there is an element of dramatic impersonation; such, for example, as the wing-like motion of the arms in the Eagle Dance, or the realistic body movements in the burlesque "horse-tail" dance, or the plastic action of the Dog Dance.

In the tribes observed the men do the greater part of the dancing, though the women also often participate. In this respect the custom of the white race in modern times is reversed, at least in so far as the dance is considered in its use as a cultural and a dramatic art-form. In its social aspect—such as in the

folk-dance and the ball-room dance of the white race—both sexes are equally represented. But in the dance in the schools and on the stage, girls and women now greatly preponderate, notwithstanding the late appearance—just two hundred and fifty years ago—of the female dancer in the European ballet. The Indian, in the importance he evidently attaches in his educational system to dancing by men, is but in line with some of the great nations and races of old—as witness, for example, the inclusion of dancing in the rigorous training that was given the stalwart Greek youths, that they might the better fulfill their part in the military, the religious, and the social scheme.

Since "the gesture of a people has a more ancient and unchanging history than its speeeh" (J. E. Crawford Flitch: *Modern Dancing and Dancers*), is it not conceivable that an exhaustive study of comparative dancing, with special reference to the art of the American Indian and other primitive races, might yield just as significant results as does the study of comparative philology?

* * * * *

For the purpose of conveying through the eye somewhat of the movement and posture of the Indian dancer, diagrams are given in the simple outline figures used in ballet directions—a "sign-language" familiar to students of dance-art. Now and then, for the sake of brevity or for lack of better words, terms relating to the orthodox ballet are employed in referring to some phases of Indian dancing. These terms, mostly in French or from the French, also form a sort of technical language among dance students—much as Italian terms are used by musicians, or Latin terms by the medical profession. The term "ballet" is herein used in its restricted sense as designating the form of dance-art commonly known as "toe-dancing"—not in its general sense as either a dance composition for stage performance or a corps of dancers in such a performance.

Some of the Indian steps given were observed in more than one tribe and

in more than one kind of dance. The musical settings therefore differ with the various tribes or dances. This being the case, the steps are herein presented without special accompanying songs. Rhythm and speed play a large part, of course, in determining characteristic style and mood. Therefore in order to assist the student in forming an idea of the character of a given step, a simple rhythmic pattern and a metronomic indication of approximate speed are given when advisable. A more complete form of score—with tunes, words or syllables, drum-beat, and steps—is reserved for the dance examples in Part Three.

Indian dancing, like every other dance-form, can be reduced to a few basic movements. Besides the simplest form of *step*—such as is used in stepping forward or sidewise or backward—the basic Indian dance movements are the *jump*, the *hop*, the *skip*, and the *tap*. Since these terms are often used loosely or interchangeably in daily speech, they are herein, for the sake of clearness, restricted in meaning as follows:

Jump: a leap (a) from one foot to the other; or (b) on both feet simultaneously.

Hop: a short, brisk spring (a) on the ball of one foot; or (b) simultaneously on the toe of one foot and the ball of the other.

Skip: a step forward on one foot, followed immediately by a scraping or pushing or brushing movement of the same foot on the ground —designated brush-back, brush-forward, etc., as the case may be; then similar movements on the other foot; and so on.

Tap: a light touch, or pat, on the ground with either the ball or the toe of the foot.

(By the word *toe*, in Indian steps, is meant the part of the foot known in ballet parlance as the *half-toe*—not the point of the toe as in "toe-dancing.")

SOME CHARACTERISTIC INDIAN DANCE STEPS

SPECIAL TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

In place: a step or steps made in one place—that is, without progressing forward, backward, or sidewise.

Flat: on the sole and heel of the foot.

Soft: relaxed, as opposed to tense, muscles.

Continue, with alternation: repetition of preceding movement, with alternating feet.

R: right.

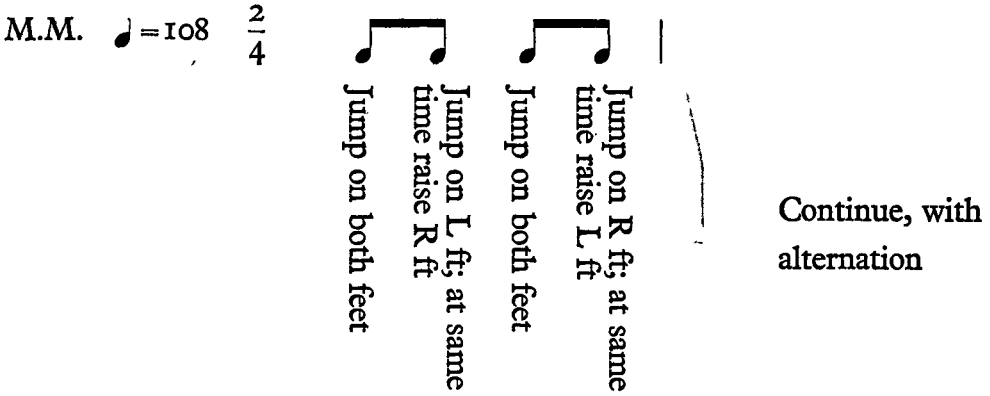
L: left.

Ft: foot.

Forw: forward.

Side: sidewise.

A HIGHLY CHARACTERISTIC MOVEMENT



The feet are parallel, and one foot is a few inches ahead of the other (see fig. 1 a). To make the step: (1) jump on both feet flat (see fig. 1 b); (2) jump on the left foot, holding the right foot up in front (see fig. 1 c); (3) jump on both

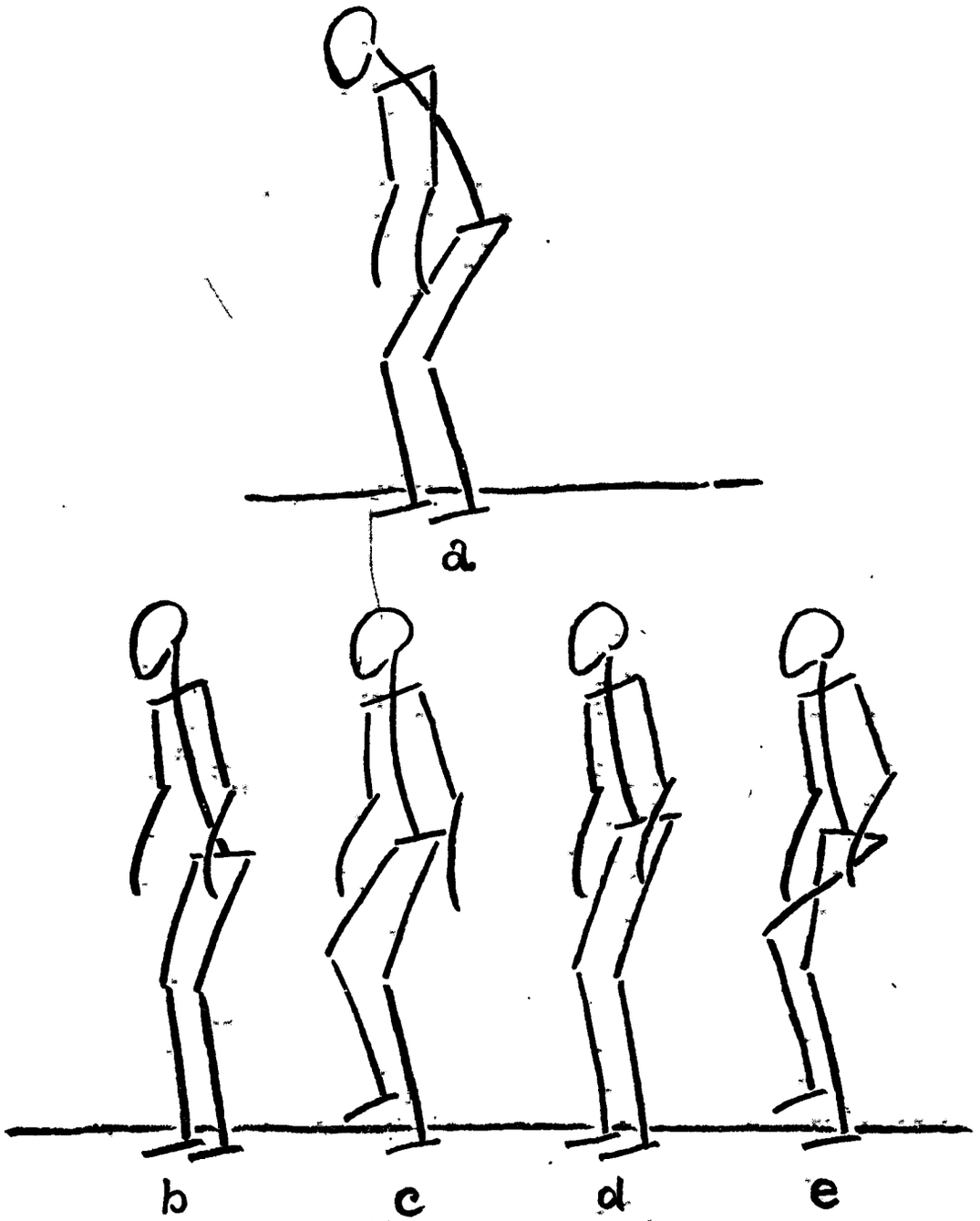


FIG. 1—A CHARACTERISTIC MOVEMENT

feet flat (see fig. 1 d); (4) jump on the right foot, holding the left foot up in front (see fig. 1 e); continue, with alternation.

Body and arm movements made with this step sometimes vary according to the fancy of the dancer. For example: some dancers exaggerate the movements, others move more calmly; some adopt a bending-forward posture (see fig. 1 a), others stand upright. The step may be done either in place or with a slight forward progression. It is sometimes done slowly, but commonly it is done rapidly.

The step is remarkably effective and gives the impression of exceeding lightness on the part of the dancer. To the observer it seems as if the feet touch the ground only for the purpose of springing away or rebounding from it. It is almost, indeed, as if the dancer's initial movement consisted in rising lightly *from* the ground as if from a spring-board, rather than in jumping *on* the ground. It is one of the most characteristic of the Indian dance steps observed. It is found in one or other of its forms in some war dances, as well as in dances of other types; such, for example, as the hoop dance of Taos Pueblo, and a "horse-tail" dance of Tesuque Pueblo that is said to be a burlesque of a Cheyenne dance.

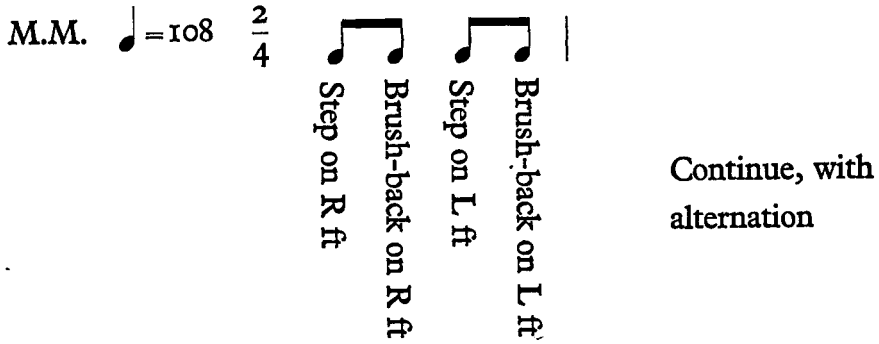
The performance at Tesuque Pueblo of the last-mentioned—the "horse-tail," so to style it—was, by the way, an interesting example of the fact that the dignified Indian drops his reserve at times and manifestly enjoys his little joke. Each dancer's gay and elaborate costume included a horse-tail fastened to the belt in a way that enabled the wearer to operate it in truly comic fashion. The performance gave the impression of being a sort of go-as-you-please affair—not a set ceremonial. Indeed at times it seemed to have the spontaneity of improvisation. One dancer, for instance, rolled and squirmed on his back now and again; kicking up his legs the while like a fallen horse struggling to

right itself—the kicks, by the way, were in perfect rhythm. Another varied his movements at intervals by dropping on his knees and quivering all over like a high-strung thoroughbred. Each dancer seemed to be interpreting the dance according to his own dramatic instinct. But for all the seeming impromptu, for all the prancing and kicking and wagging of tails, the unity of the whole as to rhythm and outline was not for a second marred.

Evidently the etiquette of the occasion demanded that the dancers go on dancing until the orchestra of drummers chose to stop drumming—and they did not choose to stop betimes! It was too good comedy to be cut short unduly. Time and again did the dancers come hopefully to a stop at what seemed a logical ending; only to be spurred on to further action by a fresh attack of the relentless drum-beat. The drummers were so convulsed with delight at the antics of the dancers that they kept on drumming until the spectators marvelled that the "horses" did not drop in their tracks from exhaustion.

An amplification of the characteristic step was noticed in the "horse-tail" dance, in addition to the original form. The first movement was the same —a jump on both feet. The second consisted of several quick jumps, instead of only one jump, on one foot (the free foot meanwhile being slightly advanced and the knee raised); followed by a repetition of these movements, with alternation. This variation is not unlike one of the figures of the Irish Jig. Oddly enough, the young Indian man who did the most brilliant dancing in the group—evidently a genius in the art—assumed with this step somewhat the same jaunty posture (hands on hips, elbows out, shoulders insolently forward) that is characteristic of the Irish Jig.

THE SKIP



The skip in some form is found nearly everywhere. A skip step that is common to Indian tribes consists of two movements: (1) a step on the ball of, say, the right foot—the weight is now on the right foot, and the left foot is off the ground; (2) a brush-back on the right foot; then continuation, with alternation. The second movement—the brush-back—is the reverse of that in the skip step common to the white races, in which there is a brush-*forward*, instead of a brush-*back*, movement. Though both the white and the Indian skipper *advance* in the course of the skipping, the brush-*back* movement of the Indian causes him to advance much more slowly than does the white skipper with his corresponding brush-*forward* step. The Indian skipper achieves his advancement by making the forward thrust of the foot (preparatory to the step) cover a greater distance than that covered by the brush-back movement. So he gets there in the long run.

The two modes of skipping differ too in the esthetic effect on the observer; and probably also in the emotional reaction of the performer. The skipping of white folk is more "springy": the Indian's is closer to the ground. The former expresses the care-free elation of youth: the latter suggests a more mature, cautious, subtle mood, a more suppressed excitement. It is probably the very deliberateness of the Indian skip step—the inch-by-inch progress, the

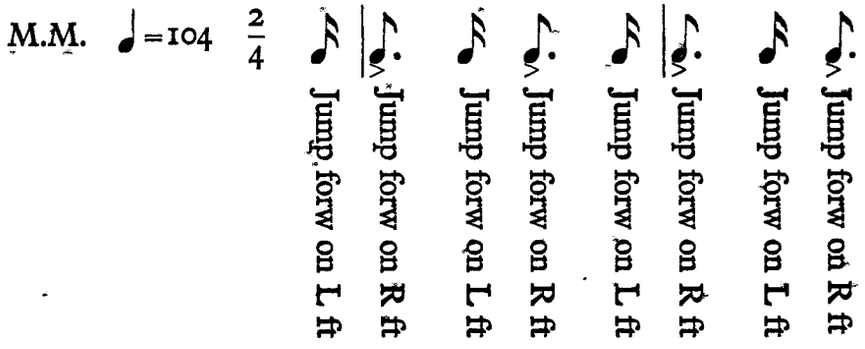
advancing and retreating body—that creates in the observer a feeling of greater dramatic suspense, of more inexorable oncoming, than could ever be conveyed by swift and unretarded motion.

THE JUMP

Continuous jumping on both feet simultaneously seems common to many primitive races, including the Indian. Indian dancers seem able to jump on both feet—flat—without feeling the usual fatiguing effects of jarring movement; and this, notwithstanding that they often keep their dancing going for hours and hours at a time. The ballet dancer is trained to land on the ball of the foot, and with soft knee, in order to avoid jar. Even the most arduously trained male ballet dancers—such as those in the great Russian companies, with whom many amazingly difficult forms of the jump are a highly developed art—could not compete with such endurance as that of the Indian dancer. Relaxation of body in dance movements is, also, specially characteristic of primitive man. This is probably the reason why the Indian can keep up his dancing so much longer at a time than can the white dance artist.

A JUMP STEP

(Observed among Pueblo Indians)



The feet are parallel; but one foot, say the right, is about four inches farther forward than the other. The knees are soft. To make the step: stand on both feet; then (1) jump forward a few inches on the back foot, say the left; (2) jump forward quickly a few inches on the right foot, bringing it to the same distance ahead of the left foot that it was at the start. The movement gives a slow forward progress and has a peculiar, jerky effect. Both feet are kept close to the ground during the movement.

DOG DANCE

As an example of the confusion that often attends an initial effort in the study of Indian ceremonial, the writers' own experience may be cited. A friendly and artistic young Indian woman of San Ildefonso Pueblo sent word that on a certain date the tribe would give the Dog Dance. The ceremony, as is usual with Indian dances, was given out-of-doors. It was on a freezing day in January. The dance was done by two men whose bare legs and bodies were painted black; as were their faces also. In the right hand each carried a decorated rattle, and in the left a stick ornamented with a strip of gay cloth and dangling feathers. A great feather headdress extended from top to toe in the back. The dancers were accompanied by a splendidly attired choir of singers and drummers. (Sometimes, it was learned, each dancer has a long sash tied to his belt and held by an Indian woman, as if on a leash.)

At the close of the dance an Indian appeared from one of the little adobe houses of the Pueblo and threw a loaf of bread to the dancers, who got down on all fours, so to speak, and grubbed on the ground after the bread with their mouths. Finally one of them succeeded in catching the loaf securely between his teeth and carried it in this way to a singer in the choir, who relieved him of it. Another Indian came out of a house with another loaf, and the "scrap" was repeated. Then some bystanders—not Indians—threw small change; whereupon the dancers grovelled again on the ground, and, after rooting about vigorously, came up with coins between their teeth and their mouths choked with the dry soil. Not an edifying spectacle, this part, however realistic.

"What does the dance mean?" one of the drummers was asked.

"Peace," he replied.

"Why, a dog-fight over a loaf of bread doesn't seem a very peaceful ending," was the comment of the puzzled inquirers.

The drummer smiled his inscrutable Indian smile and said nothing.

"Why do the dogs carry the sticks with feathers?" was the next query.

"They are shields or banners," was the answer.

"Does the food belong in the ceremony?"

"Yes, food belongs," said the Indian.

"Do the coins belong?"

"No," he said, "Mexicans throw coins." (That was somewhat of a relief; for the unpleasant coin feature seemed hardly akin to the picturesque whimsey of occasional Indian comedy.)

"What is the right name of the dance?" the Indian was asked.

"It is called Dog Dance; but it is Peace Dance," was the calm response.

Peace! There *was* no peace—there was only a stubborn determination to track those two dogs to their lair. At first, hopefully following the peace clue, the inquirers were heartened in their search by coming across (in the official program of a Santa Fé fiesta) a graphic description that tallied admirably with the dance given at San Ildefonso Pueblo. The ceremonial described was a "Tanoan Peace Dance—part of an ancient Peace Drama, in which two dancers, representing the chiefs of opposing forces, stage a mimic combat, and description in movement of the battle that brought peace to the tribe. It goes back to the time when war issues were often settled among the people by single combat between opposing leaders. Sometimes the wife of each chief appears, holding a cord attached to the belt of each, showing how ties of home and family life moved men to valor in battle."

Back again to the San Ildefonso tribe for further persistent questioning:

"Where did the Dog Dance come from?" one of the Indians was asked.

"It did not come from any place," was the answer. "My father said it has been dance here for years and we still dance it yet. I have seen it dance the same way as it dance now since I was a small boy."

"Are the two men who do the dance supposed to represent dogs?"

"Yes, the two men represent as dogs while they are dancing—till it's over!"

"What does the Dog Dance mean?"

"It don't mean anything much. It's just call Dog Dance."

"Why is it called Dog Dance?"

"Because it was named it Dog Dance by the old people when they first dance it. They were painted all black and look like dogs."

"Does an Indian woman sometimes hold the dancer by a long sash tied to his belt? And what does it mean?"

"Yes, sometime the two dogs has a Indian belt tied to his belt and held by the women. They use the women same time so they can dance too. They carry the dogs around so they wouldn't run away."

"Why is the Dog Dance called also Peace Dance?"

"There is no dance here call Peace Dance. The Peace Dance is dance by the Taos Indians. It is almost the same as the Dog Dance."

Back of all these conflicting versions there is probably a very ancient symbolic ceremonial whose origin is lost in the obscurity of a remote past. Researches by eminent authorities show that the dog dance idea is widespread among tribes of the Plains Indians, and may have filtered through from them to the Pueblos of the Southwest, in one form or another. Dr. Clark Wissler, for example, describes (in his *Societies and Dance Associations of the Blackfeet Indians*) ceremonials, customs (including the food feature), and costumes of the Dog Societies of Plains Indians that would seem to establish definitely the kinship of the various "dogs" in Indian dances. And Pliny Earle Goddard

(in his *Dancing Societies of the Sarsi Indians*) notes that in the dances of the Dog Society the wives of the members joined in, dancing behind their husbands; the wives of the leaders holding the ends of the long sashes as they danced.

Whatever its origin, and whether the dancers represent great chieftains dancing the dance of peace or (as is more probable) huge black dogs moving about with their lithe bodies in sinuous curves, the Dog Dance of San Ildefonso Pueblo is a remarkably effective impersonation. Not even the ensuing fight over coins mars its plastic beauty; for, happily, this feature is not introduced until the dance proper is over.

The principal movement in the dance consists in a nimble stepping forward or backward or in circles as each dancer advances toward or retreats from his opponent. The action is not difficult or peculiar in any way. It is just a continuous "soft," free stepping about—always graceful and light of foot; never jerky. Though through the greater part of the dance the two men are face to face (moving either toward each other as in fig. 12 a, or away from each other as in fig. 12 b), at intervals they turn away and move about in small individual circles. At certain times the dancers advance close to each other and pause a second, while each defiantly raises his shield (or banner?) aloft with emphasis (see fig. 12 c). The shield is usually held at the middle of the stick; but sometimes it is held by one end. The dance is repeated many times.

When each man is held on a leash by a woman, the latter follows the man with the same kind of step as that used by him. Each woman adorns herself for the dance according to her own fancy. She lets her hair hang loose. Besides holding the leash in one hand, she carries two feathers in each hand.

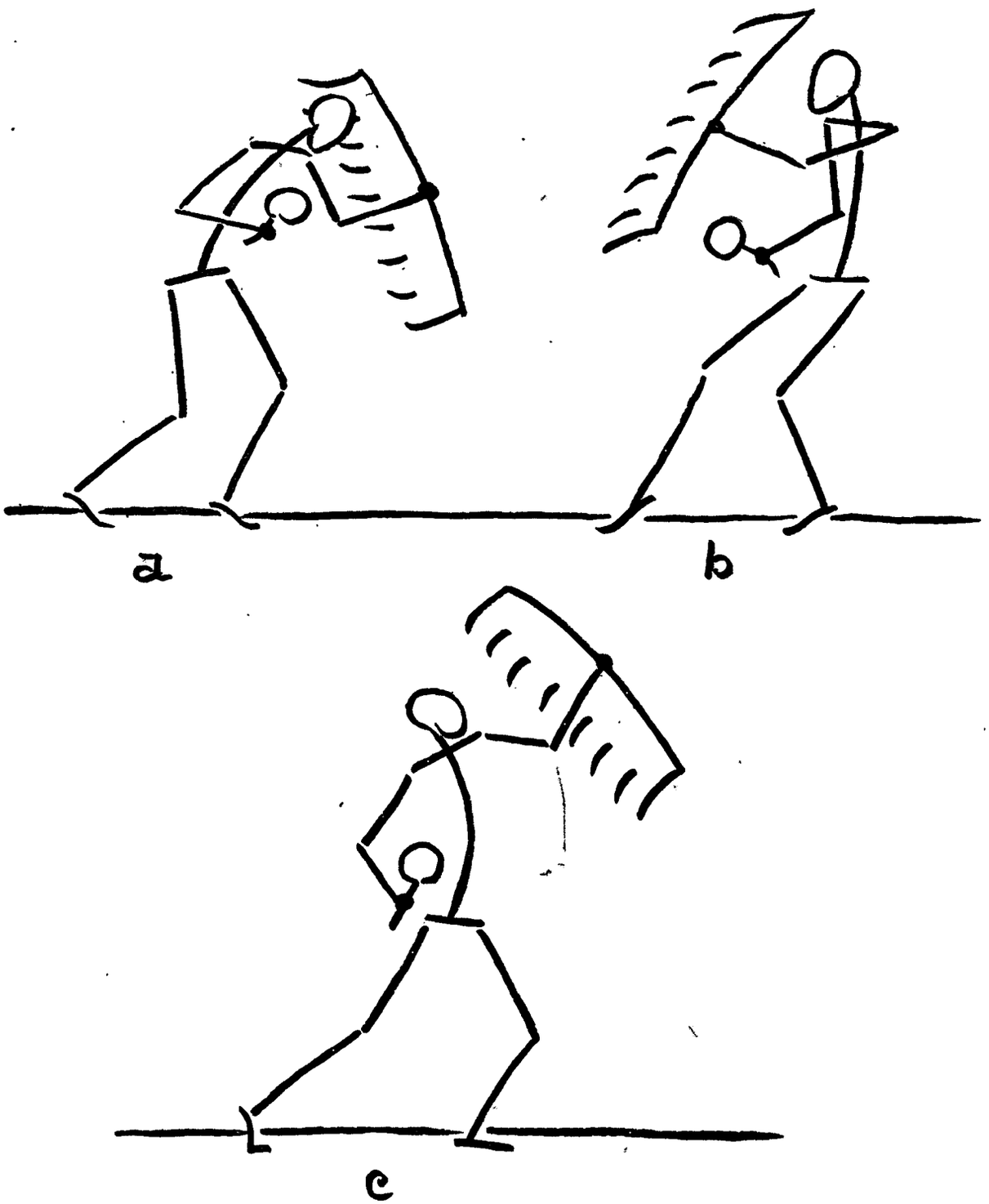


FIG. 12—DOG DANCE

(Explanation of step reference-numbers in score.)

DOG DANCE

1. Step lightly on ball of right foot.
2. Step lightly on ball of left foot.

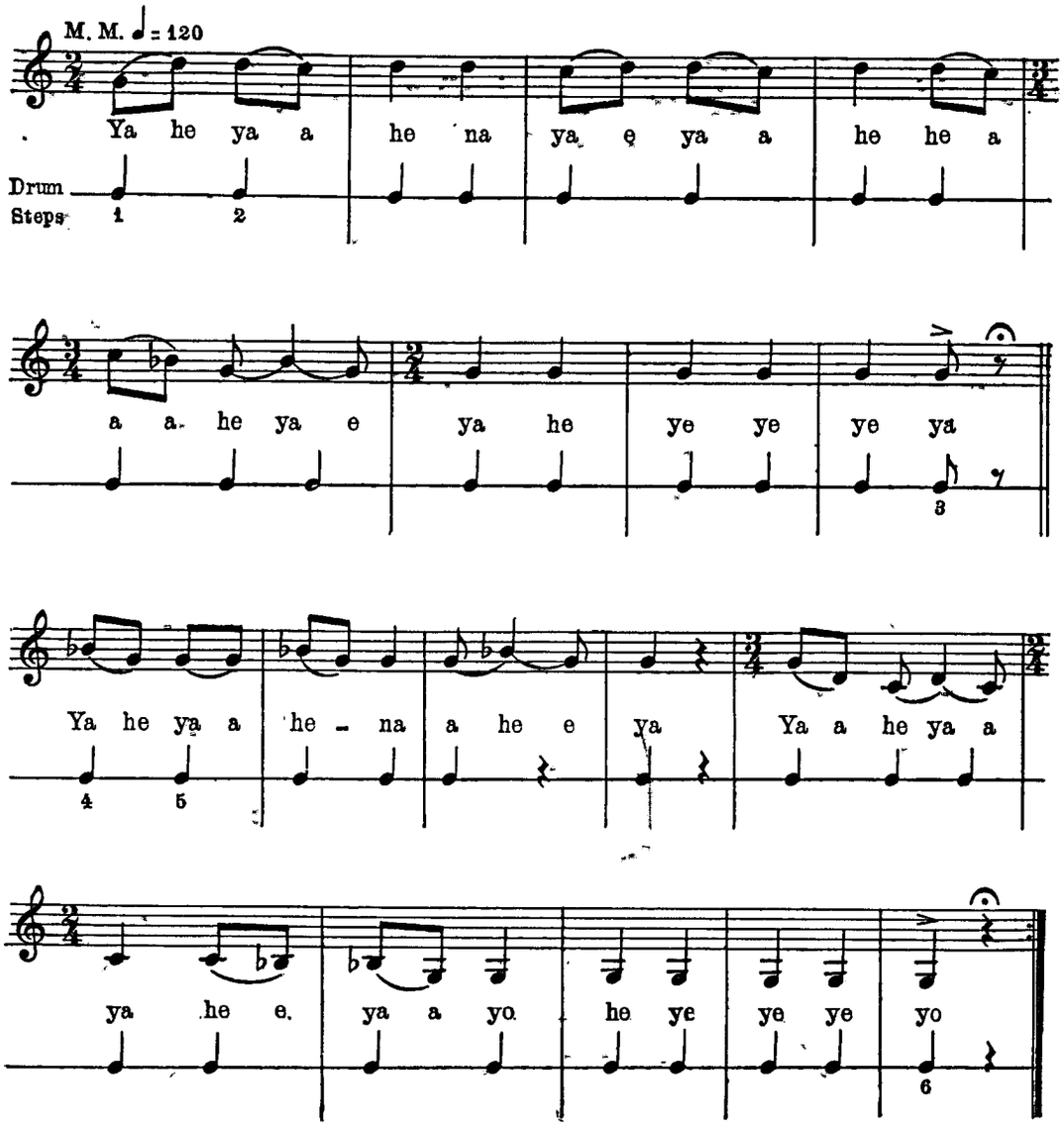
   Continue movements 1 and 2, with alternation, and with same time-value, a step to each quarter-note (while advancing, retreating, or circling), until movement number 3 is reached.

3. Pause and hold up shield, in a charging position; with the weight on the front foot.

4 and 5. Resume movements 1 and 2 (while advancing, retreating, or circling) and continue until movement number 6 is reached.

6. Pause and hold up shield, as in number 3.

DOG DANCE


M. M. ♩ = 120
Ya he ya a he na ya e ya a he he a
Drum Steps 1 2
a a he ya e ya he ye ye ye ya
3
Ya he ya a he - na a he e ya Ya a he ya a
4 5
ya he e. ya a yo he ye ye ye yo
6