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The Dancing History Collection: Cultural Dances, Part 1. Chapter 2: Vietnam, Harvest Dance

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Author

Beck, Jill

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VIETNAM: HARVEST DANCE (Ganh Lua)

Lily Dam and Jill Beck

2.1 EXCERPTED SUMMARY

Ganh Lua is from the South of Vietnam, a dance from the countryside. All age groups would traditionally perform and enjoy a dance of this nature, and the usual time for a dance celebrating the end of the harvest is the autumn. This genre of happy, celebratory dance could be seen in any of the festivals that are held in many southern villages during October. The harvest dance has long roots, but the dance has changed over time. Originally, men and women would have sung and danced on different sides of the performing space. Even in the dance as it is performed today, men and women do not touch. The hat is used as a device to enable partners to dance together without touching. Because young, contemporary Vietnamese are more involved in social dancing than in dances with historical traditions, the harvest dances are not seen as much as they were in earlier years.

2.2 MATERIALS

Audio CD
Cone-shaped straw hat for each dancer

2.3 OBJECTIVES

1. To learn how dance can reflect the labor of farming, and the happy celebration of a successful community harvest
2. To work cooperatively with a partner, and collaboratively with a group to produce an overall result
3. To handle a prop in various ways to signify different meanings and activities
4. To achieve a high level of unison performance, and to understand the value various societies place on group harmony and discipline
5. To contrast this highly thematic and representational dance with the more abstract Israeli dances. These selected dances of both societies reinforce a sense of community, but through different strategies.

2.4 RECONSTRUCTION STRATEGIES

1. Practice the basic step with the music, traveling forward and back, then side to side, then circling in place. Since the travel patterns in the dance are fairly complex, ease in performing the basic step in all directions is important.

2. Practice the basic step using the hat in various ways: holding it in both hands in front of you and moving it side to side as if showing a basket full of rice (page 69); holding it from underneath, cupped in the right hand while circling in place (page 68); holding it in both hands and tracing an arc with it overhead, as if it were the sun traveling from one side of the sky to the other (page 75). All of these steps are done by individuals and are best mastered before steps with partners are attempted.
3. Learn the dance from the introduction through measure 29. Practice a presentation that is calm but pleasant.
4. Discuss the qualities of this opening section. What aspects of community are represented? Of what possible actions associated with work, harvest or marketing might these opening sequences be representative?
5. Practice the threshing step. The dancers need to feel confident and at ease about what their feet are doing, so that their main concentration can be on the arm actions. What dynamic would be appropriate to communicate “threshing?”
6. Continue through the end of the dance, discussing the possible significance of each sequence. For example, when partners exchange hats, could this be a metaphor for trading, or sharing? What possible meanings could the movements in the dance have been crafted to communicate? Discussion should acknowledge that interpretations may or may not reflect the original intent of the dance’s creators.

2.5 ASSESSMENT

Students may be assessed on:

1. Their ability to work seamlessly as a group, to achieve an overall quality in which individuals do not stand out, but contribute to the whole
2. Interpretations of the meaning of different dance sequences
3. Comparison of this dance with the Wedding Dance from “La Sylphide” (Volume 3 of The Dancing History Collection). Each of these dances uses unison dancing by a large group to achieve a celebratory quality. Yet the dances differ in their overall result. Why?
4. Knowledge of basic Vietnamese geography, history, language characteristics and Confucian values

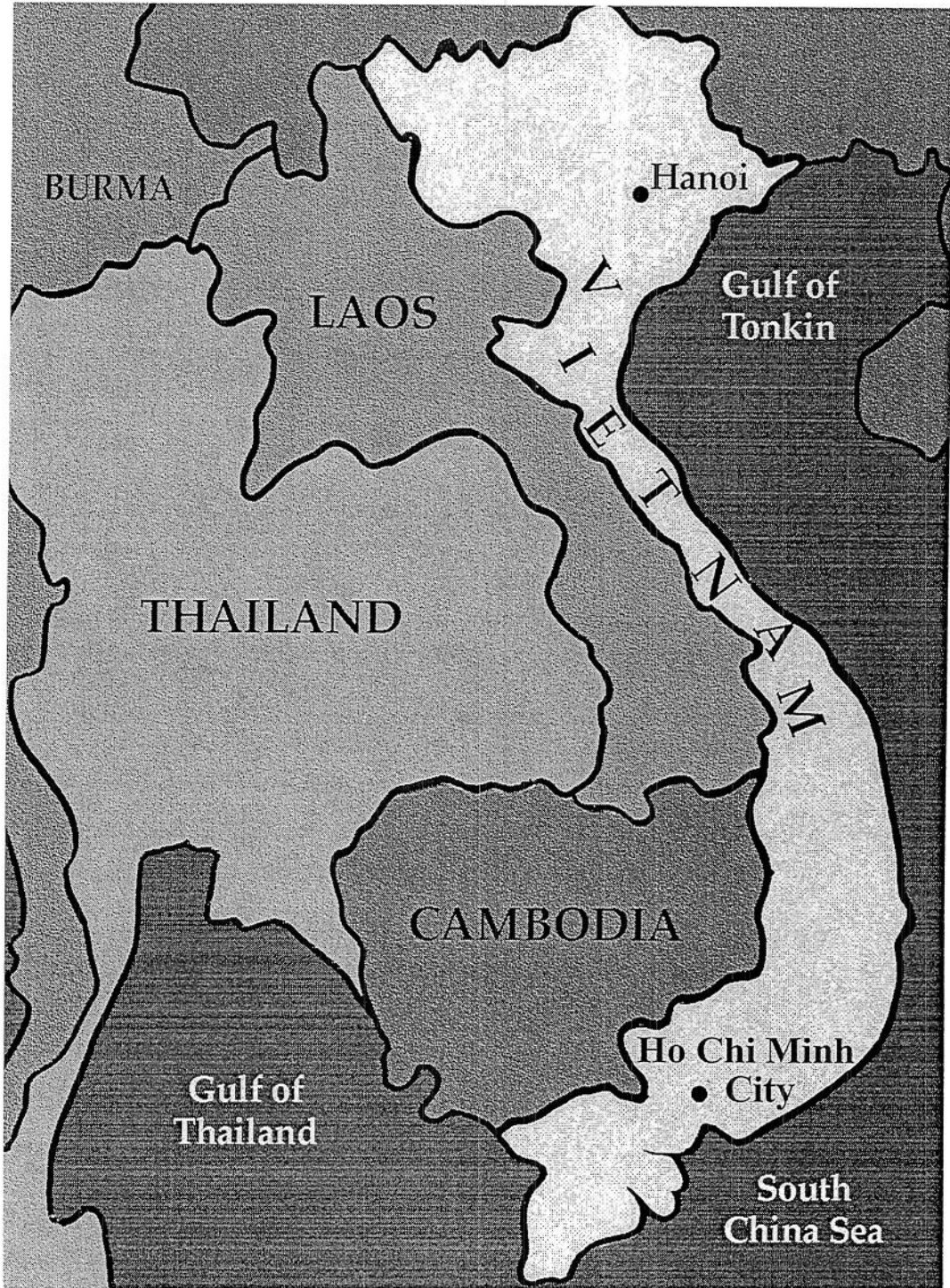


Illustration 7

MAP OF VIETNAM

Showing Hanoi in the North and Ho Chi Minh City in the South

2.6 VIETNAM: GENERAL INFORMATION

The country of Vietnam forms an S-shape (see illustration 7), with China to its north, and Laos, Kampuchea (formerly Cambodia) and Thailand to the east. The broad geographic area within which Vietnam is located is Southeast Asia. Vietnam is very different culturally from its neighbors. A general knowledge of Asia may be informative about Laos, Kampuchea, and Thailand, but will be less applicable to Vietnam.

The Vietnamese people originated in the Red River delta, as a racial and cultural fusion of Indonesians, Austroasiatics, Viet and Thai immigrants and Chinese sailors and scholars. This period of origination extended from 200 B.C. to 200 A.D. The area was under Chinese rule for over 1,000 years, from roughly 111 B.C. to 938 A.D. This period of Chinese rule dramatically shaped the external manifestations of Vietnamese culture, including interpersonal customs, costumes, and fashions such as braided hair. In general, outside appearances were more affected by Chinese influence than internal character and religion.

By current estimates, there are 65 million people in Vietnam and 3 million Vietnamese living overseas. Of these, 1.5 million Vietnamese are now United States residents or citizens clustered in California, Texas and New York. The Vietnamese people are, in many ways, the most Westernized group in Asia having been a French colony from 1858-1954. Yet in their overseas homes, Vietnamese groups maintain their customs and culture, which are varied. For example, Buddhist temples and Catholic churches would both be important in Vietnamese communities.

2.7 VIETNAMESE HARVEST DANCE (*Ganh Lua*)

“Vietnam is one of the world’s leading producers of rice, along with other countries of Southeast Asia. Rice fields extend over more than 12 million acres today, and have been a central part of life in Vietnam for many centuries.”¹ So it is only natural that one of the festival celebrations of the Vietnamese people would center around the rice harvest. The Vietnamese festival that is most familiar to non-Vietnamese is the Tê’t festival, marking the lunar New Year. However, “at least three times a year, traditional festivals take place in the villages of Vietnam.” Beside the Tê’t festival there are others “associated with the seasonal activities of planting and harvesting of rice and other crops.”²

The Harvest Dance *Ganh Lua* is a folk dance with no formal history, no recorded data, and no formal mechanism for passing the dance on from one generation to the next. As a dance in the rural tradition, the harvest dance originally involved a substantial amount of singing. Harvest dances are actually a group of dances on a similar theme, celebrating the daily life activities and the achievements of an agricultural economy. *Ganh Lua* depicts people in the field or going to the marketplace with hats or baskets full of grain. The harvest dance tradition extends deeply into the history of the Vietnamese people. The steps and patterns of the version in this chapter were recalled by Lily Dam from her childhood. They were arranged to an appropriate popular song with lyrics that describe farmers carrying rice to the marketplace at dawn, walking quickly with their good harvest. Even older women carry

baskets full of rice; they are still strong and at work with the others. The words of the singing told the story of the dance, which the movements depict. In Selection 10 of the audio CD, this popular song has been re-recorded in an instrumental version.

Ganh Lua is from the South of Vietnam, an agricultural region. Many folk or “countryside” dances in the Vietnamese tradition featured groups of people singing back and forth, more than actual dancing. The song that originally accompanied the dance described “walking, walking to the marketplace” to sell the rice produced in the harvest. All age groups would traditionally perform and enjoy a dance of this nature, and the usual time for a dance celebrating the end of the harvest would be the autumn. Festivals are held in many southern villages during October to commemorate the harvest season; this genre of happy, celebratory dance could be seen in any of these festivals.

The harvest dance may have long roots, but the dance has changed over time. Originally, men and women would have sung and danced on different sides of the performing space. There was sometimes an element of friendly challenge in the songs and dances of the two groups, who would have improvised some of the singing as they went along. Even in the dance as it is performed today, there is no touching between men and women. Hats are used as a device enabling partners to dance together without touching.

Young, contemporary Vietnamese are more involved in social dancing than in dances with historical traditions, so the harvest dances are not seen as much as they were in earlier years. Since the period of the French occupation of Vietnam, the country’s music has become increasingly modernized and Westernized; the early genres of singing accompanied by dancing have become difficult to find in performance or documentation.

Harvest dances can be performed with variations; for example, men in this dance can carry bamboo sticks and hit them rhythmically as they move. Or, baskets can be carried in the dance, similarly to the hats represented here.

2.8 COSTUMES

As would be expected, Vietnamese dancers wear different costumes for different dances. For restagings of the royal dances that were created to entertain the royal family and the court, dancers wear costumes made of silk that include a colorful hat, a tunic over tight pants and pointed and curved shoes. For folk dances, they either wear a white, brown or colored (for women) V-neck long-sleeved top over black “high water” pants. Dancers depicting a northern Vietnamese folk song would wear a scarf over their head and a colorful dress with a split in the front or sides, over black pants.



Illustration 8

Two dancers showing a scarf over their head and a colorful tunic with split sides over black pants.
Photo courtesy of Lily Dam

For more formal dances such as fan dances and sword dances, performers wear the formal Vietnamese outfit called, “Ao Dai” which is a dress with splits at the side over white or black pants and a round head ornament.



Illustration 9

Two dancers showing the costume “Ao Dai”.
Photo courtesy of Lily Dam

In some Vietnamese communities in the United States, after-school clubs have formed that sponsor activities relating to Vietnamese culture. Lily Dam, the cultural expert for this chapter, directed one such group, and used the following costuming for students performing the harvest dance:

1. Men or boys in brown shirts, the color of the earth
2. Women or girls in colorful shirts
3. All wear black pants
4. Scarf over head for men, tied in back, or worn over the shoulders (would have been used in the fields for wiping faces hot and wet from work)

2.9 NOTES ON STYLE AND INTERPRETATION

Please note the importance of particular movements and formations in the harvest dance as it is notated. For example, there is a prevalence of rows in the spatial formations. This is reminiscent of the rice workers who “with their heads shaded by conical hats and clothes, ...move across the fields in a row.”³ This “moving across fields in a row” may be literally depicted in measures 17-18 and 22-23.



Illustration 10

“With their heads shaded by conical hats and cloths, the transplanters move across the fields in a row”.

Photo reprinted by permission of Yale University Press

Other actions are equally mimetic of the actual work, such as “scooping” water with the hat. (See measures 46-47.) Scooping is a means of irrigating the rice fields that can be done by an individual or a pair of workers, “There are several variants of the scooping method. For a one-man operation, a long triangular scoop is suspended from a tripod placed over a narrow water channel. The operator straddles the channel, and holding the small end of the scoop he

shovels the water into the irrigation ditch. An alternative way requires two men, and the device is a conical basket with double ropes attached to each side. Standing on the edge of the water source, the operators drop the basket into the water, and then in unison they lift the brimming basket by stepping back and tightening the guide ropes, swinging it so that it empties into the higher field or channel. This is done rhythmically and quickly, and although it appears to be done with ease, it is the most difficult of the irrigation techniques.”⁴



Illustration 11

“Standing on the edge of the water source, the operators drop the basket into the water, and...lift the brimming basket...swinging it so that it empties into the higher field.” Photo reprinted by permission of Yale University Press.

When performing a dance based on real-life activities, it can be beneficial to bear in mind the strenuous labor involved in the actions that are at the root of the dance steps. Understanding the physical difficulty of the scooping methods of irrigation may make the gesture in measure 48 of wiping the brow easier in turn to understand and perform. It may also lead the dancer to involve the back and upper torso more in the performance of the scooping gestures (measures 46-47 and 51-52).

The sense of community in the dance can become quite palpable if the dancers remain aware of each other and of being members of a group as they perform. In Vietnamese villages, “there is exhilaration in the air as the harvest begins. . . . All village families, even the wealthy, rally every able-bodied member to assist in the fields. It is imperative to complete the harvest as soon as possible. . . . The size of the field determines the number of workers in a harvesting team, and in some of the particularly large fields, several teams are necessary. Both men and women reap the plants.”⁵ So the principle of a team at work is built into this dance. Some actions such as threshing (measures 29-35) and the exchange in trading of hats (measure 38-39) cannot be done alone; it takes two people to accomplish these actions. The dance is less about individuals performing than it is a mirror of a team in the process of achieving, and celebrating, a harvest that depends on the collaborative participation of the community.

Lastly, there is no direct interpersonal contact in *Ganh Lua*, yet it is a dance that can generate pleasurable emotional and social responses in those participating and in those watching. In Vietnamese dance, viewers “don’t see touching but always see caring.”⁶ Vietnamese dance movements communicate story elements and emotions that are often peaceful. This dance should be reconstructed not as an abstract array of steps, but as an evocative series of stylized mimetic movements for the work of the harvest, and the bountiful return it signals for the strenuous work of the community of people.

2.10 BRIEF HISTORY OF VIETNAM

The period 2279-111 B.C. is known as the prehistoric period, with rule by the Hong Bang, Trieu and Thuc dynasties. This era was followed by that of Chinese rule, from 111 B.C.-938 A.D. From 39-43 A.D. there was a revolt by the Trung Sisters. These were two sisters who formed a military group to revolt against the Chinese. Women and men fighters, led by the sisters, formed military troupes. The strength of the Vietnamese women was unusual in Asia, and is unusual internationally.

In 248 A.D. another revolt was led by Lady Trieu, who was fiercely independent and raised hopes of escape from Chinese influence and domination. However, release from Chinese rule was not achieved until 938. The period 938-1858 is known as the Independence Era, when Vietnam fully became its own kingdom. Militarily, the Chinese moved out of the country.

The Ngo, Dinh, Le (Anterior), Ly, Tran, and Le (Posterior) dynasties succeeded each other throughout the Independence Era. During the weaker periods in dynastic rule, Mac lords usurped power in many sections of the kingdom. They were in effect feudal lords with power that extended throughout the country. Rivalry between these ruling lords climaxed in a Civil War that pitted the Trinh lords against the Nguyen lords, but the kingdom remained intact. Other threats to the integrity of Vietnam occurred during the Independence Era. For example, invasions by Chinese and Mongolian armies were defeated (1284-1288 and 1407-1427), as the Vietnamese repulsed attempts to access their long coastline. Since Vietnam is a peninsula, it enjoys excellent access to the ocean and to southeast Asia in general. This geographic advantage made the country an enviable target for invading armies from the north.

After 1858, the transition of Vietnam to Western culture began, although prior to this some Western influence had been introduced by Portuguese missionaries, who brought Catholicism, and their alphabet as an alternative to Asian characters. However, the country’s independence was defeated in 1858 by the French, who then dominated Vietnam until 1954. With the French occupation came French culture, music and dancing, food and clothing styles. Some of this influence has been very long-lasting. For example, the sense of fashion in Vietnam is distinct from the rest of Asia. A number of successful Vietnamese designers are currently training or working in France. The cultural and political domination of the French was not challenged effectively until the Resistance War of 1945-1954.

From 1954-1975, Vietnam was divided into North and South. A communist regime assumed power in the north, and at this time, the cultural advisor for this study unit, Lily Dam, became a refugee in the south from the repression she experienced in the north. On April 30, 1975 came the collapse of South Vietnam, and from 1975 to the present the country has been unified as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam with Hanoi as its capital. A significant exodus of Vietnamese from their country began in 1975. 500,000 people came to the United States from Vietnam in the 1970s, and in the 1980s the Boat People claimed international attention for the plight of Vietnamese fleeing their country.

The history of Vietnam, then, falls into two broad periods. It may be considered an “Asian” country until the 1850s, and a hybrid “Asian-Western” country from the 1850s. That hybrid period introduced bilingualism into Vietnam (Vietnamese and French), and it may be generally concluded that the two greatest external influences on the development of the Vietnamese identity have been China and France.

According to Lily Dam, Vietnamese women may have been unusually strong because the men were away so much at war. Women made many decisions, and after the French arrived, academic training was increasingly available to them. Vietnamese women have been recognized for their success in business. (You will read in the following pages that business was at the base of the Confucian scale of social values.) As a result of women being in business, they controlled their own money; thus they had the means to assume power in the community.

HISTORY OF VIETNAM: A TIMELINE

2879 – 111 BC Prehistoric Period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hong Bang, Trieu, Thuc Dynasties
111 BC – 938 AD Chinese Domination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 39 – 43 AD : Revolt by the Trung Sisters • 248 : Revolt by Lady Trieu
938 – 1858 Independence Era	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ngo, Dinh, Le (Anterior), Ly, Tran, Le (Posterior) Dynasties ; Mac Lords • Rivalry between the Trinh and Nguyen Lords, Tay Son • Chinese (and Mongolian) invasions defeated (1284-1288), (1407-1427)
1858 – 1954 French Domination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1945 - 1954 : Resistance war against the French • 1954 : Geneva Agreement, the two Vietnams
1954 – 1975 War between N. and S. Vietnam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April 30, 1975 : Collapse of South Vietnam
1975 – present Socialist Republic of Vietnam	

2.11 CONFUCIAN BELIEFS-A CHINESE INFLUENCE

The teachings of Confucius represented more a philosophy of life than a religion. Although Confucius did refer to a supreme being in his writings, the majority of his teachings were moral and social. Confucius's teachings extended to principles of values, dancing and music. In his teaching, literature and academic achievement were greatly admired. His tenets organized society into ranks with roles and responsibilities for every person in the community and the family. Confucius's ideas on Music and Dance are compiled in the I Ching. In this book are directives for royal celebrations and social propriety. Confucius valued dance and music as part of everyone's education. He himself played the flute. His overall teachings became part of the way of life for the people of Vietnam, with the great exception, however, of his ideas on dance and music. In traditional Vietnamese belief systems, dance and music were not valued as much as academic achievement. This hierarchy of values does not flow from Confucian philosophy. However, the moral education of Confucianism did pervade Vietnamese schools for generations, and "recipes of life" were recited verbatim in classrooms. Lily Dam remembers reciting this rule: "As a young girl, obey parents, especially the father. If the father dies, obey the mother and the oldest brother. To be a proper lady, master four characteristics: voice and manner; moral behavior; appearance; and household skills."

Confucian ranks in society place people according to their utility to the culture, rather than according to their money-making potential. The order he specified was:

Scholars
Farmers
Builders
Business People

It is regrettable from the perspective of the arts that Confucian philosophy on dance and music did not take root in Vietnamese culture. In fact, dance and music have been viewed by the Vietnamese principally as vehicles for entertainment. As such, they are not highly valued since entertainment does not have academic value. The performing arts are seen largely as a "pastime." In fact, there is a saying in Vietnam of which the direct translation is, "Singing is no business."⁷ More admired intellectual life may include the literary arts of writing and reading books, and poetry. This stance on the literary arts versus dance and music separates Vietnam from many other countries in Asia, which have great traditions in the performing arts. The sole segment of Vietnamese society that prized achievement in music and dance was the royalty, and in fact the royal courts were the source of many of the country's contributions to the performing arts.

2.12 LANGUAGE

The Vietnamese language is tonal, meaning that different pitch levels of sounds signify different vocabulary. Each tone, then, has a semantic quality.

A monosyllabic language, Vietnamese is easy to spell, but its varied tones are difficult to master. Clarity in tone is essential to communicating the desired meaning. An example of one syllable with multiple possible meanings based on tone is given below, and pronounced in Selection 9 of the audio CD:

MA (level tone) = ghost

MÃ (high broken tone) = horse

MÁ (high rising tone) = mother

MA (low broken tone) = rice seedling

MÀ (low falling tone) = but

MA` (low rising tone) = tomb

The tones of speech in the Vietnamese language have influenced the country's music, and listeners should try to perceive the various spoken tones that have permeated Vietnamese music composition.

2.13 TERMINOLOGY

The following words and phrases are pronounced in Selection 9 of the audio CD.

Vũ: dance

Múa: dance

Y Phục: Costume

Nhạc: Music

Nhạc Khí: Instrument

Đàn: Instrument

Vũ Dân Tộc: Folk dance

Nhạc Cổ Truyền: Traditional music

Dân Ca: Folk songs

Vũ Điệu Cổ Truyền: Traditional dances

2.14 MUSIC AND DANCE

From the 14th century, records indicate that music and dance were popular as entertainment at Court. Documentation is sparse, however, since the performing arts were largely passed on as oral traditions. There is particularly little recorded about the music and dances that might have been popular among people outside the royal courts. It is known that royal traditions in music and dance were not allowed to spread outside the courts, and this may have been a factor in segregating enjoyment of the arts from the majority of the population.

Much of the information we have about the arts at the royal courts was recorded by French observers in the early 19th century. French advisors to the Vietnamese kings witnessed performances and described them in written accounts, giving us some of our best information on how art events were organized. Succeeding paragraphs preserve some of the original French terms for the music and dance groups seen at court.

Even now, in the 20th century, the traditional dances are still, unfortunately, not being documented in written form even though they are an important part of Vietnamese culture. Lily Dam stressed the importance of beginning this work. The need for recorded material for the preservation of Vietnamese traditional dancing, as well as its history, is immeasurable.

The following section preserves some of the original French terms for the music and dance groups seen at court.

2.15 MUSIC

For the king's entertainment, there was the *Grand Orchestre*, a large orchestra of at least 50 musicians. The *Petit Orchestre* (a small Orchestra of 5-6 musicians) was employed frequently for entertainment at Court, performing royal chamber music. For special annual events, a *Ceremony Orchestre* was a distinct cultural feature, commemorating events such as the anniversaries of ancestors' deaths. These annual events were an opportunity for families to collect and to reminisce about happy memories. The first-year anniversary of a death was especially important because it represented the end of the official mourning period. This year-long process enabled the family to recover cohesively from its loss. The *Ceremony Orchestre* could play on an ancestor's death anniversary generations later, as a celebration of their successful life, their happy life.

The *Military Orchestre* was used primarily for parades and marches. This may have been the only musical form from the court to which the people were exposed.

In support of entertainment at Court, the king would hire artists to practice their art in residence at the Court, and to be available to entertain the king and the noble families. Classical operas were favored as evening-long performances, depicting historical people and events through complex, lengthy stories set to music and movement. These operas could extend from 2-4 hours, and included singing and fighting scenes that resembled Western operas, but with different stories and styles of music composition. The artful pitches in Vietnamese operatic music sometimes make it difficult to understand the words, since the melody of the music may interfere with the tonal requirements of language pronunciation.

2.16 DANCES

Dances at Court were not followed by applause. These dances were considered part of the general ambience of Courtly society, and were not especially acknowledged.

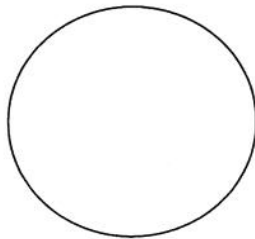
Dancing at court was divided into three broad categories:

- I. **Martial dancing.** These dances were performed by men or mixed casts and depicted military events. For example, two lead dancers might perform with 64 supporting dancers carrying sticks as symbolic weapons. In military dances, the use of the sticks

went beyond mimicry of actual battle. Performers threw and caught the sticks in patterns and to intricate rhythms, demonstrating synchronization and group discipline.

- II. Literary dancing.** These dances were performed by women and were characterized by graceful movements in close harmony with musical rhythms. Literary dances were often accompanied by an instruments called the dan trahn (dan = instrument), a 16-stringed guitar-like instrument that was placed on the floor or in the player's lap. Female musicians played the dan tranh for literary dances, which could last from 15-30 minutes. Though lengthy, the atmosphere of the literary dance was quiet and soothing, and the length of the dance contributed to the extent of the mood that the performance created. The dancers could themselves carry flutes or quill pens, moving into moon shapes or bow shapes as visually pleasing formations.

Moon shape (circle)



Bow shape (crescent)



- III. Combined martial and literary dancing.** These dances involved large numbers of participants (64 was common) and emphasized complex spatial patterns and interchanging rows.

Dances with large numbers of participants could be performed outdoors, to accommodate the spatial patterns that the groups would form and transform. Finales often brought all the dancers into one huge line in front of the audience.

Various Vietnamese dances with roots in the Court (the literary, martial, or combined traditions) are:

- 1. Three Benevolence Dance.** The three benevolences were Happiness, Prosperity, and Longevity.

Three dancers assumed the characters of the three benevolences.

- a. Longevity was an old man with a bamboo stick.
- b. Prosperity was an athlete carrying a wooden gun. Athletics symbolized strength and productivity. The gun may have represented success in war.
- c. Happiness was a fairly young man carrying a baby.

Each dancer danced separately to express “their” benevolence. The three characters danced together as the finale.

This dance was used to entertain at the king’s birthday or at some very happy event at Court. The Court’s celebration of birthdays was a French influence. The general population traditionally does not celebrate birthdays early in life. Birthday anniversaries begin to be celebrated in a person’s 60s, because age is respected, with its accompanying wisdom and signs of a successful life.

2. Eight Benevolence Dance. For men and women.

Eight dancers representing eight fairies brought eight different offerings to the king: health, prosperity, longevity, happiness, good luck, peace, success, and a big family.

The number “8” is significant in Buddhism. Enlightenment requires accomplishing eight goals.

3. Four Spirit Dance.

The four spirits are the dragon, unicorn, turtle, and phoenix.

These noble animals represent royalty. Eight dancers performed the dance – 2 for each animal. It was a happy dance, harmonious with dancing in pairs. The pairs could be male and female. The dance shows Chinese influence.

4. Lantern Dance. For men and women.

The Lantern Dance lasted until “close to the modern time.” Dancers passed the dance down as an oral tradition for generations. The finale of the dance—a human pyramid—has been pictured on calendars. This pyramid takes great strength and is done holding lanterns, a significant feat of balance and power. The Lantern Dance was in six parts, representing six phases of the Buddhist ceremony. The culmination, with a group of dancers raising themselves upward and in the shape of an arrow toward the sky, may express symbolism about ascension above the worldly.

The dance features even numbers, honoring a general superstition against odd numbers. Forty-eight to sixty-four dancers performed the Lantern Dance, and rows of performers were divided into even-numbered groups.

5. Fan Dance.

In a spectacle that calls to mind the movement design for large groups of dancers by Hollywood film choreographer Busby Berkeley, 48-64 dancers in the fan dance sang and danced at the same time. Fans were used to produce images of water and waves. The feathers in the fans were green and blue, and the group of performers moved in and out of formations, and synchronized actions for their fans. Lines, semi-circles and fan-like shapes were used to cluster the dancers.

6. Horse Riding Dance.

In the original form of this awesome spectacle, 48 dancers performed outdoors in six formations, moving and singing on horseback. Later, make-believe horses were used. This artifice cut down on practice time, and allowed the dance to move indoors.

The horse dance was traditionally performed once a year, to celebrate the country's birthday.

In a variation of the dance, 4-6 horse dancers were placed in some of the operas. The main characters in these opera versions were the generals. Embroidered and rhinestone-studded tapestry was used to cover a sculpted form, or actual people, to represent the general's horse. The general population may have glimpsed this dance because it was performed for the country's birthday. While other dances were only seen at Court, the horse dance could be seen publicly every April (on the lunar calendar). The horse dance can still be seen in Vietnamese communities in America. For example, it was performed in Arlington, Texas on April 15, 1995.

7. Historical Event Dance of the Trung Sisters.

The context of this dance is the rebellion of Vietnam against Chinese domination. It is important to remember the giant scale of China in population and territory, compared with the much smaller Vietnam. Circa 1440, a battle was led by two women against Chinese rule in Vietnam. This battle remains a very famous event in Vietnamese history.

In the dance commemorating the battle, two leading women dancers are joined by a supporting cast of 12. The performers sing and dance using swords in sequences that are very fast and very rhythmic. The tempo and rhythmic intricacy of the dance require enormous practice.

The dance has been seen in Vietnam in recent years, performed with real swords by women trained in the martial arts. A children's version of the dance uses wooden swords, and modern versions may delete the singing, concentrating on fast synchronized movement to instrumental music. In some versions of the dance, some of the cast is costumed as Chinese, to represent the opposing forces in the battle. The Trung Sisters dance captured strong sentiments against the Chinese invaders in Vietnam, and the persistence of the dance has kept the memory alive of the bravery of the women leaders in the resistance and revolt.

2.17 THE VIETNAMESE DANCE AESTHETIC

Documentation of Vietnamese dance is minimal. From the information available to date, it appears that Vietnamese dances of different traditions nevertheless share common, distinguishing characteristics.

Firstly, the dances are often commemorative and related to the calendar. Dances may be used to mark everything from anniversaries of great battles to culminating seasonal events such as

harvests. Secondly, they feature identifiable characters, themes or stories. Vietnamese dances represent events or ideas that can be easily translated into words. It seems plausible to generalize that many of the dances have a literary or narrative basis, which would bring them into harmony with the country's bias toward the literary arts.

Choreography is frequently symbolic or metaphoric, including meaningful numbers of dancers, aspirational formations such as rising pyramids, and movement sequences that reflect real life artfully, such as traveling to market, or trading goods. The use of props is a near constant, and can be seen as a departure-point for choreographic inspiration. For examples, fans are used to create images of waves and water, and conical hats within the harvest dance suggest baskets, the process of irrigation, the sun traveling across the sky, and more. Unison movements by groups seems to be preferred, with more emphasis given to complex travel patterns and spatial formations than to step sequences.

From the point of view of this initial set of principles and techniques, the Harvest Dance, *Ganh Lua* is very representative of the general Vietnamese dance aesthetic. It is related to the calendar (October) and commemorates the success of a season of work. The dance is unified by a clear theme, which could easily be translated into a narrative. Once reconstructed, *Ganh Lua* can in fact be paired with a continuous narrative that charts its course from travel to the fields, to showing baskets full of rice, to threshing, irrigating, resting, trading, and so on. The props of conical straw hats are employed throughout, and help the dance achieve some of its metaphors (scooping movement as irrigation) and symbolism (gestures to side high salute the sky's sun and rain; gestures to side low salute the earth's fertility). And the entire choreography is organized around one 2-count step, done traveling, circling, or in place. What enlivens the dance and makes it enjoyable both to perform and watch are the spatial patterns, the changing formations, the synchrony of the group as it achieves graceful unison.

Vietnamese Harvest Dance: Ganh Lua

Notated by
Jill Beck
as presented by
Lily Dam
at

Southern Methodist University, 1995

Music: new arrangement based on popular Vietnamese folk song, by
Alan Terricciano

Dance score checked by
Ray Cook

Labanotation Reading Level:

Elementary

Theory and Score-reading Elements:

Various path signs
Various repeat signs
Floor plans

2.18 Vietnamese Harvest Dance Performance notes and Glossary

1. The dance is notated for 8 participants but can easily accommodate larger groups.
2. The knees are released throughout to add to the ease of performance and appearance.
3. Group travel in the floorplans is shown by arrows with double tips:

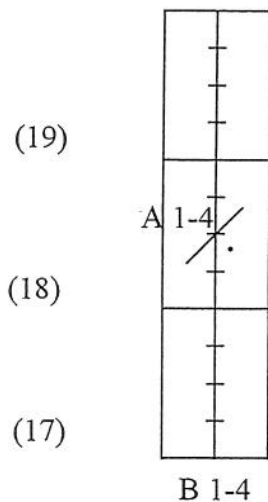


4. Measure 9:



The shape of the path need not be precisely circular; some freedom is allowed.

5. Measures 17-19: Dancers B 1-4 perform the same movements as dancers A 1-4, in these measures.



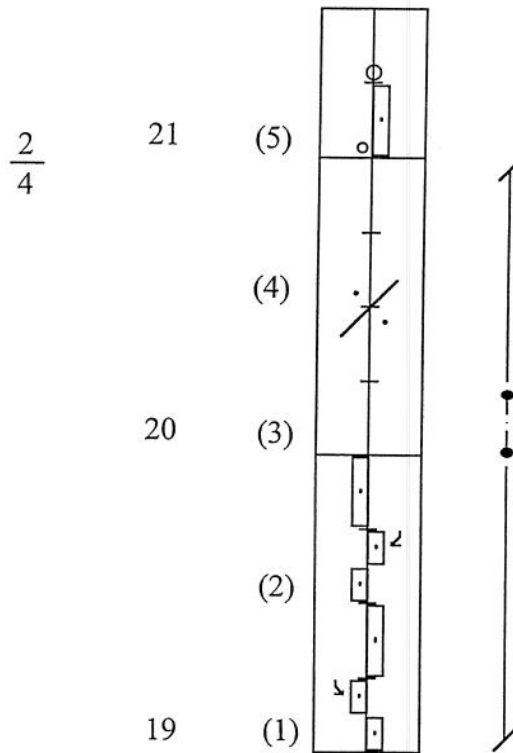
This form of repeat sign is always placed in the middle of the amount of material that is repeated. If it is centered within three blank measures as in measures 17-19, then three measures of the "A" group's movement is replicated by the "B" group. In measures 22-25, the repeat is centered within a four-measure sequence.

Measure 22: Plain numbers in repeat signs within the staff refer to measures that are repeated. For example,



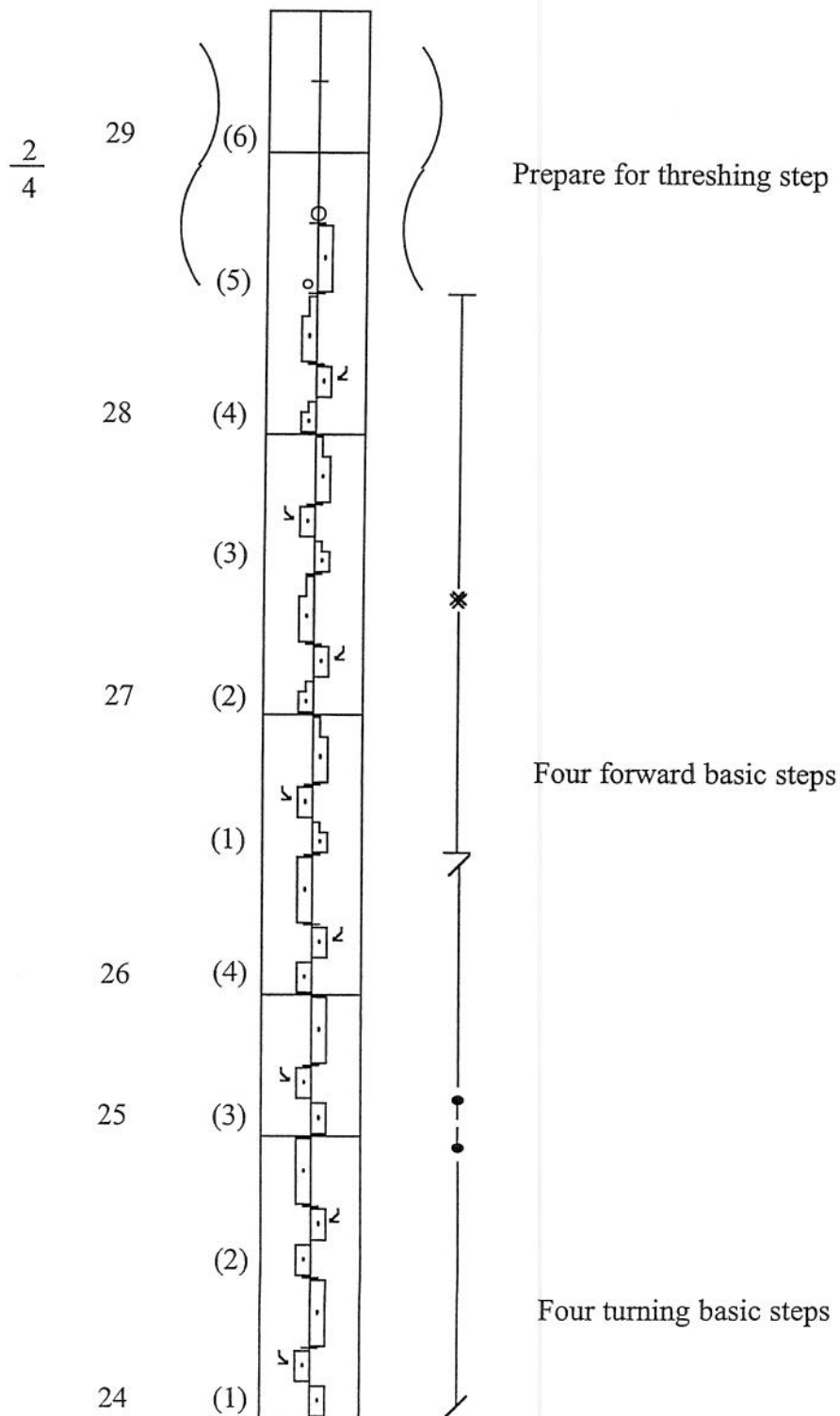
means to repeat measure 17. So measure 22 has the same movement as measure 17.

6. Notice the unusual change of meter in measures 19-21. The four turning steps in measures 19-20 are followed by an extra 2-count measure, during which the feet come together and the hat changes position. This sequence may be most easily counted as phrase of a "5".



Vietnamese Harvest Dance Performance notes and Glossary (continued)

7. Measures 24-29 should be counted through, with attention focused on the number of dance steps. These measures contain a sequence of four turning steps, followed by four forward steps that end in a transition to the threshing step (which can be counted 5-6).



8. Measure 46:



The torso is included freely in the scooping action of the arms. Bend and/or twist as if scooping water with hat.

F

Right knee in support column (kneel).

9. Measures 63-70 can be performed in an alternative way. The dancers can use this time, which is the equivalent of 16 basic steps, to perform their own work motifs in groups of four. Clusters of four dancers create and practice their own sequence that conveys a sense of work, and that takes four people to accomplish. Their motifs should communicate a sense of interdependence, and develop the celebratory and harvest themes of the dance. Each motif by four people should be distinctive.

When all of the motifs are performed simultaneously in measures 63-70, three elements are added to the dance:

- a. An impression of an entire community at work, but made up of sub-groups that are busy with their own tasks
- b. A contrasting section that interrupts the predictable flow of the dance, but that quickly resolves again into unison
- c. A sense of the "friendly challenge" and "making it up as you go along" that characterized some traditional harvest songs and dances. (See page 87 of this chapter.)

At the end of the work motifs, dancers transition as simply as possible to the sequence that begins in measure 71. They may need a few basic steps to adjust their spacing.

10. Measure 71:



Right hip supports hat.



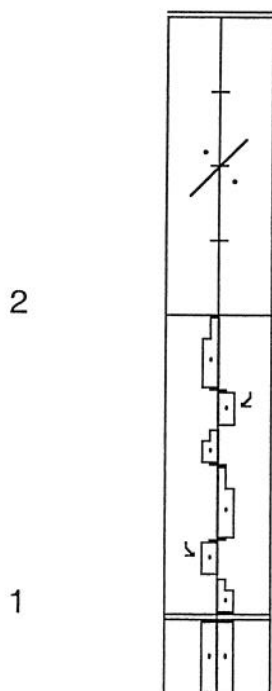
Torso twists to each side.

2.19 Vietnamese Harvest Dance

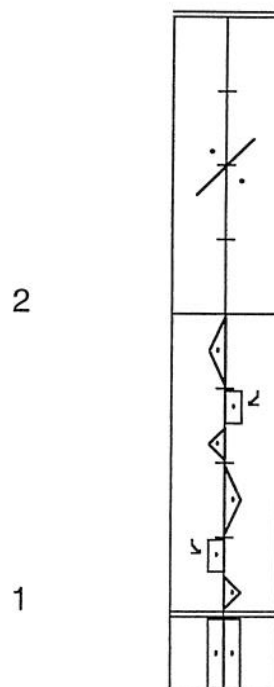
Notation of Basic Steps

On the following pages are the notations for the basic steps used in the dance, with their accompanying arm movements. Familiarity with these basic steps will facilitate mastery of the dance sequences.

Basic Step travelling forward



Basic step from side to side



Ways of holding the hat

The hat is always held with the point at the bottom, so the hat is like an open basket.

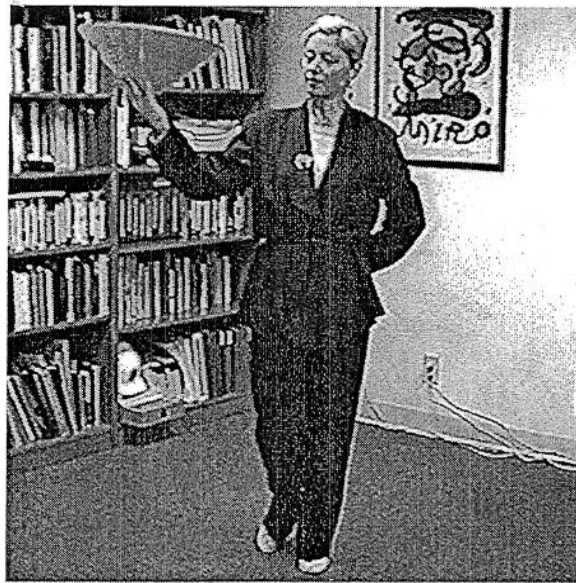
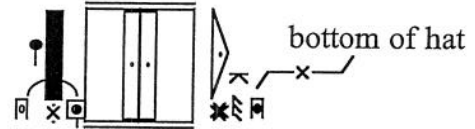
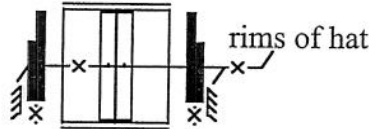


Illustration 12

Moving the hat from side to side with the basic step

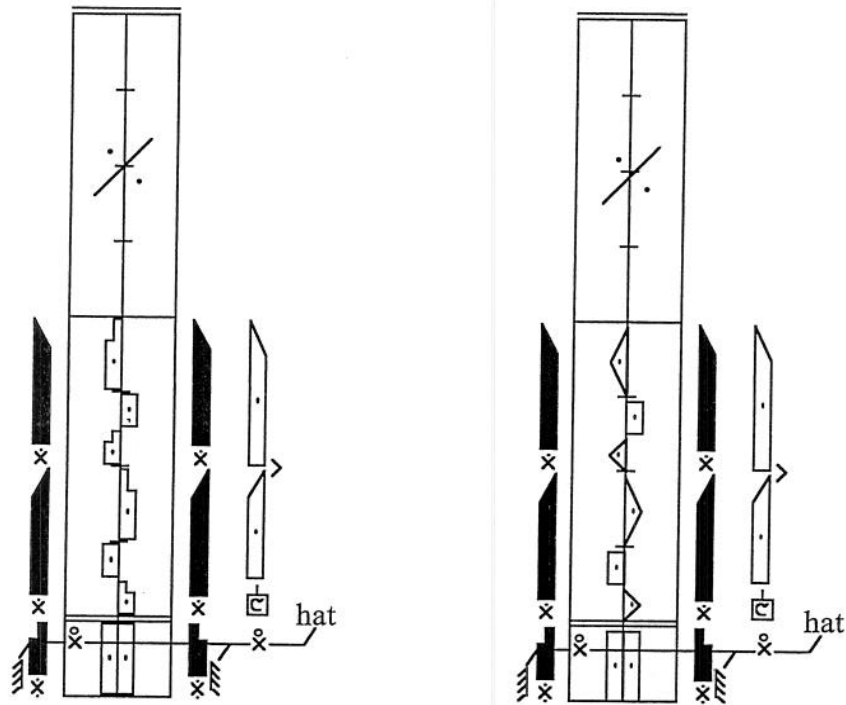
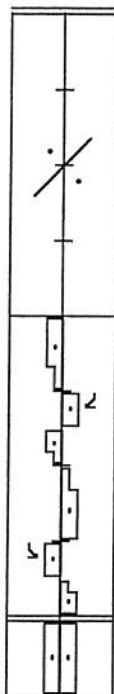


Illustration 13

Basic step swinging forward and back

This variation is used in the threshing step, and at the end of the dance in the bowing step.



More ways of holding the hat

Partners face each other, place one hat inside the other, and grasp the double hat between them

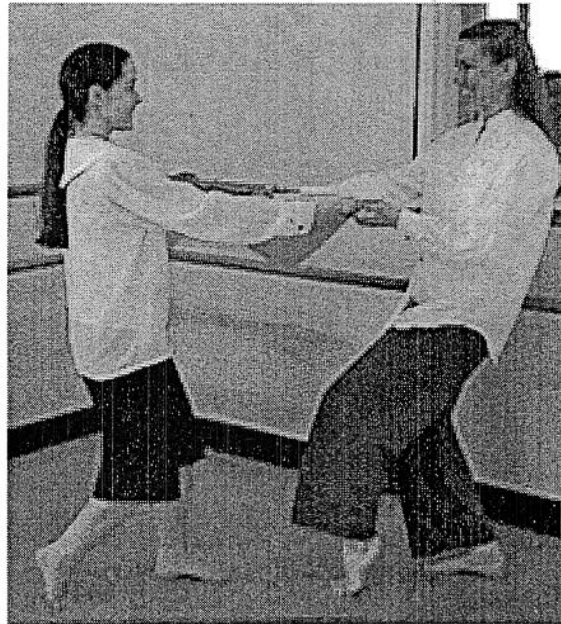
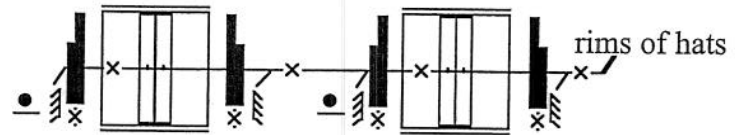


Illustration 14

Threshing step

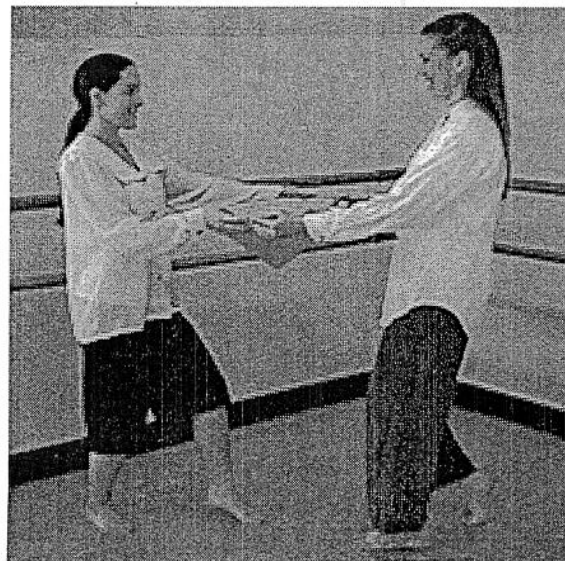
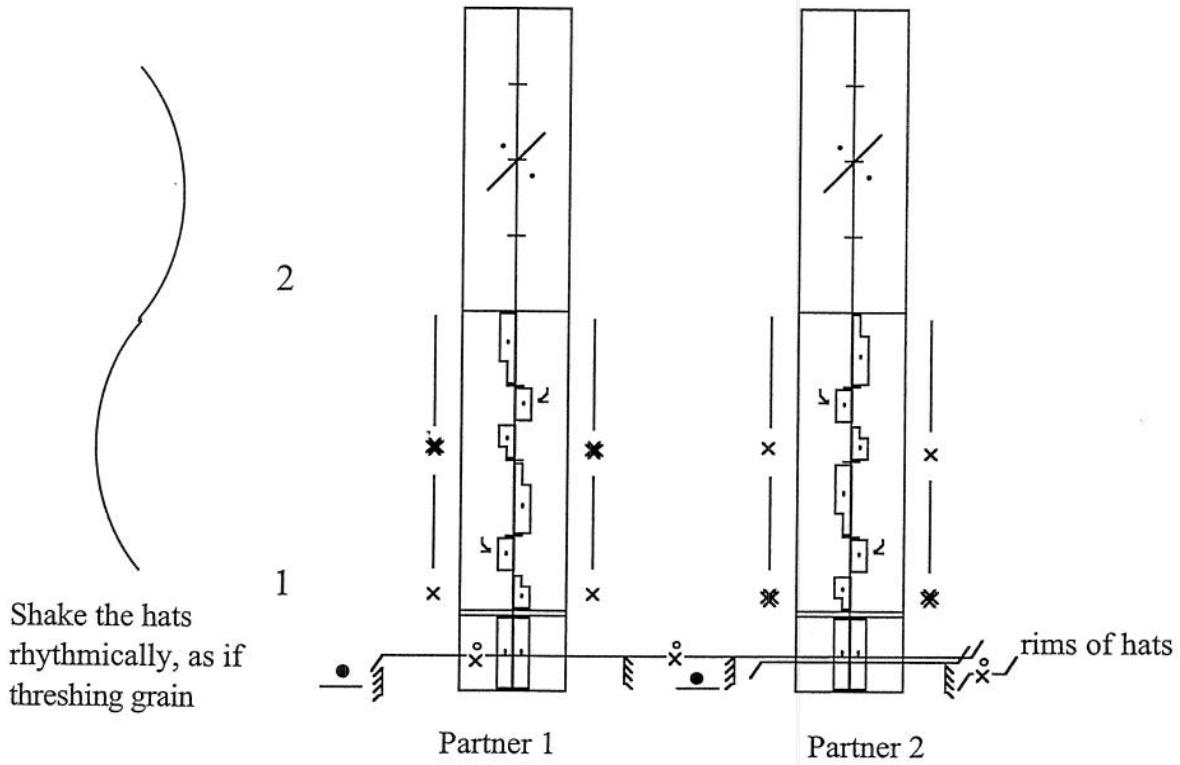


Illustration 15

"Sky and earth" movement of the right arm with basic steps from side to side. Hat is held with the pointed side to the right to begin.

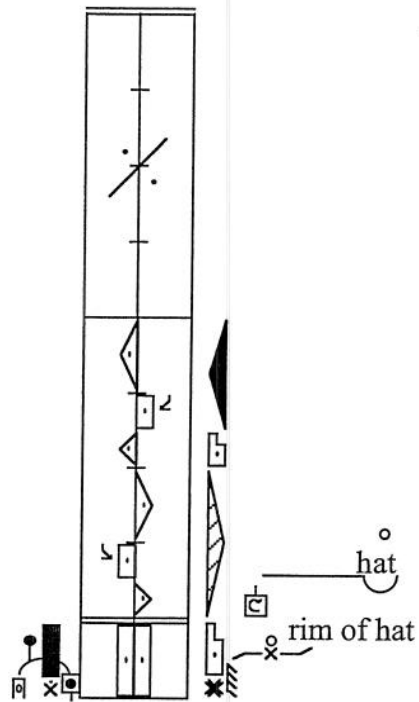


Illustration 16

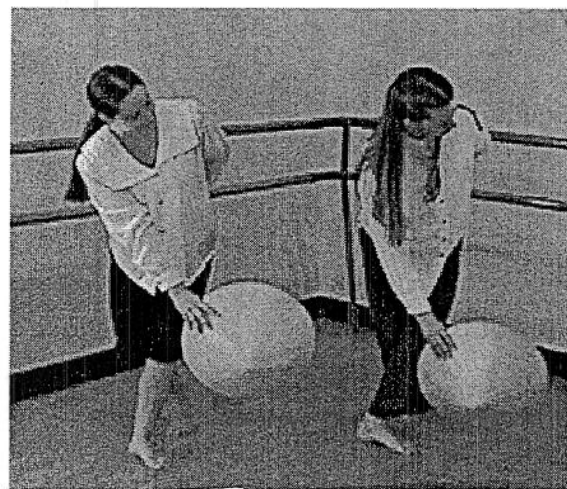


Illustration 17

Basic step with hat on hip

The torso turns from side to side with each basic step. The feet follow somewhat the new facing in the body.

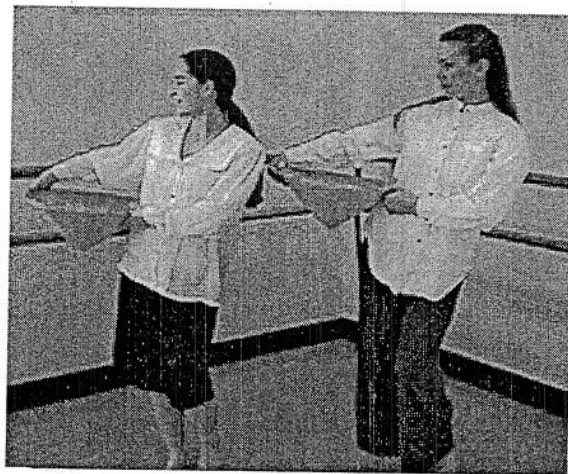
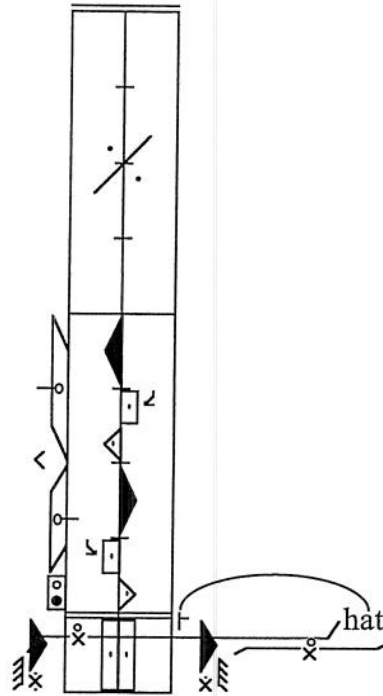


Illustration 18

Basic step side to side, with arms moving in an arc-like shape, as the sun moves across the sky.

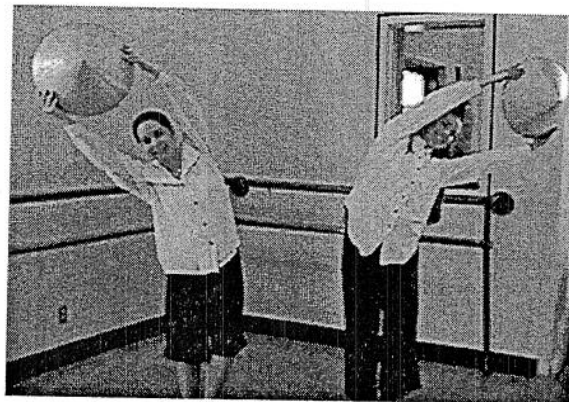
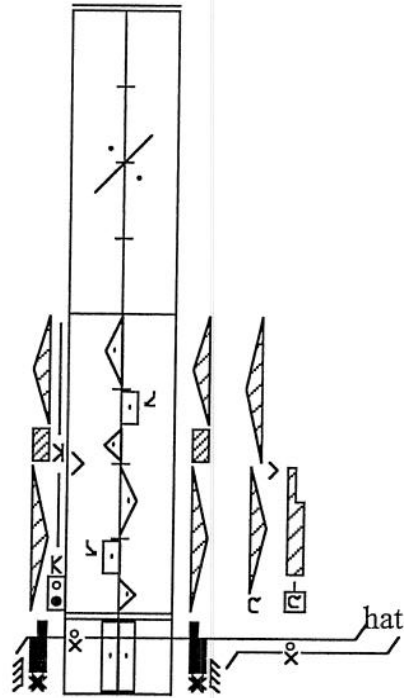
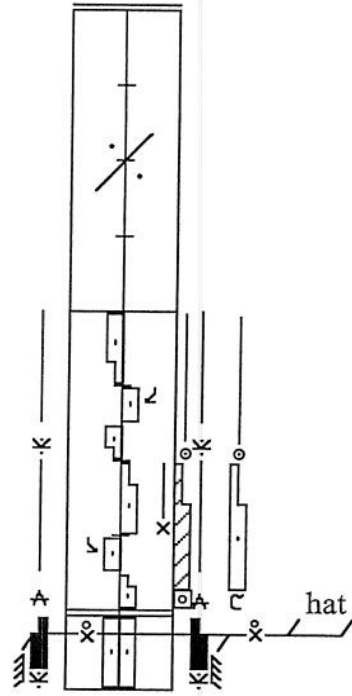
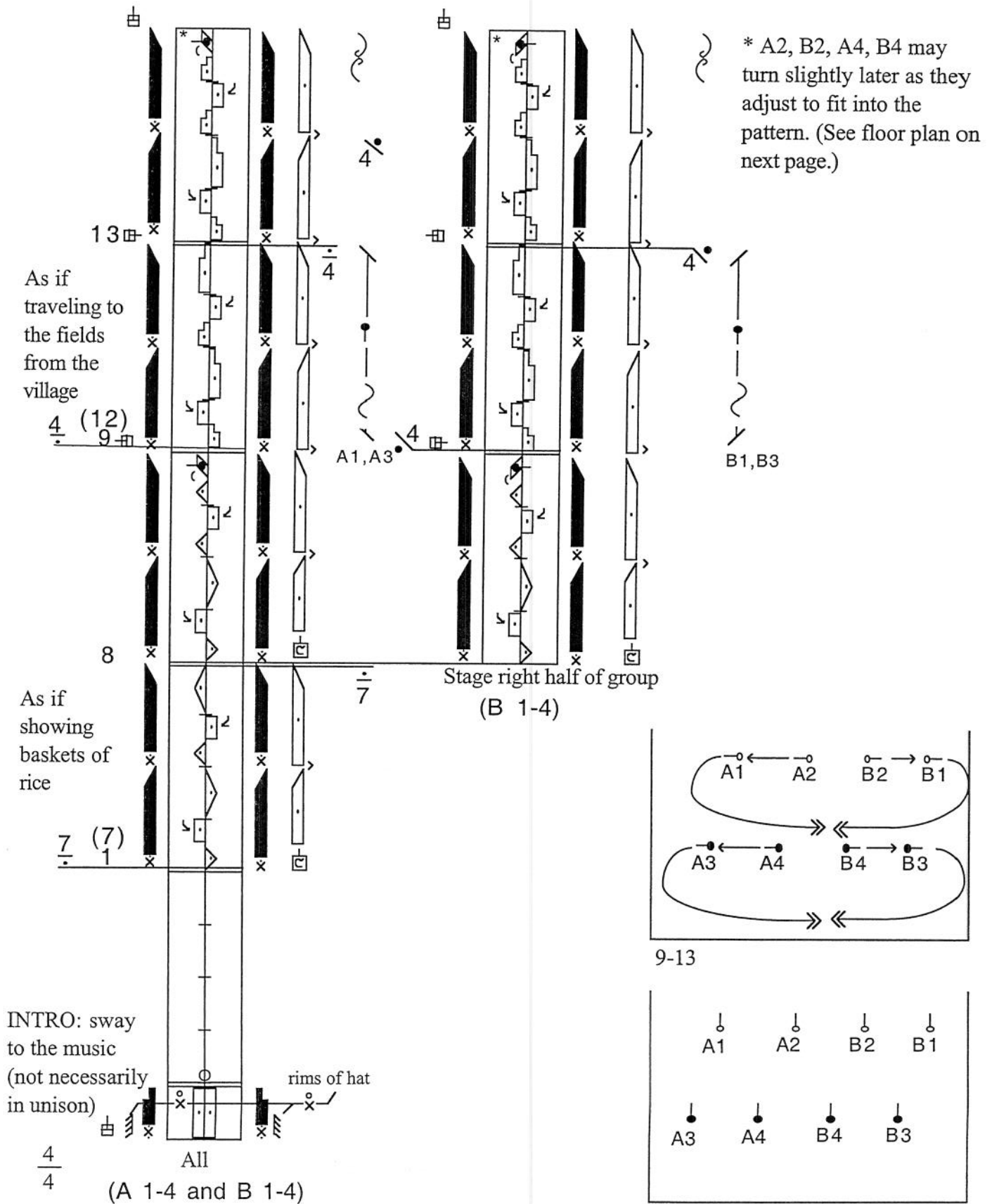


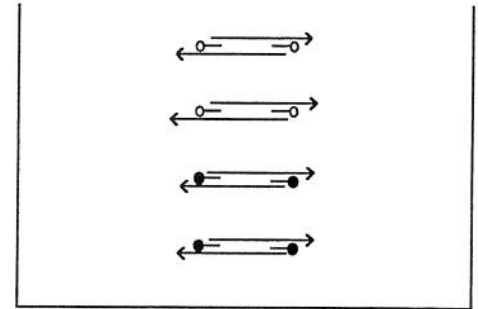
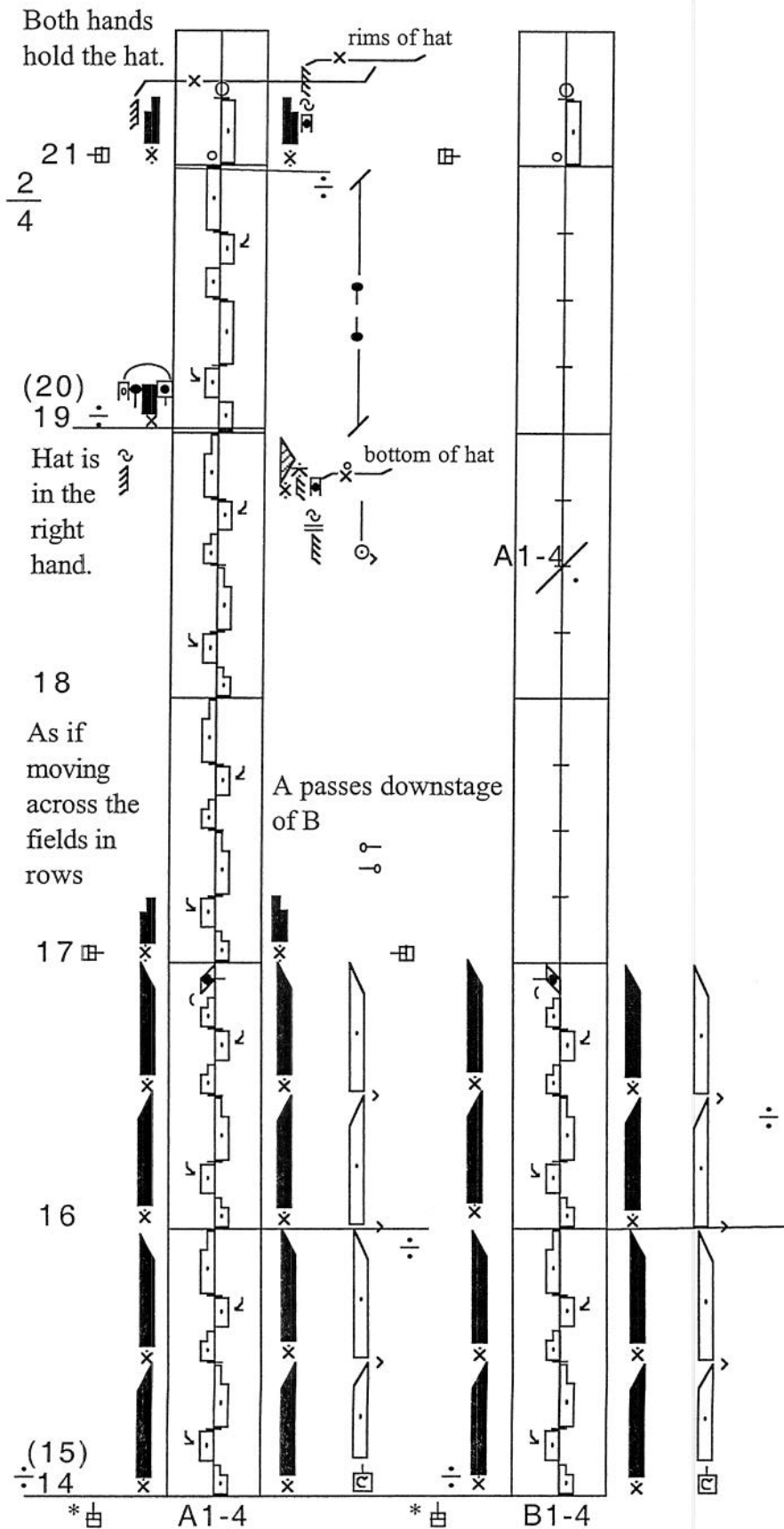
Illustration 19

Basic step forward and back, with bowing

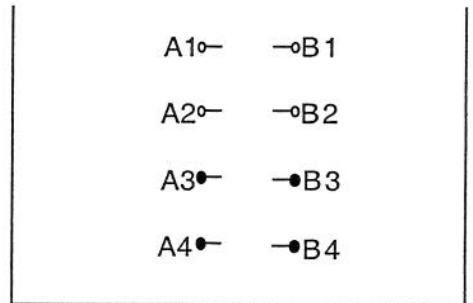


2.20 Vietnamese Harvest Dance (Ganh Lua)

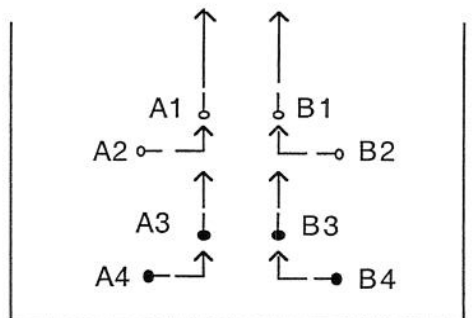




17-18



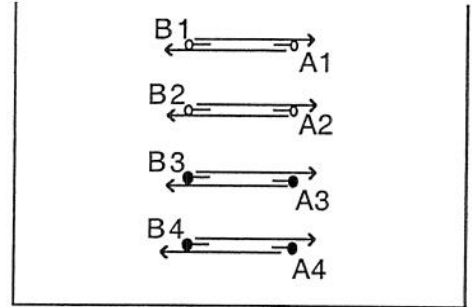
To begin 17



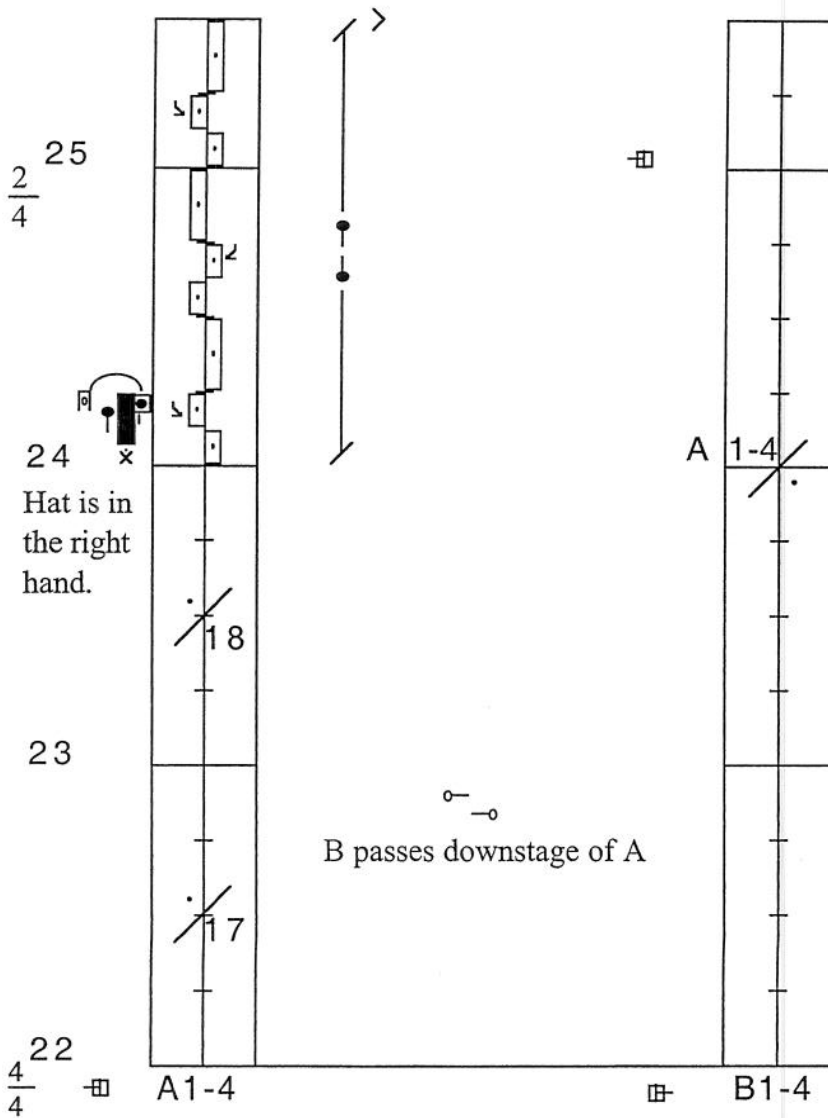
14-16

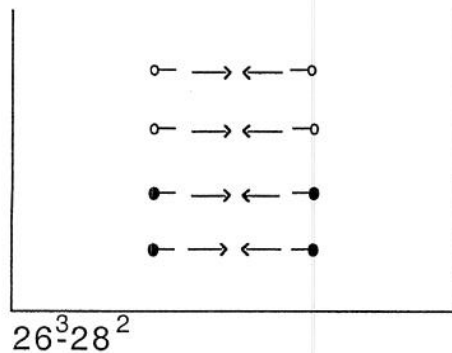
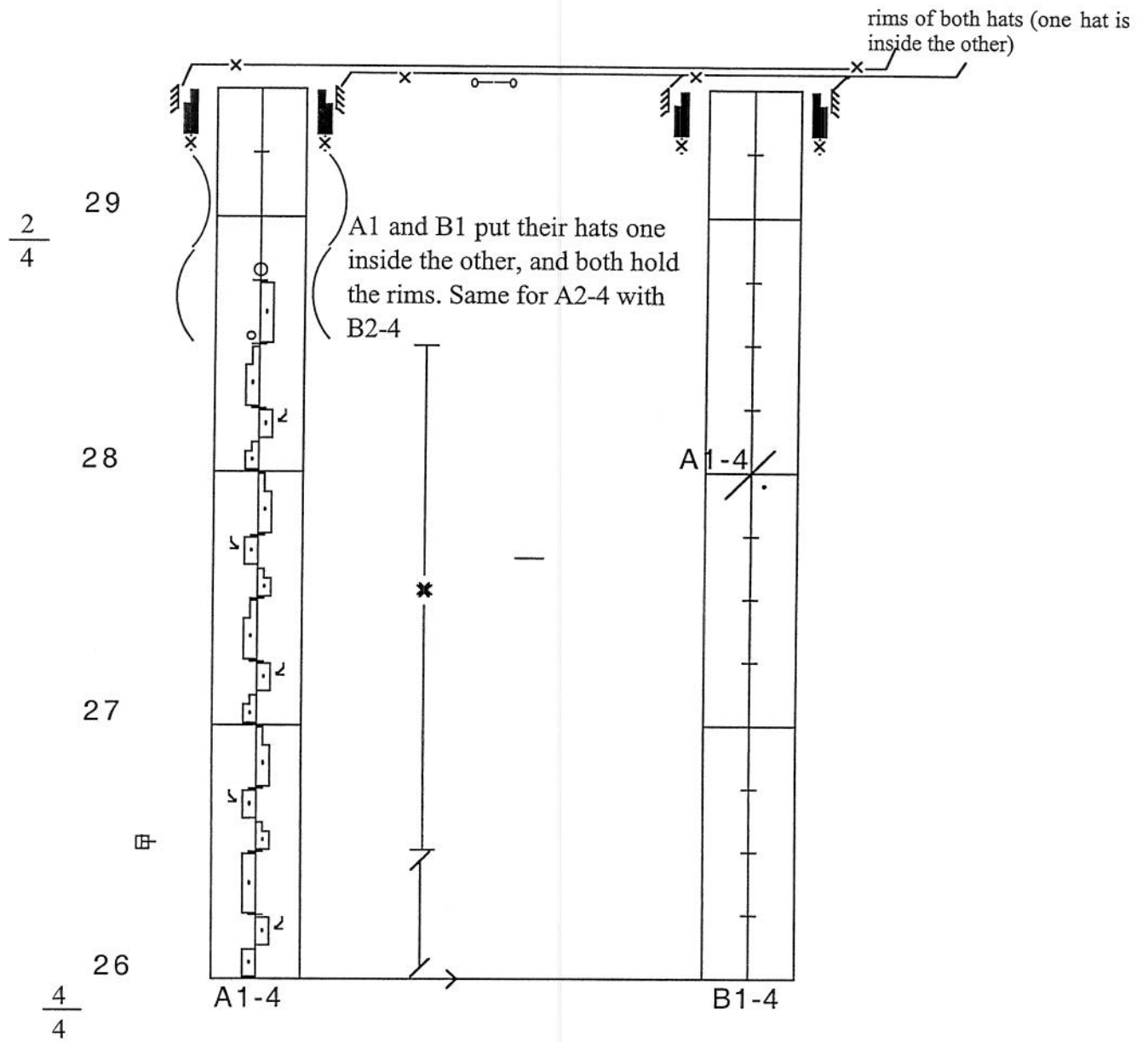
* A2, B2, A4, B4 adjust to this facing as soon as convenient.

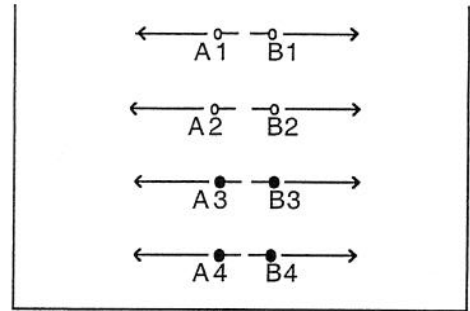
Vietnamese Harvest Dance (continued)



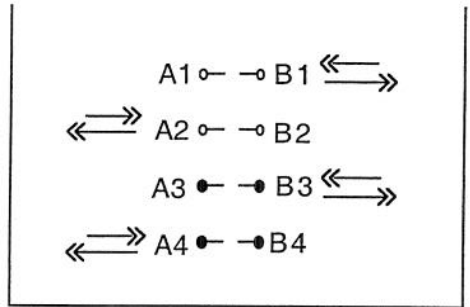
22-23



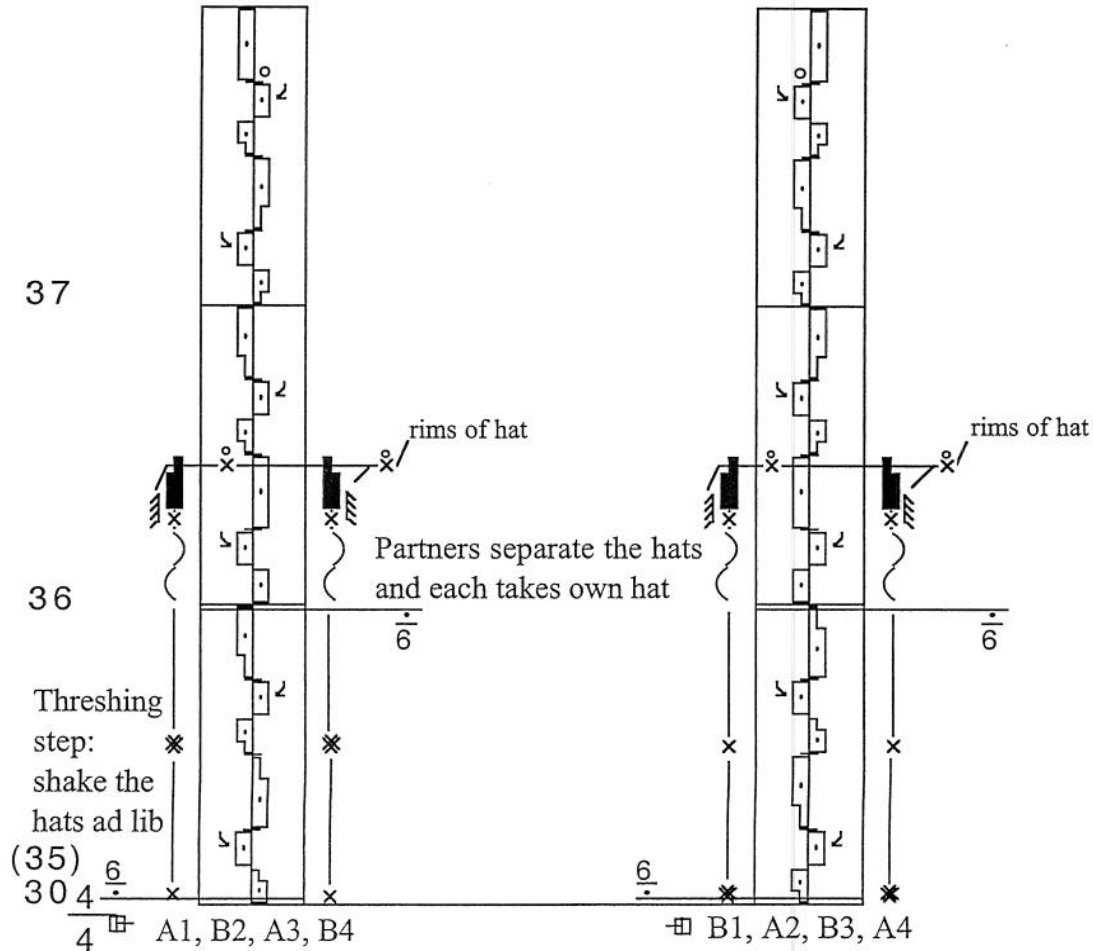




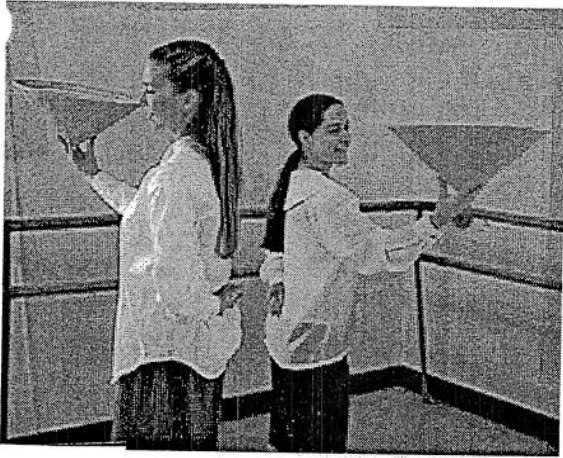
36³-37



30-35

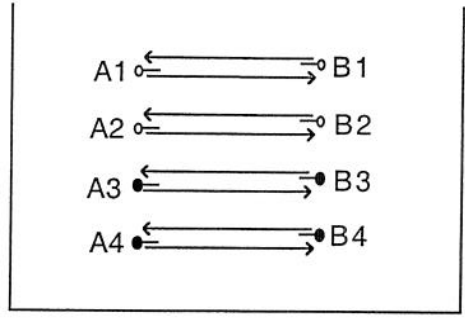
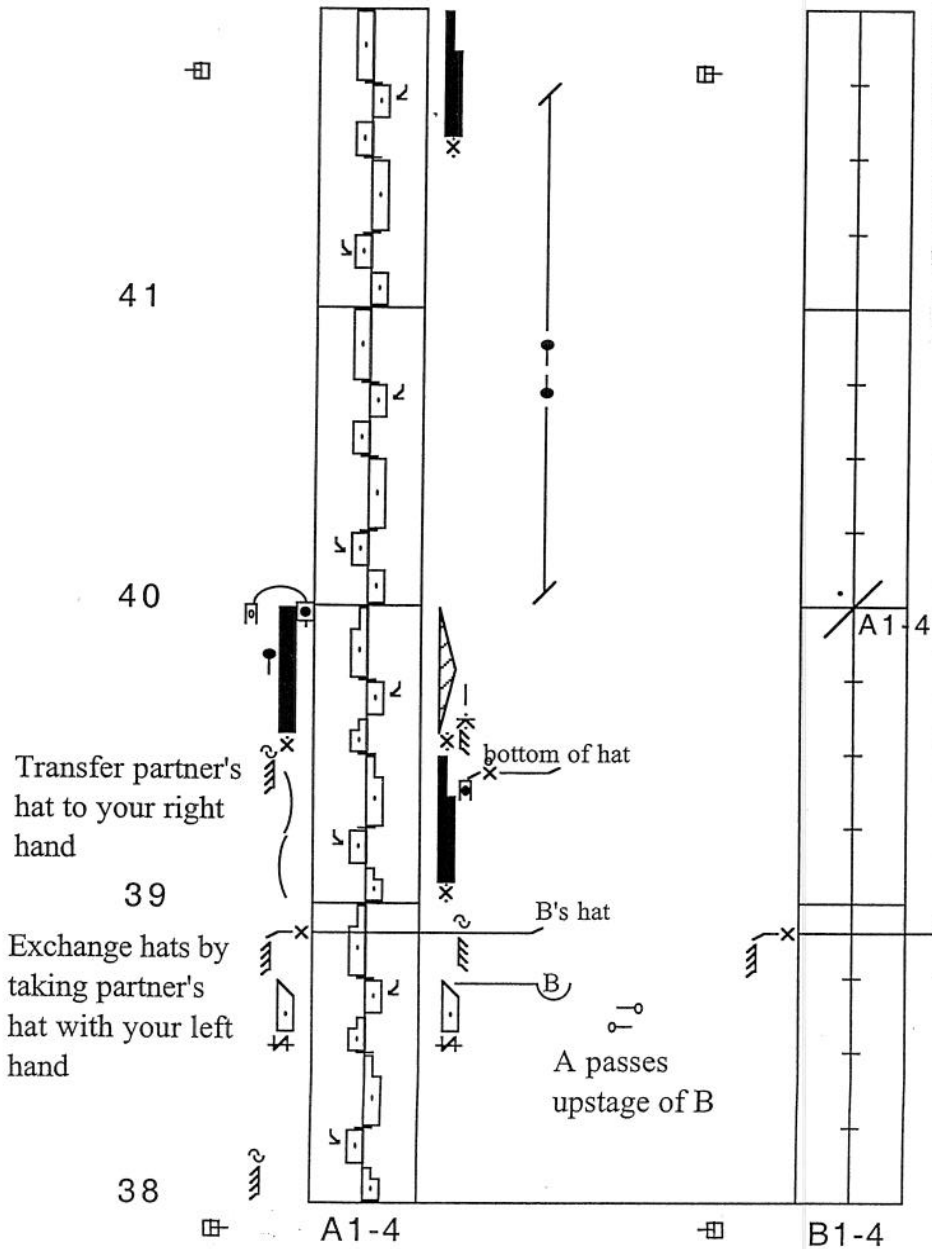


Vietnamese Harvest Dance (continued)

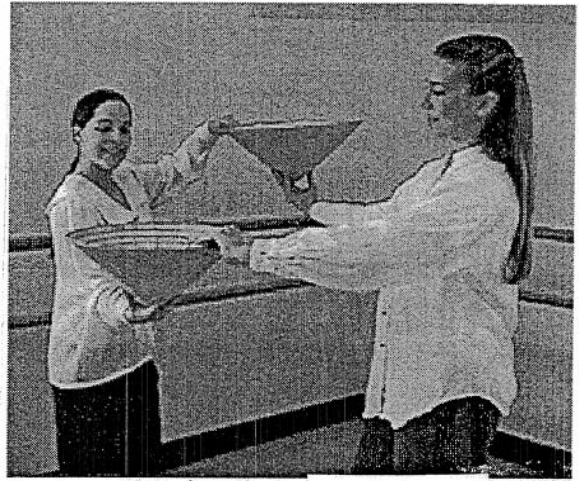


m.39

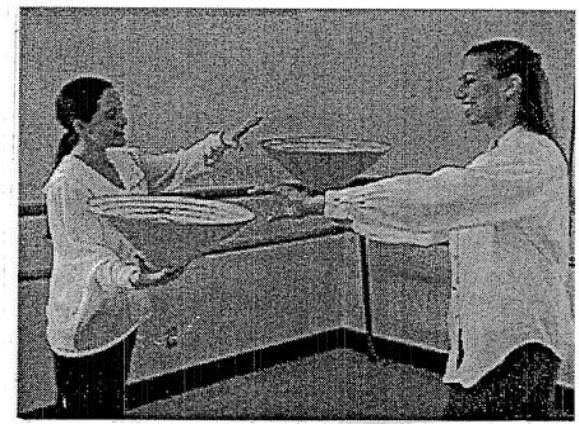
Illustration 22



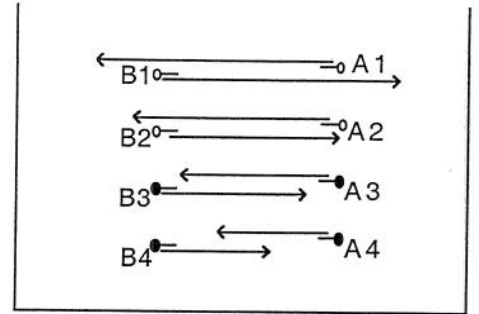
38-39



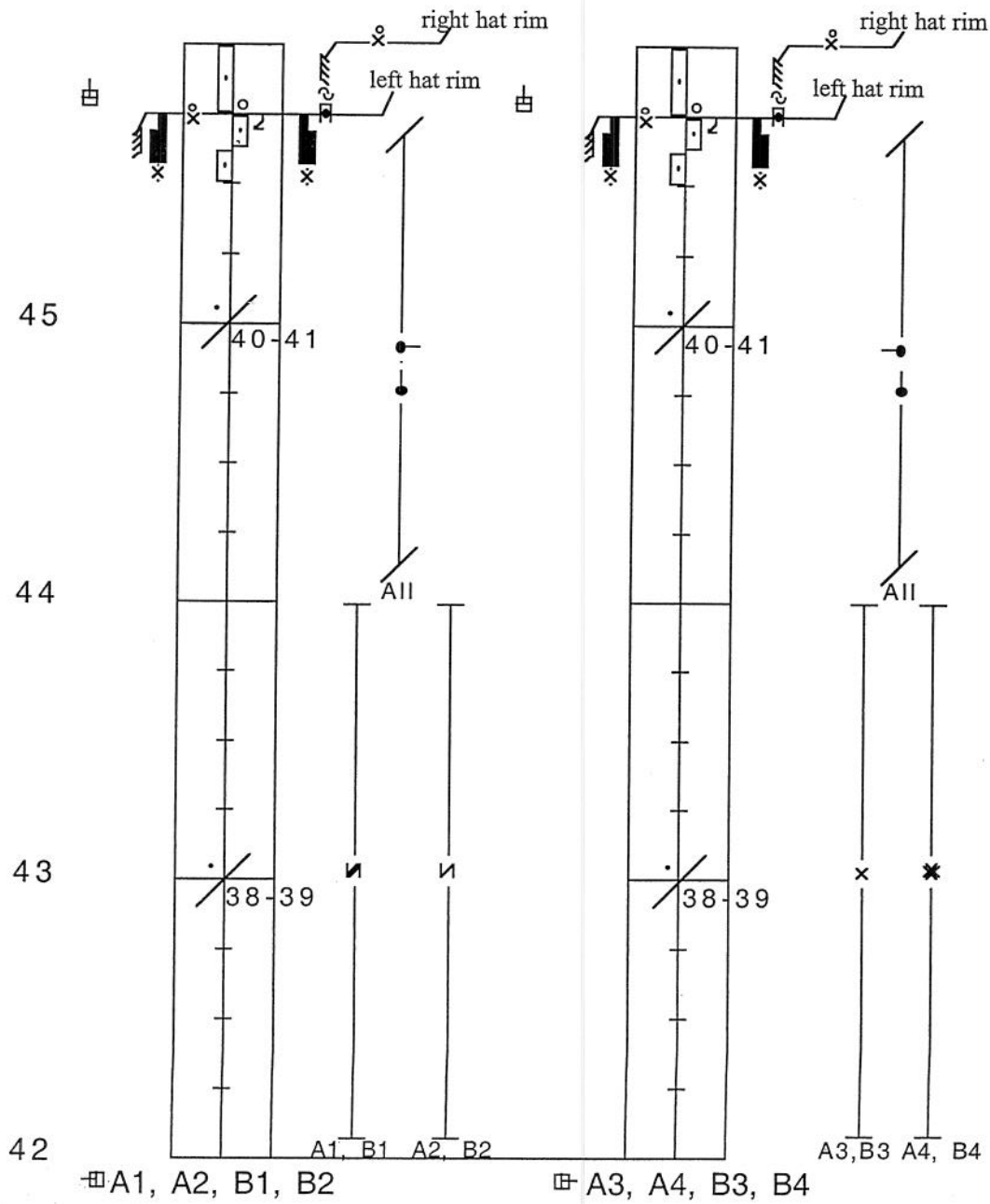
m. 38, ct. 4
Illustration 21



m. 38, ct. 3
Illustration 20



42-43



$\frac{2}{4}$ 50 (2)

Hat creates an arc-like shape, as the sun moves across the sky.

(1)

left and right rims of hat

49 (7)

(6)

Place hat on floor. Make gesture with right arm and hand as if wiping brow, or stretch your back and arm muscles. This rice harvest is hard work.

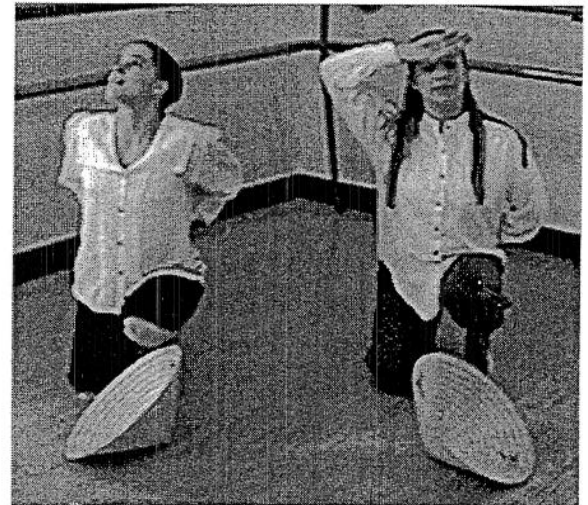
48 (5)

(4)

47 (3)

Scooping action, as if using the hat to scoop water

(2)



m.48

Illustration 24

46 (1)

hat

由

All



m. 46

Illustration 23

A1

B1

A2

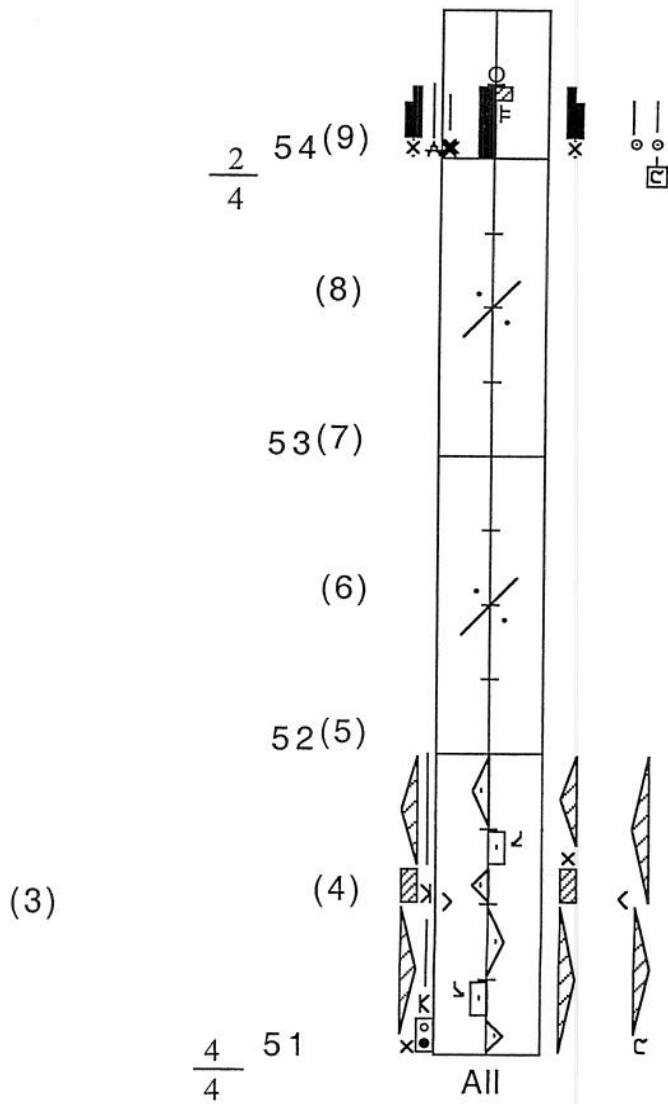
B2

A3

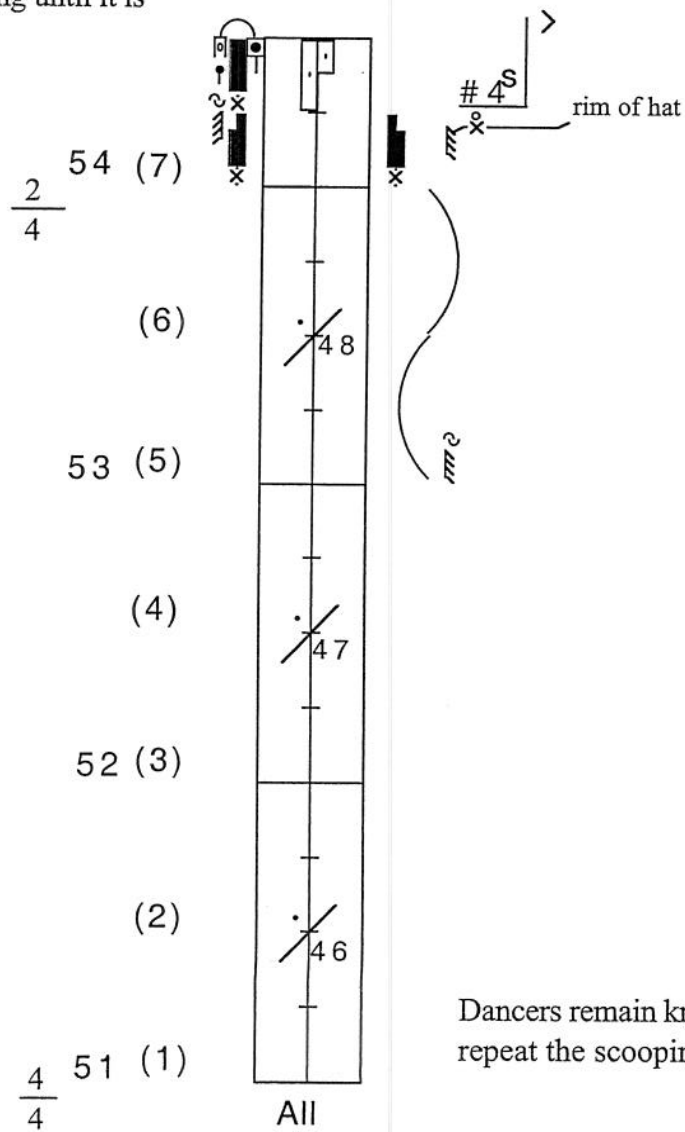
B3

A4

B4

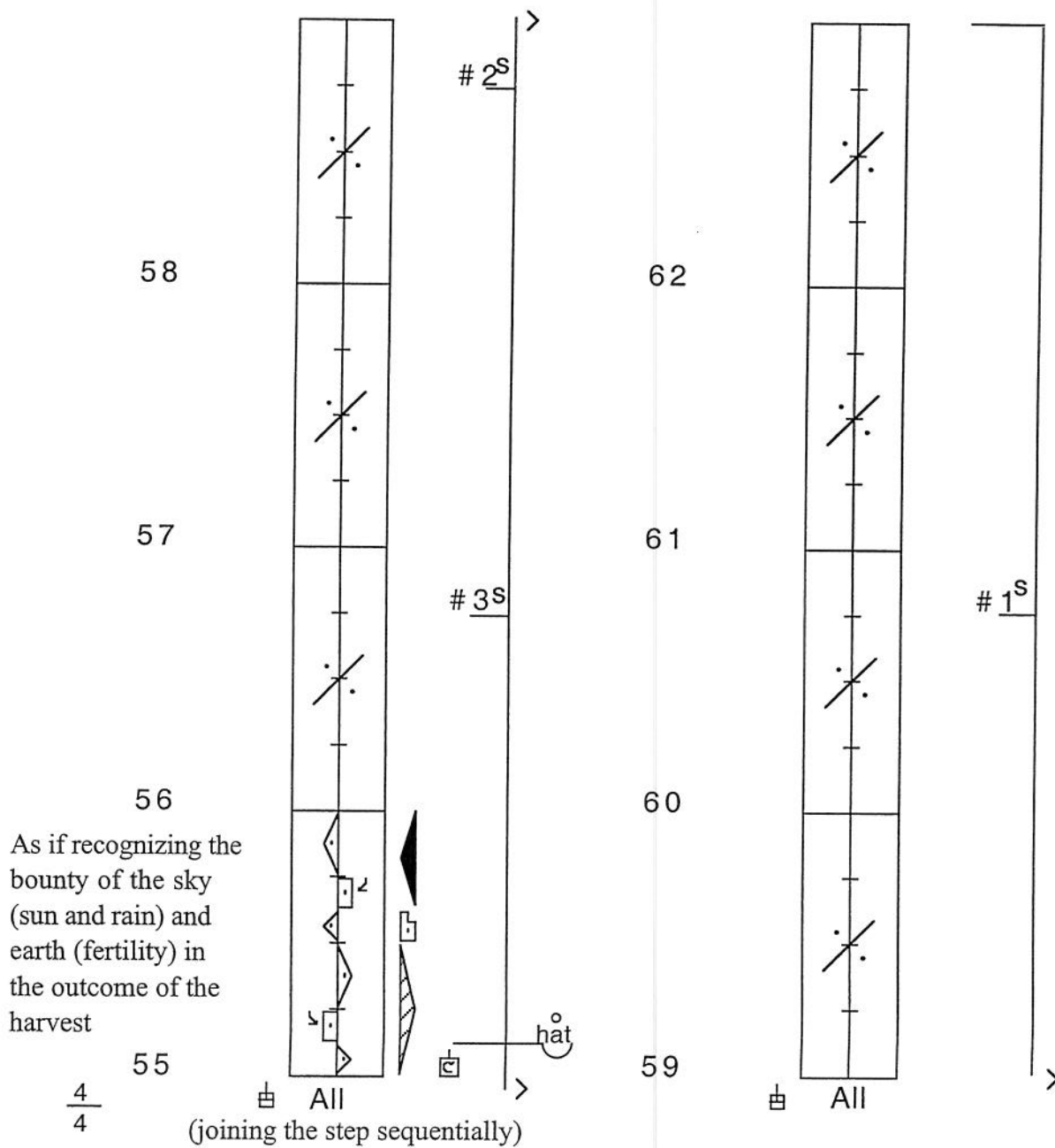


Sequential entry begins. Dancers #4 enter the sequence first (A4 and B4); other dancers remain kneeling until it is their turn to join.

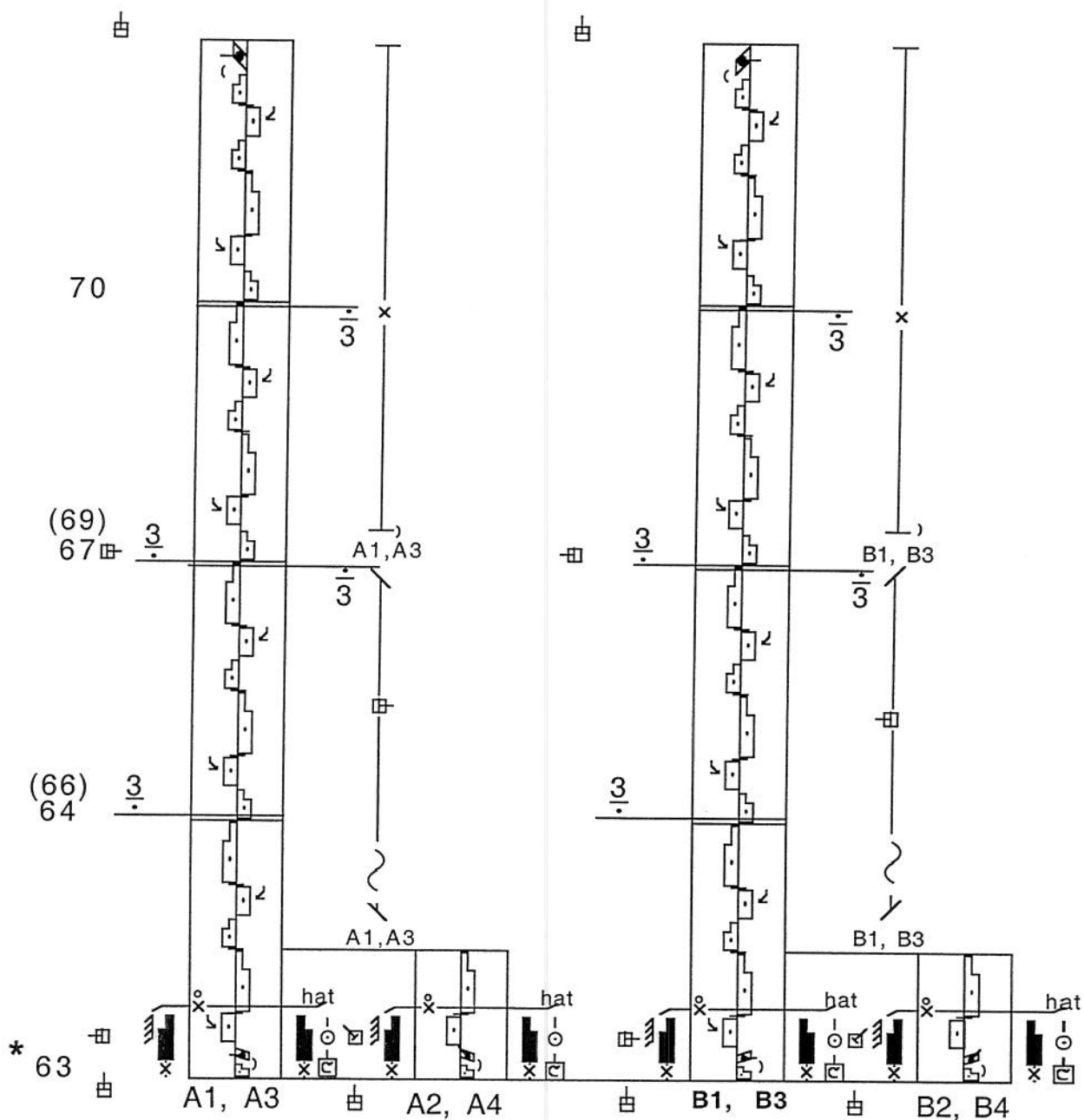


Dancers remain kneeling and repeat the scooping actions.

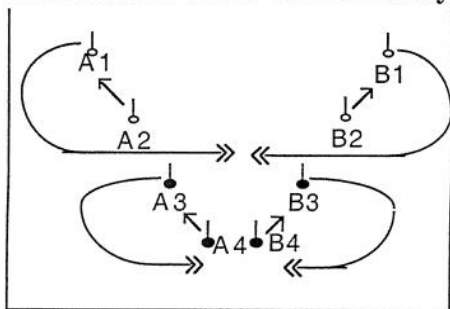
Each pair of dancers stands and does 2 complete "sky and earth" steps before being joined by the next pair. By measure 61, everyone is standing and dancing.



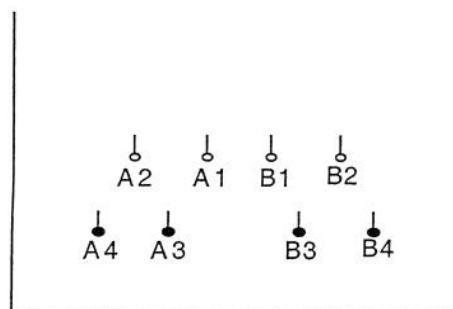
Measures 63-70 can be performed with newly created work motifs by teams of four dancers. See Performance notes and Glossary, #9.



* See Performance notes and Glossary, #9.



63-70



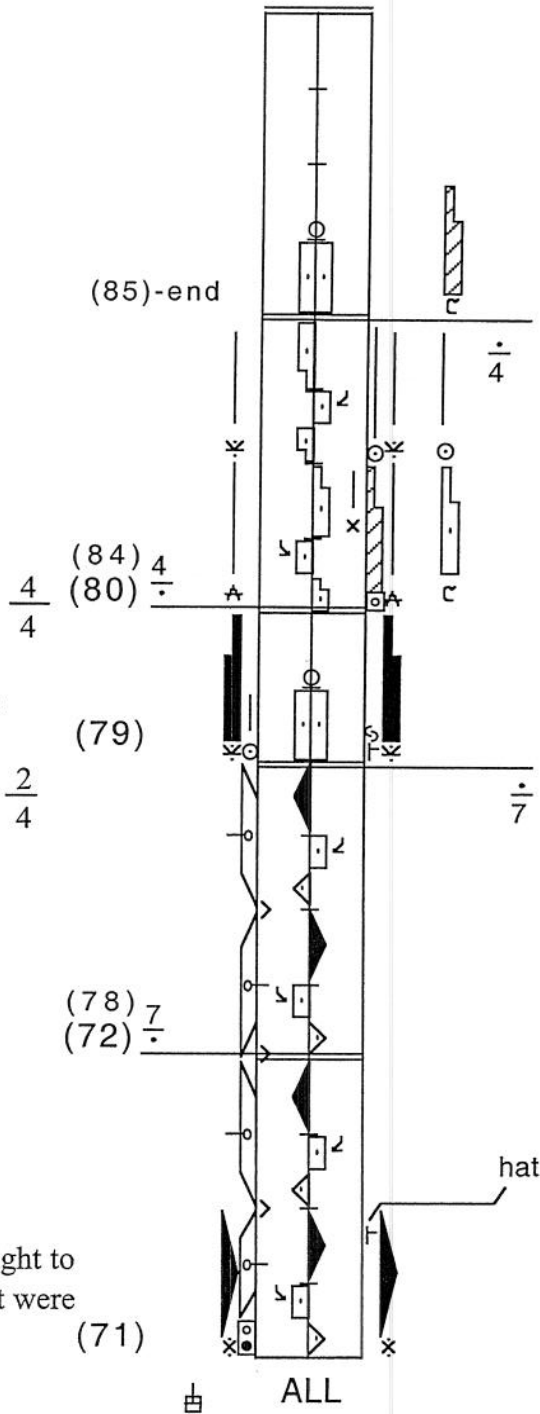
end of 70

Ad lib bow. Hold for
fade-out of music.

Bowing

Hat comes to front of chest,
with brim toward the body,
and the point away from the
body.

Continue to hold hat in both
hands. Carry the hat to the right to
rest it on the right hip, as if it were
full of heavy grain.



ALL

2.21 CONCLUSION

Reconstruction of *Ganh Lua* reveals a dance that is extremely homogenous in its dynamic range. The choreography's reliance on a single step has the effect of evening the dance out, but consistency shows up in other ways. Tempo never varies. Also, the dance phrases are all of a similar length (generally 16 measures). The body remains still, with very little movement in the torso except in response to arm gestures. This stable torso establishes an air of calm and tranquility that places the celebratory theme of the dance within defined parameters. The speed and scale of travel are relatively constant; patterns form and change at a predictable pace. The dance is reassuring and pleasant to watch, and dancers have described the experience of performing it as "serene."

During performance, the participants are very aware of other dancers, because they rely on each other as partners and in group formations. The choreographed use of the head in several of the dance phrases accentuates a sense of being out in the world, and of being sensitive to both the world and to others. The relatively lively use of the head and focus has the effect of making the serenity of *Ganh Lua* social, rather than introspective.

The dance mirrors to some extent the event that it commemorates. Both the harvest and the dance demand coordinated, patient execution of a series of group operations that yield shared emotional satisfaction when they conclude successfully. *Ganh Lua* is not a dramatic dance; it does not raise emotions in the same ways as, for example, the Israeli dances in Chapter 1. *Ganh Lua's* approach to movement is more intellectual and visual. By de-emphasizing physicality, the dance's symbolic movement content remains paramount. It is a choreography to be read, created by a culture that favors literature.

Are there other connections that can be made between dance and language in Vietnam? Is dance vocabulary conceived in a similar way to language vocabulary?

Recall that the Vietnamese language is monosyllabic. It builds meaning through varied tonal pronunciations, which can configure one syllable to convey multiple meanings, as in the example of the word "Ma" on page 56. *Ganh Lua* is built on the choreographic equivalent of a monosyllabic structure, using only a single step that is repeated in many variations; it is a brief 2-counts long. This step unit functions as a basic "sound" that conveys different meanings according to how it is nuanced through gesture and direction of travel. Performed from side to side with corresponding arm gestures, it signifies "showing the bounty of the harvest." With a partner in forward-back motion, it signifies "threshing." Moving continuously forward, it translates as "traveling to the fields or to market," and so on. *Ganh Lua* raises the question of whether the Vietnamese culture conceives its non-verbal expression in terms similar to its verbal expression. Does the language's dependence on the tonal "shape" of monosyllables link with a choreographic style that emphasizes alteration of the shape of a basic step unit?

2.22 ENDNOTES

¹Phong Thuyet Nguyen and Patricia Shehan Campbell, From Rice Paddies to Temple Yards: Traditional Music of Vietnam. Danburg, CT: World Music Press (1990), p.18.

²Ibid., p. 22.

³Gerald Cannon Hickey, Village in Vietnam. New Have, CT: Yale University Press (1966), p. 138.

⁴Ibid., p. 142.

⁵Ibid., p. 144.

⁶Kim Chi Vu Potter, "A Dance from my Homeland Vietnam" (videotape). Boston, MA: Refugee Arts Group (1990), Documentary section.

⁷Kim Chi Vu Potter, "A Dance from my Homeland Vietnam" (videotape). Boston, MA: Refugee Arts Group (1990), opening Background section.

2.23 RECOMMENDED READINGS AND RESOURCES

Videocassettes:

A Dance From My Homeland, Vietnam Kim Chi Vu Potter and the Ve-Nguon Dance Troupe (Return to Origin). Prod. Ann Bartholomew. Video portrait of the life and art of Vietnamese choreographer and dancer, Kim Chi Potter, including rehearsal and full performance by the Ve Nguon (Return to Origin) Dance Troupe of her work "Paradise." Refugee Arts Group, 1990.

The JVC Video Anthology of World Music and Dance Southeast Asia: Vietnam/Cambodia. Prod. Ichikawa Katsumori. JVC Video Anthology of World Music and Dance; Volume 6. Rounder Records, 1990.

Articles:

Rebling, Eberhard. "Die klassische Tanzkunst Sèudostasiens: VI. Vietnam." Ballett-Journal/Das Tanzarchiv. Volume Number 4 (December 1997): p.60-64. ill.

Books:

Buttinger, Joseph. A Dragon Defiant: a short history of Vietnam. New York: Praeger, 1972.

Nguyãæn, Thuyãæt Phong. From Rice Paddies and Temple Yards: traditional music of Vietnam. Danbury, CT: World Music Press, c1990.

Klein, Michael. The Vietnam Era: media and popular culture in the US and Vietnam. London; Winchester, Mass.: Pluto Press, 1989.

Clifford, G. Vietnam: the land we never knew. San Francisco: Chroni Books, 1989.

Hickey, G.C. Village in Vietnam. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966.

Huu N. Sketches for a portrait of Vietnamese culture. Hanoi: The Gio Publishers, 1995.

Klein, Michael. The Vietnam Era: media and popular culture in the US and Vietnam. London; Winchester, Mass.: Pluto Press, 1989.

Nguyããen, Thuyããet Phong. From Rice Paddies and Temple Yards: traditional music of Vietnam. Danbury, CT: World Music Press, c1990.

Pham, K.V. Vietnam: a comprehensive history: the most updated book on Vietnam. CA: Pham Kim Vinh Research Institute, 1992.