

Branles de Bourgogne & de Champagne

The branle is originally a French dance. The term is etymologically derived from the verb “branler” which, according to the Larousse dictionnaire, means “to shake, wave, sway”¹. Other names are also bransle, brande, brant, brando, bralle or brawl. In the literature for Renaissance lute we find about five hundred branles. The branle was very popular during the time of the French king Henri III (1551-1589). In the year of the birth of this king, in 1551, the “*Premier livre de tabulature de luth, contenant plusieurs motetz, chansons, fantasies, pavanes, gaillardes, almandes, branles, tant simples qu'autres: le tout composé by Adrian Le Roy*” was published in Paris. The “*Orchésographie et traicte en forme de dialogue, par lequel toutes personnes peuvent facilement apprendre & practiquer l'honest exercice of dances. Par Thoinot Arbeau demeurant a Langres*” was published in 1589, the year in which Henri III was murdered. This last book is an invaluable resource on the different types of Renaissance dances. For example, we learn that there are different types of branles, including the branle simple, branle double, branle des cheveaulx... Some branles refer to places, such as our branle de Bourgogne and branle de Champagne, but also the branle de Poictou, branle de Hault Barrois, branle de Malta...

Branles were originally folk dances that were sometimes danced in a chain but usually in a circle. They were also danced at court at an early age. Everyone dances the same steps and shakes hands. The dance steps consist of simple and double that are performed both to the left and to the right. They start with a curtsey, a kind of bow, followed by pieds en l'air and grèves. The whole is accompanied by only one musician playing drum and whistle. Sometimes the violin is also played. Branles are often bundled into suites. For example, one starts with a branle double, also called branle commun, then a branle simple followed by a branle gay. Finally, one ends with a branle de Bourgogne, also called branle de Champagne by some². Arbeau further explains that the elderly dance the branle double and branle simple, the newlyweds dance the branle gay and finally the youngest (those who are not yet married) the branle de Bourgogne³.

The first branles in lute literature can be found in “Dixhuit basses dances” published by Pierre Attaignant in 1530. The first branle de Champagne under that name appeared by Phalèse in 1549. For the branles de Bourgogne we have to wait until 1551. There are roughly two branches, the first of which starts with Adrian Le Roy. His “*Premier livre de tabulature de luth*” contains nine branles de Bourgogne. We also find three of these nine branles in 1563 by Phalèse, who published the complete set of nine branles again in 1568 and 1571. In 1573 Jobin printed the first three branles de Bourgogne, providing the first with some additional divisions. And finally in 1591 we see the first and third branle appear again with Weissel⁴. All versions are virtually identical, apart from the divisions in Jobin. Le Roy and Phalèse both use French tablature while Jobin and Weissel use German tablature.

¹ Larousse, dictionnaire de Français en ligne, www.larousse.fr (consulted on 13/09/2024)

² In Phalèse 1563, Jobin 1573 en Weissel 1591 the Branles de Bourgogne are always followed or preceded by a Branle de Champagne.

³ Orchésographie, Thoinot Arbeau, 1589, p.69

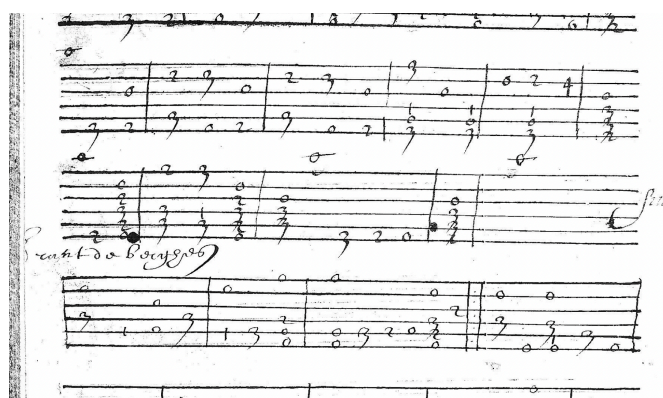
⁴ Theatrum Musicum, Phalèse 1563; Luculentum theatrum musicum, Phalèse 1568; Theatrum Musicum, longe amplissimum, Phalèse 1571; Das ander buch newerlessner kunstlicher Lautenstück, Jobin 1573; Tabulatura Allerley künstlicher Preambulen, Weissel 1591; Versions for cittern are not listed separately here.

Pierre de Pouille's lute manuscript from around 1609-1615 deserves special mention. The “Brant de berghes” on f.35v uses Le Roy's third branle de Bourgogne in the fifth movement. This manuscript, which certainly requires further research, is strangely enough in Italian tablature. The “Brant de berghes” is also identical to the piece of the same name in a proof print from around 1575 for a lost lute book by... Phalèse⁵. And so the circle is almost complete again. A second branch with much shorter branles de Bourgogne also starts with Phalèse, but in his *Thesaurus musicus* from 1574⁶. We also find one of these branles in the Dallis lute book, which dates from around 1583 and has a strong connection with the Low Countries⁷.

The branles de Champagne in the later editions of Phalèse, Jobin and Waissel consist of several short themes and are very similar⁸, just like that in the lute book of Thysius which is more easy, while those in Phalèse 1549 and D-LEm Ms.II.5.32b are much shorter and have a different theme⁹.

Below are all branles de Bourgogne and branles de Champagne, transcribed in French tablature for ease of use. The first stanza of Le Roy's first branle de Bourgogne corresponds melodically to the second sentence of “Tant vous allez douce Guillemette” in Emanuel Adriaenssen's 1584 lute book. The beginning of the second branle shows great similarity with the well-known branles de villages by Jean-Baptiste Besard¹⁰. The “Brant de berghes” from de Pouille was originally recorded without rhythmic indications. The rhythmic sign additions are based on the version in NL-M Coll.169 I-4, the proof print of Phalèse. The bar structure of the original has been retained and, where necessary, adjusted with broken bar lines.

Have fun playing.



F-Pn Rés.941 (Pierre de Pouille), f.35v [B]rant de berghes

⁵ Tabulatura de leuto, F-Pn Rés.941 (Pierre de Pouille); Some foils from a proof print are kept in the State Archives of Maastricht for “Raphaelis Violae Carminum pro testudine” (1575) or “Carmina in testudine” (1578)(NL-M Coll.169 I-4). However, both editions of Phalèse have been lost. The proof also contains a fragment from the branle de Champagne. See also the article by dr.Godelieve Spiessens in *Geluit 44* (2008): “Raphael Viola, 16de-eeuwse luitcomponist herbekeken”. See also Prof.dr.Jan W.J.Burgers en KVMN, *The Lute Music Published by Pierre Phalèse*, 2023.

⁶ The 4.Branle [d'Arras] in Phalèse 1574, f.83r is almost identical to the second Branle de Bourgogne by Adrian Le Roy.

⁷ *Thesaurus musicus*, Phalèse 1574; IRL-Dtc 410/I (Dallis). Various branles d'Arras also appear in both sources.

⁸ The theme of the 4.Branle de Champagne in Waissel however differs.

⁹ *Carminum quae chely vel testudine canuntur, Liber primus*, Phalèse 1549; D-LEm Ms.II.5.32b (1555-1560) contains handwritten additions to three bound books with works by Orlando di Lasso; NL-Lu 1666 (Thysius)

¹⁰ *Pratum musicum*, Adriaenssen 1584, f.14v and next (“Et Guillemette avez vous desienez”); *Diverses Piesces mises sur le luth*, Ballard 1614, p.52 (second branle de village), *Novus Partus*, Besard II 1617, p.28, the second branle de village; This branle has strong resemblances with the sixth branle de la royne in *Testudo Gallo-Germanica*, Fuhrmann 1615, p.139, *Le second livre de Tablature de Luth*, Vallet II 1616, p.14 and GB-Eu Col.2073, f.235r.