

VOLTA

Brit. They bid us to the English dancing-schools,
And teach lavoltas high and swift corantos,
Saying our grace is only in our heels,
And that we are most lofty runaways.

Henry V (III. V. 32-35)

Tro. [...] In this I do not call your faith in question
So mainly as my merit. I cannot sing,
Nor heel the high lavolt, nor sweeten talk, [...]

Troilus and Cressida (IV. iv. 84-86)

The volta was both popular and controversial, as it involved closer contact with one's partner than any other recorded dance of the period. A variant of the galliard, it involved the man lifting his partner into the air while the couple is turning in place, as shown at right, in a detail of a painting entitled "Queen Elizabeth I doing a leaping turn of the Volta, assisted by Earl of Leicester" (there is some debate as to whether this title is correct).



The volta is sketchily described in one of the Measures manuscripts, but Arbeau provides a more detailed description, though not without editorial comment. When discussing decorum, Arbeau says "Nowadays, dancers lack these courteous considerations in their lavoltas and other similarly wanton and wayward dances that have been brought into usage. In dancing them, the damsels are made to bounce about in such a fashion that more often than not they show their bare knees unless they keep one hand on their skirts to prevent it" (Evans, 87). Arbeau adds later when describing the dance, "And after having spun round for as many cadences as you wish return the damsel to her place, when, however brave a face she shows, she will feel her brain reeling and her head full of dizzy whirlings; and you yourself will perhaps be no better off. I leave it to you to judge whether it is a becoming thing for a young girl to take long strides and separations of the legs, and whether in this lavolta both honor and health are not involved and at stake. I have already given you my opinion" (Evans, 121).

The description of the volta in the Measures manuscript Douce 280 is: "The French Levolto. Honour. By demonstration likewise, falling into your pace, holding hands, & conveyinge the gentlewoman with your right arm and right legg by boundes in to 4 several places. Honor & ende."

MUSIC

Since the volta is a variation of the galliard, just about any galliard music can be used. Arbeau does provide a specific melody, against which he tabulates the steps.

STEPS

Arbeau describes just one step for the Volta, but since the step is done differently depending on whether one is traveling forward or turning, and if turning, on whether one is male or female, I separate the descriptions and add details below.

- Forward on left
1. Hop on the left foot, lifting the right foot in the air.
 - 2-3. Step right.
 - 4-6. Jump, landing onto both feet.

Transition on left (It is helpful to take a sequence to arrange yourselves before beginning the turns)

1. Hop on the left foot, lifting the right foot in the air.
- 2-3. Step right.
- 4-6. Men: Turn right to face your partner, drawing her close to you, placing your right hand below her bust (if she's wearing a corset), and left hand at the small of her back.

Women: Turn halfway around to your left, so that your right side is next to your partner's chest; place right arm across his shoulder for stability; hold dress down with left hand if necessary (or place on partner's other shoulder).

Turn on left

Men:

1. Hop on the left foot, lifting the right foot in the air.
- 2-3. Step right, turning 1/4 to right.
- 4-6. Pivot on right foot 1/4 to right, guiding partner around you with your hands and left thigh as she jumps. Men need not lift; all vertical effort can come from her jump.

Women:

1. Hop on the left foot, lifting the right foot in the air, and moving 1/4 circle forward around partner.
- 2-3. Step right, moving 1/4 circle forward around partner.
- 4-6. Jump; partner will guide you 1/4 circle forward around himself.

CHOREOGRAPHY

Arbeau prefers opening the dance with the volta steps moving forward, then performing the circling volta steps. He notes that one could begin with galliard steps instead. Note that multiple volta steps in a row begin with the same foot, and multiple turns go in the same direction; Arbeau suggests performing alternate sequences in the opposite direction. The dance continues for as long as the dancers wish.

LAVOLTA (THE TURN)

Galliard
Arbeau, Orchesography

Couples
Advanced

I	A1	1-6	Forward left	<i>Kick, step, and jump</i>
		7-12	Forward left	<i>Kick, step, and jump</i>
		13-18	Forward left	<i>Kick, step, and jump</i>
		19-24	Transition left	<i>Ready to turn</i>
	A2	1-6	Turn left	<i>Kick, step, and jump</i>
		7-12	Turn left	<i>Kick, step, and jump</i>
		13-18	Turn left	<i>Kick, step, and jump</i>
		19-24	Turn left	<i>Kick, step, and jump</i>
II	<i>Repeat as desired, alternating sides</i>			

A little step hopping on the left foot to make a right foot in the air. A larger step on the right. Big jump. Posture with feet together.

Petit pas en sautant sur le gaulche pour faire pied en l'air droict. Plus grand pas du droict. Sault majeur. Posture en pieds ioincts.

Reconstruction by Peter Durham. Original transcribed from Fonta edition. Translation by Peter Durham.