

VELIKO KOLO

Serbian

PRONUNCIATION: VEH-lee-koh KOH-loh

TRANSLATION: Big circle dance

SOURCE: Dick Oakes learned Veliko kolo from John Filcich and also from Dick Crum who presented it at the 1960 and 1972 Folk Dance Camp at the College of the Pacific, Stockton, California (now Stockton Folk Dance Camp), and at the 1974 San Diego State University Folk Dance Conference.

BACKGROUND: Veliko kolo was learned by Dick Crum from members of the Banat Tamburitza Orchestra and from native dancers in Srenjanin (Banat), Yugoslavia. Veliko is one of the most enjoyable of all kolos, once it is learned. There are many subtleties in it and it would not be an exaggeration to say that it takes years to master. This dance is native to Banat, Vojvodina, and was brought to the United States at the turn of the century by Sebs from the Banat district (the banaćani"), who settled most concentratedly in and around New York City, New York; Philadelphia/Lebnon, Pennsylvania; and Elizabeth, New Jersey. Other important banaćani centers were Detroit, Michigan and Youngstown/Campell, Ohio.

Dick Crum said, "The banaćani were avid dancers, and many of them were excellent tamburaši as well. They contributed many dances to the United States kolo repertory, and Veliko kolo held a special place at all their dance events. Their American-born children and grandchildren considered it the epitome of kolo dancing, the most difficult of all to learn. Many recount a discipline that consisted of observing the dance from the sidelines, then tentatively entering the circle next to their elders, and eventually absorbing the subtleties of Veliko by frequent, prolonged physical contact over many years.

As the old-timers danced it, one of the dance's main characteristics was a long pattern of extremely subtle, syncopated bounces of varying intensities, practically invisible to the observer's eye and perceptible only if you danced next to a native dancer, with your arms about his or her shoulders or waist. The women's steps were small, amounting to little more than marking time in rhythm as the men improvised with a battery of rapid-fire, minute kicks, flashing crossing movements, hops, and bounces (cifranje).

In the early 1950s, I had several rare opportunities to witness original banaćani perform Veliko, and I learned it from two of them: Zdravko Jezdzimir and Milan Josić (leaders of the Banat Tamburitza Orchestra and excellent dancers), both from what is today Romanian Banat. I had earlier

learned another version in Pittsburgh, which was common among the American-born generation of kolo dancers there."

John Filcich said, "Veliko kolo is big, but it is also great – it's the greatest dance. In the old days, they thought only banaćani could do this dance. In many places they would not allow people to get in to the dance if they were not from Banat. It's quite complicated and takes many years to learn. I started learning it from Dick Crum in 1955 and I still don't have all the variations that Dick knew. However, I would like to see everyone in this dance so it doesn't die out and perhaps owing to Dick Crum and to Michael Hermann, who recorded Veliko kolo, the dance is available to us now. The main thing is the bounce that you continually have in the dance and you can dance along next to the best dancers if you have that bounce. This the only Serbian dance I know of that moves to the left."

Whereas native dancers don't mind if you enter a kolo circle unsure of a dance, they DO mind in the Veliko kolo, so be sure you are either invited to join or know it quite well. The written word cannot adequately describe the subtle intricacies of what looks like a simple step in print.

MUSIC: Festival (45rpm) FR-4819
Folk Dancer (45rpm) MH 1004

FORMATION: Single Circle, no partners, hands on shldr of adjacent dancers.

METER/RHYTHM: 2/4

STEPS/STYLE: All steps are small and lifts are very small, the toe never leaving the floor, to the point of only being felt, not seen. Dick Crum referred to this as "dancing inside your shoes."

MEAS

MOVEMENT DESCRIPTION

THE DANCE

- 1 Moving L, step L to L (ct 1); step R (ct 2).
- 2 Step L to L (ct 1); touch L toe in front of R without wt (ct 2).
- 3 Step R to R (ct 1); touch L toe in front of R without wt (ct 2).
- 4 Lift in place on R (ct 1); step L next to R (ct 2).
- 5 Quickly lift in place on L then step onto R next to L (ct 1); quickly lift in place on R then step onto L next to R (ct 2).

6 Step in place R,L,R or do a small, flat pas-de-basque (step in place R, step L somewhat fwd, step in place R) (cts 1,&,2).

NOTE: Difficulty comes in meas 4-5, because native dancers introduce a number of subtle, additional syncopations that are impossible to reduce to written description. Natives also do variations on the dance, the men taking more lively steps, while the women are more reserved. No matter what the dancers are doing, however, the rhythm and bounces are all the same and in strict unison.

Repeat entire dance from beg.