

Brian R Bishop, *The Sardana: How To Dance It*. Carshalton (Surrey): Brian R Bishop in collaboration with the Society for International Folk Dancing, 2012.



Being the national dance of Catalonia, the *sardana* has a special place in the life of Catalans and catalanophiles. This slim, A4-sized spiral-bound book aims to teach the dance to English speakers. In doing so, it provides not only the steps but also some of the history and culture surrounding it in order to fire enthusiasm for the dance in the learner. It must be understood that the book is first and foremost a practical dancing manual, not an academic tome for occasional consultation nor a book to read from cover to cover. It is a modern work; as such, it makes abundant reference to on-line resources to help the reader understand the subject matter, but that can be a two-edged sword, as will become clear.

A mere 34 pages long, the book packs in a huge amount of information, and there are copious diagrams and illustrations to help the student or teacher, from beginner to advanced. Topics include the *sardana's* origin and meaning, its setting and sounds, tips for beginners, the stance, the steps, the order of the dance, counting (a fundamental aspect of this dance), examples of complete allocations of *sardana* steps in specific dances, dance programmes, and musical examples in notation. The author has obviously spent many years dancing the *sardana* and his source references are impeccable.

As a practical dancing manual, one might expect music to be provided, e.g. in the form of a CD, but there is none, apart from a single score on pages 28-30. Instead, the author provides two pages of Internet references to music and video downloads which can be used for teaching/learning, so one imagines that users of the book would download the music and play it while practising the steps as illustrated, holding the book in their hand. Otherwise, they will be in need of an accompanist who can read music.

Once having learnt the basic steps for the *curts*, the *llargs* and the end figures, the reader has then assembled the kit of parts for doing the dance. Each dance is assembled from multiples of these figures, and this is where the complexity begins. The author goes through them in detail for various dances. The key thing is to count bars in the music and never to lose count, because the counts vary with each piece of music: so many *curts* followed by so many *llargs*, followed by so many *curts*, etc., each set with its own ending. This I think is done very well in the book, and to quite an advanced level, although some of the details reproduced on pages 25 and 26 are rather small and blurred. However, if the reader has got that far in his or her *sardana* dancing, I suspect that this will not be critical.

That all said, and there is much to admire in this well-produced manual, there is one glaring omission. The author does not state clearly the most important feature of the *sardana*, which distinguishes it from many (most?) western European dances: *it is not danced to the rhythm of the music!* Instead, it is danced to the *bars* of the music. Thus the stepping for a *curt* or *llarg* will last a set number of bars and will be the same irrespective of the music time signature; whether the *cobla* or band plays a march or a waltz does not affect the steps. That is why the dance looks so strange to foreigners, for the dancers will at times be stepping across the rhythm of the music, but all in stately unison. It is also the reason why there are the special ending steps at the end of each section of *curts* or *llargs* to fit the timing of the end of the music. In fairness, the author does say it is danced to the bar on page 10, but by not explicitly stating the obvious of not dancing to the rhythm he risks confusing the beginner at the outset. Once this principle is grasped, however, the importance of counting bars becomes obvious, otherwise the dancer will get lost.

The other issue I have with this book is the use of so many Internet web references. There are a couple of problems with this. First, it is the nature of web links that they go out of date over time; although all of the links that were tested during this review (May 2013) worked, there is no guarantee that they will still be working in a year's time, say. Secondly, most of these links are extremely long (often more than 30 characters) and almost impossible for the average

reader to type in accurately, so they will simply cause frustration. Had a music CD or DVD been included with the book, the problem would be less severe, but since the only way to get hold of the specified music and examples is by using these links, the usability of the book as a teaching manual is greatly reduced. The solution is obvious: to put the manual on line as a .pdf document that can readily be kept up to date by the author and printed (or downloaded to a tablet) by the user as and when necessary. One can only assume that this has not already been done for copyright and revenue protection reasons, which is self-defeating and a great pity. This otherwise excellent book deserves better, for it should be compulsory reading for all budding *sardanistes*.

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