

Dances are artistic forms of expression that have been fascinating and engaging people since ancient times. Folk dances, in particular, have contributed shaping cultural identities, in which somewhere are still deeply rooted, together with customs and traditions, songs and music, flavours, odours and colours. Folk dances represent typical mores of the places they originate from which are usually accompanied with music.

Not only has nearly every country its own folk ones, but also regions, towns and even small villages have traditional dances and songs.

Although not all ethnic dances are folk dances, nearly every ethnicity has one of them.

ITALIAN FOLK DANCES



Folk dances are developed by local people in order to reflect and represent the life of a certain community, region or country.

Italian folk dances had been an essential part of the Italian culture for centuries, and have been a continuous thread in the Italian life in some areas of the country.

Italian traditional dances are numerous, sometimes very different to one another and they sometimes share various aspects with different ones, mainly due to their geographical position.



ITALIAN FOLK DANCES, WHICH ARE OFTEN ACCOMPANIED BY MUSICIANS FREQUENTLY PLAYING ORIGINAL AND HAND-MADE INSTRUMENTS, CAN BE GROUPED ACCORDING TO THEIR GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION ALONG THE BOOT



NORTHERN ITALY

In this part of the country, typical Tyrolean dances originated in the area around Trento, Rovereto, Bressanone e Bolzano, are still in use. Absolutely jolly, they involve the whole mountain community, especially during traditional banquets, full of delicacies, local desserts and muddled wine.

In Piemonte, very popular are the so-called *Balli delle Valli Occitane* (Dances of the Occitan Valleys) that commonly gladden village festivals. Their music is still characterised by the sound of the mouth organ, of the clarinet, of the violin and of the classical squeeze box.

In Emilia Romagna, the typical dances are called *Balli Strascicati* (Shuffled Dances), a bit different from the previous ones. In fact, here, popular dances have a series of steps and hops and are performed in groups or in a pair.



CENTRAL ITALY

There, the most popular folk dances are the so-called *Saltarello* mainly common in Lazio, Molise, Umbria e Marche (four of the Central Italian Regions) and *Trescone* in Tuscany.

As for *Saltarello*, original steps, got nearly lost; thanks to a careful work of some researchers those old dances have been redesccovered and reevaluated by local folk groups.

As long as *Trescone* is concerned, it dates back to the Middle Ages. It was originally an exclusively male dance and only many years later women were allowed to join it.



SOUTHERN ITALY AND ISLANDS

This is the part of the boots where folk dances are still very alive.

Tarantella (all Southern Regions), *Pizzica* (Puglia), *Tammurriata* (Campania) and *Balli Sardi* (Sardinia) are the most known among Southern Italian popular dances.

As for *Tarantella*, the most famous one, it spread out during the Bourbon Age.

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NORTHERN ITALIAN DANCES

FURLANA



The *Furlana* is an Italian dance from Friuli Venezia Giulia (one of the 20 Italian Regions) that originated as a Slavonic dance. It dates back, at least, to 1583 though its popularity extended from the late 1690s to about 1750. It is particularly associated to Venice because, at the time of its highest popularity, Friuli belonged to the Serene Republic of Venice. The *Furlana* is a jolly and fast dance performed in pairs. It was extended also to France in 1697-1699 and it quickly became a popular and social dance there, too.

OCCITAN DANCES

Occitan dances are the traditional dances of the Occitan Valleys of Italy and along with the language, the religion and their music are a fundamental element of aggregation for the local community.

Most of them consist of ballads and they are mainly performed in the territories of Piedmont.





MONFERRINA

Monferrina is a lively Italian folk dance named after the place of its origin, Montferrat, in the Italian region of Piedmont from where it spread throughout all Northern Italy such as Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, reaching Switzerland as well.

This dance is usually accompanied by singing and it is performed by several couples. The dance is known under several different names:

Monferrina di Friuli, Monfremma Bulgnaisa, Monfrenna Mudnaisa, Giardiniera or Jardinière and Baragazzina

CENTRAL ITALIAN DANCES

TRESCONE

It is a typical Tuscan dance initially performed only by men, also mentioned by Dante and Boccaccio in their works. The name derives from the Germanic word “dreschen” (thresh) because it recalls the way in which the peasants in the farmyards removed the grains from the ears of wheat.



SALTARELLO

Saltarello, as its name suggests, is a skipped dance (in Italian *saltarello* means little jump). The different geographical and morphological distribution can be traced back to the different spheres of influence of the Latins and the Greeks. It is also known in various areas of Abruzzo, Molise and Campania where we still find the shoulder (or the thump), with some links to the area inhabited by the ancient Sannites. It is danced in pairs by six people (three couples).





ZUMBARELLA

Similar to Saltarello, it has been known since the 1400s and it is still performed today among the young people of the town of Castiglione Messer Marino (Abruzzo) to serenade the couples in love.

The eight bass accordion accompanied the singers and the dancers. Before the performance started, it was important first to the man introducing himself to the landlord and then asking for permission to sing and dance to the girl.

If the girl agreed the Zumbarella lasted for a long time, if not, the boy immediately stopped and moved on to the next girl to be courted not missing to sing some hot stanzas on the girl's honor before leaving.

MAGGIO

The dance called *Maggio* (May) is linked to the “Canto del Maggio” which is an ancient tradition widespread in Northern Tuscany and especially in Liguria where the “maggianti” (the local performing inhabitants) roamed the houses and neighboring countries singing dialectal and jolly songs accompanied by music and dances during the night between 30th April and May 1st, in order to celebrate the end of the long winter and to welcome spring with its re-birth.



SOUTHERN ITALIAN DANCES

TARANTELLA

Tarantella is a group of various folk dances accompanied by tamburrines. It is among the most recognized forms of traditional Southern Italian music.

The specific dance name varies in every Southern region, for instance «Pizzica» in the region of Salento or «Sonu a ballu» in Calabria. T

In the Italian province of Taranto, in Apulia, the bite of a local common type of wolf spider named «tarantula» after its region of origin, was popularly believed to be highly venomous and to lead to hysterical condition known as tarantism. Because of the strange movements of these folk dances it has been named «Tarantella».



PIZZICA

Pizzica is a popular Italian folk dance, originally from the Salento peninsula in Apulia (Puglia) which later spread throughout the rest of the region, as well as throughout Calabria and Eastern Basilicata.

It is part of the wider family of Tarantella. The traditional Pizzica is a couple dance not necessarily performed by two individuals of opposite-sexes, in fact it often occurs to see two women dancing together.

Recently it has become rare to see two men dancing an entire pizzica, despite in Ostuni where one of the two dancer, jokingly pretends to be a woman or when both men pretend to be engaged in a duel.



BALLU TUNDU

Ballu tundu is a traditional Sardinian folk dance which is typically performed in a closed or open circle.

*In northern and central Sardinia, the dance is lively and animated with leaps and agile movements and usually accompanied by a choir of three or more singers in the center of the circle. In other areas, the dance is done to *launeddas* and the shepherd's *sulittu*.*

At least in the past, the manner of holding hands was very important and followed strict rules. Married or engaged couples could hold hands palm to palm with fingers entwined, but a man could not do this with a young girl or another man's wife. If a stranger entered the circle, he had to do so to the woman's right so as not to come between her and her husband.



ErasmusPlus Project *Recognize Yourself in He or She, Who are not like You and Me...*
Presentation realised by **Eva Borgioli** and **Giulia Genovese** – Students at IIS A.Meucci (MS) – 5BLSA
and supervised by **Alessandra Mazzi** – English teacher at IIS A. Meucci

