

Veliko kolo

(Serbia—Banat region)

Veliko kolo (big kolo) was brought to the U.S. at the turn of the century by Serbs from the Banat district (the banaćani), who settled most concentratedly in and around New York City, Philadelphia/Lebanon, Pennsylvania, and Elizabeth, New Jersey. (Other important banaćani centers were Detroit, Michigan, and Akron and the Youngstown/Campbell areas in Ohio.)

The banaćani were avid dancers, and many of them were excellent tamburaši as well. They contributed many dances to the U.S. 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 one's arms about his or her shldr 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 minute kicks, crossing movements, hops, and bounces (*cifra, cifranje*).

Pronunciation: VEH-lee-koh KOH-loh

Music: 2/4 meter
About a half-dozen recordings of Veliko kolo are available, some better than others.

Formation: Closed, mixed circle, arms on neighbor's shldr.

Styling: Steps are small; bounces and other ft movements are done "privately," "inside your shoes." to use some of the descriptions that have been applied to them. Often the dance can only be felt in the vibration of the shldr of the person dancing next to you.

<u>Meas</u>	<u>Pattern</u>
1 ♪♪	Facing very slightly L, step on L to L (ct 1); continue moving L, stepping on R across in front of L (ct 2).
2 ♪♪	Step sdwd on L to L (ct 1); touch R ft at L toe (ct 2).
3 ♪♪	Step sdwd on R to R (short step, almost in place) (ct 1); touch L ft at R toe (ct 2).
4 ♪♪♪	Hop (very low, don't leave floor) on R in place, L ft is barely off the floor, beside R (ct 1); step on L in place, R ft barely off floor (ct &); hold (ct 2); hop (don't leave floor) on L in place, R ft barely off floor, beside L (ct &).
5 ♪♪♪	Step on R in place, L ft barely off floor (ct 1); hop (don't leave floor) on R in place, L ft barely off floor, beside R (ct &); step on L in place (ct 2); hold (ct &).
6 ♪♪♪	Step on R in place (ct 1); step on L beside R (ct &); step on R in place and hold (cts 2,&). Note: In meas 4 stress the hop on ct 1 (think "UP!"), and in meas 5 stress the steps in place in cts 1, 2 (think "DOWN!"); a cue for these meas might be "UP-down, up-DOWN, up DOWN."

VARIATIONS

The above basic step is subject to infinite variations, especially by the men, who introduce various tiny flourishes as the dance progresses. Below are a few examples I have noted down over the years, among U.S. banačani and in Banat.

VARIATION ON MEAS 1 (TRIPLE SHAKE)

- 1  Step sdwd L on L, momentarily sharing wt both flat ft apart—some old-timers did this with a slight pigeon-toe (ct 1); low but marked bounce on L in place (ct &); step on R beside L ft (ct 2).

VARIATION ON MEAS 1 AND/OR MEAS 6 (BOTH-CROSS-STEP)

1. (6)  Step sdwd L on L, momentarily sharing wt on balls of both ft apart—some old-timers did this with a slight pigeon-toe (ct 1); shift wt onto L ft where it is or a bit to R of there (slight “backtrack” twd R ft) (ct &); step on R across in front of L to L (ct 2).

VARIATION ON MEAS 2-3 (4 LITTLE SIDE LEAPS)

- 2  Very short leap onto ball of L ft to L (almost in place), keeping R ft close to L ankle (ct 1); very short leap onto ball of R ft to R (almost in place), keeping L ft close to R ankle (ct 2).
- 3  Repeat meas 2.

VARIATION ON MEAS 4-5 (DOUBLE BOUNCES)

- 4  Bounce twice on R (“private” bounces, “inside your shoes”) (all in ct 1); step on L in place beside R ft (ct &); hold (ct 2). “private” double bounces on L (all in ct &).
- 5  Step on R in place beside L ft (ct 1); “private” double bounces on R ft (all in ct &); step on L in place beside R ft (ct 2); hold (ct &).

VARIATION ON MEAS 4-5 (LEFT FOOT IN FRONT)

This is similar to the variation immediately above, but the L ft is crossed in front of R.

- 4  “Private” double bounces on R in place (all in ct 1); step on L in front of R ft with slight flex of L knee (ct &); hold (ct 2). “private” double bounces on L in this front position (all in ct &).
- 5  Step on R in place behind L ft (ct 1); “private” double bounces on R ft (all in ct &); shift wt fwd onto L ft (ct 2).

VARIATION ON MEAS 4-5 (REEL STEPS)

- 4  “Private” double bounces on R in place, bringing L ft around close in back (all in ct 1); step on L toe close behind R heel (ct &); hold (ct 2); “private” double bounces on L in this position, bringing R ft around close in back (all in ct &).
- 5  Step on R close behind L heel (ct 1); “private” double bounces on R ft, bringing L ft around in back (all in ct &); step on L toe close behind R heel (ct 2); hold (ct &).

VARIATION ON MEAS 6 (PAS-DE-BASQUE)

6  Step on R in place (ct 1); step on L in front of R (ct &); step on R in place (cts 2); hold (ct &).

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