***Lebanese Celebration Dance*: Debke**

**A Teacher’s Guide Preparation: Joan Litman**

Recording: La Tsalouni Mohamed Iskander (Lebanon)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mI1ows2iiJs>

This popular dance, the *debke*, is performed in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt and throughout the Arab diaspora. There are both simple and complex versions.

This is the simplest!

The dance “erupts” in celebratory settings—weddings—harvest festivals etc. The mood is pride. Being tall and erect is more important that correct foot work!

“One should see that debke is being danced by looking through the window”

------L’Emir Hassan Harfouche (Lebanon/Boston)

This dance celebrates people’s connection to each other and the land. More than the “accuracy” of specific steps is the “look” of confidence.

**The four stages (form) of a traditional harvest debke:**

**1.Before the music:** Picking crops, social gathering, some activity that will be interrupted shortly! Mime in silence. Students will add their own details—a sweaty brow, a baby needing to be held, an occasional bite of fruit, etc.

Doing the mime in silence and slow motion allows student the best setting to think about what they are doing that—when complete—will be cause for celebration—

If performed for an audience, a chance to show the larger context of the dance

**2.The musical call to the dance: Mizmar (folk oboe)**

People put down their crops/whatever they’re doing. The work season is over. They smile, make contact with others—silently-- and follow the sound of the mizmar. They might mime running to a village (*slow motion*). By the time the throbbing/shouting starts, the people should be getting in line (or already in line) and counting.

**3. The throbs/shouts 12 beats. (1,2,3,4/ 2,2,3,4/ 3,2,3,4, Practice counting it our for the students without, then with the music. Count it out for the students.**

The first step of the dance (Cross left) (Is *immediately* after 3,2,3**,4**)

Count this aloud for and with the students a few times before they actually begin the footwork.

**4. The dance begins**…The leader is on the right, people join in grabbing hands to his/her left. The dance winds. It is a line—not a circle! People can join at any point. “Straight and tall like the cedars of Lebanon!”

It is a good idea to eventually break the long line into smaller lines so that people can move freely.

**5. The footwork**

L Crossover R

R, (step to the side )

L cross over R,

R (step to the side)

L STOMP

LSTOMP (repeat! L cross over)

**Preparation: The form and the footwork**

Teachers draw a horizontal diagram (line) on the board. Identify the form of the dance. It is helpful for the students to see the whole layout of the dance, visually.

Along the line on the board, mark these four points

1. *Silence (picking crops)*
2. *(Recording begins) mizmar (folk oboe) the people hear the instrument, and in slow motion “run to town and line up for the dance.”*
3. *Once in line, bounce in place to the throbs*

*4. The actual dance begins. (Left over right on the downbeat.)*

Mark out this form *without* music. (i.e. act out picking crops, putting the bag down, slow motion coming to town, lining up shoulder to shoulder.

**Preparation: The footwork!**

Learn the steps of the dance which eventually will start at the end of the “throbs” on the next beat.

Students can practice individually— first, just six steps (LRLRL(stomp) L (stomp)

Then in small lines

Holding hands is up to you. Make sure the students are confident of the foot work before

any hand holding is attempted. Check youtube videos to see variations. (Different spellings: debke, dabke)

People can join in – at any time. The rather rigid counting of the throbs is to help students adapt to this particular recording. Recordings don’t breathe. Of course there are many other recordings. I like this one because one can hear and act the preparation for the dance… (mizmar, throbs, etc) i.e. there is space and sound for students to understand

the context of the debke.

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