Prinsesse Alexandrine kvadrille [the Alexandrine quadrille] (Danse og musikhistorier 4)

by Ole Skov

The dance Les Lanciers [the Lancers quadrille] arrived in Denmark in the 1860s, and quickly became widely popular. It was danced at court, in the towns and in the countryside. It was part of the repertoire of every school of dance, and was *the* dance that dance teachers most frequently included in their published dance collections up until the 1900s. Around 1900 it was very common for adults as well as children to attend dances. Therefore many of the dancers at Det Kongelige Teater [the Royal Danish Theatre] also ran dance studios in addition to their jobs in the theatre. For example, 'Nationaltidende' [National news, a Danish newspaper] of September 23rd, 1902 included 15 advertisements for 27 courses in dance, taught by 19 dance teachers in various parts of Copenhagen. Hans Beck (1861-1952) was at that time the head of Den Kongelige Ballet [Royal Danish Ballet], as well as running a dance studio teaching social dance. He was of the opinion that for some time there had been enough couple dancing (runddans), and that there was a need for a new, neat little quadrille dance. He felt it should be in the same style as Lanciers, but a little shorter, since especially the younger generation felt the Lanciers was too long. This he proposed to the dancers in the Ballet, and asked them to think of it as an assignment. Ludvig Smith (1850-1924), a former dancer with the Royal Ballet and at that time musician for ballet instruction, asked a colleague, ballet dancer Georg Berthelsen (1867-1954) if he would come up with something based on some music for a quadrille that he had composed. Both were teachers of social dance, and ran dance studios. Ludvig Smith had previously composed some dance tunes, for couple dances such as waltz, trippevals, and polka-mazurka, as well as Anglo-Dane and Orion, for both of which he had choreographed the dance as well as composing the music. As a composer, Ludvig Smith had taken the pseudonym Louis Forgeron, which means 'smith' in French.



Ludvig Smith ca. 1918. Georg Berthelsen ca. 1910.

The newly composed music was good, and included 4 dance rhythms: polka, waltz, mazurka, and gallop. Since Lanciers could appear boring to some, in that each sequence is danced 4 times, the new dance would have each sequence danced only twice. Georg Berthelsen accepted the challenge, and when the choreography was finished, taught 8 children (4 couples) to dance it. It went splendidly. The new dance was danced in 'a well-known Copenhagen private home' and at the next Studentersamfundet soirée [Student Association evening event].

Although the dance lacked a name, it is mentioned in several national newspapers in September of 1902. From Lolland-Falsters Folketidende [Lolland-Falster news] of September 23rd, 1902:

 A new social dance

Georg Berthelsen, a dancer at Det Kongelige Teater [Royal Theatre], has, according to 'Dannebrog' [the Danish flag, a Danish newspaper] composed a new social dance. It is a quadrille, for at least four couples, with a formation like Lanciers. The quadrille consists of three sequences plus a finale. Each sequence is danced only twice, as opposed to four times in Lanciers. The very catchy music has been composed by the dance music composer Louis Forgeron. The dance, which is shortly to be published by Wilhelm Hansen Publishers, has been performed for Hans Bech, balletmaster, and other interested parties, who have all expressed their approval of the dance as well as of the music. The creation of the dance is in response to a long-felt need to add to the somewhat sparse repertoire of quadrille dances in our ball programs. Despite all its figures being new, one objective of the choreography has been that it should not be difficult to learn. In order to popularize it as quickly as possible, the composer and the choreographer have arranged with the publisher that anyone purchasing a copy of the music will also receive one hour of free instruction in the dance.

The dance needed a name. Georg Berthelsen applied to the [Royal] court for permission to call it 'Prinsesse Alexandrine kvadrille'. "With the outmost graciousness, permission was granted me." Princess Alexandrine was the daughter of Grand Duke Friedrich Franz (1851-1897) of Mecklenburg-Schwerin in Germany, who in 1898 married Prince Christian (1870-1947), later King Christian the 10th. She was, in other words, paternal grandmother to Queen Margrethe.

Around November 1st, Prinsesse Alexandrine quadrille was published in the form of sheet music with a dance description by Wilhelm Hansens Music Publishers in Copenhagen.



Title page of sheet music published 1902.



Prinsesse Alexandrine kvadrille in 1902.Georg Berthelsen is one of the dancers, e.g. front right in sequence 3. Ugebladet Verdensspejlet 16.11.1902 [Weekly World Mirror, November 16, 1902]

Georg Berthelsen's dancing friends liked the dance, and it quickly became part of the repertoire of the dance studios in Copenhagen. Dance teachers from outside the capital also came to Copenhagen to learn it, so it quickly became popular all over the country. Less than a month later, between November 28 and December 24, 1902, 3 dance teachers advertised in Fyns Stiftstidende [The Funen Diocesan news] that one could learn the dance from them in Odense [150 km west of Copenhagen].

Wilhelm Hansen had to reprint the music several times over a short period of time. With the 7th edition, Georg Berthelsen and Ludvig Smith were awarded a 3-month ticket on Danske Statsbaner [DSB, Danish State Railways] so that they would be able to travel to as many towns as possible during the holidays to teach the dance.

During the summers of 1907 and 1908, Georg Berthelsen spent some months in Iceland to give courses in social dance. Not only minuet, Lanciers and Française were taught and danced, but also Prinsesse Alexandrine kvadrille. He also taught it to 16 children, who gave a very successful performance at an afternoon concert in Reykjavik.



Newspaper ‘Reykjavik’ 13.8.1907 [August 13, 1907],

sale of sheet music

The sheet music published by Wilhelm Hansen was also published in Norway. At that time, a number of Icelandic and Norwegian dance teachers had, according to their advertisements, been trained in Copenhagen. The dance was probably also danced quite a bit [in those two countries]. As late as 1914 one can find Norwegian dance teachers with Prinsesse Alexandrine kvadrille on their programs. Below is an advertisement, offering instruction in [the Prinsesse Alexandrine] kvadrille along with tango and Boston, in Kristiania (Oslo) in 1914.



Advertisement in the Norwegian ‘Aftenposten’ [Evening news]

6.1.1914 [January 6, 1917]

Georg Berthelsen also taught at the cadet training academy in Copenhagen, at which Prinsesse Alexandrine kvadrille was one of the examination assignments. It had a similar role in the training of new dance teachers at Paul Petersen's Danseinstitut [dance academy]. Its students should be able to both teach and dance it, and in the written portion of the exam, describe pedagogical teaching methods for it. This teaching program continued until the 1930s-1940s. The following is an extract from an exam paper from Paul Petersen's dance academy:

The dance requires a quick comprehension, as most of the sequences are danced in a quick tempo, and there are a number of figures which do not occur in other set dances. Similarly it requires graceful, correct foot movements, and the gentleman must be able to lead his partner in a natural and graceful manner. In the instructional program, students only learn this dance once they have learned all the old set dances and the minuet...When students are being taught the Finale detailed instruction is required, and, since it contains many new figures which will require a lot of effort to learn, it should be broken up into 2 or 3 parts.

Between 1904 and 1911, a couple of other dance teachers published their own descriptions, but of most interest is that the Prinsesse Alexandrine kvadrille was filmed by Nordisk Film in 1908, as evidenced by having been listed in Registrant over danske film [the Danish film index] for the years 1896-1914. The instructor was Viggo Larsen, and the photographer Axel Sørensen. Fifty-three copies of the film were sold, and the title is given in Danish, German, English and Italian. This may indicate that the film was used as public relations material for Denmark at exhibitions abroad. I have not yet been able to find a preserved copy of the film, either in Denmark or elsewhere, but am hopeful that one will surface one day.



I can readily understand why the dance became popular. It is stylish, set to good music and was well marketed. It disappeared from Danish dance repertoires for some decades, but became popular again in 1998, when my wife Annette Thomsen and I republished it. We are delighted that in the last 20 years or so it has regained some popularity. It is danced at most historical balls in Denmark and Norway, as well as in many folkdance associations.

Major sources:

- newspapers from the period

- Statsbiblioteket Århus [Århus Public Library]

- Nasjonalbiblioteket Oslo [National Library of Norway, Oslo]

- Landsbókasafn Íslands Reykjavik [National and University Library of Iceland, Reykjavik]

- Georg Berthelsen's memoirs, in the private collection of his grandson Søren Møllerhøj Breyen.

Source: Skov, Ole "Prinsesse Alexandrine kvadrille" (Danse og musikhistorier 4) Trin & toner 2017(1): 16-18, marts-juni, 2017

<http://folkedanseren.dk/Clubs/CommonDrive/Components/GetWWWFile.aspx?fileID=62095>

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