

## Basque Morris Dances.

I do not know if you have heard of the Basque dances? If you have no knowledge of them I believe that what I am about to describe will interest you greatly.

On Sunday, Jan 30<sup>th</sup> 1910, there came into St. Jean-de-Luz a troop of 12 young men from the Basque hamlet of St Jean d'Yrube, near Bayonne. They were performing in the streets an ancient Basque dance and its similarity to our English Morris was extraordinary. The dancers were 8 in number dressed in white. Many coloured ribbons hung down their backs and were tied round their arms above the elbow. The outside seam of their white trousers was sewn with little bells. They wore the Basque shoes - something after the style of a bath slipper with fibre soles - and on the toes little bells appeared. They carried little sticks tied with ribbons and decorated with bells. On their heads were red Basque berets (the national hat). The leader carried a large blue & white flag on a pole wh. must have been a considerable weight, but

which appeared not to trouble him in the least for he was as light and agile as a ballet-dancer.

Besides the 8 dancers appeared 2 young men in white trousers, red coats & hats. These 2 were armed with collecting boxes, but joined in the dance when business allowed them.

The musicians consisted of two men in dark coats & white trousers. One played a clarionette, the other a side drum.

The dances were as follows: -

(1) All in single file followed the leader. Two polka steps forward, 2 backward. A quick shuffle; each foot being in turn thrown out & pointed in front.

2 polka steps forward, two back.

A complete turn and jump in one movement or nearly so.

Then on again, sometimes in a "dual" sometimes straight forward as the leader chose.

Curiously suggestive of Morris Off but all done in a lighter and fresher spirit.

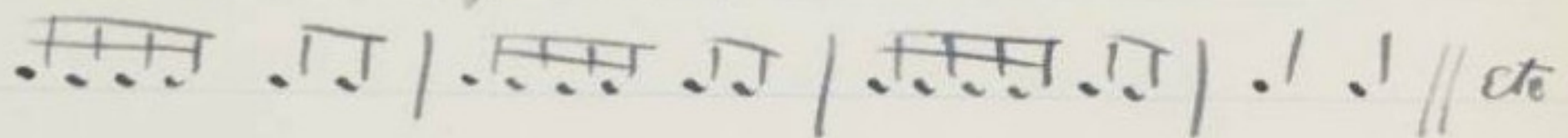
Then the tune suddenly changed and (suppose) another dance began.

(2) The men broke into couples facing one another, but each couple apart. Then began to plain steps backwards

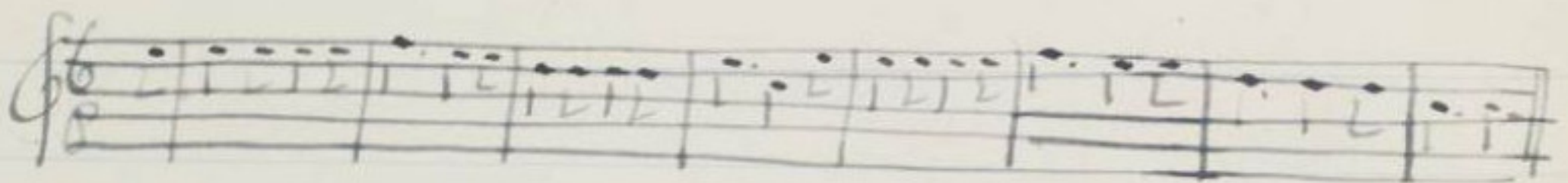
----- forwards till face to face.

Then stick tapping, twice on one side of the partner's stick, once on the other side. This was repeated once or twice and came to an abrupt End.

The music of n<sup>o</sup>. 1 was a simple major tune. The rhythm is now ringing in my head for the drum could be heard all over the town. The drum beats were as follows: -



The music of n<sup>o</sup>. 2 was this



(Melhouse)

I learn from a Basque woman that the performance is called "Le Saut Basque"; that it is very ancient, that it is now dying out; & that women never take part in it.

I learn from a Gendarme - also a Basque - that the dancers are young men from the same village (St. Jean d'Yrube). That the dance is performed once or twice a year, generally (as now) at Carnival time. He also told me that many of the Basque villages round had a company of young men dancers. . . . .

What chiefly surprised me was the resemblance between their tunes & ours - I should have expected ~~or~~ something more Southern in their music. Yet our Morris steps <sup>"ours"</sup> perfectly to their ~~steps~~ rhythm.

The chief dissimilarity was

- (1) The feet were not noticeably lifted from the ground.
- (2) There was no snuffing or warring of the arms.
- (3) The step was lighter & less plodding than ours.

In a word it seemed to show the Morris nearer the Morris, not far removed from its native land and untouched by any Northern or Roman influence.

Letter from Miss Violet Alfred, Saint Jean-de-Luz. 1910.

Miris Alfad saw the French Basques from St Jean de Luz dance and also some Spanish Basques from Guipozcoa at a Pelota match.

The French Basques were 12 in number, 8 dancers 2 collectas and 2 musiciens. The 2 collectas sometimes joined in the dance.

The dancers wore white trousers ~~and~~ (duck) and white pleated shirts, white Basque shoes and the national hat the Basque Beret (blue).

Bells outside seams of trousers, 2 on toes of shoes.

Attached to ribbon pinned between the shoulders on the back were many ribbons of different length width & colour, hanging down to the waist, completely covering the back. Diagonal scarves of broad

silk or ribbon (folded) of any light or startling

colour. When she saw them dance they

didn't use handkerchiefs but in some dances e.g.

Dantza Corda, they do. They used sticks, one to

each dancer. The sticks were small, treated with

ribbon with bows and bells at each end. They

tapped very quietly and delicately.

They began with Morris off to Dantza Corda

the leader with French flag on a pole going in front.

Step 6/2, very light, jumping and turning completely round at every 8' bar. No hand movements. They hold sticks with two hands in front of thighs and move arms slightly, rather like S.B. and S.J. but with elbows very little bent.

This is called the Sant Basque though danced to Danza Corda. Never saw them dance a set dance to Sant Basque. (Tune derived from waltz)

Musicians walk anyhow behind, one with clarinet the other side drum slung round shoulders.

When they arrived in front of an inn the dancers break into a circle, face in pairs, and stick sticks to Mackila tune,  $\cdot ! \cdot ! | 0 ! | \cdot ! \cdot ! | 0 !$  sideways as in Shepherd's Hey. They do this once or twice through the tune, then dance round in the circle to Danza Corda, then go off to Morris off.

This is the only dance the French Basques performed.

Spanish Basques. Costume very similar, but red belts instead of blue. Also two scarves of rose & scarlet hanging in a loop from shoulders over the chest, like an M.V.O. order. Leader carried a maypole instead of a flag.

8 dancers, a the leader, & 2 musicians.  
 (Collectors absent because dancers engaged by  
 Pelota management)

The may pole, Miss Alfid Haybit was a modern  
 addition. They started etc; no distinctive  
 tune.

Each man had two sticks, larger than the French  
 ones, painted grey, without bells or ribbons. They  
 struck sticks very violently and constantly probe  
 them, the leader supplying dancers with new ones.

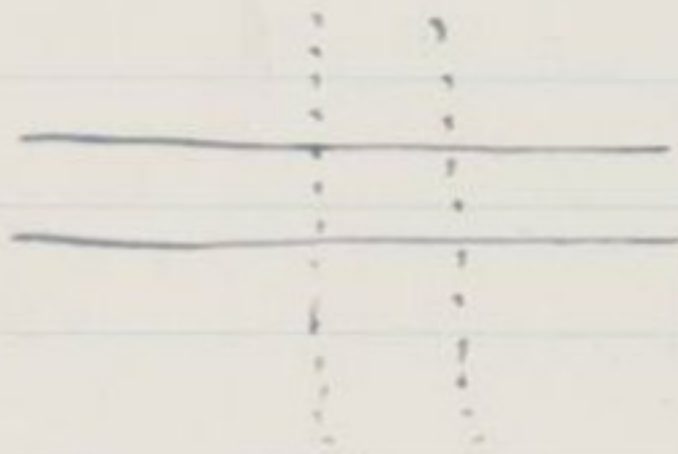
They arrived to Pantza Corda, not dancing but  
 marching - the leader in the middle, with the  
 dancers in 4 couples behind. The partners were  
 widely separate so that the formation formed  
~~square~~ a square.

The danced in front formation, 4 per side, the  
 Makkila, but not to the Makkila tune but  
 another much more elaborate, full of runs and  
 and appessi. Began with once to yourself to  
 a different tune. Then Feet up, in front  
 formation moving sideways, 4 has up,  
 4 has down, ending with immense leap holding  
 sticks across thighs like the French haspues, and

not raising them more than they could help.

After part up, they struck into Makkele. First  
 No. 1 with both sticks struck both sticks of No. 2  
 on right then on left, then high, then low (right & left)  
 Dances then separated and struck their sticks under  
 thighs, behind etc as in Sheplund's Hey Fig.

Then the two lines changed very suddenly to a  
 formation at right angles, done in a moment



Hitting then resumed. They then broke up into  
 two teams of 4 each, then hit up & down as before  
 but couples striking at different times, so that  
 2 of the couples were always hitting up and two  
 hitting down simultaneously.

Performed these evolutions <sup>Several times</sup> ~~once~~ in each position.

Top couple also ran outside (cast off) and struck  
 sticks with <sup>Each other</sup> ~~bottom couple~~, and then ran (not  
 danced) back. Then bottom couple did ~~as~~ ditto,  
 the other 2 couples meanwhile remaining stationary.



116.  
The dancers then performed other Spanish dances, Jota (Hota) and fandangoes with castanets to waltz tunes. Directly they discarded sticks and took their castanets away they seemed changed; character & atmosphere completely altered.

Miss Alfred got much information from a Basque waiter, <sup>(Elicessant by name)</sup> and also all tunes. She derived the Makilla also from the French Basques; Danza Corda from all three.

The Sept Sauts dance & tune from waiter only who thus described it.

Danced in single file at  $4/2$  step, one has forwards, one has backwards, but always advancing a little. Possibly a turn at 8' has (not quite certain) at end of 16' has one enormous leap into the air with straight legs. At second time, 2 leaps, 3' time 3 leaps & so on up to seven.

at Espelette, almost on Spanish Frontier, they used to black their faces. There are sand dunes planted with fir trees by Napoleon to prevent

s and from encroaching. They take the resin from these trees burn it and hold their faces in the black smoke. This information derived from an old Basque, aged 80, who said dances were falling into desuetude owing to superior attractions of Carnival dances. He saw the faces blackened as recently as 60 years ago. Later on they came up the practice finding it easier, he said, to use the Carnival masks for a disguise.

The Maypole dance performed thus. - once to yourself; then plaited; then once to yourself; then unplaited. This dance unlike all the others had no Basque name. It did not seem to belong to them. Minis Algal regarded it as an intrusion.

In 1490 when Ferdinand & Isabella conquered Mars, all the latter were driven out except those who consented to attend Mars. These latter lived apart under the name of Moriscoes.

Later on circa 1619 another fanatical wave arose and Moriscoes & Jews expelled. Some went into Portugal, others North. but a party of both settled

118  
in Basque country near Bayonne where there  
is a lake now called Lac Mouriscot.

They were known as far north as Pampeluna  
southern Spains of the Pyrenees in what is  
now Spanish Basque country. They spread  
as far west as Portugal and as far East as  
Eaux-Bonnes. At the latter place they tell  
dance up to Church Poir where they are  
received by the Priest, go in and hear Mass  
and then depart dancing.

Stick dances by men alone.

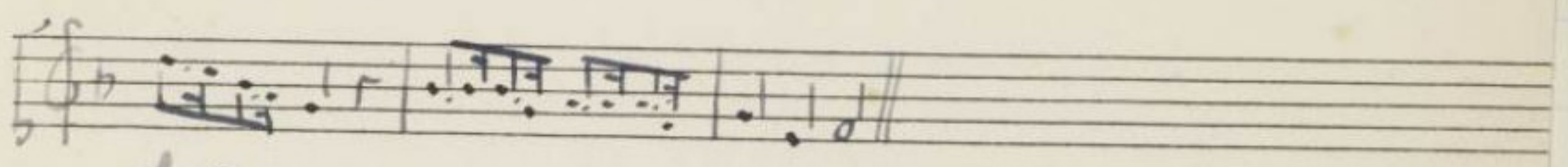
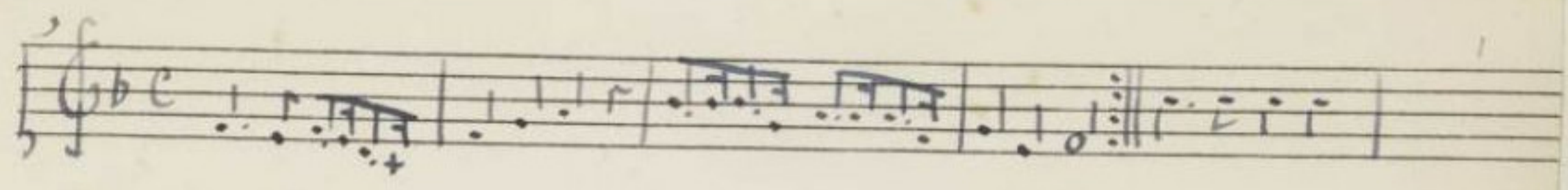
Some dances end with a wild cry.

The Danza Corda with handkerchiefs, but  
by men & girls.

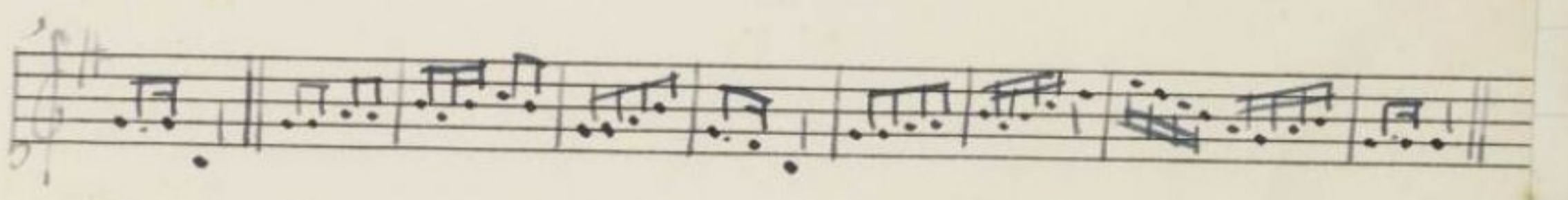
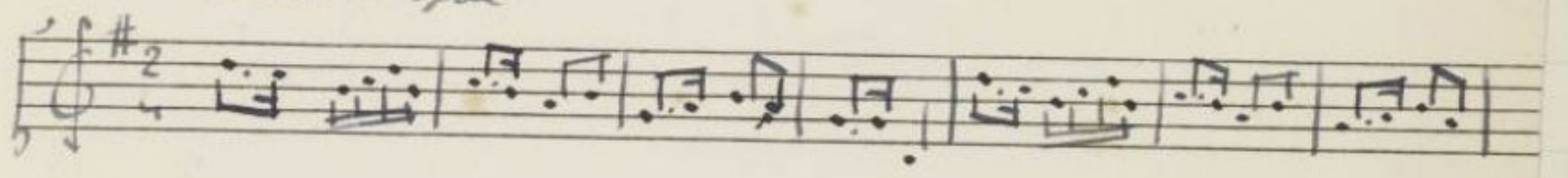
These dances known as far South as Eaux Bonnes  
as far West as Portugal.

Sometimes a lobby horse is used (see p. c.).

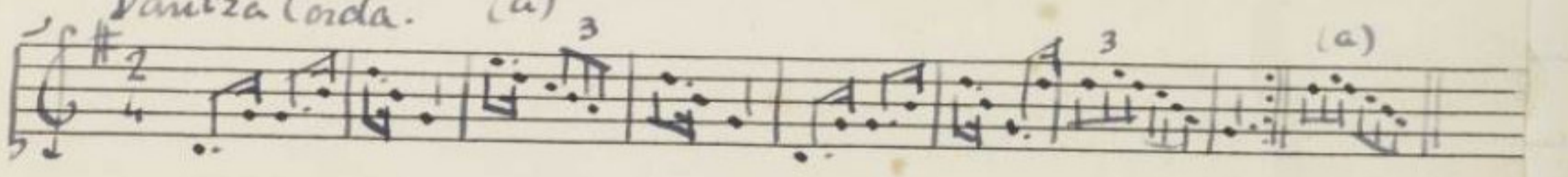
An other Sign of Sant Basque as follows. A man accompanis  
dancers carrying on his back a Spanish skin bottle of wine.  
He runs through the line of dancers, bent, and they all hit the  
wine bottle with their Makkilas. After which they drink  
the wine. (Mme A. did not see this)



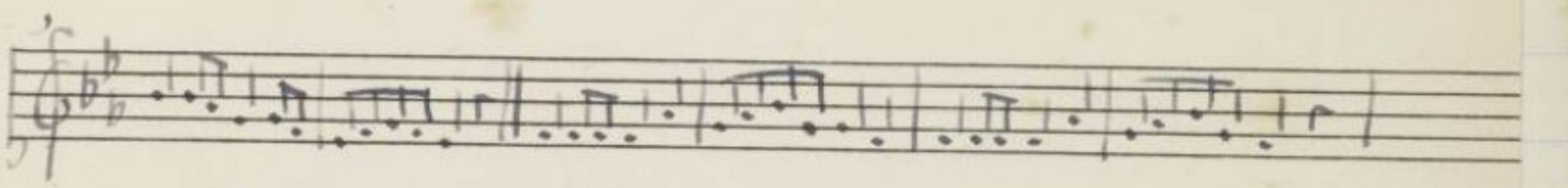
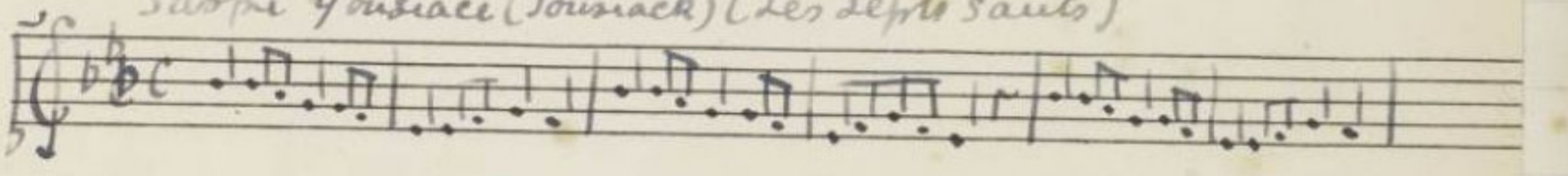
*Le Sant Basque.*



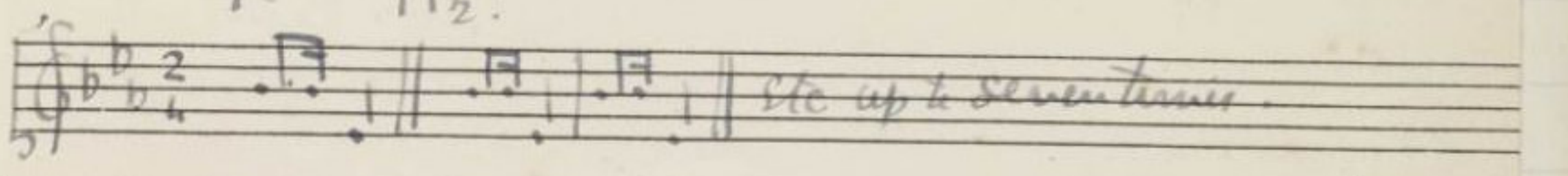
*Dantza Corda. (a)*



*Saspi Yousiacc (Jousiack) (Les Septo sauto)*



1. 1 1/2.



*Le Makkila Dantza (Dance des Batons) same as Mallekou with middle & three sections (see letter)*



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121



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Le Saut Basque,

K.