

Kleftes

Bill and Carol Wenzel and Bob Gardner wrote the following notes about Kleftes in 2004:

“The dance Kleftes takes its name from “Kleftes Veltistinoi” or “Oi Kleftes Oi Veltistinoi” a traditional song celebrating the Klephts, poorly armed men who fought for independence from the Ottoman Empire. It is attributed to Regis Velertinlis, also known as Regis Pheraios, a native of Velestino in Magnesia Thessaly. He was a Vlach intellectual, schooled in Zagori, who was active in the promotion of Greek interests, including the fight for freedom from the Ottomans. For the latter activity he was executed in 1798.”

“This music, in 6/4 meter, is common to all of the many versions of the dance, a type of Tsamiko with four measure patterns. ... Because improvisation is common in Epirus, there are also many variations ... It is common for musicians to play medleys of two or more different types of dance music; the later dances are called girisma¹ (a “turning”). ... The band often finishes with the Sta Dyo (Pogonisios) in 4/4 meter.”

The explanation of “girisma” appears to be an error. The word refers not to the later dances as stated above, but to the point when the music changes from one dance to another.

The Wenzel/Gardner notes are incomplete in relation to the Klephts: they were also outlaws, and their name is the root of the English word “kleptomaniac”. Greeks generally claim that the Klephts stole from the Ottomans only, but this is unlikely to be true. The Klephts lived in the mountains of Epirus not only to avoid Ottoman rule, but also to avoid taxes, debts, and vendettas. Like Robin Hood, they have been given a heroic image that probably does not resemble reality.

During the Greek war of independence, the Klephts fought alongside the Greek army, but refused to become part of the regular force.

Dance Directions

Music: 6/4, slow tempo

Formation: Broken circle, facing centre

Handhold: W hold

Steps (version taught by Vagelis Gousias in Vancouver in 2023)

BAR	COUNT	STEP
1	1	Facing centre, step sideways to R on R foot
	2	Step to R on L foot, crossing behind R
	3	Same as count 1
	4	Step to R on L foot, crossing in front of R
	5-6	Lift R foot behind L ankle and hold
2	1-6	Same as bar 1
3	1	Step sideways to R on R foot
	2	Lift L foot beside R calf
	3	Step to L on L foot
	4	Step forward on R foot
	5	Step back on L foot in the same place
	6	Lift R foot in front

¹ The Wenzels and Gardner misspelled “girisma” as “yirisma”. They probably misread the Greek letter gamma (γ) as “y”.

4	1	Step on R foot beside L foot
	2-3	Lift L foot in front and hold or bounce gently
	&	Step on L foot beside R foot
	4	Step on R foot crossing in front of L
	5	Step back on L foot in same place
	5-6	Touch R foot beside L without weight

Steps (version learned by John Pappas in Athens in 1970)

BAR	COUNT	STEP
1	1	Facing centre, step sideways to R on L foot, crossing in front of R
	2	Step sideways to R on R foot
	3	Same as count 1
	4	Same as count 2
	5-6	Lift L foot in front of R foot, gently bounce twice
2	1	Step sideways to L on L foot
	2	Step to L on R foot, crossing behind L
	3	Same as count 1
	4	Same as count 2
	5	Touch L foot diagonally to back and L, without weight
	6	nothing
3	1	Step forward on L foot
	2	Lift R foot behind L ankle
	3	Step back on R foot
	4	Step on L foot beside R
	5	Step forward on R foot
	6	Lift L foot behind R ankle
4	1	Step back on L foot
	2	nothing
	&	Step on R foot behind L foot
	3	Step on L foot beside R foot
	4	Step on R foot behind L foot
	5-6	Touch L foot to L without weight

The Wenzels and Gardner provide four more versions from Steve Kotansky and Joe Graziosi. See their dance notes at [Kleftes2004LD.pdf \(folkdance.com\)](#).

Some features are common to all or most of these versions. All versions move sideways in the first two bars: some to the right in both bars, and some to the right in bar 1 and to the left in bar 2. In nearly all versions, bars 3 and 4 are danced mostly in place. All versions include one or more (not very many) steps on an “and” count or “off beat”. Except for the Pappas version, all begin by stepping on the right foot.