

# Dancing with the Sun King

Not for the faint-hearted, the baroque style of dancing oozes a sense of drama and history. Caroline Sherwood visits Bath for some lessons



The Consort de Danse Baroque's 2010 Summer School

Baroque conjures images of the dramatic swirls of Bernini's St Teresa, the luscious female forms of Rubens' paintings, or the Fontana di Trevi in Rome. Very likely you will recall the music of Pachelbel, Vivaldi or J S Bach. As well as all these, the baroque period, which lasted from 1600 to 1750, also produced a wealth of dances with elegant names such as *bourée*, *chaconne*, *courante*, *gavotte*, *gigue*, *menuet* (aka 'minuet') and *sarabande*.

Baroque dance was a precursor of classical ballet and flourished at the court of Louis XIV – Le Roi Soleil – who reigned in France from 1643 to 1715. Charles II introduced this dance to the English court and French dancing masters were employed *de rigueur* at theatres and courts across Europe, where courtiers danced beside professionals at court entertainments.

Louis XIV founded the *Académie Royale de Danse* in 1661, furthering the codification of the French Baroque style. In 1700, Raoul-Auger Feuillet published the Beauchamp-Feuillet notation system, which had been devised by Pierre Beauchamp.

Philippa Waite is Artistic Director of *Consort de Danse Baroque*, which runs regular classes in Bath. She trained as a dance teacher at the Laban Studio in Surrey and studied historical dance in the UK before specialising in Baroque dance in the USA, where she studied with Wendy Hilton and taught for her at the annual Baroque Music and Dance Workshops at Stanford University, in California. An historical-dance performer,

choreographer, scholar and teacher, Wendy Hilton's contribution to the international development of baroque dance during the last 50 years was profound. She died in 2002.

Philippa is guest teacher of Period Movement and Dance at The Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama in Cardiff, and the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. An experienced choreographer and performer, she has taught all over the





**Above** The Bath Minuet Company

**Right** Costume for Louis XIV, Ballet de la Nuit, 1653



world, and has appeared on TV and in films, as well as performing in opera and live theatre in Europe, Japan and the United States. She was the dance adviser for productions as varied as *Coram Boy*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, *The Man of Mode*, *The Way of the World* and *Time and the Conways*. Her expertise includes period movement and dance, the history of the body in movement and historical perspectives on dance.

Students come from a wide variety of backgrounds (professionals to 'non-dancers'), including musicians, actors, and people with an interest in history. While no previous dance experience is necessary, any knowledge of other dance forms will enable you to pick up the steps more easily as this form is definitely not for the faint-hearted.

Classes cover social dances as varied as the Elizabethan pavane, gallerde and almaine, 17th and 18th century English country dances, Regency waltz, Victorian

dances, such as polka, and schottische, and ragtime dances.

Jesse (67) has been a member of the Bath Minuet Company for about eight years. After finishing a 12-hour shift, he drives from Newport to Bath to attend Philippa's classes because she is "very patient and very good with teaching the steps." He loves genuine 18th century waistcoats and buckles, which he sews onto his shoes.

"Men danced in noble places," he reminds us. "Dance instructors would come along and teach the children how to dance. The more young people we can get into baroque dance to learn about the baroque period, the better, – to dance in costume, stepping back in time..."

Invite Consort de Danse Baroque to give a performance or lecture/demonstration:

Consort de Danse Baroque performances are suitable for theatres, art

## CLASSES AT CLAVERTON DOWN COMMUNITY HALL IN BATH

- Monthly on Saturdays
- You don't need a partner
- You don't have to attend every class in a series
- Wear comfortable clothing and flat shoes, trainers or extra thick socks (if you don't mind them getting dusty!). Not high heels.

Session 1: 11am-1pm, all levels (beginners welcome)

Session 2: 2-4pm, (intermediate/advanced).

Contact: Philippa Waite if you're planning to attend a class:  
[philippa@ukbaroqueance.com](mailto:philippa@ukbaroqueance.com)  
 Phone: 029 2049 0680  
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Bath Minuet Company  
 Bath Minuet Company specialises in the recreation of the social and court dance of the eighteenth century in authentic period costume. Their next Georgian Ball will be on 31 March 2012 at The Guildhall in Bath:  
[bathminuetcompany.co.uk/](http://bathminuetcompany.co.uk/)

centres, galleries, museums and colleges, as well as castles and stately homes.

The *Masque of the Elements* is a lovely early 18th century entertainment, which incorporates dance, music, song and speech. Each of the elements is individually represented and Neptune, Roman god of the sea, is seen to dance a sarabande with three of his sirens! The Moon, the Morning Star and the Sun also take part. Sometimes 18th century style refreshments are served. □

**How about having a Baroque Ball? Consort de Danse Baroque can act as hosts for a ball for a special occasion; providing musicians, a dance instructor/caller and costumed dance demonstrations.**