

The Dance!

A Stomp in Time

Melora Cann

Meet the artists: Pieter Bruegel the Elder

Meet the subject: The Wedding Dance, 1566

The Detroit Institute of Art comments, “*The Wedding Dance is a splendid example of Bruegel’s fascination with the peasant life of his native land. Public and private holidays and festivals provided him with typical situations and characters for his paintings. Here the wedding guests are very simply modeled, the positions of their arms and legs somewhat exaggerated to make the dancers look more awkward and more rustic. Although a modern audience might see this panel primarily as a genre painting, Bruegel’s contemporaries would have noted its moralizing overtones: frenzied dance and lustful behavior could lead to sin and damnation.*”

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The Dance!

A Stomp in Time (continued)



The Wedding Dance, 1566

The Dance!

A Stomp in Time (continued)



The Wedding Dance, 1566 (Close up)

The Dance!

A Stomp in Time (continued)



The Wedding Dance, 1566 (Close up)

The Dance!

A Stomp in Time (continued)



Bruegel from a drawing

The Dance!

A Stomp in Time (continued)

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Meet the artist:

Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Netherlandish, 1525-1569

One of the leading painters of the Flemish Renaissance, Pieter Bruegel lived when the Italian Renaissance influence on art was at its peak. He took frequent trips to Italy to study artistic expression. Still, he kept to the style of Hieronymus Bosch as a foundation for his own work.

Bruegel is known for intricate landscapes and scenes of common folk and peasants. His work is known as “genre painting.” His busy crowds and towering landscapes connect him to the works of Bosch, but without the religious focus.

The Golden Age of Dutch painting led to changes in subjects away from religious work, in part because of the Protestant Reformation.

By the age of 26, Bruegel was a master painter in the Antwerp painter’s guild. By the end of the 1550s, he began to focus on painting. His best known and most popular pieces were done in the last 15 years of his life.

Art critics identify certain ‘running themes’ in Bruegel’s paintings including ‘the absurdity, wickedness, and foolishness of humans.’ It has been posed that this painting was part of a series on wicked sins, in this case the sin of dancing, waving the arms and kicking the legs in indecorous fashion, clearly ‘the work of the devil,’ according to some studies that note he probably did this with tongue planted firmly in cheek.

The Peasant Dance (c.1566-1567) shows Bruegel’s style where he “reduced the forms to their elemental essence and managed to enhance and hone the detail of the design and color of his paintings. The Wedding Dance, one of his most famous and beloved works, was painted to honor the simplicity and honesty of the country folk. The painting shows Bruegel’s wit.

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Scholars have noted that “Peter Bruegel the Elder was one of the most tireless artists of the 16th century and is regarded as a brilliant artist and illustrator of the daily life of the Flemish peasants. Today, his intricately detailed, enormous landscapes continue to be seen as the highest level of Flemish art. In that era’s fast-paced chaos, whether cultural, religious, social, or political in nature, Bruegel’s art remains celebrated among the greats of the Flemish Renaissance. His artistic reputation as one of the greatest Dutch Renaissance painters is truly certified.”

Curious fact:

During his lifetime, he was known as “Peasant Bruegel” because he preferred to use peasant’s clothes when painting and when observing or sketching. Wearing such clothing also allowed him to mingle with the poorer classes and attend their social gatherings and celebrations.

More info-bites:

- The painting, lost for decades, was rediscovered in 1930 at a London art auction by the then director of the Detroit Institute of Arts. Bought for very little, it was authenticated and now resides in the Detroit museum as one of their most prestigious pieces.
- Bruegel had two sons, Pieter Bruegel the Younger and Jan Bruegel the Elder, both of whom became noted painters in their own rights. Thus, this Bruegel has become known as “Peter Breughel the Elder.”
- *The Peasant Wedding* (1567) and *The Peasant Dance* (1569) also by Bruegel share the same wedding theme and elements and were painted in the same period in Bruegel’s later years. They are considered to be a trilogy of works by Bruegel
- The pipers are playing the pijpzak (bagpipes),
- The brides wore black in the Renaissance period and the men wore codpieces, which were an important part of their clothing at the time. The codpieces depicted are apparently especially ‘well endowed’ - shaped and padded.
- Wiki definition: A **codpiece** (from Middle English: *cod*, meaning “scrotum”) is a covering flap or pouch that attaches to the front of the crotch of men’s trousers, enclosing the genital area. It may be held closed by string ties, buttons, folds, or other methods. It was an important fashion item of European clothing during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

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How was it done: Oil painting on wood panel, 47 × 62 inches

Want to learn more?

Read more at <https://www.thevintagenews.com/2017/12/04/pieter-bruegel-the-elder/>

Online, visit the **Detroit Institute of Art** to see the original – full size, and in multiple close-ups

Link: <https://www.dia.org/art/collection/object/wedding-dance-35573>

Watch videos on YouTube:

DIA teaser

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

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

BBC report

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c5BOzhwaWeM>