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THE AFRO-AMERICAN TRANSFORMATION OF EUROPEAN SET DANCES AND DANCE SUITES¹

John F. Szwed and Morton Marks

It is well acknowledged that the court dances which developed in Europe from the seventeenth century onward spread to the rural areas of Europe and to the new world.² What has not been properly recognized is that these dances — the quadrille, the cotillion, the contradance and the like — were taken up by Afro-Americans in North and South America and the West Indies and were modified and adapted to local cultural circumstances. In many cases — especially in the West Indies — they continue to be found today. Yet as similar as these dances may look or sound, their functions are not always necessarily the same as those of their European sources. At one extreme, they were “Africanized” for sacred purposes; at the other, they were re-formed and became the basis of a new world popular culture. An example of the former occurs on the island of Montserrat.³

There *country dance* orchestras made up of various combinations of fife, fiddle, concertina or accordion, triangle, and two drums known as the *woowoo* and the *babala* (or *babla*)⁴ play for social dancing, but the same music is also used for inducing possession on other occasions, called “jombée dances.”⁵ On these latter occasions quadrille dance rhythms are intensified and gradually “Africanized”⁶ in order that individuals may become possessed and convey the messages of the spirits. Secular customs such as suppers for guests are transformed into ritual sacrifices for spirits, and the mundane lyrics of quadrille songs become part of the mechanism for possession. But the ritual occasion has become “masked,” reinterpreted so extensively that the traditional European elements of the dance seem predominant to the casual observer.

On other West Indian islands, dance suites and set dances are also associated with the spirits of ancestors, as on Trinidad, where the *reel* is danced prior to a wedding to ask for the ancestral spirits’ consent, and the quadrille danced at a healing rite is associated with African ancestors;⁷ or on Carriacou, where libations may be poured for ancestors during a quadrille dance (*reel engagé*); and on Tobago, where the spirits are invoked during the *reel dance*.⁸ (The Tobago *reel* is performed mainly by people of Kongo descent and is said to be similar to the *danse Kongo* of Haiti.)

The best example of the transformation of set dances and dance suites into popular culture is their use in the creation of jazz in the United States, through the slow mutation of the quadrille/cotillion from music for social dancing to a purely abstract musical form. Sometimes, even where these dances seem in other respects similar to their European antecedents, they at least differ in setting, as on St. Croix in the Virgin Islands, where quadrille is danced in the streets instead of indoors.⁹

The chief problem in working with Afro-American folk dances is their lack of visual or written documentation. As in any folk dance tradition, these forms are passed down in an “oral” — i.e., body-to-body — tradition. But there are additional problems, beyond those of transformation, in the documentation of Afro-American dances. While dance is frequently mentioned in historical, travel, and ethnographic literature, it is treated briefly, quite often in negative comparison to European dancing.

And even where descriptions exist, they are often minimal and confusing; a European dance name may refer to an entirely different dance; or a native New World term may disguise a well-known European form; and the European name for a step may label a complex dance in its own right. On the other hand, descriptions of the music for these dances are fuller, and the audio documentation is quite rich, especially as the recordings of folk music in the West Indies began well before that of the U.S., in the first decade of the 1900s.

This uneven documentation has had the unfortunate result of reinforcing Western scholars’ tendency to think of dance and music as separate. But in the Afro-American tradition, they are thought of together, the steps and the music inextricably intertwined — in theory, the same. It may be possible for dance scholars to recover some of the dance from the music and musical descriptions alone, since in this tradition, the dance is embedded within the music. For this reason, we offer here a capsule view of Afro-American set dance and dance suites (that is, what in Euro-American terms might be called “the music for set dances and dance suites”), in order to encourage their recognition and systematic study.

The Dance Suite in the Circum-Caribbean

The island of St. Lucia is one of the best documented New World areas for the continuing presence of set dances such as the quadrille, *belé*, and mazaruka.¹⁰ The quadrille was probably first introduced there in the early 1800’s by the French, or at least by the English after they took control in 1814. Quadrilles — more than other adapted European dances — require considerable learning and rehearsal, both to dance and to play. The performance of the dances thus requires a kind of planning and order different from other dances done on St. Lucia, and a system of values are attached to quadrilles which contrasts with those associated with other local dances. The St. Lucian *kwadril* is understood as essentially European, as associated with economic and social power, as something inherited from the plantocracy which can now be participated in and controlled. In this respect, *kwadrils* are to local dances what standard languages are to creole languages.

Contemporary St. Lucian *kwadrils* are made up of five dances, four of them strictly prescribed, the fifth a round dance of choice. The orchestra, at least during the early 1900's was composed of a violin, tambourine and *chakchak* (maracas), but is currently made up of violin, banjo, *cuatro* (a small ten-string guitar), guitar, mandolin, and *chakchak*. No callers are used. Despite the dance's identification with Europe, St. Lucians have made considerable adaptations. *Kwadrils* are more complex in structure than the European quadrille, often have improvised melodies, are accompanied by percussion instruments, use off-beat phrasing, and often involve singing.¹¹

In Martinique and Guadeloupe formal European dances such as the mazurka, the waltz, and the polka exist in both rural and urban areas, all of them having undergone considerable creolization in the last 100 years or so. The quadrille remains especially important in Guadeloupe, where beneficial societies hold *balakadri* (quadrille balls) for fund raising and social activity.¹² *Festival de Quadrille* (Debs HDD 512) is a commercial recording of such a folk quadrille from Guadeloupe.¹³ It documents two sets of four figures, the dance directions provided by a rhythmic, monotone chant from a *commandeur* over a band of accordion, hand drum, triangle and maracas, a group which sounds remarkably similar to a *zydeco* band from rural black Louisiana.¹⁴ Yet, it oddly does not include the "fifth" figure of each set (which may actually be a sixth, seventh, or eighth figure), the concluding dance of which is always of local origin and is in this case usually a *biguine*. It appears that throughout the Caribbean the last dance of a set is typically a local form. Whether this indicates the chronological order of the appearance of each dance in the culture (as Marie-Céline Lafontaine suggests¹⁵), or is another illustration of the Afro-American performance style of turning "European" performances into "Afro-American" ones as they progress, remains to be seen.

In neighboring Martinique a bewildering variety of European-derived dance suites exist, including the quadrille, *belair*, or *bélé* (with eight figures), *haut taille*, cotillion, and the *rejane*.¹⁶ One of the urban developments of this kind of music in Martinique are orchestras such as Malavoi (*Malavoi*, Musique des Antilles 4710), with its six-piece string ensemble and two rhythm players. This is certainly *au courant* quadrille, with phrasing drawn from the Cuban *charanga* (music played by string, flute, and *timbales* orchestras) and bebopish chords. But their quick changes of tempo and melodies within single songs suggest miniaturized dance suites, and in fact on "Quadrille C", they switch back and forth from a lively dance tempo to slow, baroque-like ensemble playing, while a jazz violin solo surfaces in between. Again, though it is too soon to say for sure, single songs with changing melodies and rhythms often seem to be reduced versions of older dance suites.

For Haiti, the music of the older *contredanse* tradition can be heard on Maya Deren's recording of "Bal Li Chaise Pou Moin" (*Meringues and Folk Ballads of Haiti*, Lyrichord LLST 7340), a piece played for the dance called the *Martinique*. It can also be sampled within a more recent big band setting on Nemours Jean Baptiste's *Musical Tour of Haiti* (Ansonia ALP 1280), complete with accordion.

In Jamaica, the quadrille (pronounced 'katreel' or 'kachriil' — a linguistic creolization also suggesting 'scotch reel') is danced and played in virtually all of the parishes, but with different emphases. Five or six figures are used in the set, and may include European-derived dances, steps, and figures such as the waltz, polka, schottische, vaspian, mazurka, jig, chassé, balancé, and promenade, as well as local dances such as *mento* or *shay-shay*, especially as the last dance in the set.¹⁷ Two basic forms of quadrille are distinguished in Jamaica: the ballroom (or European type) and the "camp" style, with two facing lines of dancers; but various combinations of the two appear in different parts of the island.¹⁸ Samples

of Jamaican quadrille music are included on *John Crow Say . . .* (Folkways 4228), where the instrumentation is harmonica, wooden trumpet and cassava grater; *Black Music of Two Worlds* (Folkways 4602), a fife and drum band; and *Bongo, Backra & Coolie: Jamaican Roots*, Vol. 2 (Folkways 4232), where a fife, guitar, and banjo play most of the figures of a set. (In earlier years Jamaican bands might also be made up of combinations of one to three fifes, two tambourines, big drum, grater, triangle, horse jawbone, and possibly violins, accordion or concertina. At the end of the 19th century the most popular part of the quadrille was the fifth dance, an apparently local form, possibly similar to *mento*.¹⁹) The *mento* was a local development, a looser, hotter form, with certain parallels to Trinidadian calypso, but also having elements of European and local folk tunes within it. Recorded examples include *Mento: Jamaican Calypsos 1950* (Ethnic Cassettes KA 5), a collection of commercial recordings; "Mango Time" on *Caribbean Island Music* (Nonesuch H-72047); "Wheel and Turn" on *Black Music of Two Worlds* (Folkways 4602); "You Tell a Lie" on *From the Grass Roots of Jamaica*; and *The Roots of Reggae* (Lyrichord LLST 7314). Jamaican quadrille and *mento* are direct forerunners of *ska* and *reggae*, and echoes of the older forms persistent in contemporary Jamaican popular music, most strikingly on the Wailers's "Ska Quadrille" and more recently on Yellowman's "Skank Quadrille" (*Galong Galong Galong!*, Green-sleeves GREL 87) with his updated "calls."

Similar to the dances of Jamaica are those found in the Virgin Islands (such as "Seven Step" [to fife, banjo and maracas], whose rhythm gets freer as it proceeds, and "Fourth Figure of Lancers" [both on *Caribbean Dances*, Folkways 6840]); Trinidad and Tobago ("Reel," on *An Island Carnival*, Nonesuch Explorer Series 72090, or on *Vastindien*, Caprice CAP 2004: 1-2); Carriacou ("Gwa Bélé," *The Big Drum Dance of Carriacou*, Folkways 4011, "First Figure" (lancer's dance) and "Second Figure Waltz" on *The Big Drum and Other Ritual and Social Music of Carriacou*, Folkways 34002); and the Bahamas, where quadrilles and other European dances are accompanied by various combinations of guitar, fife, trumpet, accordion, musical saw, maracas, and drums (although it is said that around the turn of the century singers were the only source of melody).²⁰ *Music of the Bahamas*, Vol. 3: *Instrumental Music from the Bahamas Island* (Folkways 3846) provides quadrille melodies by several instrumental combinations, including one with two trumpets, mandolin and drums that is suggestive of the early New Orleans-inspired King Oliver-Louis Armstrong jazz recordings (*King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band*, Milestone 47017).

In Panama — where many English-speaking West Indians migrated for work on the Canal in the early 1900's — the quadrille has continued to be important, with annual dance exhibitions and club competitions. *Quadrille*, by Eric Garcia y sus 5 Progresivos (SallyRuth Records SR 1004) preserves a five-part "Quadrille" and a five-part "Caledonia" (a mid-nineteenth century European quadrille innovation) by a band of tenor saxophone, clarinet, two guitars, bass and drums. The polyphony of tenor and clarinet is reminiscent of both early New Orleans jazz and Martiniquais *Biguines*.

In English Creole-speaking Belize the *bruckdown* is a quadrille-derived set dance, similar to the Jamaican *bruckins*, and semantically if not choreographically related to the U.S. "breakdown." "Bruckdown-Belize Style" by Jesus Acosta and The Professionals, *From Belize With Love* (Contemporary Electronic Systems CES 7805), has four dances (*Degagez [dégagé]*, *Action*, *Ou pas Bensoiw*, and *La Lancha* [lancers']) threaded together by percussion interludes with rhythms suggestive of Martiniquais *cadence* drumming.

In Cuba the *contradanza* arrived by way of the French planters and slaves from Haiti who, following the 1791 slave rebellion, settled in Oriente Province, especially in the cities of Santiago de Cuba and

Guantanamo. The slaves' Tumba-Francesca societies of these cities developed drum-accompanied versions of these French dances called *cocoyé*, *masón*, *babril*, *catá* and *juba*.²¹ A mason can be heard on *Antología de la Música Afrocubana*, Vol. VII: *Tumba Francesca* (Areíto LD-3606).

In the middle of the 19th century other European dance forms such as the *cuadrillos* and the *lancers* entered urban Cuban society, and along with the evolved *contradanza*, a quick-paced double-theme form, they were the basis for creolization into the *danza*, or *habanera*, in the mid-1800's. The *danzón* was a further development of the same dance in the late 1800's, a three-musical-theme couple dance, quite similar in form and development to ragtime of the same period in New Orleans.²² The *danzón* became especially associated with *charanga* orchestras; by the 1940's a *mambo* section was added to the end. Since the *cha-cha* developed out of the *mambo*, both these dances ultimately belong to the *contradanza* family.

In other areas under the influence of Cuban music, even Dutch Curaçao, drums are important, and the Cuban *danza* seems to be a reinforcing influence ("Erani ta Malu" is an example on *Tumba Cuarta & Ka'i*, Original Music OMC 202). By contrast, in another Spanish-speaking area, Venezuelan string band music uses no drums, but nevertheless shows its relationship to traditional *contredanse*. (Hear "Las Viejas" and "La Tremenda," examples of polka and merengue derived from the Venezuelan dance cycle, on Maria Rodriguez, *Songs From Venezuela*, World Circuit WC 001.)

In Brazil, the *quadrilha* continues as a regional dance, and is especially performed on the *Festa Junina* (mid-summer day), mostly in the Northeast (*Isto é Quadrilha* Campeiro KCL 62033). And in coastal Suriname the *seti* dance is a multi-part form paralleling the *contredanse*, but using English and American melodies.

Quadrilles and other ballroom-derived set dances are by no means merely survivals of European culture in the West Indies and South America. They remain vital in their own right and also affect the development of popular music in the New World. The 1984 LP *Yélélé* (GD 0202), by Pierre-Edouard Decimus and Jacob Desvarieux (the leaders of the disco-zouk band from Guadeloupe, Kassav'), includes "Kavalié O Dam," which opens with the title chanted, the traditional call for gentlemen to get their partners, and then moves through a catalog of dances (including clogging); as if this message of pan-national quadrilla weren't clear enough, a U.S.-type country fiddle enters to churn up a hoedown. All this, against a drum-machine beat and words in French Créole. Similarly, Jamaican rapper Sister Carol's "Wild Thing," from the end of the soundtrack recording of Jonathan Demme's film *Something Wild* (1985), joins a reggae beat with U.S. country banjo and fiddle: near the end Sister Carol cries out, "schottische!"²³

Musical creolization (the fusion of two or more historically unrelated forms) is nicely illustrated in contrast to the West Indies by the case of the Seychelles, an archipelago of islands in the Indian Ocean northeast of Madagascar, first colonized by the French in 1770-1796 and later by the English in 1796-1976. Slaves from the Malagasy and East Africa were used as laborers in the development of the spice industry. Here, in these islands whose *Créole* language, architecture, dress, and people make them seem as if they were West Indians on the wrong side of Africa, the local dance is the *kamtóle*, a suite of country dances that date from contact with the European *contredanse* in the late 1700's. Their first local *contredanses* feature two violins, a mandolin, a triangle, and drum. Later, other dances were added to form suites — the polka, the schottische, and the one-step; and the accordion, banjo and guitar were added to the orchestra. Finally, English, Scots and Irish folk melodies were included, entering the Seychelles when the English introduced the quadrille. Today the *kamtóle* suite can include the waltz, schottische, mazurka, polka, "jazz" (one-step), four *con-*

tredanses directed by a caller who improvises calls, the *écossaire*, *belin* (a polka variant), and *katpas* (*pas de quatre*). These dances continue to exist alongside older African musical forms of dance and music.²⁴ A contrast in the opposite direction — the non-creolized — is provided by set dance music from Quebec. In rural France, like rural Quebec — areas at least culturally much closer to the urban sources for the spread of French "country" dances — the fiddle was initially the central instrument, eventually to be replaced by the accordion.

Dance Suites Among Afro-Americans in the United States

In early 19th century United States the most common ballroom dance form was the cotillion of five or six dances in different meters and tempos. The American sets also incorporated newer round dances such as the waltz, the polka, and the schottische. Further variations developed in the suite form to include the Lancers and Caledonia quadrilles.²⁵ Dance orchestras of the 19th century were often called social orchestras or quadrille bands, and were composed of two violins (the second often doubling as caller), a cello for the bass part, and clarinets, flutes, cornets, harp or piano. These orchestras used arrangements which allowed them to expand or contract in size (down to a trio or duet) or sometimes to switch from strings to brass. A typical ball in New Hampshire in 1859 consisted of 17 quadrilles, 2 contradances and 4 other multiple dance forms.²⁶

Freedmen and urban slaves are attested to having attended formal balls at which dance suites were the central form of activity.²⁷ Just how important and widespread these dances became is shown by the fact that the ex-slaves who were repatriated back to Liberia beginning in 1820 took the quadrille with them; and when they became the ruling elite of that country, they made it into something of a national dance. It continued to be popular at least well into the 1950's.²⁸

Long before the emergence of ragtime there were a considerable number of Afro-American orchestra directors and composers at work on dance music. The outstanding social dance orchestra of its time was that of black Philadelphian Francis Johnson (1792-1844), violinist, horn player, dance caller, arranger, and composer of songs, concert works and dance suites such as "La Sonnambula Quadrille Number Two" (*Come and Trip It: Instrumental Dance Music 1780's-1920's*, New World Records, NW 293). The quality of his orchestra and the freshness of his music led to national and European tours. Richard Walm, a contemporary, spoke of Johnson's fame and ability to reshape songs into new quadrilles:

In fine, he is the leader of the band at all balls, public and private; sole director of all seranades . . . inventor-general of cotillions; to which add, a remarkable taste in distorting a sentimental, simple, and beautiful song, into a reel, jig, or country-dance.²⁹

In addition to turning songs into dances, Johnson's orchestra wrote original songs into his quadrilles for the orchestra to sing, a bold innovation recognized in the title of his famous "Voice Quadrille," (*19th Century American Ballroom Music*, Nonesuch H-71313).³⁰

Johnson was the most internationally known black musician of his time, but in the early to middle-1800's a number of others — J.W. Postlewaite, James Hemmenway, Basile Bares, and N. Clark Smith, to name a few — were leading composers of dance music in cities such as Boston, New Orleans, St. Louis, New York, and Philadelphia.³¹ The published cotillions and quadrilles of these composers were multi-sectioned, multi-strained dances in various forms, including the 5-part rondo (ABACA); they were typically in 2/4 or 6/8 itme; they changed key with each new section; and they were written in a variety of rhythms. (Yet everything we know about Afro-American musical performance style tells us that this music was played with greater flexibility and rhythmic subtlety than

the notation of sheet music can suggest.) Even the round dances — the waltz, polka, etc. — written by these composers could be complex and suite-like. The “Rescue Polka Mazurka” (1869) for example, alternates polka and mazurka rhythms. (Compare with the Cuban “new” [c. 1898] *danzón*’s two sections of 32 measures, the first in 2/4 and the second in 6/8.) What was being developed was a form capable of absorbing folk, popular and classical musics and molding them to new functions. A similar form with equally synthesizing power was to resurface with new rhythmic inventions at the end of the nineteenth century with the black composers of ragtime. As Floyd and Reisser put it, we can see “an unbroken line of development from the music of the early black composers of social dance . . . to the beginnings of notated ragtime.”³²

Meanwhile, folk and rural versions of set dances and dance suites were flourishing in 19th-century America. The ex-slaves interviewed by the WPA in the 1930’s show that the dances most often remembered from slavery days were contradances, square dances, the cotillion, the waltz, and the quadrille (though the individual steps remembered for these dances seem to be strictly Afro-American — juba, buck dancing and the like).³³ Various descendants of these dances persist today, and two states have been especially well served by recorded surveys: for Virginia, there are square dances, reels, breakdowns and buck dances played on accordions, banjos, fiddles, harmonicas, and guitar on *Virginia Traditions: Non-Blues Secular Black Music*, Blue Ridge Institute BRI-001; and for North Carolina, reels and buckdances on guitar, banjo, and fiddle are on *Eight-Hand Sets & Holy Steps*, Crossroads C-101.

In Black French areas the earliest instrumental music was mazurkas and *contredanses* played by accordion, two violins, and *bastrinque* (triangle) or just by two violins.³⁴ The second black creole musician to make records can be heard on *Amadé Ardoin* (Old Timey 124), but the three-minute time limit of the 78 rpm record keeps us from seeing the complex organization of these tunes as part of a dance cycle (and paradoxically reinforces our own contemporary provincial ideas about the brevity of popular music). Pops Foster, the New Orleans bass player (who began his career in small string groups), recalls playing for black and white French audiences in the country c. 1906:

They liked their music very fast and they danced to it. Some of the numbers they liked were “Lizard on the Rail,” “Red, Oh Red,” “Chicken Reel,” and “Tiger Rag.” They had a guy who called figures for them. First you’d play eight bars of a tune, then stop. Then the announcer would get up and call, “get your partners.” When everybody got their partners, he’d blow a whistle and the band would start playing again. The announcer would call figures like, “Ladies Cross, Gent’s Right, Promenade” and all that stuff. You’d play three fast numbers then take it down to a waltz, a slow blues, or a schotische.³⁵

Though this music is usually identified with Anglo-American fiddle traditions, travellers’ accounts of music in cities all across the country — Richmond, Wheeling, Baltimore, Charleston — mention black fiddlers playing and calling reels for white and black audiences.³⁶ And Afro-American influences on fiddling are obvious even on the earliest recordings we have of this music. Speaking of the syncretism of British and African musical practices within the southern Piedmont and Appalachian fiddle traditions, Alan Jabbour says:

Especially notable is the way syncopations at the very heart of the music of the American South are not simply superimposed, but actually built into the bowing patterns. The pattern . . . which divides eight sixteenths into groups of 3-3-2 is fundamental here and in the bowing of other fiddlers throughout the South.³⁷

The fiddle was extraordinarily popular among slave musi-

cians.³⁸ Even where fiddle melodies may have been purely European-derived, fiddles were often played “African”-style: for example, a second player — a straw-beater — was sometimes used to add rhythm to the melody, as in this 1882 description of a cotillion dance following a corn-shucking in Georgia:

The performer provides himself with a pair of straws about eighteen inches in length, and stout enough to stand a good smart blow . . . These straws are used after the manner of drum-sticks, that portion of the fiddle-strings between the fiddler’s bow and his left hand serving as a drum. One of the first sounds which you hear on approaching the dancing party is the *tum tee tum* of the straws, and after the dance begins, when the shuffling of feet destroys the other sounds of the fiddle, this noise can still be heard.³⁹

When the stringed instrument was as large as the bass, however, it was struck by sticks. (Hear drummer Ray Bauduc and bassist Bob Haggart on the Bob Crosby’s band’s 1939 recording, “Big Noise From Winnetka” (Bob Crosby, *Suddenly It’s 1939*, Giants of Jazz GOJ 1032.) This practice is of Kongo origin, similar to the *ti-bwa* sticks on the side of drums in Guadeloupe, or the *cajónero* (in Peru) on the strings of the guitar. (For examples of Kongo drumming itself in the New World, hear *juba* on *Ritual Drums of Haiti*, Lyrichord LLST 7279, and *Tambor de Crioula*, FUNARTE, Rio CDFB 012, from Brazil.)

The dance calls, too, were different from their European counterparts: more than mere directions, they took the shape of rhymed “raps,” adding rhythmic subtlety and humor that helped spirit both the dancers and band alike.⁴⁰ Willis James quotes one “caller-out” this way:

If you like the way she look
Hand the lady your pocketbook.
Swing her fancy,
Come to the middle,
But be careful, don’t bust the fiddle.⁴¹

(The best parallel in another genre is cadence-counting in the military: Afro-American drill sergeants introduced both melody and syncopated rhythm into the pattern and permanently altered the “ONE-two-three-four” call which had dominated Western military marching for centuries. The same could be said for the influence of black cheerleaders on audiences for American athletics.) Black square dance- and reel-calling are part of the Afro-American dance-instruction song tradition which extends from “Ballin’ the Jack” to “The Twist” and beyond (songs which tell the dancers what to do next), and which is at least partly rooted in the older tradition in which African master drummers signal and direct dancers.⁴²

It was Lafcadio Hearn who in 1876 observed the black roustabouts on the riverfront of Cincinnati dancing a quadrille to the “Devil’s Dream” (accompanied by fiddle, banjo, and bass), gradually transforming it into a Virginia reel, and then changing it again, this time to a “juba dance” done to a shout-like call-and-response song.⁴³

Again, there is the sense that these European dance forms were flexible and open to transformation and improvisation, at least within the performances of Afro-Americans. It seems odd, then, that many writers on ragtime and early jazz underplay their importance. Certainly the oldest jazz musicians recalled playing for quadrille and set dances around 1900: Johnny St. Cyr in New Orleans, Wilber Sweatman in St. Louis, and Perry Bradford in Atlanta, for instance.⁴⁴ The mother of New Orleans clarinetist George Lewis recalled dance music of the 1880’s this way:

At a dance, before the quadrille time — they’d give about two or three quadrilles a night — but before the quadrille came, they would play a waltz, you’d have to waltz around the floor. Lancers and varieties, that’s in quadrille, and ‘balancé, balancé,’ that’s in quadrille too.⁴⁵

Alphonse Picou’s orchestra played four or five sets a night, c. 1897,

each consisting of a mazurka, a waltz, a schottische, a polka, a two-step, then ending with a quadrille and a march.⁴⁶ By 1910 these sets had changed to include a two-step, slow drag, ragtime one-step, and the fox-trot. But the quadrille still remained for the midnight centerpiece.⁴⁷

Most of the older New Orleans musicians also remember playing set dances and dance suites well after the turn of the century. (The modern jazz musician's use of the word 'sets' for groups of pieces in live performance probably derives from these older dance forms.) Baby Dodds noted that there were certain dance halls where we could only play mazurkas, quadrilles, polkas, and schottisches.⁴⁸ After 1910 sets were changed to comprise a two-step, a slow drag, a ragtime one-step, and a fox-trot, but the quadrille remained the climax of the evening.⁴⁹ And those who remember Buddy Bolden, the cornetist usually given credit for being the first important jazz musician, say that he first played in a string band with cornet and/or clarinet (similar to the Cuban *charanga francesa*, c. 1898), his group "might play a schottische and follow that with a variety, 'a long thing made up of waltzes and all kinds of time;' " they played "no ragtime, 'except in the quadrilles or late at night'"⁵⁰ (Nick La Rocca, the trumpet player for the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, the first band to record jazz, also played with string groups of the same type for the first three years of his career [1905-08].⁵¹)

These multi-strain, multi-rhythm dances were ideal forms for the development of early jazz. Under pressure to find new melodies to set against a variety of rhythms, musicians altered conventional patterns and improvised new ones. The New Orleans pianist Armand Hug said "The quadrille was a proper dance, usually limited to a certain social strata, but the Uptown bands changed it to their own style."⁵² Jelly Roll Morton in his Library of Congress recordings described and illustrated just how it was changed in his account of how "Tiger Rag" came into being:

... "Tiger Rag" happened to be transformed from an old quadrille that was in many different tempos, and I'll no doubt give you an idea of how it went. This was the introduction meaning that everyone was supposed to get their partners . . . it may be five minutes' lapse between the time, an' of course, they'd start it over again, and that was the first part of it . . . then the next strain would be the waltz strain . . . Also, they'd have another strain . . . mazooka time . . . that was that . . . third strain, an' that was in a differen' tempo . . . a two-four time . . . of course, they had another one, . . . now I'll show you how it was transformed . . . I also named it. It came from the way that I played it by 'makin' the tiger' on my elbow.⁵³

(The French jazz writer Robert Goffin recognized the "Tiger Rag" as the second dance of a quadrille he had heard as a child in Belgium.⁵⁴ And others have recognized phrases borrowed from "London Bridge is Falling Down" and the "National Emblem March," along with second chorus riffs which parody the alto part in German brass bands.⁵⁵)

New York composer and pianist James P. Johnson said that set dances and dance suites were the basis for a number of jazz compositions. In fact his own "Carolina Shout" was a ragtime arrangement of a set dance preferred by dock workers originally from the Charleston, South Carolina area:

My mother was from Virginia and somewhere in her blood was an instinct for doing country and set dances — what were called "real [reel?] shoutings." My "Carolina Shout" and Carolina Balmoral are real southern set or square dances. I think the "Carolina Balmoral" was the most spirited dance in the South. I find I have a strong feeling for these dances that goes way back — and I haven't found anyone else with it yet.

One of the men would call the figures and they'd dance their own style of square dances. The calls were . . . "Join hands" . . . "Sashay"

. . . "Turn around" . . . "Ladies right and gentlemen left" . . . "Grab your partner" . . . "Break away" . . . "Make a strut" . . . "Cows to the front, bulls stay back" . . .

When he called "Do your stuff" or "Ladies to the front," they did their personal dances. The catwalk, for instance, was developed from the cotillion, but it was also part of the set dances.

.....
These people were from South Carolina and Georgia where the cotillion was popular — and the "Charleston" was an offspring of that. It was a dance figure like the "Balmoral." A lot of my music is based on set, cotillion and other southern country dance steps and rhythms.⁵⁶

.....
I heard good piano from all parts of the South and West, but I never heard real ragtime until we came to New York. Most East Coast playing was based on cotillion dance tunes, stomps, drags and set dances like my "Mule Walk Blues," "Gut Stomp," and the "Carolina Shout" and "Balmoral". They were all country tunes.⁵⁷

The dances they did at the Jungles Casino were wild and comical — the more pose and the more breaks, the better. These Charleston people and the other southerners had just come to New York. They were country people and they felt homesick. When they got tired of two-steps and schottishes (which they danced with a lot of speling), They'd yell: "Let's go back home!" . . . "Let's do a set!" . . . or "Now put us in the alley!" I did my "Mule Walk" or "Gut Stomp" for these country dances.⁵⁸

At a piano contest in Egg Harbor, New Jersey in 1914, Johnson first heard other dance suites for piano which were the basis for various jazz forms:

There was a pianist there who played quadrilles, sets, rags, etc. From him, I first heard the walking Texas or boogiewoogie bass. The Boogiewoogie was a cotillion step for which a lot of music was composed.⁵⁹

Johnson's equation of the shout with the quadrille is also important. It has usually been assumed that the shout was a strictly religious dance derived from Africa, in which a circle of dancers shuffle counterclockwise around one or two dancers while others keep time and sing around the edges of the room, the point being to bring on possession. But Johnson was very clear on the secular function of the dance as he knew it in late-nineteenth century New Brunswick, New Jersey:

The Northern towns had a hold-over of the old Southern customs. I'd wake up as a child and hear an old-fashioned ring-shout going on downstairs. Somebody would be playing a guitar or jew's-harp or maybe a mandolin, and the dancing went to "The Spider and the Bed-Bug Had a Good Time" or "Susie". They danced around in a shuffle and then they would shove a man or a woman out into the center and clap hands.⁶⁰

But it was equally clear that these shouts could serve religious functions. Willie "The Lion" Smith said, "Shouts are stride piano — when James P. and Fats and I would get a romp-down shout going, that was playing rocky, just like the Baptist people sing."⁶¹ The ring shout was a widely diffused form, present in country or city, certainly wherever Sanctified or Holiness churches were to be found. And as such, it seems to have acted as a reservoir for a variety of African performance style features.⁶² Its use as a secular form as well as a sacred one is not well documented, but fits patterns of multiple functions seen in the West Indies.⁶³

It was Jelly Roll Morton who carried these set forms to their greatest heights in jazz. Perhaps more than any other jazz musician, Morton was concerned with balance in the structure, melody, and rhythm of his compositions. His works for his Red Hot Peppers like "Black Bottom Stomp," and "Grandpa's Spells" were wonders of contrasted texture and form, multi-thematic works in which even repetitions of a theme were varied in instrumentation,

rhythm, and dynamics. As he showed with "Tiger Rag," Morton borrowed from the forms of ragtime and quadrille in order to set up sectional contrasts within his song form. This he did not do mechanically, but so creatively that Gunther Schuller suggests that he often reached a level of formal complexity which was close to or even beyond that of the rondo.

Morton's melodies were also quite often borrowed from a wide variety of sources: the blues, ragtime, Creole folk songs, marches, operatic arias, Mexican pop songs, Cuban *sones*, music hall melodies, and of course French quadrille tunes. But this wholesale appropriation was not a result of a lack of originality. First, there was already a pattern of melodic borrowing within the quadrille tradition. "Quadrilles consumed melodies at a fearful rate," according to early American popular music scholar Thornton Hagert, "and it was common practice to make the music up out of bits of popular songs or snatches from opera arias."⁶⁴ As a result, the quadrille form was often the means for joining together otherwise musically incongruous materials, or for using music in unorthodox ways.⁶⁵ But Morton's intention was to "jazz" up these tunes, not merely arrange them in new settings. A certain degree of familiarity with the original melodies was required so that the variations would be understood and appreciated. Besides, as Morton put it, "Jazz is a style that can be applied to any type of tune."⁶⁶

As has often been pointed out, Morton's greatest work appeared on record just at the point when the fashion in music was changing from the multi-strained, complex form to the 32-bar pop song. The biggest names in jazz were now improvising on these simpler forms, and, with certain exceptions, jazz was to be reduced to theme-solo-theme for many years to come. Morton resisted the trend, but it cost him an audience. He was perhaps the last in a line of a 19th century tradition of composers who worked in forms built on the contrast of themes and their variations.

Some writers on the history of ragtime have attempted to minimize the influence of dance suites and set dances, primarily on the basis of very limited notions of what these dances were like and how they were recombined. Edward A. Berlin⁶⁷ and Eric Thacker,⁶⁸ for instance, both mention the limited possibilities for building rags on 2/4, 3/4, and 6/8 meters. But there is reason to believe that these forms were more flexible and syncretic than has been thought. Dancer Sidney Easton from Savannah, for example, said that "the colored people used a four-four, not a six-eight tempo, four couples at a time, with lots of solo work and improvised breaks by each dancer putting together steps of his own"⁶⁹ in their set dances. Certainly, Jelly Roll Morton and James P. Johnson seem to have made an effort to show how the transformations in these forms occurred. In any case, there is no particular reason to see the evolutionary sequence of dance suite-to-ragtime-to-jazz as rigidly unilinear as it has been portrayed. Until very recently at least, jazz was a music for dancing. And in New Orleans, brass bands are still playing multi-thematic musical compositions in second-line rhythm, not just as an evolutionary step towards another musical development, but as a thriving, ongoing tradition of its own.

Nor have we seen the end of the quadrille's influence on jazz. Dennis Charles — drummer with avant-gardists such as Cecil Taylor and Steve Lacy — was born and raised in St. Croix, the Virgin Islands within a family which performed West Indian quadrille music. Asked about his unique approach to playing the cymbal, he said:

What I try to do is . . . years ago in the West Indies these guys used to play and they had a guy who played triangle. The triangle is the kind of beat I try to get, ting-a-ling ting-a-ling, it's the same 3 beats you play on the cymbal, but it's that feeling I try to capture.⁷⁰

NOTES

1. We wish to acknowledge the help given us by John Forrest and by the anonymous referees for *Dance Research Journal*.
2. For the European background of set dances and dance suites, see Jean Michel Guilcher, *La Contredanse et les renouvellements de la danse française*. (Paris: École Pratique des Hautes-Études et Mouton, 1969) and Philip J.S. Richardson, *The Social Dances of the Nineteenth Century in England* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1960).
3. Jay D. Dobbin, *The Jombee Dance of Montserrat: A Study of Trance Ritual in the West Indies* Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1986).
4. Compare to *bambuala* and *babalao*, as well as to the Gaelic drum, the *bodhrán*.
5. John C. Messenger, "Montserrat: The Most Distinctively Irish Settlement in the New World," *Ethnicity* 2 (1975): 298-299.
6. Dobbin, pp. 136-37. Dobbin also provides an exceptionally vivid and complete presentation of a dance he witnessed (pp. 60-96).
7. Melville J. Herskovits, *Trinidad Village* (New York: Knopf, 1947), pp. 88, 160-62; Andrew Pearse, "Aspects of Change in Caribbean Folk Music," *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* Vol. 8 (1955): 31-32.
8. Pearse, pp. 31-32; Donald R. Hill, Notes to *The Big Drum and Other Ritual and Social Music of Carriacou*, Folkways 34002; Molly Ahye. *Golden Heritage: The Dance in Trinidad and Tobago* (Trinidad: Heritage Cultures, 1978), p. 99.
9. *The Original Quadrille Saint Croix Cultural Dance*, (U.S. Virgin Islands: no publisher, no date [c. 1982]), p. 4.
10. Jocelyne Guilbault, "A St. Lucian *Kuadril* Evening," *Latin American Music Review* 6 (1985): 31-57. This discussion is indebted to Guilbault's extensive research.
11. Very Little St. Lucian folk music is available on record, but a sample of *masouc* (mazurka) played on violin, *cuatro* and *shak-shak* appears on *An Island Carnival*, Nonesuch Explorer Series 72090 and also on the Swedish LP *Vastindien*, Caprice CAP 2004:1-2.
12. Some of the most exciting work on Afro-American dance outside of the United States is being done by the West Indian anthropologist Marie-Céline Lafontaine. Cf. her "Musique et société aux Antilles." *Présence Africaine* no. 121-122 (1982): 72-108; "Le Carnaval de l' 'autre,'" *Les Temps Moderne* no. 441-442 (April-May, 1983): 2126-2173; and *Alors ma chère, moi . . .* (Paris: Editions Caribéennes, 1987).
13. Two other examples of complete quadrilles from Marie-Galante — an island which is part of Guadeloupe — are on *La Musique à Marie-Galante*, Société d'histoire de la Guadeloupe ATP 82-1. And an example of a mazurka from Martinique can be found on *Caribbean Dances* (Folkways 6840), where the notes to the record suggest that the much accelerated mazurka of the French West Indies is a prototype of the *biguine*.
14. Hear, for instance, Fremont Fontenot's "Contredanse" with accordion and triangle on *Zodoco: Louisiana Creole Music*, Rounder 6009, or "Contredanse & Shoefly Swing" on *Louisiana Creole Music*, Folkways 2622.
15. "Musique et société aux Antilles," pp. 101-105.
16. Cf. Jacqueline Rosemain, *La Musique dans la société Antillaise 1635-1902* (Paris: Éditions L'Harmattan, 1986; Maurice Jallier and Yollen Lossen, *Musique aux Antilles: Mizik boo kay* (Paris: Edition Caribéennes, 1985).
17. For a description of a set dance in the Maroon area of Jamaica, see Katherine Dunham, *Journey to Accompong* (New York: Henry Holt, 1946), pp. 22-27.
18. Cheryl Ryman, "The Jamaican Heritage in Dance: Developing a Traditional Typology," *Jamaican Journal* no. 44 (n.d.): 11, 13. Ryman is a principal dancer with the National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica, and she has developed a core vocabulary of dance moves for the Company that includes quadrille patterns. Cf. Rex Nettleford, *Dance Jamaica: Cultural Definition and Artistic Discovery* (New York: Grove Press, 1985), p. 181.
19. Walter Jekyll, ed., *Jamaican Song and Story* (New York: Dover, 1966 [1906]), pp. 216-17. Jekyll includes words and music to 79 quadrille songs.

20. Norris Stubbs, "Major Musical Forms in the Bahamas," in *Third World Group: Bahamas Independence Issue, 1973* (Bahamas Printing and Litho Co., 1973), pp. 101-102, as quoted by Basil C. Hedrick and Jeanette E. Stephens, *In the Days of Yesterday and in the Days of Today: An Overview of Bahamian Folkmusic*, Research Records No. 8, University Museum, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, 1976, p. 32.
21. Lisa Lekis, *Folk Dances of Latin America*. (New York: Scarecrow Press, 1958), p. 226.
22. John Santos, Liner notes to *The Cuban Danzón*, Folkways 4066.
23. This cry occurs *only* on the recording, not on the film soundtrack.
24. Liner notes to *Seychelles: Danses et Romances d'Ancienne France*, Ocora 558534.
25. Thornton Hagert, liner notes to *Come and Trip It: Instrumental Dance Music 1780's-1920's*, New World Records NW 293; Charles Hamm, *Music in the New World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1983), pp. 297-306.
26. Notes to *Homespun America: Marches, Waltzes, Polkas and Serenades of the Manchester [New Hampshire] Cornet Band . . . and Manchester Quadrille Orchestra*, Vox Records, SVBX 5309.
27. See, for example, Eyre Crowe, *With Thackeray in America* (New York: Scribner's Sons), 1893, pp. 147-148, and the New Orleans sources referred to in John W. Blassingame, *Black New Orleans, 1860-1880* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), pp. 145-146.
28. John Collins, *E.T. Mensah: King of Highlife*. (London: Off the Record Press, 1986), p. 34.
29. Richard Walm (Peter Atall, Esq.), *The Hermit in America on a Visit to America*. (Philadelphia, 1819, as quoted by Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans* (New York: Norton, 1971), p. 113.
30. This was long before a parallel musical development in 1920's Cuba: the *danzonete* — borrowing from the Afro-Cuban *son* — added voices to the *cheranga* orchestra (cf. John Santos' album notes to *The Cuban Danzón*, Folkways 4066).
31. Samuel Floyd, Jr. and Marsha J. Reisser, "Social Dance Music of Black Composers in the Nineteenth Century and the Emergence of Classic Ragtime," *The Black Perspective in Music* Vol. 8, No. 2 (Fall, 1980): 161-194; Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., "A Black Composer in Nineteenth-Century St. Louis," *Nineteenth Century Music* 4 (November, 1980): 151-167; Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans* (New York: Norton, 1971), p. 114; Charles D. Jerde, "Black Music in New Orleans: A Historical Overview," *Black Music Research Newsletter* Vol. 9, no. 1 (Spring, 1987): 6.
32. Floyd and Reisser, p. 175.
33. Robert B. Winans, "Black Instrumental Music Traditions in the Ex-Slave Narratives," *Black Music Research Newsletter* Vol. 5, no. 2 (Spring, 1982): 4.
34. Ann Allen Savoy, *Cajun Music: A Reflection of a People*, Vol. 1 (Eunice, Louisiana: Bluebird Press, 1984), pp. 304-05. The second violin was also called a *bastrinque*, calling attention to its rhythmic function in this music.
35. *The Autobiography of Pops Foster, New Orleans Jazzman as Told to Tom Stoddard* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 7-8.
36. Southern: Winans; as well as Dena Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press) and Lynne Fauley Emery, *Black Dance* (Palo Alto: National Press Books, 1972).
37. Alan Jabbour, liner notes to *The Hammons Family*, p. 25. See also Robert Cantwell, *Bluegrass Breakdown* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984), *passim*.
38. Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 20-22; Winans, p. 3.
39. David C. Barrow, Jr., "A Georgia Corn-Shucking," *Century Magazine* XXIV, (1882): 878.
40. Barrow, p. 878.
41. Willis James. "The Romance of the Negro Folk Cry in America," *Phylon* 16 (1950): 18.
42. Hear Otis Redding's recording of "The Hucklebuck," where his vocal part, set in the midst of the melody as played by the Memphis Horns, cuts across the beat like an African talking drum.
43. Lafcadio Hearn, "Levee Life," in *An American Miscellany*, Vol. 1 (New York: Albert Mordell, ed., Dodd, Mead, 1924). Dunham describes a Jamaican Maroon set dance that follows a similar pattern of Europe-to-Africa style change through the progression of the dances.
44. St. Cyr is quoted in "As I Remember: Johnny St. Cyr," *Jazz Journal* Vol. 19, no. 9 (September, 1966): 7; Sweatman and Bradford in Marshall and Jean Stearns. *Jazz Dance* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. 23.
45. Tom Bethell, *George Lewis: A Jazzman from New Orleans* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), p. 21.
46. European-derived dances such as the mazurka and the schottische had become thoroughly nativized and regionalized by the late 1800's. In light of this, it is interesting that John Storm Roberts seems to think of them as "Latin influences" in *The Latin Tinge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 31-37.
47. Samuel B. Charters, *Jazz: New Orleans 1885-1963*, revised edition (New York: Oak Publications, 1963), p. 18.
48. Baby Dodds, *The Baby Dodds Story as Told to Larry Gara* (Los Angeles: Contemporary Press, 1959), p. 10.
49. Charters, p. 18.
50. Louis Jones, quoted in Donald M. Marquis, *In Search of Buddy Bolden: First Man of Jazz* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), p. 107; see also Beatrice Alcorn, quoted on p. 94; and Charlie Love's and Harrison Barnes's interviews ("Buddy Bolden was a Tall Man . . .") on *The Music of New Orleans, Vol. IV: The Birth of Jazz* (Folkways 2464).
51. H.O. Brunn, *The Story of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1960), p. 9.
52. Marquis, p. 101.
53. Transcribed in Rex Harris, *Jazz*, second edition (London: Penguin Books, 1953), pp. 66-67.
54. Robert Goffin, *Jazz from Congo to Swing* (London: Musicians Press, 1946), p. 19.
55. Wilfrid Mellers, *Music in a New Found Land* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), p. 289.
56. Tom Davin, "Conversations with James P. Johnson," *The Jazz Review* Vol. 2, no. 5 (June, 1959): 15-16. See also Walter "One-Leg Shadow" Gould's comment that "Old Man Sam Moore was ragging the quadrilles and schottisches before I was born . . . He was born way before the [Civil] war." Blesh and Jannis, *They All Played Ragtime*, p. 190. One contemporary observer also drew attention to the square dance qualities of The Big Apple, a popular dance of the 1930's, which was said to have originated in Columbia, South Carolina (Kyle Crichton, "Peel That Apple — the Story of the 'Big Apple' " in Robert S. Gold, *Jazz Talk*, p. 18.
57. Tom Davin, p. 170.
58. Davin, "Conversations With James P. Johnson," *Jazz Review*, Vol. 2, no. 6 (July, 1959), p. 12.
59. Davin, p. 13.
60. Blesh and Janis, *They All Played Ragtime*, p. 190.
61. Blesh and Janis, p. 188. In August Wilson's play, "Joe Turner's Come and Gone," an after-dinner secular ring shout at a Pittsburgh rooming house turns into a possession ritual.
62. See Marshall Stearns, *The Story of Jazz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 13, on the importance of the form for preserving style. Sterling Stuckey provides the best overview of the evidence for the presence of the ring shout in the United States and in West Africa.
63. There may also be reason to see an East Coast tradition at work here, one with roots in the coastal areas of Northern Florida and South and North Carolina, and extending (by migration) to Washington, D.C., Wilmington, Delaware, Philadelphia, New Jersey and New York. Sharing the characteristics of 3-3-2 additive rhythm, shifting meters, etc., this tradition produced the Broadway influences of James P. Johnson and Eubie Blake (Baltimore), the pop music of Jerry Lieber (Baltimore), the gospel music of Philadelphia, North Jersey and New York City, the bebop of Dizzy Gillespie (South Carolina) and Thelonius Monk (North Carolina), and the avant-garde playing of John Coltrane (North Carolina.)
64. Hagert, p. 1.
65. "Quadrille," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Vol. 15, p. 491. Examples include the *Bologna Quadrilles* (based on Rossini's *Stabat mater*), Chabrier's *Souvenirs de Munich* (based on themes from *Tristan und Isolde*), and Faure and Messager's *Souvenirs de Bayreuth* (based on themes from *The Ring*).
66. As quoted in Schuller, p. 139. Schuller's work was an invaluable source for these comments on Morton.

67. Edward A. Berlin, *Ragtime: A Musical and Cultural History*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 118-119.
 68. Eric Thacker, "Ragtime Roots," *Jazz & Blues* Vol. 3, no. 8 (November 1973): 6.

69. Stearns and Stearns, p. 23.
 70. "Dennis Charles," interviewed by Ludwig Van Trikt, *Cadence* Vol. 13, no. 10 (October, 1987): 6.

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