

**Gigue.** The origins of the term *gigue* and the Baroque court and theater dance genre of that name are uncertain. Most likely, *gigue* derived from the Old French verb *giguer*, “to leap, gambol, or frolic.” This derivation is also cited for the English term *jig*: “Used variously for types of music and dance it contains the idea of vigorous up and down movement, of which the dance is expressive” (Dean-Smith, 1980, p. 648). This term seems to encompass many different kinds of dances, all called jig but not necessarily related specifically in content or form, such as the English sixteenth-century bawdy song and dance genre and country dances. All, however, do have a vigorous and frolicsome spirit, the essential quality of movement that seems to link these dances to one another. The spirit suggested by the term is certainly reflected in the French court dance form that has been described as “gay and skipping” (Brossard, 1703), “airy and light” (Tomlinson, 1735), and “lively” (Rousseau, 1768). The steps and technique of the French *gigue* as it was practiced at the European courts of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries are, however, unique to a style of dancing sometimes simply referred to as French dancing. It was described by Pierre Rameau in his *Le maître à danser* (1725) and by other dancing masters of the time.

Raoul-Auger Feuillet published the first known, notated *gigue* choreography in 1700. However, the growing popularity of the dance form during the second half of the seventeenth century is evidenced by the increasingly frequent inclusion of *gigues* in the works of Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632–1687). The first dance called a *gigue* in Lully's *ballets de cour* appears in 1660, and sixteen more appear in his works through 1687.

Approximately a dozen *gigues* from the ballroom and theater dance repertory of the early eighteenth century are available in *chorégraphie* (eighteenth-century dance notation). These notations provide examples of *gigues* performed by one couple (ballroom and theater) and as solos (theater). Two publications of dances by Raoul-Auger Feuillet and Guillaume-Louis Pecour contain the earliest known examples of *gigue* choreographies. The “Gigue pour Homme,” a theatrical *gigue*, and the “Gigue à Deux,” a dance for which no clear indication is given for its intended performance in either the ballroom or theater, can be found in Feuillet's *Recueil de dances*, published in 1700. Pecour's “La Contredance,” a *danse à deux* for the ballroom, can be found in another *Recueil de dances* published by Feuillet in that same year.

The liveliness and gaiety of the *gigue* were expressed in springing steps, such as *contretemps* and *jetés*. The theatrical *gigue* was a virtuoso dance composed of *pas battus*, multiple pirouettes, and other nameless, intricate *pas composés* that demonstrate the technical prowess of the professional dancer. The ballroom *gigue*, although simpler in its step vocabulary than that for the theater, certainly did not lack in vivacity. It demanded stamina, agility, and a sure technique. The *gigue* served to demonstrate skill and lightness of step; however, as in all Baroque court dances, the required agility had to be accompanied by a calm and elegant deportment.

In the music of this period two distinct styles of the *gigue* emerged: French and Italian. The meter of the French *gigue* was 3/8, 6/8, or 6/4, while the Italian *giga* was usually written in 12/8. All surviving choreographies are in the French style, with one *pas composé* equaling one measure of compound double time; with few exceptions, they are written in 6/4 meter. To date, no choreographic examples of the *giga* have been found.

Characteristic of the French *gigue* is the dotted rhythm, , which may be reflected in the performance of the *pas composés*. Neither the dance manuals of the time nor the notation indicates this rhythm for performing step because dancing masters did not differentiate between double and compound double time (Hilton, 1981). However, the dotted rhythm clearly complements the music to which the dance is performed and emphasizes its characteristic skipping quality. *Pas composés* that contain more than two single steps, such as the *pas de bourrée*, are generally performed in this dotted rhythm. Basic *pas composés* commonly found in the *gigue* and their corresponding rhythms in 6/4

meter include *pas de bourrée*, 1/2 [crotchet] 1/2.; *contretemps de gavotte*, 1/2 [crotchet] 1/2; two *demi-contretemps*, 1/2 [crotchet] 1/2 [crotchet]; and *pas de sixsonne*, 1/2. 1/2..

Dance phrases in *gigues* can be quite long and irregular—that is, nine or fifteen measures. The “Gigue pour une Femme Seul Dancée par Mlle. Guiot à Opéra de Tandrede” (Pecour, 1712) is composed of two lengthy phrases of twenty-two and thirty measures with no repetitions of particular movement sequences or patterns. This dance phrasing does not mirror the phrase structure of the accompanying music, which is composed of two strains of eleven and fifteen measures, both repeated, with the resulting musical pattern A-A-B-B.

The “Gigue à Deux” (Feuillet, 1700) is one of the few examples of a dance in the Baroque style in which the dance patterns and steps as well as the musical strains are repeated (Hilton, 1981). The musical pattern consists of two strains (A and B) structured as follows: A, nine measures, repeated; a linking passage of four measures; B, eight measures, repeated; the last four measures of B. The dance is composed of two figures, each repeated. The steps in the figures are repeated as well, with different steps occurring only in the linking passage and in the last four measures of the dance.

Today, reconstructions of the French *gigue* are danced at a moderate to quick tempo. The complexity of a choreography and, to a lesser degree, the technical skill or preference of the dancer determine the tempo of a particular *gigue* within this range. A *gigue* for the theater, such as the “Gigue pour une Femme” in Pecour (see above), containing more brilliant and complex footwork than that of a *gigue* for the ballroom, can be danced at a slightly slower tempo to accommodate the demands of the choreography. However, the buoyant quality of movement may be lost if the tempo is too slow. On the other hand, an excessively fast tempo may also rob the *gigue* of this springing quality, leading to unclear execution of the steps.

Extant *gigue* choreographies, particularly those for the theater, provide some of the most lively technical and stylistic challenges of the Baroque dance repertory. With their brisk, complex footwork, they illustrate the refined dance technique of both the courtiers and professional dancers of the period.

See also **Ballet Technique**, **History of**, article on **French Court Dance**.

## Bibliography

Brossard, Sébastien de. *Dictionary of Music* (1703). Translated and edited by Albion Gruber. Henryville, Pa., 1982.

Dean-Smith, Margaret. Jig. In *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. London, 1980.

Hilton, Wendy. *Dance of Court and Theatre: The French Noble Style, 1690–1725*. Princeton, 1981.

Little, Meredith Ellen. “The Dances of J. B. Lully.” Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1967.

Little, Meredith Ellis. Gigue. In *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. London, 1980.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *A Dictionary of Music* (1768). Translated by William. 2d ed. London, 1779.

Tomlinson, Kellom. *The Art of Dancing Explained by Reading and Figures*. 2 vols. London, 1735.

Witherell, Anne L. *Louis Pécour's 1700 Recueil des dances*. Ann Arbor, Mich., 1983.

Susan F. Bindig

### How to cite this entry:

Susan F. Bindig “Gigue” *The International Encyclopedia of Dance*. Ed. Selma Jeanne Cohen and the Dance Perspectives Foundation. Oxford University Press, 2003. Case Western Reserve University. 24 December

Your subscription to Oxford Reference Online is brought to you by:  
CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY

Copyright © Oxford University Press 2009. All Rights Reserved  
Privacy Policy and Legal Notices