

**Rigaudon.** The lively *rigaudon*, spelled *rigadon* or *rigadoon* in English usage, was popular at the French court of Louis XIV from about the 1670s. From there it spread to other European courts and cities, especially in England and Germany. The *rigaudon* is mentioned by French writers of dictionaries (Ozanam, 1691; Furetière, 1701; Compan, 1787) as a dance from Provence. Artists working under Louis XIV probably transformed it to suit aristocratic taste, and it became one of the favorite dance types associated with the French court (others included the *menuet*, *courante*, *passepied*, *gavotte*, *sarabande*, *loure*, and *bourrée*). It was mentioned as early as 1673 in a letter from Madame de Sevigné to her daughter: “Madame Santa Cruz triumphs in the Rigadon.” The *rigaudon* was enjoyed both as a social dance and as a ballet *entrée*, and in the form of both instrumental and vocal music, reflecting the elegance of the court in a lively though controlled manner.

The musical accompaniment is duple on all metric levels and has a quarter-note upbeat, with almost all phrases four or eight measures in length. Although it seems to be virtually identical to the *bourrée*, the melodies tend to have larger leaps, greater range, and more movement in a single direction without turning; in addition, the tempo is slightly faster (possibly 88–100 M.M. to the half note in a time signature of 2 or [tempus imperfectum cum prolatione imperfecta diminution-2]). This was considered a fast tempo at the time, though it would seem rather moderate to the twentieth-century listener. The music usually consists of a bipartite piece with repeats, sometimes followed by a second *rigaudon*, also bipartite with repeats.

The steps of the *rigaudon* are the usual ones of French court dancing—*pas de bourrée*, *contretemps*, *glissade*, *jeté*, and *sissonne*—but most *rigaudons* also contain at least one *pas de rigaudon*. This unusual step-unit, occasionally used in other dance types as well, comprises several springs in place, along with leg gestures to the side (see Hilton, 1981, for performance details). It is usually seen only once or twice in a dance and marks a particularly important moment or climax. Charles Compan (*Dictionnaire de danse*, 1787) remarked that the courtly *pas de rigaudon* was more graceful and actually quite different from the one done in Provence; the leg, instead of extending to the side, was extended to the front in Provence, as if the dancers were kicking each other.

The figures of the *rigaudon* follow the geometric patterns common to French court dancing, with both performers of a pair usually doing the same steps but on opposite feet to create a mirror image.

Many *rigaudons* survive in choreographic notation. In addition to numerous *contredanses* (for example, “La Frêne,” published by Raoul-Auger Feuillet in 1707) there are at least twenty-nine theatrical and social dances, composed by choreographers residing in France (Louis Pecour, Feuillet, Claude Ballon, and Jacques Dezais), in England (Mister Isaac, Anthony L'Abbé, Kellom Tomlinson, and Jean Jacques Rousseau), and in Germany (the French dancing master Jean Dubreuil). Although most of the pieces are ballroom dances for mixed couples, we have two theatrical *rigaudons* for two men, by Feuillet (*Recueil de dances*, 1700). No solos are extant. Some of the most popular ballroom *rigaudons* were “Le Rigaudon de la Paix” (Feuillet), “Le Rigaudon des Vaisseaux” (Pecour), and, in England, Isaac’s “The Rigadoone.”

In ballet, *rigaudons* were often used in pastoral scenes or as a sailor’s dance. None occurs in the works of Jean-Baptiste Lully (died 1687), but later French theatrical composers such as André Campra, Henry Desmarests, André Cardinal Destouches, and Jean-Philippe Rameau used it frequently. It was also popular in England, as the stage works of Henry Purcell and George Frideric Handel show. Johann Georg Sulzer (*Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*, 1794) remarked that the *rigaudon* in ballets was not a noble dance but was used for flighty and low-born characters.

The characteristic melodies and phrase structure of *rigaudon* music were exploited by Baroque composers of many countries. Keyboard *rigaudons* may be found in the works of Purcell, François Couperin, Rameau, Elisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre, Louis-Claude Daquin, Gottlieb Muffat,

Johann Pachelbel, and Johann Kirnberger. Composers of orchestral or chamber music with *rigaudons* include Couperin (IV *Concert Royal*), Joseph Bodin de Boismortier, Hendelinne, Michel-Richard de Lalande, Michel Monteclair, Johann Casper Ferdinand Fischer, Handel (“Water Music”), though not Johann Sebastian Bach. The *rigaudon*'s popularity in the theater died out after the 1750s, but it continued to be enjoyed in stylish ballrooms well into the nineteenth century.

*Rigaudon* folk dances of various types have been mentioned by European writers from the Renaissance to modern times, but no systematic research has been done. Violet Alford (1944) reported on numerous traditional *rigaudons* performed by local people in the south of France in the late 1930s.

[For related discussion, see **Ballet Technique, History of**, article on **French Court Dance**.]

## **Bibliography**

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