

**Canary** The term *canary* (It., Sp., *canario*; Fr., *canarie*) denotes two types of dances. The first is a *villancico* from the Canary Islands, called a *negrilla* when it represents in music and dance the islands' blacks, descendants of the Africans brought there by the Spanish slave trade. It is a leaping dance in the syncopated meter (with shifting accents) of *villancicos* (sesquialtera, 6/8 and 3/4), often with a narrative text in dialect.

In European dance history, *canary* denotes a sixteenth-to eighteenth-century dance in fast triple (or compound duple, 6/8) meter. It first appeared in Fabritio Caroso's *Il ballarino* (1581) and other dance manuals of the late sixteenth century as a fiery wooing dance, marked by rapid heel-and-toe stamps (resembling the current Mexican *zapateado*), by noisy sliding steps with which the partners alternately advance and retreat, and by distinctive music. By the eighteenth century these characteristics are almost gone, but the charm and spirited affect remained.

No concrete choreographic proof exists of the canary's provenance. It was thought either to have come to Spain from the Canary Islands and thence to Europe (Covarrubias Horozco, in *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o espanola* [1611], terms it a *saltarello gracioso*), or to have been invented for a spectacle (cf. Thoinot Arbeau, 1588). The first known references are Spanish (e.g., Diego Sanchez de Badajoz, 1554), and Spanish sources from the mid-sixteenth century onward continue to mention it (Miguel de Cervantes, Lope de Vega). Other references, however (e.g., Shakespeare, *Love's Labour's Lost*, act 3, scene 1: "canary to it with your feet"; *All's Well That Ends Well*, act 2, scene 1: "and make you dance canary / With spritely fire and motion"), and many musical sources from western Europe and England attest to its universal popularity. John Florio (1598, 1611) refers to castanets as "little shels used of those that dance the canaries to clacke or snap with their fingers." Whatever its real origins, then, its title and "Spanish" character place it with many other "exotic" dances typically borrowed or invented throughout the ages to reinvigorate "civilized" social dance.

The major sixteenth-century choreographic sources of the canary are Italian (Caroso, 1581, 1600; Livio Lupi, 1600, 1607; and Cesare Negri, 1602, 1604). (See Example 1.) They give discrete canary choreographies, each containing numerous variations which presumably were intended as a pool of ideas from

which dancers could extract choreographed variations for their “improvised” canaries. (Livio Lupi provides more than one hundred variations and *passeggi*.) Caroso and Cesare Negri place a canary movement at the end of fourteen *balletto* suites.

From France comes a brief description and only two variations; they are similar to the Italian canaries in movement and music, though in simple duple meter (Arbeau). Theatrical canaries appear in two *balli* by Emilio de' Cavalieri (in the sixth *intermedio* of the Florentine spectacles of 1589 and in *La rappresentazione di anima et di corpo*, 1600); these are specified for men only, and there are no choreographies. Cavalieri's canary music is neither distinctive nor typical; in fact, in his *La rappresentazione*, a *galliard*, a *canario*, and a *corrente* (*courante*) are danced successively to the same music. None of the sixteenth-century choreographic sources mentions the use of castanets; there is no way of knowing whether this was deliberate, whether the castanets or finger snapping were simply assumed, or whether the Italians omitted them as unsuitable for aristocratic dancers.

The typical sixteenth-century ballroom canary consists of alternating male and female variations framed and interspersed with passages danced together—a pattern similar to that of the *passo e mezzo*, *galliard*, or *tordiglione* (*tordion*). More specific to the canary, however, are the pantomimic courting elements: the challenging approach to and retreat from the partner (*retirata*), often with strong flanking movements, and the complex and percussive alternating footwork. Indeed, a number of canaries in *balletto* suites contain such a quick alternation of rhythmic footwork between the partners as to suggest a rapid-fire dialogue (termed *pedalogue* and defined by Caroso) that enhances the flirtatious mock fury of the dance. Canary steps in the Italian manuals are always so named when used in other dance types and are always in rapid triple meter (e.g., the *seguito battuto del canario* in “Allegrezza d'Amore,” a *cascarda* in both of Caroso's books).

Canary music in the Renaissance manuals (and in a number of musical collections, e.g., Michael Praetorius's *Terpsichore* [1612]) is instantly recognizable, based on one of several closely related and short bass ostinatos with reiterated chordal schemes and on similarly related short melodies of narrow range with repeated (usually) dotted rhythms and melodic motives. Phrase lengths are regular, and the short length of most tunes (four, eight, or twelve bars) means that they are repeated often to accompany a complete dance variation. Such insistent repetitions of internally repetitious music, when combined with footwork that joins the dancers to the musical ensemble, indeed produces a colorful effect. (The earliest musical source of a canary is Diego

Pisador's *Endechas de canario for vihuela*, from 1552, a lament apparently unrelated to other canaries.)

The absence of precise canary choreographies from about 1620 to 1700 makes it impossible to know how its style changed in the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, there is ample evidence of the canary's continuing popularity. Marin Mersenne, in 1636–1637 described it as virtuosic, with *batteries de pieds* (three, six, or twelve), half capers, and turns on the ground or in the air; he gave a standard tune. Juan de Esquivel Navarro mentioned it in 1642 among the dances taught at dancing schools in Spain, but without details. After 1650, many opera and ballet types include canaries (Jean-Baptiste Lully has fifteen) but without choreographies.

The earliest choreographed examples of Baroque canaries appear in Raoul-Auger Feuillet's publications of 1700 and 1704; the music to some of his notations dates from before 1700, so those choreographies may also be earlier: for example, Guillaume-Louis Pecour's "Canarie pour Deux Hommes" in the 1704 collection is from Henri Desmarets's opera *Didon*, from 1693. By then the canary was considerably different from earlier ones; although still either a discrete dance or part of a suite, and still both social and theatrical, it became less distinctive and its pantomimic aspects were gone. As in other Baroque dances, partners danced simultaneously on mirrored paths; even in social settings, the dance might then have been a solo or may have had partners of the same sex. Steps were also mirrored, the step vocabulary (e.g., *contretemps*, *pas glissés*) typical of lively and showy dances like the *gigue* (with which the canary is sometimes identified at this time), and the music lost its pervasive ostinatos. Nevertheless, the Baroque canary was still seen as a Spanish dance from the Canary Islands (Samuel Rudolph Behr, 1713). Some of its steps were associated with other "Spanish" dances of different tempo and affect (e.g., *chaconne*, *sarabande*), especially a beaten step (see also Kellom Tomlinson, 1735). In Spain, however, a stamped step still existed, termed *passo de canario* and described by Bartolomé Ferriol y Boxeraus (1745).

The canary continued to be danced through much of the eighteenth century, gradually losing popularity; Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote in 1768 that it was no longer in use. It survives as a folk song in Spain, however.

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## Videotape

Julia Sutton, *Il Ballarino (The Dancing Master)*, a teaching videotape featuring a glossary of steps and three sixteenth-century Italian dances by Caroso and Negri (Pennington, N.J., 1991).

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