



History of the Quadrille Dance

Developed in France during the 18th century as a court dance for Napoleon, the Quadrille was brought to England, and then introduced to the colonial Caribbean during the early 19th century, providing entertainment on social occasions for planters.

Slaves were forbidden to practise their culture, as the planters realised their music and dance were used to communicate and to plan their release strategies. However, to save on the expenses of bringing musicians from England, slaves were engaged to provide music for planters' parties.

Forbidden to practise their own dances, African musicians and house workers learned the dance of the English planters, taking it into their camps and altering it. Slaves used the Quadrille to mock the planters, but more importantly, used this newly approved dancing time to secretly formulate uprisings to hasten their freedom.

Dominican versions of the Quadrille dance feature four men and four women, forming of a square, with traditional background music in the form of "**mazook**" – a special feature of which is the "heel and toe"; or the "**bele**" – which features the tambou drum, the rhythm of which follows the steps of the dancers who perform in front of a half-circle of spectators.

Dance styles can be either formal, with couples gliding rigidly in turn, or a more free style where all couples dance at the same time with unfettered movements and improvisations.

Darren Sylvester is a quadrille dancer and performs professionally with the DONA Quadrille Dance Group, London.