



Kalinda!

The Newsletter of
Afro-Caribbean &
U.S. Black Music
Interconnections

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Indecent Kalinda

BY MARCOS SUEIRO

*It isn't everyone who knows how to dance
the two-beat waltzes.*

—"Allons Danser Colinda"

BEFORE the lambada, before the twist, there was the kalinda—an incendiary dance of African origin that spread like wildfire throughout the Caribbean and was eventually banned. The kalinda was the original dance craze of the Americas; it has been performed throughout the Caribbean and even reached Louisiana, where it was one of the dances of the famous Place Congo in antebellum New Orleans. It is still danced today in Trinidad and Carriacou, is the precursor of the ever-popular calypso, and influenced the Puerto Rican bomba. It has been called "the universal Caribbean dance."

Early descriptions

Like a good recipe, the kalinda seems to have endless regional variations—both in name and in form. The earliest known written account of the dance comes from Martinique, where Father Labat (who calls it calenda) in 1698 describes it as two lines of dancers—one line of males, one of females—approaching each other "with absolutely lascivious gestures" and then retreating several times, encircled by a clapping ring. Labat, even at this early date, condemns the performance as "contrary to all modesty." It was a sign of things to come.

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During the next century and beyond, numerous descriptions of the kalinda appear, often under different spellings (calinda, caleinda, kalenda, and colinda) or names (Joe-and-Johnny, Joan-and-Johnny, Jo-and-Johnny, chica, fandango, and congo). The labeling frequently becomes confusing or seemingly arbitrary, since all these West Indian dances (which also include the chica, the juba, and the bamboula) influenced one another; for example, one of the drums used in the kalinda was the bamboula. Although disparate, the descriptions agree that most of the movement came from the hips, that almost always there were two lines of dancers (though not necessarily of different gender) surrounded by a ring, and that the music was "hideous," "screeching," "infernal," or just plain "bad."

Despite the less than (*continued on 2*)



