

LOGICA

CHOREOLOGICA The Journal
of European Association of Dance Historians



CHOREO



ISSN 1746-5737
Edizioni Joker

Vol. 4 n. 1 - Winter 2008 / Spring 2009

CHOREOLOGICA

The Journal of
European Association of Dance Historians

Winter 2008 / Spring 2009
Volume 4 Number 1

Edizioni Joker

Volume 4 No.1 Winter 2008/Spring 2009
ISSN 1746-5737

European Association of Dance Historians
41 Talma Gardens
Twickenham
Middlesex TW2 7RB
UK

Tel/Fax: +44 (0)20 8892 9638
Email: eadh_queries@yahoo.co.uk
www.eadh.com

Editorial Committee:

Giannandrea Poesio
Elena Grillo
Patricia Daly
Mike Dixon

Published by Edizioni Joker
Via Crosa della Macarina 28/B
I-15067 Novi Ligure (AL) - ITALY
Tel/Fax +39 (0)143 322383
Email: info@edizionijoker.com
www.edizionijoker.com

Printed by Digital Print Service
Segrate (MI) - ITALY

© European Association of Dance Historians 2009

Page	
5	Sources for Understanding Sallé's <i>Pigmalion</i> . By Sarah McCleave
25	Dramas at Drury Lane. By Madeleine Inglehearn
31	"Dove sono I bei momenti...". The Eclipse-Ellipsis of Love in the Italian "Ballo Grande". By Elena Grillo (translated from Italian by Simonetta Allder)
45	Evenings on Olympus. By Mike Dixon.
57	Book and DVD Reviews: <i>The Incomparable Hester Sant- low: A Dancer-Actress on the Georgian Stage</i> and <i>Serge Lifar Musagète</i> .

Sources for Understanding Sallé's *Pigmalion*

By Sarah McCleave

Although Marie Sallé (1707?-1756) was arguably the most innovative performer-choreographer of her generation, her career presents many enigmas. Her professional activities in the years between her début at London's Lincolns-Inn-Fields Theatre in 1716 and her return there in autumn 1725 are largely obscure; likewise, we know very little about her life after she retired from the Paris Opéra in 1740 (Dacier, 1909; Vince, c. 1965). Her collaborations with opera composers George Frederic Handel in London (1734-35) and Jean-Philippe Rameau in Paris (1735-40) offer us a substantial body of music and two scenarios from which we can gain some appreciation of her creative work, yet two of her most important creations — the ballets en action *Pigmalion* and *Bacchus and Ariadne* (London, 1734) — have been inaccessible, for no music, no scenarios and no choreographies survive.

Sallé's tercentenary year encouraged an exploration of obscure areas of her life and career: while choreographer Jane Gingell effectively captured the essence of *Bacchus and Ariadne* in a performance (mus. Handel) staged at Stockholm's Confidencen Theatre (symposium 'La Sallé', 12-13 May 2007), this article will attempt to elucidate her *Pigmalion*, drawing on the original source for the story, two eyewitness accounts as well as other dance sources.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

Eighteenth-century choreographers who sought to tell entire stories through action usually worked from sources which were rich in visually suggestive incidents and were also well-known to their audiences. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (circa 8 AD) was a popular poetic source; book 10 (lines 243-297) offers us the first published account of the story which inspired Sallé's *Pigmalion*. Ovid's artistry in his transformation of an unsavoury tale from ancient history has been noted: the story seems to have its ultimate origins in an episode where a Cypriot king attempted to have sexual intercourse with a statue of Venus (Anderson, 1972, p. 497). Pigmalion, a confirmed bachelor, "carved an ivory statue of a woman so convincingly beautiful that he began to imagine it alive" (Anderson, 1972, p. 495). After dressing the statue in "fine clothes" and adorning it with jewels, he takes her to bed. He courts the statue by offering her small gifts; Ovid indicates that the sculptor caresses his creation with such vigour that she would have shown bruises had she been made of flesh (Anderson, 1972, p. 134, lines 256-58).

Not content with this lifeless thing of perfect beauty, he prayed to Venus [during a festival in her honour] that his wife might be, if not the statue, at least like it.

Ovid paraphrased by Anderson, 1972, p. 495

The festival, which includes a sacrifice of animals, occupies a mere four lines of the poem (Anderson, 1972, p. 135, lines 270-273). After this ritual, Pigmalion prays to the goddess. His state of mind is described as timid ("timide") rather than distraught (Anderson, 1972, p. 499). The favourable omen which he receives while standing at the altar of Venus — "three quick blazings up of the fire and the soaring of a tip (or tongue) of flame into the air" (Anderson, 1972, p. 499) — is emulated in other eighteenth-century theatrical versions of this story (Rameau, 1748 and Rozoi, 1780). After receiving the omen, Pigmalion returns to his house where the statue remains in his bed:

And when he went home from the temple and began to kiss the ivory, it slowly became flesh, a wife to respond to his passion.

Ovid paraphrased by Anderson, 1972, p. 495

We can appreciate that this story would translate particularly well into a mimed and danced entertainment, as there is not a single action or interaction which is dependent on spoken or sung text for its expression. The tale is both straightforward and appealing, with human love as the ultimate agent of a wonderful transformation (Anderson, 1972, p. 499). The immediacy and intensity of the action — which centres on the marked reactions of Pigmalion and Galatea to each other — would have been a particularly productive foil for Sallé's creative genius. She was equally acclaimed as a graceful dancer and as a moving pantomime; before *Pigmalion* her most noted accomplishment as a choreographer had been her revision of teacher Françoise Prévost's solo choreography for *Les Caractères de la danse* (mus. Jean-Féry Rebel) as a pas de deux for herself and her brother, Francis.

The *Mercur*e Letter

While Ovid's poem alone could provide a modern choreographer with enough stimuli to create a work in homage to Marie Sallé, we are fortunate to have two eye-witness accounts of her *Pigmalion*. (These are both well known, but have never been analysed in depth.) The first was written by an anonymous correspondent and published in the *Mercur*e's April 1734 issue. Written in the manner of a letter to the editor, this source (see Appendix 1) enables us to construct a coherent scenario.

The entertainment opens with the entrance of Pigmalion and his sculptors who perform a characteristic dance with mallet and chisel (Appendix 1, line 8). On Pigmalion's orders, the front of the scene is opened by his attendants to reveal the various statues in his workshop (lines 8-9). One statue excites particular admiration from all the assembled sculptors; Pigmalion himself is moved to sigh before caressing its every curve and limb (lines 10-12). He adorns the statue's arms with

precious bracelets and its neck with an opulent necklace (lines 12-13). Pigmalion succumbs to his passion: while kissing the statue's hands, he expresses his anxieties by falling into a reverie before throwing himself at the feet of a statue of Venus (lines 13-16). This is an adaptation of the "festival" described in Ovid, when the sculptor attends an event where the goddess of love is being celebrated. In Sallé's entertainment, the statue is presumably in Pigmalion's workshop and thus conveniently at hand for his appeal.

Venus's favourable response to this prayer is signalled by three shafts of light and a symphony of appropriate music (lines 17-18; the lighting effect is taken directly from Ovid). The statue gradually becomes animated and surprises Pigmalion and his followers with her expressions of astonishment at both her new existence and also all the objects with which she is now surrounded (lines 18-20). The astonished and transported sculptor offers the statue his hand; she takes it and steps down to perform a series of the most beautiful attitudes (lines 21-23). Pigmalion dances in front of her; the statue copies the most simple and the most difficult movements. The sculptor succeeds in inspiring her to respond to his tenderness (lines 23-26). The Mercure's account continues with a description of Sallé's costume (lines 28-32) and concludes by indicating how popular *Pigmalion* has been with its performance for Sallé's forthcoming benefit keenly anticipated (lines 33-37).

It is possible from this source to construct a complete action, for the cast is identified and we have a coherent story with several clearly defined incidents. The writer, however, makes no claim to have provided us with a full account of the work and it is reasonable to assume he was describing the events which struck him particularly, or which he assumed would be of certain interest to his readers.

Berchères and Eighteenth-Century Theatrical Dance Sources

If we turn to the second description of Sallé's *Pigmalion*, which is found in a poem written as a tribute to her by one Pierre Bordes de Berchères (Appendix 2), we find some details which amplify the Mercure's account. By collating these with information from contempora-

neous theatrical sources as well as modern studies, we should gain a fresh appreciation of Sallé's ballet en action.

The Mercure opens the entertainment with a character dance for sculptors ("une danse caractérisée"); Berchères instead describes a pantomimed action where Pigmalion oversees the rough planning, trimming, polishing and finishing of the statues (Appendix 2, lines 9-10). A dance for sculptors in Gregorio Lambranzi's *Neue und Curieuse Theatralische Tantz-Schul* (1716, Book 2, plate 24; see Illustration 1) reveals this could have been a dance into which some mime was integrated:

Here is a wooden state which has been covered with pieces of stone, made to adhere by means of plaster, so that it appears shapeless. It is set upon the stage. Then enter two sculptors who chisel the statue as they dance, so that the pieces of stone fall off and the mass is transformed into a statue. The pas can be arranged at pleasure. The air is played twice.

Lambranzi 1716, translated Derra de Moroda (1928/2002),
part 2, p. 83

This description suggests a performance where both dance and mime are simultaneous, but Lambranzi's description of a dance for blacksmiths offers another model:

Two blacksmiths forge a nail in time with the music until the air has been played once. Then one lays down his hammer and dances chassés, ballonnés, pirouettes and pas de rigaudon until the air has been repeated; meanwhile the other one forges. Finally they both dance together and exit.

Lambranzi 1716, translated Derra de Moroda (1928/2002),
part 2, p. 83

The character dances — where the character is defined by the nature and quality of his or her gestures — described in Lambranzi are mirrored in the titles for entr'acte dances in the London theatres. Sallé's

