European Association of Dance Historians

Volume 1 No. 1
SUMMER 2005
ISSN 1746-5737

Choreologica

Papers on Dance History

Journal

Volume 1 Number 1
Summer 2005

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Considerations regarding the application of Rhetoric and the Theory of the Passions onto 17th & 18th Century Dance & Music compositions

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Prologue

Thanks to the work of some researchers, scholars, archivists, performers and indeed publishing companies, researchers and performers alike have managed to gather a substantial amount of information through documents, treatises, performing manuals and other sources, which have furnished them with resources to accomplish a plausible 'historically informed' performance in music (i.e.: a style of performance that ultimately recreates the original sonority idealised by composers, by means of adopting performing techniques pertinent to the period the piece was composed, making use of accurately copied instruments and even by choosing a suitable surrounding or venue).

Equally in the early dance revival, the restoring process of pure movement is based on the study of treatises, dance manuals, iconographic evidence, letters and many other documents that help to recreate as accurately as possible a plausible historically informed performance.

More precisely, the dance panorama in 17th century France was of great importance, given the fact that the monarch, Louis XIV, was not only the great sponsor and promoter of the arts in general, but he particularly cherished dancing. He not only took part in stage

productions as a dancer, but also boosted the status of dancing by organising grand balls at the court and noticeably more intimate events in his private quarters in Versailles. His "Jour-d'appartements", as these were called, consisted of *soirées* which happened as frequently as three times a week, where selected guests could indulge their senses with music, food, card and table games, poetry and dancing. Courtiers grabbed the sought-after opportunity to get closer to the king so as to obtain political or social favours. Being invited to attend one of the '*Appartements*', or even better, to perform in such an event, meant much more than just attending a party. In particular, in regard to dancing, being invited to perform at the '*Appartements*' was considered the first step towards reaching the stage and taking part in one of the numerous productions commissioned by the King.

Dancing was part of the education of a nobleman alongside horse riding and fencing. Versailles catered for its courtiers by providing several dancing-masters who supervised the daily training for noblemen and for the royalty. Louis' passion for dancing was such that he commissioned a system of choreographic notation to his principal dancing-master, Pierre Beauchamps, around 1674.[1] This system was finally published in 1700 by Raoul-Auger Feuillet and was immediately widespread in most courts in Europe, being translated into several languages including English.[2]

The commissioning of a system notation was actually preceded by the establishment of the Académie Royale de Danse, founded in 1661, and the Académie Royale de Musique (established in 1669). Before the launch of both Académies, dance and music were in fact regulated

by the same governing body, the Confrarie de St Julien, from which music and dancing masters obtained the titles which enabled them to teach as *maîtres*.

"The Marriage of Music & Dance"
According to historical documentation one can verify that music and dance shared the same principles of performance and composition. For instance, Guillaume DuManoir, established violinist and member of the 25 *Violons du Roi* who also holds the title of Dancing Master (i.e.: entrusted by the *Confrarie de St Julien* to teach dancing), writes that Music and Dance are in fact "one same body"[3] and possessing "equality in spirit and capacity"[4], to list just a few among several examples. He also compares the Dance-Music entity to painting and sculpture by cunningly stating that in the same manner these last two do not exist without a media or material (in this case the canvas and the marble), dance necessarily depends on music in order to exist.[5]

Guillaume Colletet declares in the foreword for the *Ballet de l'Harmonie* by Horace Morel, for which he wrote the *livret*, that "dancing is a vivid image of our actions and an artificial expression of our most secret thoughts" and that the soul has the power to cause the body to unify the harmony of nature to the harmony of music by means of the movements of dancing and that it therefore "creates unity between the Body and Soul, and between the Soul and Music."[6] This is one of the many citations that directly relate the performance of music and dance to the utmost expression of feelings, or more particularly to the expression of Passions, according to the Descartian theory.

Rhetoric

During the 17th century, France experienced a major influence from Greek Mythology and Ancient History, immersed in a frenzy which would bring gods, heroes and epic events to reflect the latest episodes at the court, to celebrate a social event or a victory in the battle fields, raising the status of mortal noblemen to mighty and immortal gods and heroes. This grandeur was celebrated in painting, sculpture, acting, poetry, music and dance in a display of the Nation's wealth and majestic grandiosity.

The masterworks from Greek philosophers were not only a novelty, but commonly referred to and ultimately were incorporated into the educational syllabus. A courtier would, therefore, be expected to be well versed in Classical history, philosophy and in rhetoric (also known as *L'Art de bien Parler*). In other words, one should know how to elaborate and present a convincing and engaging speech. According to Jeanette Bicknell, "most school boys would have a thorough grounding in Latin by the age fifteen" having learned rhetoric, grammar and logic as the so-called "trivium", or the first cycle of arts subjects.[7]

Authors such as Jean Dusin (1608)[8], François Cassandre (1654)[9], Jacques DuRoure (1662)[10] and Bernard Lamy (1672)[11] published treatises which relate to the writings of Aristotle, whose works were also extensively reprinted during the 17th and 18th centuries and proved to be an essential source for public orators, politicians, lawyers, judges, writers, actors, composers, musicians, choreographers and dancers. Rhetoric, in fact, provided the frame onto which any form of expression consisting of an orderly 'speech' (which can

also be applied to music and dance) should be accommodated. In order to convince the audience, an 'orator' should follow certain rules when exhibiting his ideas.

According to Bernard Lamy a speech should consist of at least 3 parts: Proposition, Intrigue and Denouement. These could be further subdivided in 4 or 5 parts: Exordium and Narration (consisting of the Introduction), Confirmation and Confutation (consisting of the Intrigue) and, finally, the Conclusion (Denouement). The orator should also be able to skilfully choose which rhetoric figures to employ and most importantly, to gradate the intensity of emotion used in such figures as to raise or counteract certain passions in the audience. At the end of his speech, he should have managed to convince the audience of his statement and successfully banished any contrary argumentation.

One should note at this point that conventions vary slightly from author to author. For instance, in his much later publication *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*, Johann Mattheson further breaks the speech into 6 parts[12]. Nevertheless, the main framework remains the same: presentation and explanation of an argument, refusal of adverse arguments and reinstatement of the initial argument. The author reminds us that the listener should be able to clearly apprehend the meaning of the figures and the function of every sub-division in the speech, even without the use of words.

In order to convince an audience, the orator should skilfully appeal to their emotions. These emotions were treated as 'Passions' during the 17th and 18th century and

non-surprisingly relate to the very same Greek theory of *pathos*. The orator must dose type and intensity of the Passions he wants to stir in his audience, as to reach a climax in favour of his statement.

On an initial and rather straightforward approach, one can immediately apply the principles of a concise and yet elaborated speech framed by the rules of rhetoric onto sung *récits*, airs and indeed onto dance movements related to a sung passage (i.e.: when the original song further produces purely instrumental versions, examples of which can be often found in 17th century French *Tragédies*, *Comédies*, *Ballets* and *Opéras*) in the first instance and, consequently, onto purely instrumental dance movements without any apparent co-related textual version. The juxtaposition of textual analysis to the musical and chorological elements does reiterate the very basis of oratory and 'poetic action' by conforming to the strict frame set by rhetoric. A practical analysis demonstrates that the musical and chorological aspects of a composition do follow the crescendo and diminuendo of tension as prescribed by the laws of rhetoric and are simply predisposed by the text. In a particular case, the subdivisions may have the following specific functions:

1 ***Exordium*** – a short introduction where the orator addresses his audience, a particular person or a character;
2 ***Narration*** – following the initial address the orator slightly increases the tension in his speech (by means of making use of specific figures or emotionally stressing words) and briefly states the matter to be discussed;

3 ***Confirmation*** of the proposed matter by presenting proof in order to make his statement convincingly acceptable;
4 ***Confutation*** – at this point the orator reaches the climax of his declamation. He makes use of dramatic figures of speech and appeals to the listener's emotional vulnerabilities in order to ban every single argument one may raise against his initial statement.
5 ***Conclusion*** – the orator drastically diminishes the emotional charge in his speech and reinstates his original proposition.

The variation in tension caused by rhetoric figures directly applied to the text is translated into the musical lexicon by dramatic harmonic changes, extension of the register used, expressive figures such as *port-de-voix*, *pincées*, *coulements*, specific intervals, strategically placed rests, interrupted cadences and many other resources, which comply to the rules set out by the text and, therefore, abide by the rhetoric precepts. Likewise, this tension is conveyed in the chorological vocabulary through the use of specific steps, which correspond to their musical and textual equivalents. For instance, in order to express grief, the choreographer may use a majestic yet confiding and expressive *temps-de-courante*; whereas, to reinforce an idea or to demonstrate persistence, he may use a series of consecutive *chassées*. The choreographer may still appeal to pantomimic expression by applying categorical arm gestures onto steps.

There are a few citations of the parallels between rhetoric and music during the 17th and 18th centuries. As early as 1636, Marin Mersenne states that

> Airs in a way ought to imitate orations, in order to have members, parts and periods, and make use of all manner of figures and harmonic passages, as the orator does, so that the art of composing airs and writing counterpoint will not be second to rhetoric.[13]

It is reassuringly sensible to relate the application of textual analysis ruled by rhetoric to De Pure's remarks regarding sung *récits*. He entrusts the poet with the responsibility to make the subject of each *récit* clearly understandable through the correct choice and placement of words as to clarify the senses. De Pure points out that a word, a demy-verse or a line should make perfect sense in connection to the *Entrées*, the steps and the postures (gesture attitudes).[14]

De Pure clarifies the point that some authors make by referring to dance as an 'exercise' subject to music. He states:

> Whether the original word is explained either literally or figuratively, it should signify a visible and sensible action. Therefore the *Ballet* is necessarily seemed as a 'demonstration' for it not only consists of an external and evident action, but it also ultimately expresses, paints and shows before the eyes all the issues represented in the dance.[15]

The author makes clear that the choreographic work can represent the words (and indeed the Passions therein contained) both in literal (strictly representing the meaning of the word) and figurative (as an interpretation of the overall Passion or a reference to it) ways.

Passions

According to René Descartes[16] the 'Passions' (or emotions) could be stirred up by certain external elements that would incite specific 'Animal Spirits' to run inside one's body ("it appears that all such Passions may also be excited by objects which stimulate the senses and that these objects are their principal and most common causes. From this it follows that, in order to discover all the Passions, it suffices to consider all the effects of these objects."), causing therefore, reactions such as trembling, crying, blushing and many other 'symptoms' of the numerous listed Passions of which the causes and effects are minutely detailed. Lucie Desjardins[17] notes that the theory of the Passions exposes the dichotomy between inner and the outer-self, the visible and the invisible, the body and the soul, the private and the public realm; and with such an approach one can not avoid but to recall the ideals expressed earlier in 1632 by Colletet[18] which agree with the intent of unifying the exterior images and actions to interior feelings – or in a rather poetic view, to unify the Harmony of Nature to the Harmony of Soul. The Passions, by definition, are expressed by exterior reactions originating in the Soul, and are perceived by the recipient (or addressed person) as an exterior incitation. Therefore, one should cautiously know how to codify and to interpret these emulations. This hypothesis was by consequence widely spread and the typology of

Passions became a common theory of faculty psychology as well as of traditional rhetoric. It was also translated into the musical & choreographic lexicon, by means of elements that are logically placed together in accordance to rhetorical speech.

Although Descartes overtly dismissed rhetoric as verified in his philosophical writings, Jeffrey Woodbury[19] points out that Lamy's *oeuvre* lies in its combination of Cartesian rationalism and Augustinian religious thought, in an attempt to unite reason and faith, theory and practice. Lamy, in an appendix[20] to his revised and expanded third edition of *L'Art de Parler*, extensively addresses the issue regarding the proper use of rhetoric in order to move the audiences' Passions.

Numerous authors provide evidence of the ideology in vogue during the 17th & 18th centuries that theatrical dance composition should be moulded by similar rules of those applied to oratory and, furthermore, that by skilfully using the 'figures' of speech (in this case translated into choreographic and musical figures), one should be able to fully understand what the dancers intend to express without the use of words and most importantly that the dancers should be able to incite certain Passions in the audiences.

At the peak of the artistic production under Louis XIV's auspices, Père Menéstrier states that:

> the *Ballet* expresses the movements ... (through which) one expresses the Nature of things & the disposition of the soul. ... This imitation is made through the movements of

> the body, which are the interpreters of the Passions and of the interior sentiments.[21]

Michel de Pure draws our attention to the fact that

> This representation (the *Ballet*) has many similarities with the 'Dramatic Poetry', as they are both equally pleasing; they represent the past by means of their artifices and by addressing the Soul ... and by either the beauty or the ugliness of it one can instigate both love and hatred in the spectators.[22]

De Pure consistently gives us invaluable in-depth information on the application of rhetoric onto dance composition by explicitly stating that the *Ballet* has the same divisions as oratory. When addressing the 'essence of the Ballet' in chapter XI, he defines it as "a mute representation, where the gestures and movements mean what cannot be expressed by words."[23] And continues stating that the feet and the hands (or rather the steps and gestures) speak for themselves and are able to decipher and develop all the 'mysteries' contained in its design. He also warns his readers of the expressive qualities of dancing by stating that:

> Ballet steps do not simply consist of subtle feet movements or various 'agitations' of the body. They consist of a combination of both and furthermore comprise everything that a well skilled and trained body can give in gestures or actions in order to express anything without the use of words ... but the

> most important and principal rule is to keep the steps expressive and that the face, shoulders, arms and hands make comprehensible what the dancer can not say.[24]

John Weaver equally shows the importance of Passions in the performance of dance also referring that the interpreter (the dancer) should use his positions, gestures, movements and attitudes in order to project a skilful representation of his character.[25]

Even if all the theoretical evidence provided so far failed to convince anyone of the real significance of such expressive devices in theatrical dancing during the 17th and 18th centuries, one cannot disregard the astonishing *Description d'une Sarabande dansée*[26] by Père François Pomey, which amazes his readers with a rich report linking certain movements and attitudes to specific Passions. His testimony also gives us an indication that certain Passions were conveyed through the help of particular rhythmic patterns in dance and music.

One can only conclude from the aforementioned valuable evidence that both dance and music shared some compositional principles, which relate to the declamation of a 'speech without words' with the use of rhetoric as a frame to shape its course and where dance and music interact in order to reinforce the oratory speech. In the same manner, an orator would carefully choose what rhetoric figures to apply and what intensity of emotion to use in each section of his speech in order to stir the audiences emotions (or 'Passions'), composers and choreographers alike employed specific

musical & chorological figures, which relate to each other and have specific functions in the discourse.

Contemporaneous insights

Despite the vast amount of evidence provided by primary sources, very few researchers and scholars in the later part of the 20th century and early 21st century have turned their attention to the application of rhetoric, oratory and the 'Theory of the Passions' onto 17th and 18th century dance & music compositions. As far as one can ascertain, scholars such as Patricia Ranum[27] tend to provide an analytical approach concerning text rhythm and accentuation in relation to musical figures and the overall phrasing of a given piece. Betty Bang Mather and Dean Karns[28] venture further afield by comparing choreographic phrasing with the textural music characteristics in the *Passacaille de Persée* in accordance to the parameters established by oratory and its subdivisions as prescribed by Lamy. Judith Schwartz[29] adopts a similar approach to Mather in categorically subdividing the *Chaconne d'Amadis* into distinct oratory sections; and so does Régine Astier[30], when analysing the *Chaconne pour Femme* ('*de Phaeton*'). Although not clearly stating so, the aforementioned scholars seem to share the belief that the expression of passions in dancing is restrictedly applied to the so called 'Spanish Sarabande' (as richly described by Pomey) and in dance forms, which they assumedly relate to it, namely the *Chaconne* and the *Passacaille*. None of these scholars provide a minute analysis of dance steps in relation to music figures, constraining their visualisation to a rather overall view of a given work. The intrinsic relation between step sequences and music figures has, unfortunately, not

been explored. This gap will only be definitively and efficiently covered by means of a deep and well-informed research through systematically comparing, cataloguing and cross-referencing choreographic and musical sequences framed by the oratory subdivisions and relating to the expression of Passions; therefore breaking new grounds in the performance practice of early dance and music with an original and unprecedented scholarly approach.

Notes:

[1] Ken Pierce. Dance notation systems in late 17th-century France. *Early Music*, 1998, 26 (2), 287-99.
[2] Raoul-Auger Feuillet. *Chorégraphie ou l'Art décrire la Danse*. Paris, 1700, reprint Broude Brothers (New York, 1968).
[3] Du Manoir, Guillaume, *La Marriage de la Musique avec la Danse*. Paris, 1664, p.59, reprint Arnaldo Forni Editore, Bologna, 1985.
[4] *Ibid.*, p.74.
[5] "*it is simply not enough to have the desire to dance and to express ideas through steps and patterns and even to have the legs and feet and a good disposition to perform this Art; but overall it is necessary to have a 'basis' for this exercise; in other words one needs harmony, melody, rules, bars, movements, cadence and one shall say that the composition of a tune precedes the composition of the steps. They must be inseparable, otherwise it would be impossible to teach or to learn any dance; and this exercise* (the dance) *would be a body*

without a Soul, an excitement without attractiveness, posture without any orderliness." – *Ibid.*, p.11-12.

[6] Morel, Horace. *Ballet de l'Harmonie*. Paris, 1632, preface.

[7] Bicknell, Jeanette. Descartes's Rhetoric: Roads, Foundations, and Difficulties in the Method. *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 2003, 36 (1), p.25.

[8] Dusin, Jean. *Les trois livres de la rhétorique d'Aristote traduits du Grec en Français par Jean Dusin*. Paris, 1608.

[9] Cassandre, François. *La rhétorique d'Aristote*. Paris, 1654.

[10] DuRoure, Jacques. *La rhétorique française*. Paris, 1662.

[11] Lamy, Bernard. *De l'Art de Parler avec un Discours dans lequel on donne une idée de l'Art de Persuader*. Paris, 1678; and *Nouvelles Refléxions sur l'Art Poétique*. Paris, 1668.

[12] Harriss, Ernest Charles, *Johann Mattheson's Der vollkommene Capellmeister: a revised translation with critical commentary*, UMI Research Press (Michigan, 1981).

[13] Mersenne, Marin. *Harmonie Universelle, contenant la théorie et la pratique de la musique*. Paris, 1636, p.365.

[14] De Pure, Michel. *Idée des spectacles anciens et nouveaux*. Paris, 1668, p.268, reprint Éditions Minkoff (Geneve, 1972).

[15] *Ibid.*, p.282.

[16] Descartes, René. *Les Passions de l'âme*. Paris, 1649. In: Cottingham, John (translator) *The Philosophical Writtings of Descartes*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985, p.325-404.

[17] Desjardins, Lucie. Dévoiler l'intime: la savante éloquence des passions au XVIIe siècle, in *Abstracts from the 65e Congrès de l'Acfas – Association Francophone pour le Savoir*, ed. Manon Brunet. Quebec, 1997, p.86-113.

[18] Morel, Horace. *Ballet de l'Harmonie* (Paris, 1632), preface

[19] Woodbury, Jeffrey. *Bernard Lamy's Rhetoric and Perspective: Towards an Interdisciplinary Theory of Interpretation*, PhD Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1995.

[20] Lamy, Bernard. *De l'art de parler avec un discurs dans lequel on donne une idée de l'Art de Persuader*. Paris, 1678, p.241-291.

[21] Ménestrier, Claude-François. *Des ballets anciens et modernes selon les règles du theatre*. Paris, 1682, p.41, reprint Éditions Minkoff (Geneve, 1972).

[22] De Pure, *Idée des spectacles*, p.211.

[23] *Ibid.*, p.210.

[24] *Ibid.*, p.248-49.

[25] *"Stage-dancing was at first design'd for Imitation; to explain Things conceiv'd in the Mind, by the Gestures and Motions of the Body, and plainly and intelligibly representing Actions, Manners and Passions; so that the Spectator might perfectly understand the Performer by these his Motions, tho' he say not a Word. Thus far the Excellency of the Art appears; but its Beauties consist in the regulated Motion of all Parts, by forming the Body, Head, Arms and Feet, into such Positions, Gestures and Movements, as represent the aforesaid Passions, Manners and Actions ... And without the help of an Interpreter, a Spectator shall at Distance ... be capable*

of understanding the Subject of the Story represented, and able to distinguish the several Passions, Manners or Actions; as of Love, Anger, and the like."- Weaver, John. *An essay towards the history of dancing*. London, 1712. In: Ralph, Richard. *The Life and Works of John Weaver*. Dance Books, London, 1985, p.160-161.

[26] *"At first he danced with a totally charming grace, with a serious and circumspect air, with an equal and slow rhythm ... Then, standing taller and more assertively, and raising his arms to half-height and keeping them partly extended, he performed the most beautiful steps ... Sometimes he would glide imperceptibly, with no apparent movement of his feet and legs, and seemed to slide rather than step. Sometimes ... he would remain suspended, immobile, and half leaning to the side with one foot in the air; and then, compensating for the rhythmic unit that had gone by, with another more precipitous unit he would almost fly, so rapid was his motion ... Now and then he would let a whole rhythmic unit go by, moving no more than a statue and then, setting off like an arrow, he would be at the other end of the room ... But all this was nothing compared to what was observed when this gallant began to express the emotions of his soul through the motions of his body and reveal them in his face, eyes, steps and all his actions. Sometimes he would cast languid and Passionate glances through a slow and languid rhythmic unit; and then, as though weary of being obliging, he would avert his eyes, as if he wished to hide his Passion; and with a more precipitous motion, would snatch away the gift he had tendered. Now and again he would express anger and spite with an impetuous and turbulent rhythmic unit;*

and then, evoking a sweeter passion by more moderate motions, he would sigh, swoon, let his eyes wander languidly; and certain sinuous movements of the arms and body, nonchalant, disjointed and passionate, made him appear so admirable and so charming that throughout this enchanting dance he won as many hearts as he attracted spectators" - Pomey, François. 'Description d'une Sarabande dansée', *Le dictionaire royal augmenté*. Lyon, 1671, p.22.

[27] Ranum, Patricia. Audible rhetoric and mute rhetoric: the 17th century French sarabande. *Early Music*, 1986, 14 (1), 22-39; and Y a t-il une rhetorique des airs de danse Français? In: *Die Sprache der Zeichen und Bilder: Rhetorik und nonverbale Kommunikation in der fruhen Neuzeit*. Marburg, 1990, p.238-254.

[28] Mather, Betty Bang and Dean Karns. *Dance rhythms of the French Baroque: A handbook for performance*. Bloomington, 1987, p.119-125.

[29] Schwartz, Judith. The passacaille in Lully's Armide: phrase structure in the choreography and the music. *Early Music*, 1998, 26 (2), p.300-320.

[30] Astier, Régine. The influence of Greek rhetoric on the composition and interpretation of baroque stage dances. In: Stradou, Dorra (editor) *Papers from the 5th International Conference on Dance Research: Dance and Ancient Greece*, New York, 1991, p.199-212.