

Introduction

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The theme of the conference was the implied question: Is historical dance to be treated as a serious attempt at the re-creation of the dances of the past, in all their technical detail and physical mastery, or are they to be left as the province of the amateur, as recreation and re-enactment in fancy dress? At the same time there is the underlying question: What exactly do we know about Early Dance from the sources that remain available to us? How authentic can the dance reconstructions from this source material be, when the whole context in which they existed has changed? And finally, how might this knowledge be used, as material or as inspiration, for the creation of new forms of dance?

The contrast with the situation of Early Music is stark. Kimiko Okamoto explores the differences between these two sisterly disciplines in her paper on “separate paths”. The principal source of difference lies, of course, in the adoption of notation: While music had very early on developed a consistent and unique written notation, leading to the creation of a vast corpus of canonical works, dance had many different notations, few of which were widely adopted over time or space. Our corpus of recorded dances prior to the 19th century thus consists of only a few hundred examples, compared to the many thousand musical works recorded on paper. This relative poverty of the historical record for dance, compared with music, leads to a different **kind** of history.

Is there a need, therefore, for more ‘historically informed’ dance? The situation in which this most clearly presents itself is with the reconstruction of 18th century

‘baroque’ opera. Few professional productions of 18th century operas on major London stages have made any attempt at 18th century dance, while all seem studiously to have paid obeisance to 18th century musical techniques, even when using modern instruments (or voices). To dance historians this rankles, as it suggests both neglect and ignorance of historical sources, even if a rational case for the use of modern dance in such a context can easily be made. Things may be marginally better in France, where recent productions (such as that of Lully’s *Atys*) have placed equal emphasis on authentic staging (including dance) as on using the ‘correct’ instruments. Mind you, we may already have lost an essential part of authenticity way back in the 18th century when David Garrick forbade the audience from sitting on the stage to watch and comment on the performance!

This leads inevitably to the general question of ‘authenticity’ in early dance. In this regard, Georgina Boyes poses the very simple question that sorely exercised the minds of those at the head of the Folk Dance Revival: What to wear? This question came to a head, apparently, in the conflicting ideas of Mary Neal and Cecil Sharp. Mary was happy to see her *Espérance* dance club members – urban working class – enjoying their limited leisure in the innocent activity of country dancing, dressed in ‘rural’ smocks and bonnets [Fig.1]. Sharp on the other hand, insisted that his strictly disciplined middle class adherents performed in a uniform of cricket whites and plimsolls [Fig.2]. Both, of course, to our eyes highly inauthentic, even bizarre!¹

For some critics of Sharp (such as Rolf Gardiner) dance would only become authentic if the original context could somehow be restored – one in which farmers' boots would replace the poncy footwear adopted by the urban middle classes for dancing country dances in the church hall. To many this also meant re-invigorating those rural festivals that were in danger of being lost through increasing urbanisation. To the puritanical Gardiner or Sharp, the costumed prancing of Mary Neal's 20th century Londoners pretending to be 18th century rustics would not do, no matter how much they enjoyed it.

But if authenticity requires restitution of the context then we are probably backing a hopeless cause. For if the context of an art form has changed or disappeared, is it still 'real'? This problem is particularly acute in 'folk' music, although a similar problem applies to the performance of essentially religious liturgical music in a secular context (such as a concert hall rather than a church). The case of Early Music is again an interesting pointer to the difficulty – for what could be more anachronistic than listening to Bach on a CD (or worse still, listening on an iPod to Bach cantatas downloaded from the Internet!) The nearest equivalent in Early Dance – a videoclip of a baroque dance on YouTube – seems almost too 'real' by comparison, while the performance of costumed galliards in the context of a shopping mall is no more than mildly anachronistic.

Yet it is worth reminding ourselves that context and costume are eternal themes, for similar things were happening in 15th century Burgundy. It may seem strange to us now, but 'what to wear' for the dance may well have been a serious issue even then, given their concern to evoke the glories of ancient Greece and Rome by dressing as Jason, Hercules, or other classical heroes. Bill Tuck's paper explores some of these questions.

Inevitably, an unrestrained passion for dressing up can lead to accusations of amateurism, ignorance and anachronism. Has our understanding of the Renaissance been

coloured too much through watching too many bad movies? Have we unwittingly adopted the superficial aspects of the past that the film industry finds easiest to convey, ending up with a romanticised view rich in costumed detail but devoid of social content? [Cecilia Nocilli] Or does film itself throw new light on the dance that otherwise would not be available? [Françoise Carter]

This brings us back to the importance of analysing the original source material. Despite the fragmentary nature of much of the historical record, that is all, ultimately, that we have to work on to understand the past. [Moira Goff]

Yet even this record is open to a variety of different interpretations and may itself prove a useful starting point for a new and radical creation – not of 'historical' dance but of a genuinely new and original form.[Anne Daye] This approach, of taking early dance as a starting point for creation, is perhaps one that has been least explored. The work of Martha Graham and her musical director and accompanist Louis Horst shows how an understanding of and fascination with early dance forms can lead to great creative leaps in fashioning a new repertoire.

Klaus Abromeit also takes an inventive approach in his re-interpretation of Lambranzi – it may seem fanciful to some, but the creative potential is impressive. It also poses serious questions as to what we really understand of the source material. Many of us will have used the plates from Lambranzi to create fanciful interpretations of the basic text and visual representation without realizing the possibility of much deeper levels of interpretation that can be derived from a 'close reading' of the material. Here some earlier unpublished work by Klaus, giving a detailed study of the first 'Entre' plate of Lambranzi, has been used as an introduction to his conference paper on the dances of *Scaramuzza*. It shows the extraordinary richness of information that may be derived from the illustrations in this frequently undervalued but oft-quoted work.

And we can, nevertheless, still get it completely wrong, as the example of the Bayadère shows. In her well-researched paper, Tiziana Leucci explores the complex background to this famous ballet. The character of the temple dancer – the “bayadère” (from the Portuguese “baylhaderas”, meaning female dancers) – became known in Europe from the 16th century on. In Paris in 1830 Maria Taglioni created the role of the bayadère in an opera-ballet entitled *Le Dieu et la Bayadère*. This so captivated the French public that when a group of real Indian temple dancers, or *devadâsî's*, visited the city in 1838, the public were rather neutral in their response, believing that they were not quite the real thing as portrayed by Taglioni’s stage version. Having recently seen both Indian classical temple dance and the later Petipa version of the *Bayadère*, we can readily attest to the striking differences between the Indian reality and the Western fantasy. Yet if we are prepared to accept this ‘ethnographic fantasy’, why should we not also be prepared to accept the ‘anachronism’ of modern dance in an 18th century opera? If the past really is simply ‘another country’, then surely we can be as cavalier with ethnographic reality as we like?

This provides a convenient link into the following paper, which takes as its case study the productions of the Polish dance company *Cracovia Danza*, for it was in Krakow that we recently had the pleasure of seeing and talking to the Indian dancers of Alaknanda Bose’s group (while in St Petersburg some months later, we were to witness our first complete performance of *La Bayadère* at the Maryinsky Theatre, scene of its original performance in 1877).

‘Kitsch’ and ‘milky-bar-art’ are the two conceptual metaphors underlying Tomasz Marcin Wrona’s discussion of the court ballet productions of the *Cracovia Danza* company. How do you stage court ballet without falling into the trap of creating kitsch? With ‘milky-bar-art’ we are dealing with a slightly more complex concept, derived from both ‘milk bar’ (a sort of café, prevalent in the 1950s and

still familiar in Eastern Europe, in which the main product was a supposedly healthy ‘milk shake’) and ‘milky bar’ (a milk chocolate based product of dubious nutritional value). The value of these concepts is that they provide something concrete and familiar to serve as a metaphorical framework which can then be used to analyse the more complex problem of understanding ‘kitsch’ and its alternative, ‘high art’.

Metaphor is again the subject of Catherine Bowness’ paper on dance performance. She likens the study of historical dance to trying to capture an ice cube in the hand – inevitably the mere act of holding it causes it to melt and change to something quite different. The broad results of a questionnaire survey show the diversity of attitudes to early dance, among practitioners, those who give them employment, and audiences.

Finally, Michael Bukht gives a spirited analysis of some the problems of ‘authenticity’: “What matters, in the end, is to keep early dance interesting, properly evidenced and fun for its researchers, dancers and watchers”. The challenge is to help educate the audience in context, style and quality of performance without destroying the pleasure.

But when all is said and done there is a strong case for taking heed of that almost clichéd imperative to ‘just do it!’ To give due prominence to this ultra-pragmatic approach we have used the introductory paper by Jackie Marshall-Ward and brief accounts of the workshop demonstrations by Barbara Kane (on Isadora Duncan dance) and Nira Pullin (on Ragtime dance – with William Wilson) as ‘book-ends’ for this unique collection of papers.



Fig.1. Country dancers at Stratford upon Avon 1911

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Fig.2. EFDSS dancers at Cheltenham, c.1920-1922

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Notes

¹ Derek Schofield, 'The Everyday Dance of the Country Folk' *English Dance & Song*, vol. 73 No. 1, Spring 2011, pp. 12-13