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The Dancing Master in early eighteenth century Dublin.

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I would like to look at some dancing masters working in Dublin city during the early eighteenth century. In fact, Dublin city is ideal for a such a study, as it contains every layer of eighteenth century life. Dublin was ranked as one of the top ten European capitals of the early eighteenth century. It was home to the Vice-regal Court, the Irish Houses of Parliament and the country's law courts, and therefore played host to the country's most powerful and important people, the nobility, gentry, lawyers and judiciary. As an established port, and as the banking and financial centre of the country, it was home to a wealthy merchant, citizen and banking class. Finally, it housed the country's only university, Trinity College Dublin, making it the education centre of the country.¹

The role of dance within this social framework was very much to the fore. To the nobility and gentry, dancing was an essential element of a young person's education. Ease of movement and a nonchalant air bespoke the gentleman or lady. Instruction and knowledge of dancing, however, were not confined to this class. Anyone who could afford dancing-masters' fees could receive tuition at one of the many dancing schools in the city. These dancing schools were particularly important to any wealthy merchant or banker who was moving up the social scale during the eighteenth century, and to those attending the Lord Mayor's Annual Balls.

I would like to present some of the names of these eighteenth century dancing masters. My findings to this end are primarily derived from a trawl of the Dublin newspapers of the eighteenth century. However, I would like to preface the presentation with the caveat, that

often the most prominent and successful Dublin dancing masters remain undocumented. Generally newspaper notices pertaining to dancing-masters, detail a move from one location to another, commencement of business, or in one or two cases, aim to clear up a misunderstanding with respect to a particular school. Sometimes the name of a dancing master is only learned on reading a death notice in a newspaper. Such was the case with Mr. Goston who died at his house in Werburgh's Street on 5th March 1742. The *Dublin Gazette* described him as a 'noted Dancing-Master.'² Therefore, while newspaper references are the main source of names, subscription lists where available, are invaluable.

One of the earliest eighteenth century references to a Dublin dancing master crops up in the subscription list to John Weaver's *Orchesography, or the Art of Dancing*, 1706, when a Mr. Delamain of Dublin is listed.³ That same year, Delamain and a Mr. Smith of Dublin subscribed to *A Collection of Ball Dances perform'd at Court, by Isaac, and writ down by Weaver*.⁴ Nothing more is known of Smith, but the Delamain of Dublin listed here is most probably John Delamain, one of the city's most important dancing masters, who had very close links with the Theatre Royal, Smock Alley, and as his name crops up on quite a few subscription lists with other Theatre Royal performers throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it is suspected that he also performed at the Theatre Royal, Smock Alley during this decade.

John Delamain was still active in 1735, when he is listed as one of the managers of the Ridotto, at the Theatre Royal, Aungier Street, along with Anthony Moreau (the theatre's

foremost dancer of the seventeen twenties and early seventeen thirties).⁵ The Ridotto in Dublin was essentially made up of a concert of music, followed by refreshments and then a ball. It evidently fell to Delamain and Moreau to direct dancing on these evenings. John Delamain was probably the father of William Delamain, the stage dancer and dancing master who performed at Smock Alley throughout the seventeen thirties and forties, partnering the young Peg Woffington during the late thirties, and dancing in the Smock Alley corps de ballet, when Signora Barbarina visited Dublin with Garrick in 1742.⁶ There are no newspaper notices to suggest that William Delamain taught while performing at the Theatre Royal, but in the light of his father's success and the knowledge that teaching was quite common to performers, it is suggested that he did. He was certainly listed as a Dancing-master by the 1750's, by which time his theatre career had ended, and was quite prominent in the city then, as he was elected Marshal-keeper of the city Marshalsea in 1751.⁷ A Mr. Delamain was appointed Dancing-Master to the Hibernian Academy, when Mr. Morris died in January 1768, but whether this was William, or indeed a son who followed in his footsteps, is unclear.⁸ In view of the fact that Morris was a theatre name, it could be the same William.

Another Delamain, Mr. Delamain the younger Brother, of Dublin, subscribed to Pemberton's *An Essay for the further Improvement of Dancing*.⁹ Could this be the Richard Delamain encountered in subscribers lists along with John Delamain and other Theatre Royal acting names in the seventeen twenties? Subscriptions to these dance publications indicate that the Dublin dancing master fraternity was very familiar with the names and works of Isaac, L'Abbe and Pécour. It also throws up the other question - How many Dublin dancing masters bought copies of Essex and Weaver that did not contain subscription lists?

Before leaving the Delamains, another member of the family, Faith Power, alias Delamain, was also concerned with

education. She placed a notice in *Pue's Occurrences* of January 1733, advertising the fact that she had just set up a Boarding School near Great Britain Street, "where young Ladies may be taught French, Musick [sic], Singing, and Dancing to perfection, by the best Performers in this Kingdom."¹⁰ The use of the word performers and not masters, as was more common to such advertisements, hints that she is related to the performing Delamains.

Other dancing masters from the early decades of the century, whose names alone are known are Mr. Rogers, who in 1707 had a dancing school in Thomas Street, and traveled as far as Leixlip to teach at Mr. Davy's school.¹¹ Another is Mr. Sloane, who returned to Dublin from England, where he had kept a boarding school, to follow the same career.¹² He advertised the opening of his school in St Mary's Abby in 1706, but by June of the following year, 1707, advertised that he had removed to Back Lane 'to the house where Mr. Deney, Dancing Master, formerly did live.'¹³

Back Lane had quite an association with dancing and fencing schools throughout the eighteenth century, and by 1715, it is known that Mr. Kavanagh, also a dancing master, kept a School there. In that year he advertised that Mademoiselle Mc Carthy had lately come from France to keep the boarding School at his house, where "Speaking of French, Singing and Dancing" were particularly advertised.¹⁴ The notice ended "Mr. Kavanagh suffers no Men into his School." Over six months later, Kavanagh, ever mindful of his school's reputation, sought to dispel any whiff of scandal that might tarnish it. He advertised most particularly that "Whereas it hath been reported, and is thereby frequently believed, that Hogins the Barber was shot thro' the Head, by a Soldier attending the Dancing School of Mr. Kavanagh, in Back Lane, the 20th inst: These are to give notice that it was not at the school of Mr. Kavanagh, but at the school of Mr. Cantwell, in Back lane aforesaid, the said Hogins was kill'd."¹⁵ I have not encountered

Mr. Cantwell again, nor indeed another, more pugnacious dancing master, a Mr. Hoskins. In 1715, he received publicity in the *Dublin Post Man*, and not for his skills as a dancing master. Apparently he was drinking in Essex Street with one Mr. Whitman; an altercation ensued, during which “Hoskins bit of one of Mr. Whitman’s ears close to the Head for which he is committed to the Black-Dog Prison.”¹⁶

Of the many notices pertaining to boarding schools contained in the Dublin newspapers during the early eighteenth century, almost all carry a line to the effect that music, dancing and fencing would be taught. Indeed one such advertisement illustrates the very businesslike nature of peripatetic

dancing masters. The Rev. Charles Smith, who was redeveloping the school at Finglass[sic] wrote “A Dancing Master will also attend, as soon as he can get Encouragement by any reasonable number of Scholars.”¹⁷

By the seventeen-thirties, most of the newspaper notices encountered relate to dancing masters who have a connection with the Dublin stage, and usually refer to benefit performances for the said dancing masters. Some advertise availability to teach. For example in 1731, Charles Lalauze who had been in the city since December 1729, advertised dancing lessons. As with most young dancing masters starting out, he taught at home three days a week, Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and abroad the other three, Tuesdays Thursdays and Saturdays; when he was prepared to attend “any Persons of Quality, who have seats within Three or Four Miles of the City, twice a week.” As a performer, Lalauze’s dancing had been singled out in an unspoken prologue of early 1730 with the lines the “Pig-tail’d Beaus to win the like Applause,/Take for their Patterns Phillips and Lalauz [sic].”¹⁸ Lalauze was French and had fairground connections, he had worked at the Haymarket in 1726 with Signora Violante, and so was bringing his training to Dublin. In fact his notice in

Dickson’s Dublin Intelligence specifically refers to his previous work: “Mr. Lalauze, Dancing Master, who has perform’d in the Opera Houses and Theatres in Paris (where he was bred) and in the City of London for several years past, intending to make his Residence for some time in this City, will teach Ladies and Gentlemen, Young Misses and Masters to Dance, after the newest and best manner Practis’d at Court, Assemblies, Operas or Schools.”¹⁹ Lalauze’s later work as a dancing master, with Garrick in London in the seventeen-fifties, has been well documented.²⁰

Three other dancing masters who advertised in Dublin newspapers and who also danced on the Dublin stage during the seventeen thirties were, Walsh, Leigh and James Cummins. We know that in 1736 Cummins placed a series of advertisements in *Hamilton’s Dublin Daily Advertiser*, informing his students that he had removed from ‘his old Dancing School in Fishamble Street to the Stationer’s Hall on Cork Hill, where he attends Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from Three till Seven.’²¹ When he died, his widow was given a benefit at the Theatre.²²

As with London counterparts, Dublin’s dancing masters taught deportment, as well as dance. As Weaver put it, “I might add, that a moderate knowledge in the Rules of Good Breeding gives a man some assurance, and makes him easier in all Companies. For want of this, I have seen a Professor of a literal science at a loss to salute a Lady; and a most excellent mathematician not able to determine whether he should stand or sit while my Lord drank to Him. It is the proper business of the Dancing Master to regulate these matters.”²³ This was put in more forthright terms in a letter to *Hibernicus*, contained in the *Dublin Weekly Journal* of 1727, “and every Dancing Master will undertake the Modelling [sic] of a Country Squire, however Awkward and Uncouth, no doubt by walking the restive Beast a while in Trammels, to reform his swaggering gate into a genteel easy motion.”²⁴ Is this evidence of posture

contraptions in Dublin in the seventeen twenties?

Dublin, like London, had its fashionable resorts, where the teachings of the dancing master were on show: St. Stephen's Green, the Deer-park, the Strand, Lucas's coffee house, the playhouse, concerts of music, the ridotto, assemblies, and balls, both public state balls and private balls. In the summer there were the added attractions of the spa and race meetings. However the highlight of Dublin society was attending grand balls at Dublin Castle, where minuets opened the proceedings. It is to be assumed that one prominent dancing master was integral to these proceedings, I have yet to find that name. By the end of the century, 1799, it is known that Fontaine, who was the foremost dancing master of the seventeen-eighties and nineties, and who can be described as the d'Egville of Dublin, fulfilled this role. A review of the St Patrick's Day Ball at Dublin Castle in 1799 specifically notes his presence: 'The ladies were induced to the ball-room by their old favourite proceptor, Mr. Fontaine, sen.'²⁵

But as noted earlier, formal balls were also enjoyed by citizens and their wives. In December 1737, the *Dublin Journal* reported "Last Monday the Right Hon. the Lord Mayor gave a very grand Entertainment and a Ball, to several of the Nobility and Gentry at the Mayoralty House. And last Thursday his Lordship gave another Ball to the Citizens and their Wives, at which were present several Ladies of Quality and great Distinction, who were regaled in the most elegant Manner."²⁶

Just as dancing masters played a role in superintending grand balls, they were also instrumental to the success of entertainments associated with the numerous spas in the country. They frequently advertised a willingness to compose new tunes and dances for associated dance gatherings. One Dublin Spa, the Temple-Oge Spa, was even the subject of a ballad, written by one of its devotees. I would like to finish up by paying

particular attention to this ballad as it is one of the few Dublin poems of the time to feature dance. The author while capturing the atmosphere of the place throws up the names of two dancing-masters not previously encountered. The ballad, which is entitled *The Temple-Oge Ballad* is dedicated to the first of these dancing-masters and in true eighteenth century discretion, is incomplete: he is simply noted as the 'worthy manager, Mr B—f—n.'²⁷ The dedication confirms that this dancing master was responsible for organising and running the dancing. It begins "As all the dancing Ladies go thro' your Hands, to their respective Partners, you are the properest Person to speak a good Word in favour of the following Song, and its Author." The author then goes on to reassure him and the reader that the ballad contains 'nothing but Sincerity and Truth.' It is set to the tune 'To you fair Ladies now at hand.'

The second verse gives Monday as the day on which Company meet at Templogue, and paints the determination of the young Dublin Ladies, to be at this fashionable resort:

Those Damsels that were us'd of late,
To rise when some had Din'd,
Now leave their Toilets pleasing Seat,
For Air that's unconfin'd.
On *Mondays rise by Six – O strange!
What stubborn Hearts can't
Musick change?
*The Day the Company meet at the
Well.

The piece confirms that after breakfast the dancing begins: "The Fiddles now with sprightly Grace,/ Invite them to the Jigg." And the author, while mentioning several ladies, singles out a Miss Sm-y for her dancing skills: "By the Major she acquir'd Fame," he then goes on to explain that "The Major is a celebrated Dance, which Miss Sm-y Performs to Perfection." In the eleventh verse he clearly describes a long dance when he writes:

When all prepare their Legs to Prance,
Each Sex in Rows apart,

They long to blend them in the Dance,
And shew their hopping Art;
A Tune they want, and can't agree,
Moll bids them play, The best
in THREE,
With a fal,...

Miss Moll's dancing master is then specifically mentioned in the next verse, verse XII. He is a Mr Lee, 'whose forming Hands/first taught her the Coupee.' Lee gets the following footnote in the ballad "Mr. Lee is a noted little Dancing-Master, who had the good Fortune to initiate this Lady in the Rudiments of his Profession, and his Scholar sufficiently Rewards him for his Care, by letting the World know he taught her." The author wraps up the ballad in the twenty second verse, not before he has turned his attention to a discussion of the men who frequented the Spa.

It is noteworthy that another dancing master, Mr. Murphy, of the Mallow Spa, County Cork, also advertised his ability to 'Make a Minuet for every ball Night if required.'²⁸ This suggests composing the tune as well as the dance. Indeed the musical training required of a dancing master is attested to later in the century. In 1774 Mr. Cardot, a

dancing master placed the following advertisement in *Saunders's Newsletter and Daily Advertiser* looking for an apprentice. It clearly states that the ability to play fiddle is a prerequisite of apprenticeship:

"Mr Cardot, Dancing-master, from Paris, at Mr. Powell's, Jervis-street, wants a young Boy, about 12 or 14 Years of Age, who can play the Fiddle well, as an Apprentice; if his Merit deserves he shall have Wages; otherwise, if any one has a smart Boy, and will bind themselves for him, they may apply every Day to Mr Cardot, after eight o'clock in the Evening. No one will be taken but with good Security."²⁹

It remains to conclude that Dublin city certainly enjoyed its share of dancing masters during the early eighteenth century. Dancing masters who kept very much abreast of continental and London trends, who delighted in importing dances by renowned dancing masters and in creating dances of their own.

Notes

¹ Dickson, David, *The Place of Dublin in the Eighteenth Century Irish Economy*. In: Devine and Dickson, *Ireland and Scotland 1600-1850*. Edinburgh 1983.

² *Dublin Gazette*, 2 – 6 March 1742.

³ Weaver, John, *Orchesography, or the Art of Dancing, by Characters and Demonstrative Figures*. London 1706.

⁴ Weaver, John, *A Collection of Ball-Dances perform'd at Court. All Compos'd by Mr. Isaac, and writ down in Characters by John Weaver, Dancing Master*. London 1706.

⁵ *Dublin Evening Post*, 18-22 November 1735.

⁶ See generally Greene and Clark, *The Dublin Stage, 1720-1745*, Associated University Presses, 1993.

⁷ *Dublin Weekly Journal*, 16 February, 1751.

⁸ *Freeman's Journal*, 5-9 January 1768.

⁹ Pemberton, *An Essay for the further Improvement of Dancing; Being a collection of Figure Dances, of several numbers, compos'd by the most Eminent Masters; Describ'd in characters after the newest Manner of Monsieur Feuillet. To which is Added Three Single Dances*. London 1711.

¹⁰ *Pue's Occurrences* 6-10 March 1733.

¹¹ *Dublin Gazette*, 21-24 June 1707.

¹² *Dublin Mercury*, 2-5 March 1706.

¹³ *Dublin Gazette*, 21-24 June 1707.

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- ¹⁴ The Post Boy, 15 June 1715.
- ¹⁵ *Walley's Dublin Post Boy*, 5 January 1716.
- ¹⁶ *Dublin Post Man*, 13 June 1715.
- ¹⁷ *Dublin Gazette*, 7–10 February 1708.
- ¹⁸ *Prologue upon the Beaus*, Half-sheet, [Dublin circa 1730].
- ¹⁹ *Dickson's Dublin Intelligence*, 8 March 1731.
- ²⁰ Milhous, Judith, David Garrick and the Dancing Master's Apprentice. *Dance Research*, 1991, 11(1), 13-25.
- ²¹ *Hamilton's Dublin Daily Advertiser*, 22 October, 1736.
- ²² *Reilly's Dublin Newsletter*, 11-14 April 1741.
- ²³ *The Spectator*, 17 May 1711.
- ²⁴ *Dublin Weekly Journal*, 8 April, 1727.
- ²⁵ *Freeman's Journal*, 28 March 1799.
- ²⁶ *Faulkner's Dublin Journal*, 28 Dec 1736 – 1 Jan. 1737.
- ²⁷ *The Temple-Oge Ballad*, Rathfarnham, Printed at the Cherry-Tree, 1730.
- ²⁸ ²⁸ *Pue's Occurrences*, 15-18 April 1738.
- ²⁹ *Saunder's Newsletter and Daily Advertiser*, 27 – 29 April 1774.

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Weaver, John, *Orchesography, or the Art of Dancing, by Characters and Demonstrative Figures.* London 1706. *A Collection of Ball-Dances perform'd at Court. All Compos'd by Mr. Isaac, and writ down in Dancing Master.* London 1706.

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- Dickson, David, The Place of Dublin in the Eighteenth Century Irish Economy. In: Devine and Dickson, *Ireland and Scotland 1600-1850.* Edinburgh 1983.
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