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Scholars and Apprentices: training dancers in London c.1700-1750

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Introduction

'Young Gentlemen are in the handsomest manner and at reasonable Rates boarded and in the most Rational way taught Writing, Arithmetic, Merchants Accompts... and the Mathematicks; also English, Latin, Greek, French, Drawing, Fencing, Musick & Dancing'. So ran an advertisement for John Weston's Academy at Greenwich in the *Daily Journal* of 16 March 1733, and it introduces us to one aspect of dance training in the first half of the eighteenth century.

There were of course many different levels of expertise in the teaching of social dance. The rather cruel poem *The Dancing Master a Satyr* (1722), suggests that at one end of the spectrum were the likes of the swaggering oaf Mr Tyrrell, 'swol'n with fat Ale and red with Holland's gin', belching and cursing his way through the dances; and there were also those dancing-masters who resorted to gruesome contraptions for teaching posture and turnout¹ in the worst possible way. At the other end of the spectrum however were the respected and well connected dancing-masters such as Messrs Isaac, Gros court, and Caverley, who have left us examples of what they taught in the form of notated solos, duets, or figured minuets and jigs for larger groups.

Some practitioners however sought dance training or performance in the theatre. Some were trained by the likes of Mr Caverley or his own protégé Kellom Tomlinson, whose teaching skills extended beyond social dance to the training of pupils who performed on stage.

There was also Anthony L'Abbé, who had been a famous dancer and choreographer in

his own right, and must have influenced many other performers of his day. Within the theatres the company dancing-masters, often performers themselves, additionally devised dances for the entr'acte entertainments, coached and rehearsed the dancers, and probably also supervised those actors who had to dance in a play or a pantomime: such dancing-masters included the likes of Francis Nivelon and Charles Lalauze². If there was such a thing as a theatrical nursery for dance (that is, training on the job within the theatre), and it seems very likely that to some degree there must have been, then this was probably the category of dancing-master which made it happen.

The main labels applied to trainee dancers in advertisements for stage performances and in writings on dance seem to be 'Mr X's apprentice', 'Mr X's scholar', or 'taught by Mr X'. In theory they meant different things, in practice the situation may be less clear.

Apprentices

The term 'apprentice' was applied, by the eighteenth century, to someone over the age of fourteen who entered into a legal agreement which bound him/her as an apprentice to an employer in the learning and exercise of a specific craft or profession for a set number of years, usually seven (Richardson, 1734, p.2; Jacob, 1729, under 'Apprentice'). Because it was a contractual arrangement, the employer was reciprocally bound to give appropriate instruction to the apprentice, and therefore subject to penalties if he failed to do so. Such cases are sometimes picked up in records of the Courts of Quarter Sessions, since apprentices could

appeal to the magistrates if they felt that they had a grievance against their masters: thus, for example, when Roger Gateley, a surgeon of Clerkenwell, compelled his apprentice Edward Greene to study not as a surgeon but to appear as a 'rope-dancer, tumbler & Jack Pudding' at the London Fairs, the lad complained to the Middlesex Sessions and the Court discharged him from his apprenticeship³. In July 1705 Joseph Rhobotham applied to the magistrates to be discharged from his apprenticeship to the dancing-master John Gros court on the grounds that Gros court had 'beaten him in a very cruel and inhuman manner', but the complaint was dismissed as unproven⁴; Rhobotham therefore had to continue his apprenticeship and emerged by 1711 as a fully-fledged dancing-master in his own right, and a subscriber to Pemberton's *Essay for the Improvement of Dancing* (which of course opens with Gros court's dance, *The Ecchoe*).

Few indentures for dance apprentices survive from the first half of the eighteenth century - John Dennison's, for instance - and we only know about others from references in other documents. For example, the magistrates courts sometimes recorded the apprenticeship itself: thus, as far back as 1688 we can find one of Mr Caverley's apprentices listed in the Middlesex Sessions Book as follows: 'Thomas de Vaux, son of a surgeon of St Martin in the Fields, apprenticed for seven years to Thomas Caverley of St Andrew's Holborn, dancing-master', February 1688⁵.

By 1710 however, masters were supposed to register each apprenticeship and pay a tax on it that was proportionate to its notional value: in other words to the total he would expect to pay out in food, clothing and tuition for his apprentice. However, even a casual trawl through the apprenticeship registers and their (often tiresomely inaccurate) indexes, now in The National Archives at Kew⁶, turns up very few examples of dancers. Fewer than half a dozen occur before 1725⁷ and none of them include either Kellom Tomlinson, who on his own admission was 'placed as an Apprentice with Mr Thomas Caverley' from 1707 to

1714 (Tomlinson, 1735, preface), or Tomlinson's own apprentice who performed at Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1716 and 1721 (Tomlinson/Shennan, 1992, pp. 81,92). One can only assume that there was widespread evasion of registration because of the sizeable tax (6d in the £) that it incurred. When John Weaver, for example, in Shrewsbury registered the apprenticeship of John Cawdwell in 1725, the value of the apprenticeship was £21 and the tax therefore was 10s 6d⁸: nearly a week's wages for a craftsman or shopkeeper of the time. Costs were higher in London of course, where non-theatrical dance apprenticeships seem to have run in the range of £25-35.

Theatrical dance apprenticeships were even more expensive. John Dennison's family paid £105 for his apprenticeship to Charles Lalauze in 1749 (Milhous, 1991, pp.14-15), and another valuation of £105 is known to have been registered by John Thurmond junior, the pantomime dancer-choreographer of Drury Lane theatre, for the apprenticeship of John Evans in 1725⁹. With the tax on that running at £6 5s, why did Thurmond bother to register? Presumably because he found Evans's apprenticeship quite lucrative, for by 1730 the two of them were performing on stage at Drury Lane, and particularly in the new dramatic masque *Cephalus & Procris*. This ran for 86 performances in 1731-1732, during all of which time Thurmond would have been entitled to all of Evans's wages as his apprentice. In the masque Evans danced as one of six tritons, led by Thurmond; they appeared in the final scene in which the temple of Neptune arose from the sea and Neptune directed the apotheosis of the drowned Cephalus and his wife Procris, followed by this dance and a grand chorus. But apart from this one masque, there is not much evidence that John Evans was a meteoric rising star: his few attempts at acting came to nothing, and he rarely danced anything other than small supporting roles - although when he moved to Goodman's Fields theatre in 1733 he did dance Punch to Thurmond's Scaramouche in *The Tavern Bilkers* (see Table 1). Nevertheless, shortly

after Thurmond left the Goodman's Fields company a couple of years later John Evans disappeared without trace¹⁰. So apprenticeship was no guarantee of success.

Scholars

The term 'scholar' was usually employed to refer to one who was taught in a School or Academy, or who received instruction from a particular master (O.E.D., 1989, vol. XIV p.629). From that point of view it probably meant the same things as 'taught by', and the surviving evidence suggests that a 'scholar' or pupil 'taught by' a specific dancing-master could be of any age from young childhood to adulthood.

In terms of social dance, an interesting example of someone 'taught by' was the future Lord Chief Justice Dudley Ryder, who, as a young law student in London, took lessons from a Mr Fernley, and what is joyous is that Ryder kept a detailed diary. Fernley may not have been much good at teaching but was certainly astute, for Ryder seems to have paid him quite a lot for his dancing lessons. For Fernley however it may have been money hard earned, for Ryder was an extremely keen but inept dancer. After one private ball, for example, he recorded proudly, 'I danced a minuet with Mrs Barker... did it but indifferently, but ... I believe it passed off pretty well, though I did not keep the time at all' (Ryder/Matthews, 1939, p.68), and a few weeks later he came seriously unstuck in the dance called *The Briton*, 'where a minuet step comes in unlikely... and everyone looked

upon me as a clumsy dancer' (*ibid.*, pp.127-128). Ryder also went to country dance sessions at Mr Fernley's school, to balls run by the Livery Companies in the City, and even gate-crashed a ball at Court in 1716, although only as an onlooker. While there he watched the Princesses Anne and Amelia (aged 7 and 5) dance, and also noted that the etiquette, for formal minuets at least, was very much as it would be described by Pierre Rameau a decade later (*ibid.*, p.356). We do not know what Mr Fernley thought of his pupil, but the diary makes it clear that the relationship was strictly commercial.

When we look at theatrical dance however, the picture is slightly different. Young women dancers appearing on stage were frequently described in the theatre bills as 'scholars of' or 'taught by'. That these terms were probably interchangeable is suggested by the status of Mrs Evans (probably no relation to John Evans) back in the early 1700s; she was described both as 'Mr Siris's scholar' and as 'taught by Mr Siris' in the press advertisements of her day. And if a woman was teaching or coaching, her pupil was invariably described in the theatre bills as a 'scholar': for example, Miss Bruce, 'scholar of Mrs Elford' in 1705 (London Stage revised, 1996, pp.245-246).

Some 'scholars' appeared on stage with their dancing-masters (*see* Table 2), and the list is by no means exhaustive.

Table 1: John Evans's roles on stage 1730-1734

(Source: *London Stage*. DL = Drury Lane theatre; BF = Bartholomew Fair; GF = Goodman's Fields). **Entries in bold indicate Evans in acting roles**

Date	Theatre & no. of perf'ces	Role(s)	Comment
1730 Oct 28 to 1731 18 May	DL (74)	<i>Cephalus & Procris</i> (one of 6 sea gods / tritons)	'New Dramatic Masque' by Roger. (Thurmond: leading sea god / triton)
1731 Jun 7	DL (1)	<i>Tempest</i> (one of 6 Infernal Spirits)	
1731 Jul 23, 27	DL (2)	<i>Bayes's Opera</i> (Crowdero)	(Bayes: Cibber)
1731 Aug 26	BF (1)	<i>The Banished General</i> (Plausey); & Dancing (one of 3 dancers)	(Replaced as Plausey on 8 Sep)
1731 Oct 16 to Dec 29	DL (11)	<i>Cephalus & Procris</i> (one of 6 sea gods / tritons)	(Thurmond: leading sea god/triton)
1731 Nov 25 to 1732 Apr 6	DL (8)	<i>Perseus & Andromeda with Pierrot Married</i> (a Triton; one of 2 Bridesmen with 2 Bridesmaids)	(Thurmond: Medusa). Serious and comic dancing.
1732 May 6	DL (--)	---	Benefit for Evans + 3, but he is not listed as performing
1732 May 12	DL (1)	<i>Cephalus & Procris</i> (one of 6 sea gods / tritons)	(Thurmond: leading sea god/triton)
1732 Dec 20 to 1733 Apr 25	GF (24)	<i>Amorous Sportsman</i> (one of 4 Followers)	Masque (Thurmond: Sportsman)
1733 Jan 6-May 22, Sep 21, Nov 7	GF (11)	<i>Grand Dance of Masqueraders/ Masquerade Dance</i> (one of 2 Punches)	By Thurmond
1733 Jan 8 to 28, Apr 24 to May 8	GF (10)	<i>Milk Pail Song & Dance</i> (one of 4 men & 5 women)	Bills describe him as 'Mrs Evans'. Benefit Evans & Miss Cole on 8 May
1733 Jan 13 to Dec 14, 1734 Jan 21, Feb 4	GF (16)	<i>The Tavern Bilkers</i> (Punch)	(Thurmond: Scaramouche)
1733 Apr 20,30	GF (2)	Dancing: <i>La Provensalle</i> (in one of 3 couples supporting 2 Provencales)	By d'Vallois
1733 May 11	GF (1)	<i>Virtue Betray'd</i> (Rochford)	Benefit Evans & Miss Cole
1733 Oct 25	GF (1)	<i>The Inconstant</i> (one of 4 Bravos)	(Bravos later omitted)
1733 Nov 12 to 28, 1734 Jan 5	GF (11)	<i>The Happy Nuptials, with the Amorous Sportsman</i> (one of 4 Followers)	(Thurmond: Sportsman)
1733 Nov 29 to Dec 7	GF (8)	<i>The Rival Queens</i> : Pyrrhic dance proper to the play (one of 4 Followers)	(Thurmond: Mars)
1733 Dec 28 to 1734 Jan 1	GF (4)	<i>The Comical Story of Don Quixote</i> with 'new Rural Dance proper to the play' (in one of 4 couples)	
1734 Jan 14 to Feb 4	GF (5)	<i>Indian Emperor</i> , with Tambourine Dance 'in the Indian manner proper to the play' (one of 3 men & 4 women)	(Dancers led by Thurmond)
1734 Jan 31, Feb 4	GF (2)	<i>Macbeth</i> , with Dancing (one of 4 dancers)	
1734 Feb 11 to May 23	GF (40)	<i>Britannia or The Royal Lovers</i> (Grenadier)	(Thurmond: 1 st Swain)
1734 Apr 19, May 3	GF (2)	<i>Diana and Actaeon</i> (one of 3 Companions of Actaeon)	By Mons. Roger late of DL
Note: Thurmond returned to DL for the 1734/5 season and retired in 1737. John Evans disappeared after May 1734.			

Table 2: ‘Scholars’ appearing on stage with their dancing-masters

<i>Master</i>	<i>Scholar</i>	<i>Date</i>
Claxton, Mr	Mosse, Mrs	1703
Fairbank, Chas	anon	1704
Elford, Mrs	Bruce, Mrs	1706
Cherrier, René	Santlow, Hester	1706
Delagarde, Chas	Norris, Ann	1707
Thurmond, John jnr	Smith, Miss	1716
Moreau, Anthony	Schooling, Miss	1716
Boval, Mr	Brett, Ann	1728
Newhouse, Mr	Wherrit, Miss	1730
Nivelon, Francis	Le Brun, Mrs	1736
Nivelon, Francis	Scott, Isabella	1736
Nivelon, Francis	Scott, Miss J.	1736

Were they paid? And if so, who got the money? If they were apprentices their dancing-master did, but if they were scholars would the same have applied? The few surviving pay-lists for the London theatres in the early eighteenth century do not refer to ‘scholars’, which might suggest that they were not paid, or at least not paid directly by the theatre manager. An interesting case in point is that of Hester Santlow: in 1708 she made an agreement with her dancing-master René Cherrier by which he undertook to pay her half of what he received for her performances between 1706 (when she first appeared on stage) and 1711, noting also that he had already taught her for two years prior to 1706, and gave a surety of £100 against any breach of the agreement (Milhous & Hume, 1982, p.64; Goff, 2007, p.2). While it has been argued that this equated to a formal apprenticeship, the terms were extremely unusual because apprentices were not normally entitled to any of their earned income and there was no obligation on the part of the master to pay his apprentice anything. On the other hand, Santlow was described in the theatre bills at this time as Cherrier’s ‘scholar’, never his ‘apprentice’, and so the reason for this agreement may be that Cherrier had no power to keep Santlow under his tutelage if she was simply a ‘scholar’ and so sought a quasi-apprentice status for her by which she remained bound to him but able to keep some of her earnings.

Perhaps one factor of ‘scholar’ status in the theatre therefore was that it was capable of flexibility and negotiation, in a way which formal apprenticeship was not. Although no documentation survives to prove or disprove it, this might also have been the situation adopted by Kellom Tomlinson for his (also very successful) scholar-apprentice John Topham, who is described as a ‘Mr Kellom’s scholar’ in the theatre bills (London Stage, 1716-1717 *passim*) and in Tomlinson’s later treatise as one who had ‘danced upon both Theatres under the name of Mr Kellom’s Scholar, when he had been with me no longer than betwixt two and three years’ (Tomlinson, 1735, preface), but as his ‘apprentice’ in the dance notations recorded in his *Work Book*¹¹. It was of course possible to be simultaneously apprentice to one dancing-master and scholar of another, as Kellom Tomlinson himself and his fellow-apprentice John Shaw both were: while formally apprenticed to Mr Caverley, they took additional instruction in theatrical dance from Monsieur Cherrier of Drury Lane theatre.

Theatrical Nursery

Another use of the term ‘scholar’ in a theatrical context might also sometimes have denoted coaching in specific roles, or training up child performers too young to be formally apprenticed. A theatrical ‘nursery’ was a term first applied by Samuel Pepys in 1664 specifically to Killigrew’s training of young actors (Pepys/L&M, 1970-1973, 2 August

1664). That something similar also evolved for at least the lower rank dancers seems very likely, for it would be a logical extension of rehearsal patterns and is also implied by the gradual appearance in the theatres of dancers later described as ballet-masters. It is even more likely to have been the main method used to train up the so-called 'Lilliputian troupes' of young children who were so popular on the London stage during the late 1730s for their miniature (in every sense of the word) versions of adult entertainments - singing, dancing, acting, acrobatics, even pantomimes¹².

How were apprentices and scholars taught?

One question rarely asked is 'what were the dance scholars and apprentices taught?'. Again the evidence is very sparse, but it would make sense that, while both types of pupil were taught specific dances such as survive in the notated collections, there were some aspects of dance training which perhaps only apprentices might have learned. For example, a basic training in music theory (or at least as it applied to dance), and training in how to write Beauchamp-Feuillet dance notation and music tunes. Kellom Tomlinson's *Work Book* is the only evidence we have of what an early-eighteenth century dance apprentice studied, but it does provide some clues. It opens with a transcript of part of Weaver's *Treatise on Time and Cadence*, from which it is obvious that young Tomlinson was, by the second year of his apprenticeship, studying how dance steps and music relate to each other: not for him the fate of the dancing-master satirised as a 'blund'ring blockhead', crashing through dances with no regard for time or measure¹³. The apprentice also took lessons in playing the violin - Ryder's diary mentions one playing for dancing at an assembly (Ryder/Matthews, 1939, p.204) - kit fiddle or pochette, and in how to write out the tunes of a dance.

Tomlinson's *Work Book* also indicates that a significant part of a dance apprentice's training also lay in learning to write in

Beauchamp-Feuillet notation, as well as learning how to dance the dances and perfect the dance technique required to do so. Tomlinson's notation of his mentor's *Slow Minuet* suggests that this may have been a simplified version of a dance set to an easy tune, that he learned by heart and then wrote out in notation from memory, for it differs from the version published by Firbank some years later. The next section of the *Work Book* indicates that Tomlinson became proficient enough to work on five theatrical duets by Pecour, published in the 1704 *Receuil* (Feuillet, 1704, pp.57, 68, 122, 127, 154). That they were all French models confirms that Caverley's apprentices were being groomed as sophisticated and modish dancing-masters¹⁴. Another important thing is that these six notations were not copied slavishly from the 1704 volume: the slight differences in notation and timing suggest that Tomlinson was learning the dances and re-notating what he had learned. The whole thing was as much a training in how to notate as how to build up a repertoire of stylish French dances.

More research is needed on the whole question of how some early eighteenth century English dancers may have been trained, either to become dancing-masters in their own right or to perform and help train others in the theatre. There is not enough evidence to place the picture into sharper focus yet, and many questions still remain, but it does seem likely that studies of as many individual dancers as possible should, in time, help us to build up a more accurate picture of how the dance world worked in their day.

Notes

¹ For a fine eighteenth-century illustration of a *tourne-hanche*, for example, see the London Theatre Museum's database PeoplePlay UK, image PPUK 782.

² See papers by Moira Goff and Madeleine Inglehearn given at this conference. Jennifer Thorp's 'Pierrot strikes back: François Nivelon at Lincoln's Inn Fields and Covent Garden, 1723-1738', which is part of a larger study of Nivelon's career, is accessible in the Oxford Research Archive at <http://ora.ouls.ox.ac.uk> prior to publication.

³ London Metropolitan Archives, Middlesex Sessions Book (hereafter LMA: MSB) 523 p. 75 and 525 p.41, Oct. 1695.

⁴ LMA: MSB 631, p.43), Jul. 1705.

⁵ LMA: MSB 453, p.48, Feb. 1688.

⁶ The National Archives (hereafter TNA), Inland Revenue papers. The indexes to Masters and to Apprentices (compiled by the Society of Genealogists and available as microfiche SOG 203, 204) and the registers (available on microfilm as the series IR/1) cover the years 1711-1811.

⁷ Apprentices of Fairbank, Caverley, Pemberton, Weaver (2 names).

⁸ TNA: IR 1/48/200v.

⁹ TNA: IR 1/10/167.

¹⁰ Evans managed only two performances in Roger's *Diana & Actaeon* (type-cast again, he was one of the hero's three Companions).

¹¹ There is some uncertainty however as to whether this was the same person.

¹² For example, the pantomime *The Burgomaster Trick'd*, put on repeatedly at Drury Lane with 'all the Characters by Lilliputians', as the theatre bills expressed it. It followed by the pastoral ballet *The Shepherd's Mount*, 'all the Characters likewise performed by Lilliputians'. For full cast list see London Stage, 19 Jan 1738.

¹³ 'In vain the sounding Violin directs/A Measure nimble, easy, unperplex'd:/ Measure nor Time the blund'ring Blockhead keeps,/ Yet through the Dance with wond'rous Ease he trips': *The Dancing Master a Satyr* (1722), on the dancing-master 'Mr G----y'.

¹⁴ It also suggests that either Mr Caverley had a copy of the 1704 *Recueil* and made it available to his apprentices, or (since Tomlinson was also taking classes with René Cherrier at this time) that Cherrier had lent him his own copy of the volume.

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