

Introduction to Terpsichore & her Sisters

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The illustration above is a fresco by an anonymous artist which adorns the walls of the Odescalchi Castle in Bracciano, Italy. Dating from the late 15th century, it is entitled *The Dance of the Muses: Thalia, Clio et Sorores*.¹ This dance was a familiar theme from the Renaissance onwards. It is interesting to note that here, Thalia, the Muse of Comedy, is presented as leader of this little group along with Clio, the Muse of History (the other pair seem not to have been specified). Terpsichore, of course, was the Muse of Dance and therefore one of the nine (presumably restrictions of space led to the omission of the remaining five); their dance is thus a suitable metaphor for this conference as it traces out the interweaving patterns of relationship between the various arts and, in particular, their relationship to dance itself.

On the first evening of our conference, beginning with what at first seemed a most improbable duet, Hazel Dennison, in *The Banquet as Performance Art*, drew out the important role that choreography played in the social ritual of aristocratic dining. The tablecloth was first ‘danced’ onto the ‘stage’ of the banquet, followed by table decorations and finally the dishes themselves. I recall at one time being witness to a banquet at the Dorchester Hotel in London where I marvelled at the tightly choreographed moves of the waiters as they proceeded through the efficient distribution of several courses. More recent research into the role of music and dance in the banquets of 16th century Italy has opened our eyes to the fundamental importance this played in court ritual.²

The Dance of the Muses was also the subject of a very interesting paper by Anne Daye. Although it consists of just twelve lines of prose in a sixteenth century commonplace book, the rarity and significance of *The nyne muses* dance makes it a significant part of English dance history. It is the only sketch of an ensemble choreography, possibly a masque dance, extant in the Tudor or Stuart repertoire. Although it had already been noticed by musicologists, this document deserves to be scrutinised again from a dance perspective to address a number of mysteries that surround the dance. It was fascinating therefore to see the interpretation given by Ann and Paul Kent in their workshop which followed Anne Daye's talk; by utilizing contemporary sources of music and dance a plausible and realistic reconstruction was demonstrated to be possible.

Dance and Art was a subject addressed by several speakers, beginning with Margaret McGowan's illuminating overview of the great quantity of visual material relating to dance that exists in the archives of France, Italy and Britain. The information that can be extracted from this material is of great value in trying to understand the role that dance played in the court culture of early modern Europe, including details of costume, staging, and context. The artists responsible were themselves major contributors to all aspects of dance.

The pitfalls that may be present in the interpretation of pictorial material are elaborated in the contributions by Robert Mullally and Barbara Segal. To what extent can one trust the pictorial representation as a 'real' rather than metaphorical or idealized portrayal of 'dance'? Robert's paper looks at three miniatures from the last third of the 15th century that are considered to represent the Burgundian *basse danse*, and discusses how realistic this representation might be. Barbara looks at paintings and other art works of the 18th century to decode their representation of dance and to see if there is any 'hidden agenda' present.

The function of the mask in French court ballet is the subject addressed by Gerrit Berenike Heiter, while Petra Dotlačilová

looks at the extremes of costume design and exaggerated movement that were employed in representations of hell or the underworld that frequently appear on the 17th and 18th century stage. Both approaches – mask and costume -- allow the dancer to move away from the ordinary world of baroque dance, *la belle danse*, and into the domains of fantasy.

Dance and Music (Terpsichore and Euterpe) are, of course, generally regarded as the closest of sisterly muses. Here this relationship was addressed by Kimiko Okamoto in her paper *Conflict and Harmony: Dance and Music in Early 18th Century France* in which she considers the phrasal relationships of music and dance, illustrating the various correlations between the two arts by means of examples taken from the works of Pécour, the most prolific choreographer of the repertoire. In a different vein altogether is the paper by Nira Pullin on the relationship between the Charleston dance craze that emerged in the 1920s and the associated music of that same period.

Dance and the Muse of Drama (Melpomene) is the topic addressed by Christine Bayle. Three works which she has created in recent years through her company *L'Eclat des Muses* are the object of her detailed analysis of the problems involved in staging baroque dance ballets of the 18th century for a modern audience. The newly created work was comprised of three separate ballets, each based on music by the composer Marin Marais, and the whole was entitled: *A la suite de Marin Marais*. The music used was extracted from Marais' *Les pièces en trio*.

Next comes the Muse of Astronomy. As any pub quiz contestant would no doubt let you know, Urania is the muse of astronomy, as well as of science in general. Paul Cooper's paper introduces us to the surprising way in which Country Dancing was treated as a science in the early 19th century, with mathematical rules formulated to enable the automatic generation of new dances. This was a period in Britain's history in which the discoveries of Science and the marvels of Engineering entranced the populace and his paper explores the way in which even the

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English Country Dance tradition was influenced by these changes, c.1770-1820.

Tiziana Leucci introduces us to the way in which the training regime for traditional dance in India fuses together the art of Dance with those of Music, Poetry, Painting and Sculpture. This holistic approach to dance stands in contrast to the European tradition, where dance training is regarded as a separate discipline, and where usually it is only in the final staged performance that we see these arts combine to create a unified whole.

Travel, of course, whether to India or other exotic locations, has been a major contributor to the development of dance. Although I can find nothing that corresponds precisely to a 'muse of travel', it might perhaps be regarded as an amalgamation of the Epic (Calliope), the Romantic (Erato) and the Scientific (Urania). Camilla Kandare with her study *Queenship in Motion*, explores the role that social protocol played in the life of Christina of Sweden, who spent much of her time travelling within Europe, ending up as a resident of Rome. In their more general study, Madli Teller & Ipshita Rajesh investigate the ways in which travel influences dance creation itself, with particular reference to the travels of the ballerina Anna Pavlova.

Unfortunately, we have no Muse of Equitation: the art and practice of horsemanship. Its relationship to dance however is quite profound and the cultivation of 'horse ballets' of one form or another has been a feature of many societies over the centuries. In her paper presented here, *A Dancing Master for the Horses*, Carola Finkel discusses the work of Pierre Dubreil and two of the equestrian ballets he created for the Bavarian Court.

The Muses were, at least initially, figures of Greek mythology. It is appropriate therefore that these papers include a study from the Classical sources. Roula Lymniati does just that in her study of the potential for creating movements and dances based on the illustrations of dancing bodies found on the vases of the the Classical Greek Geometric Period. Dance was part of Greek social life, connected with worship, fertility,

orgiastic events, daily life celebrations and war preparation. In modern Greece, traditional dances are still an integral part of social life and they often constitute symbolic representations of Greek history and identity. Is the significance of Greek folk dance partly grounded on the assumed link with antiquity? This is the question posed by Roula in her fascinating historical study of dance in Greece guided, no doubt, by Clio the Muse of History.

Finally, *Dance and the Muse of Comedy* is the title of the concluding paper, bringing us neatly back to Thalia and the beginning of this introduction. The problem, of course, is to understand just what might be meant by 'comedy' for this will change with time and place. Hopefully, the 'serious' analysis presented in this final paper might lead us towards a better understanding of this important subject.

Eight muses have thus been accounted for in this collection of papers from the Early Dance Circle's Conference of 2016. Polyhymnia alone is missing. As the Muse of Sacred Music, it is to this muse that I feel these proceedings themselves should be dedicated. Thus our thanks, along with the blessings of Polyhymnia, go to Georgina Boyes for her important editorial role in bringing these papers into some semblance of order, checking the grammar, spelling and general coherence of each contribution, and also to Trevor Williams for his masterful work in managing the overall design and layout of the final publication.

End Notes

¹ Patrizia Castelli, Maurizio Mingardi and Maurizio Padovan, *Mesura et Arte del Danzare, Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro et la danza nelle corti Italiane del XV secolo* (Pesaro, 1987)

2 See, for example, Cristoforo de Messisbugo, *Banchetti composizioni di vivande e apparecchio generale* (published 1549)

