This chapter is part of:

Music and the Arts in England, c. 1670–1750

Edited by
Ina Knoth

Published by *musiconn.publish*, Dresden 2020

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25366/2020.112>

musiconn.publish has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

The digital reproduction rights for all illustrations were either obtained by the authors or granted by public domain licences. However, in case of suspected copyright infringement, please contact the editor or the publisher.

This chapter is available under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International \(CC BY-NC-SA 4.0\)](#) licence.

BARBARA SEGAL

The Contribution of Dance and Pantomime to London's Musical Culture

Throughout the long eighteenth century, dance in its various guises was arguably the most popular attraction on the English stage and seems often to have been used as a lure to get people into the theatre to see a play or an opera. An evening at the playhouse was quite different from one today. One might listen to half an hour of instrumental music while the audience was entering the playhouse, before the curtain rose. After a prologue, the first act of the play would commence – maybe some grand tragedy, such as *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*. At the end of the first act, there might be a comic scene with Harlequin and Scaramouche, doing a short comedy routine in dance and mime – it would not matter in the least that the mood of the comedy did not quite match that of the tragic play. And thus the evening would proceed, with a great variety of entr'acte (or interlude) entertainments interspersed between all the acts of the play – dances, singing, comic interludes, instrumental music, even occasionally rope walking and strange animals. When the play, or main-piece, was finally over, an epilogue would follow, then there would usually be an afterpiece, or maybe even two – a pantomime, a ballet, a farce, or perhaps an opera, *Dido & Aeneas*, for instance. An evening at the theatre provided a far greater variety of entertainments than is the case today and much of this entertainment was in the form of dance.

However, while it was generally acknowledged that dance was an important contributor to the finances of the theatre, the dancers and dancing masters themselves were not altogether happy with this ancillary role: many wanted to see dance as an art in its own right. This was a theme that ran through the whole development of dance through the long eighteenth century; how to get away from the 'fairground' element with which it had

become inevitably associated in the popular theatre. It is the aim of this paper, first, to call to mind how dance in its various guises was central to the musical culture in England in the Restoration and Early Georgian Period and second, to point out some reasons why this central role was (wrongfully) marginalised even then – with effects on our view of dance in this period persisting to the present day.¹

I. The demand for dance on the stage

In the late seventeenth and early years of the eighteenth centuries, stage dancing was most frequently to be seen among the medley of entertainments between the acts and at the end of a play. Interlude dancing may sound a trivial affair, entertaining the audience while the actors changed costumes or sets, but as early as 1699 Claude Ballon, the most fashionable dancer at the Paris Opera and Chancellor of the Académie Royale de Danse, was enticed to perform in London for five weeks for the enormous sum of 400 guineas, a fee unheard of for actors of the time.² Ballon also performed for the King, William III, at Kensington Palace, dancing with his compatriot Anthony L'Abbé, who remained in London, eventually becoming court dancing master there. L'Abbé composed "The Loure" (figure 9.1),³ a virtuoso dance for two men, which was performed by Ballon and L'Abbé for William III in London in 1699.

Interlude dances were extremely varied, comprising elegant and virtuoso French dancing, comic dancing (including those performed by commedia characters), hornpipes, national-style dances, country dances and more. Dances and dancers were often advertised on playbills. For example, figure 9.2 shows a playbill dating from 1718 for a drama by John Fletcher first staged in 1624 and revived for the Restoration stage in 1697. This playbill clearly indicates that there will be "Entertainments of Singing and Dancing".

1 Editorial annotation: It is intentional that this paper does not delve more deeply into the intimate aesthetic relationship between music and dance but gives a broader overview of the various areas where dance was essential. This is in order to emphasize the function which bodily motion, namely dance brings to sound rather than simply to be an adjunct to sound. After all, dance not only called for specific music to ensure the appreciation of movement but, taking a less accustomed perspective, made sure that composers were ordered to produce dance music in the first place.

2 Jennifer Thorp, "Dance in the London Theatres 1700–1750", in *Dance, Spectacle, and the Body Politick, 1250–1750*, ed. Jennifer Nevile, Bloomington 2008, pp. 136–152.

3 Anthony L'Abbé, *A New Collection of Dances*, ed. F. le Roussau, London [c. 1725], p. 1.

Figure 9.1: Anthony L'Abbé, "The Loure" (c. 1725); Universität Salzburg, Derra de Moroda Dance Archives, DdM 4718

The great popularity of dance made it fundamental to the economics of running a theatre.⁴ When in 1699 the talented and popular young dancer Susanna Evans suddenly died, the management of Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre was seriously worried about the effect this would have on the finan-

⁴ Cf. Judith Milhous, "The Economics of Theatrical Dance in Eighteenth-Century London", in *Theatre Journal* 55 / 3 (2003), pp. 481–508.

Figure 9.2: Playbill for Theatre Royal, Drury Lane (1718); © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

ces of the theatre, no matter that William Congreve's masterpiece, *The Way of the World*, was premiered that season.⁵ Interval entertainments were of such importance that they sometimes took precedence over the plays. An advertisement from 1703 for Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre nicely illustrates

5 Curtis A. Price, "'...to make amends for One ill Dance'. Conventions for Dancing in Restoration Plays", in *Dance Research Journal* 10 / 1 (1977 / 1978), pp. 1–6, p. 1.

this point: it lists many songs and dances for a performance of Nicholas Rowe's *The Fair Penitent*. The advertisement ends: "By reason of the Entertainments, the Play will be shortnd".⁶

Not only was dance important for the financial stability of the theatre, it was also a significant source of revenue for musicians, as the demand from the public for dance led in turn to a demand for suitable accompanying music. As 'house composer' for several London theatres, Henry Purcell wrote music for many of the dances within plays, in addition to composing songs, act tunes and overtures. His financial return for this activity is likely to have been a significant component of his income although unfortunately, it is difficult to determine his exact remuneration as much of the musical activity at Dorset Garden and other theatres was cross-subsidised through court appointments.⁷ Later, in the 1690s, Daniel Purcell was house composer for Drury Lane Theatre and John Eccles for Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre, where composing music for dances appears to have been a significant component of their employment.⁸

Beginning in the 1670s in England, there developed a taste for 'dramatic operas,' or semi-operas, in which a play was combined with music, song, dance and spectacle in an integrated fashion, as well as interludes of mostly dance and song between all the acts. Among the earliest was William Davenant's re-working of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* at Dorset Garden in 1673, with "new Cloath's, new scenes, machines, as flying for the witches, and all the singing and dancing in it [...] being in the nature of an opera."⁹ The music was by Matthew Locke and the dances were choreographed by Luke Channell and Josias Priest. The drama and all the songs were in English, and the expressive dancing was integrated into the action.

The libretti of these operas usually featured gods and heroes, along with supernatural themes as in *Psyche* (1675, Thomas Shadwell), *Circe* (1675, Davenant), *Dioclesian (or The Prophetess)* (1690, Thomas Betterton), *King Arthur*

6 Quoted in Emmett Avery, "Dancing and Pantomime on the English Stage, 1700–1737", in *Studies in Philology* 31 / 3 (1934), pp. 417–452, p. 419.

7 Andrew Pinnock and Bruce Wood, "Come, Ye Sons of Art – Again. Court Cross-Subsidy for Purcell's Opera Orchestra, 1690–1695", in *Early Music* 37 / 3 (2009), pp. 445–466.

8 Cf. Emmett Avery and Arthur Scouten, *The London Stage. A Critical Introduction*, vol. 1, 1660–1700, Carbondale 1968, p. cxviii. Daniel Purcell includes dances in his *Judgement of Paris*, while John Eccles has music for dances in his collection *Theater Musick. Being a Collection of the Newest Ayres for the Violin*, 3 vols., London 1698–1700.

9 John Downes, *Roscius Anglicanus*, London 1708, p. 33. Quoted in Jennifer Thorp, "Dance in Operas in London, 1673–1685", in *Dance Research* 33 / 2 (2015), p. 95.

(1691, John Dryden) and *The Fairy Queen* (1692, anonymous, possibly Betterton). The last three are now much better known for the inclusion of substantial quantities of very fine music by Henry Purcell. Less well-known is that in Purcell's day, dance in one form or another was a substantial feature of all these works. In the case of the Purcell operas, music to accompany dances may have amounted to as much as one third of the score.¹⁰

Priest, as choreographer for the *Fairy Queen*, as well as for *Dioclesian* and *King Arthur*, is likely to have played a significant role in the original staging. It is unfortunate that we have no record of the original choreographies and can only infer the nature of the dances (along with staging details) from existing stage directions in the libretti or score, or from other general information such as the almost four hundred extant notated choreographies from within the period of this publication, 1670–1750.¹¹ *Albion and Albanius* (music by Louis Grabu and words by Dryden) was performed at Dorset Garden in 1685 and in one scene, there were no fewer than 24 dancers.¹² While there would have been many solo and duo dances, numbers of these dancers would have been used in tableaux, or as 'movable scenery'. For instance, in *The Fairy Queen*, stage directions incorporated into the original manuscript indicate how rows of trees move to make arches, dragons form bridges over rivers, swans are seen swimming then transform themselves into fairies and dance.¹³ The stage directions suggest that many of the 'scenic elements' – trees, statues, bridges, swans and so on – were created by using the physical bodies of the dancers themselves (no doubt suitably costumed). This makes many of the transformations implied by stage directions such as the following, intelligible and relatively easy to implement:

10 Of the 59 numbered items in the *Fairy Queen* score (ed. Clifford Bartlett, Huntingdon 1994), 11 are explicitly labelled as dances. Given that dance is also likely to have been featured during the *ritornelli*, act tunes and other introductory sections, as much as a third of the musical content may have involved dance of one sort or another. Some support for this view is given by Michael Burden, "To repeat (or not to repeat)? Dance cues in Restoration English Opera", in *Early Music* 35 / 3 (2007), pp. 397–417, p. 408, where he states that "Close reading of the operas appears to indicate that there was more dancing than even the already copious amounts suggested by the printed sources."

11 See Meredith Ellis Little and Carol Marsh, *La Danse Noble. An Inventory of Dances and Sources*, Williamstown 1992. Although most of these choreographies are ostensibly for ball-room display, they frequently reference the theatre dances from which they are assumed to have been derived.

12 See Thorp 2015, "Dance in Operas", p. 119.

13 See Purcell [1692] 1994, *The Fairy Queen*.

While a Symphony's Playing, the two Swans come Swimming on through the Arches to the bank of the River, as if they would Land; there turn themselves into Fairies, and Dance; at the same time the Bridge vanishes, and the Trees that were Arch'd, raise themselves upright.¹⁴

Lighting in the theatres at this time would have been provided only by candles and therefore quite low, aiding the creation of such transformational illusions.

With their inclusion of dance and elaborate staging as important elements, these multi-media dramatic operas were in a sense, carrying on the tradition of the old English court masques. The new Dorset Garden Theatre was the perfect venue for them. It opened in 1671 and was a most splendid theatre: no expense had been spared in its building – it cost £9,000 – many times that of its rival theatre in Drury Lane.¹⁵ To complement the lavish décor of the theatre, the actor-manager Thomas Betterton went to Paris to gather ideas and to recruit the best French dancers.

Betterton's visit to Paris was motivated by the fact that stage dancing in England had become moribund during the period of Oliver Cromwell and the dominance of Puritan sentiment of the preceding decades. At the same time, a new highly-stylised form of dance had been developing in Paris. This was known as *belle danse* or noble dance and was quite different from the group country dances and the solo jigs and hornpipes then popular in England. It could require a great deal of virtuosity – many of these dances are challenging, even for a trained dancer today. French dancers had been seen in England soon after the Restoration and many, such as L'Abbé, remained in England performing, choreographing and teaching the new French style to English dancers.¹⁶

The popularity of dance on the London stage remained undimmed throughout the eighteenth century. For example, the Duchess of Marlborough recounted an interesting event that took place in London in 1735:

The famous dancing woman (I do not know her name) in the opera, the audience were so excessive fond of her that they hollered out "encor" several times to

¹⁴ Ibid., Act III, p. 54.

¹⁵ William van Lennep, Emmett Avery and Arthur Scouten, *The London Stage 1660–1800. A Calendar of Plays, Entertainments and Afterpieces Together with Casts, Box-Receipts and Contemporary Comment*, vol. 1, 1660–1700, Carbondale 1965, p. xxix.

¹⁶ Moira Goff, "Dancing-Masters in Early Eighteenth-Century London", in *Historical Dance* 3 / 3 (1994), pp. 17–23.

have her dance over again, which she could not do, because as she was coming on again, the King [George II] made a violent motion with his hand that she should not. At last the dispute was so violent that to put an end to it, the curtain was let down, whereby the spectators lost all after the third act.¹⁷

This event is known to have taken place during a performance at Covent Garden of George Frideric Handel's opera *Alcina*, and the famous dancing woman was Marie Sallé, one of the most popular of the French dancers performing in London that season. Because the King did not allow a repeat of Sallé's dance, the whole of the rest of Handel's opera had to be abandoned.

In the eighteenth century, the fashion arose for putting on an afterpiece at the conclusion of a play. This could be a farce, a pantomime, a ballet or a musical entertainment. These afterpieces were significantly longer than the interlude entertainments and could last up to an hour or more. The afterpiece was in addition to the interlude entertainments, which became even more numerous, while the afterpieces often had their own interludes.

An example of an afterpiece is Purcell's (semi-)opera *Dido and Aeneas* (1689), created in collaboration with the choreographer Priest. The first public performance in a theatre of *Dido and Aeneas* was in 1700, presented as an afterpiece although for this first performance, it was unceremoniously chopped into parts, with each part inserted between the acts of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*. It is also worth remembering that maybe half of *Dido and Aeneas* comprised dance items, many of which have been lost. The so-called 'Priest libretto' of 1688 mentions no fewer than seventeen dances.¹⁸ Even assuming each dance took only two minutes, that would be 34 minutes of dancing in *Dido and Aeneas* – a third or more of the entire work (giving a performance time as an afterpiece of well over an hour).

17 Letter from Sarah Churchill, Duchess of Marlborough, to her Granddaughter Diana Russell, Duchess of Bedford, 24 June 1735, quoted in Sarah McCleave, *Dance in Handel's London Operas*, Rochester 2013, p. 1.

18 Nahum Tate, *An Opera Perform'd at Mr. Josias Priest's Boarding-School at Chelsey. By Young Gentlewomen*, GB-Lcm D144. A facsimile can be found in Henry Purcell, *Dido and Aeneas*, ed. Margaret Laurie, Kent 1979, pp. xiii–xx. See also Andrew R. Walkling, "The Masque of Actaeon and the Antimasque of Mercury. Dance, Dramatic Structure, and Tragic Exposition in *Dido and Aeneas*", in *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 63 / 2 (2010), pp. 191–242; Peter Holman, *Henry Purcell*, Oxford 1994, p. 199, and Curtis Price, *Henry Purcell and the London Stage*, Cambridge 1984, p. 239.

II. The demand for dance in the ballroom

Thomas Bray, dancing master at both Dorset Garden and Drury Lane Theatres, published his collection of *Country Dances* in 1699.¹⁹ Bray's country dances were likely first performed on the stage by actors in the company; most had more intricate patterns than the standard ballroom country dance repertoire of the time. Several of the tunes in Bray's collection of country dances were in fact by Henry Purcell. Playing for social dancing, in addition to the accompaniment of stage dancing, provided an important and lucrative source of employment for many musicians. It is now generally accepted that the so-called English country dances were, throughout the eighteenth century, strictly the preserve of the upper classes or gentry, not rustic 'folk' dancers as the terminology might suggest.²⁰ Formal balls were a regular feature of their social life and, apart from giving employment to many musicians, they also generated a demand for printed music as dance accompaniment, along with the corresponding dance choreographies.²¹ At formal balls, before these sociable country dances could be enjoyed, one had to run the gauntlet of the more formal French courante, later replaced by the minuet. Being proficient in the courante or minuet was necessary to show that you belonged to elite society; it was used as a class identifier.

In addition to Bray's collection of country dances, those of John and Henry Playford contained many dances set to the tunes of Henry Purcell. Some 32 country dances that appeared during the late seventeenth century have been identified as having music by Purcell.²² It would not be unreasonable to suggest that it was through dance that much of the wider public gained experience of his music.

Balls were so popular they were even used to increase revenues at the opera house; finances there were always precarious. As early as 1710, the

19 Thomas Bray, *Country Dances Being a Composition Entirely New. And the Whole Cast Different from all that Have yet Been Publish'd. With Bass and Treble to Each Dance. Also, the Newest French Dances in Use, Entries, Genteel and Grotesque, Chacons, Rigodoons, Minuets, and other Dancing Tunes*, London 1699.

20 The courtly origins of 'country dance' are explored in Keith Whitlock, "John Playford's *The English Dancing Master* 1650 / 51 as Cultural Politics", in *Folk Music Journal* 7 / 5 (1999), pp. 548–578.

21 John and Henry Playford's *Dancing Master* was into its 11th edition by 1701, and many similar publications followed throughout the eighteenth century.

22 Nicholas M. Broadbridge and Marjorie Fennessey, *Purcell's Dancing Master*, Kirkfieldbank 1997, p. 13.

Swiss impresario Jacob Heidegger initiated masquerade balls at the King's Theatre. These expensive but highly lucrative events generally took place after the evening's opera was over (figure 9.3). This practice continued for much of the eighteenth century.

Figure 9.3: Giuseppe Grisoni, *A Masquerade Ball at the Kings Theatre, Haymarket, the 'Opera House'* (c. 1724); © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

III. The ill-consequences for opera of abandoning dance

As is well known, Italian opera began to be staged in London from the early eighteenth century. Unlike the 'dramatic opera,' these had no spoken words. They entirely abandoned the spoken drama, much to the dislike of the playwrights and actors of the day, who feared that music might completely displace poetry in the theatre. What is seldom considered however, is that thirteen of the twenty-one Italian operas produced in London between 1705

and 1719 had dancing, either dances proper to the story or as interludes or both.²³

In 1719, the Royal Academy of Music was founded in London by a group of nobles and Handel was appointed “Master of the Orchestra”, in addition to being one of the principal composers – twelve of his operas were staged under this company over the ensuing years. The directors also intended to hire the most fashionable dancing master in London, L’Abbé, together with a large troupe of dancers, and they were prepared to pay a considerable sum for this.²⁴ Despite these good intentions, however, it seems that the Royal Academy rather neglected the dancing, possibly because, as John Rich claimed in 1727, the importation of foreign singers consumed such a large proportion of any budget:

[...] it is evident, that the vast Expence of procuring Foreign Voices, does necessarily exclude those various Embellishments of Machinery, Painting, Dances, as well as Poetry itself, which have been always esteemed [...] Auxiliaries absolutely necessary to the Success of Music; and, without which, it cannot be long supported, unless by very great Subscriptions, of which we naturally grow tired in a few Years. It seems therefore, the only Way in which Music can be establish’d in *England*, is to give it those Assurances from other Arts which it yet wants, and by that Means to adapt it still more to the Public Taste; to moderate, as much as possible, the Expence of it, and thereby to make it a general Diversion, which hitherto it has not been.²⁵

If there is any truth in Rich’s statement, then it implies that the relative absence of dance in the Academy Opera may have been a significant contributor to its decreasing popularity and eventual decline. At the foundation of the company in 1719, L’Abbé’s original budget for dancers had been £1,000 (increased from an initial £520), but even at this stage the total budget had topped £12,000 and the proposal to include dancers was abandoned, almost certainly because of the huge cost of maintaining such a company, in which fees to leading Italian singers consumed most of the available budgets.²⁶

23 McCleave 2013, *Dance in Handel’s London Operas*, p. 23.

24 Ibid, p. 48.

25 John Rich, Preface to *The Rape of Proserpine*, London 1727, facsimile reproduced as Appendix 1 in Berta Joncus and Jeremy Barlow (eds.), *“The Stage’s Glory.” John Rich, 1692–1761*, Newark 2011.

26 London Public Record Office LC / 7 / 3, fols. 46–47, quoted in Thorp 2008, “Dance in the London Theatres”, p. 141.

That dance was less valued by the Academy is borne out by the fact that, unlike singers, dancers were never named in librettos; they were “conceived as an adjunct, a decoration to the opera.”²⁷ Moreover, for the 1720–1721 season, Milhous estimates that “each of the three leading singers is down for a salary larger than the entire budget for an unknown number of dancers.”²⁸

In 1728, the critic James Ralph wrote of the Academy operas:

The Whole being Meer Musick, not diversify'd with Grand Chorusses, Dancing, Machinery, and all the other Theatrical Embellishments, which are look'd upon as the very Limbs of the Body of an Opera; which it not only allows, but demands; and so essential are they to its Nature, that the Neglect of them shews us at best but a lame, imperfect Figure.²⁹

The attempt of the Academy Opera to establish a form of ‘pure’ opera finally failed in 1729 and the company was disbanded.³⁰

IV. Dance and the English pantomime

Charles Burney later echoed the sentiments of the above two quotations from Rich and Ralph. In his *General History of Music* (1771), he states that opera is “the completest concert”, since it can provide “such dancing as a playhouse, with its inferior prices, is seldom able to furnish.”³¹ Half a century earlier, however, the playhouse of Rich may well have satisfied Burney’s requirements for providing “the completest concert”.

Rich took over the management of Lincoln’s Inn Fields Theatre in 1714. Both Lincoln’s Inn and Drury Lane were wholly commercial ventures and thus dependent on a paying audience for their survival. Rich knew that Drury Lane had a much stronger cast of actors than he had, so to counter this he staged a large number of interlude dances. He usually had about twenty

27 Milhous 2003, “The Economics of Theatrical Dance”, in *Theatre Journal* 55 / 3 (2003), p.500.

28 Ibid, p. 499.

29 James Ralph, *The Touch-Stone. Or, Historical, Critical, Political, Philosophical, and Theological Essays on the Reigning Diversions of the Town*, London 1728, p.20, quoted in McCleave 2013, *Dance in Handel’s London Operas*, p. 185.

30 This is not to say that opera stopped altogether of course but that the big venture of the Royal Academy failed. On the further development of opera on the English stage cf. for example Thomas McGeary, *The Politics of Opera in Handel’s Britain*, New York 2013.

31 Charles Burney, *General History of Music*, vol.2, London 1771, pp.226–227, quoted in McCleave 2013, *Dance in Handel’s London Operas*, p. 49.

dancers on the payroll, comprising 25% of the performer budget.³² The dancing interludes proved so popular that Drury Lane started to lose custom, and was forced to respond in kind.

However, Rich also wanted to promote opera, and he believed that one way of increasing the popularity of Italian-style opera in London was to have it sung in English. This would also avoid paying the exorbitant cost of foreign singers. Such thoughts led Rich to concentrate on perfecting the English pantomime. The drama that had been an essential part of the dramatic operas was abandoned, but the serious opera was kept (and always sung in English), together with much dancing, amazing special effects and dazzling costumes – and to this mix was added an English version of the *commedia dell'arte*.³³

Although Rich was not the first to produce a pantomime, he developed them to spectacular heights, becoming known as the “God of Pantomimes, Jubilees and Installations.”³⁴ The combination of the serious and the comic – which had a long tradition in England – proved to be sensationally popular. This popularity can be gauged not only by the very large number of performances, but also from the fact that ticket sales usually quadrupled on nights when a pantomime was being performed after the main-piece.³⁵ Moreover they appealed to every class of society, from the King and Queen down to the London apprentices.

The comic part of the pantomime was basically an English adaptation of Italian *commedia dell'arte*. It was performed entirely in dumb show – no speech, just dance and mime. It was this lack of speech in the English *commedia* that made it very different from its Italian counterpart, where speech was the mainstay of the show.

Harlequin was the hero of the comic part; he was typically a virtuoso dancer and a comic mime. He was usually presented as having some magical power, which enabled him to transform either himself, another person or his environment into something completely different. The comic part of the

32 See Robert D. Hume, “John Rich as Manager and Entrepreneur”, in Joncus and Barlow (eds.) 2011, *The Stage's Glory*, pp. 29–60, p. 49.

33 Roger Fiske, *English Theatre Music in the Eighteenth Century*, Oxford 1986, pp. 67–93.

34 David Williams, *A Letter to David Garrick, Esq. on his Conduct as Principal Manager and Actor at Drury Lane*, London 1772, quoted in Hume 2011, “John Rich”, p. 54, n. 196.

35 For the box-office figures, see Paul Sawyer, “The Popularity of Various Types of Entertainment at Lincoln's Inn Fields and Covent Garden Theatres, 1720–1733”, in *Theatre Notebook* 24 (1970), pp. 154–163. See also Hume 2011, “John Rich as Manager and Entrepreneur”, pp. 47–48.

pantomime was full of parody and subversive behaviour – Harlequin always triumphed, no matter how immoral or politically incorrect his behaviour. Perhaps the most famous eighteenth century Harlequin was Rich himself (figure 9.4), performing under the stage name of “Lun”.

Figure 9.4: (Artist unknown), *Arlequin – Rich* (1753); © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

There was music throughout the comic part, called the 'comic tunes'. This music was usually published separately, thus providing yet another potential revenue stream for the theatre composers.³⁶ The serious part of the pantomime likewise required a large amount of music, generally combined with both singing and dancing, the singing usually telling the story of the pantomime. The serious part was based on some mythological story, with Gods and Heroes. It could involve mainly dancing, with dances in the highly stylised French belle danse style, mainly singing, or a combination of both.

The performance of Italian-style opera within Rich's pantomimes was not a second-rate affair. It was Rich's policy to use the best musicians, singers and composers available, including, on occasion, some who also worked for the Opera at the Kings Theatre. The singing was of Italian-style opera arias and recitatives (all in English). The best dancers and choreographers of the day were also employed, including one of the two most famous female dancers from the Paris Opera in the first half of the eighteenth century, Marie Sallé.

Although virtuosic French dance had usually been very popular in London, the English had a slightly different approach to dance. Dancers in Paris were generally masked, thereby limiting their means of expression; they were famous for their entrechats and multiple pirouettes, but one dancing master, John Weaver, dismissed this as mere acrobatics, not a true art that exhibited meaning and passion.³⁷ London was not saddled with the strict rules of the Académie Royale de Danse in Paris which prescribed exactly which steps and dances could be done. Dancers in London had much more freedom to experiment with new dance steps, styles and rhythms, and with more expression. However, the virtuosity of the French style of dancing always remained very popular in London throughout the century, despite Weaver's reservations. As with the comic part, the serious part of pantomimes was also very popular, and they were instrumental in bringing many English singers onto the stage.

36 For a discussion of the comic tunes and their publication see Fiske ²1986, *English Theatre Music*, pp. 67–87. See also Clive G. Chapman, *English Pantomime and its Music, 1700–1730*, PhD thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London 1981; Judith Milhous, "Hasse's Comic Tunes. Some Dancers and Dance Music on the London Stage, 1740–1759", in *Dance Research* 2 (1984), pp. 41–55.

37 Richard Ralph, *The Life and Works of John Weaver. An Account of His Life, Writings and Theatrical Productions*, London 1985.

Rich's first pantomime "mixt with Singing", *Jupiter and Europa; or, the Intrigues of Harlequin*, was staged by Rich at Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1723 and has been credited with marking the start of a new revival for English stage music.³⁸ The singers in *Jupiter and Europa* were Richard Leveridge, John Laguerre and Isabella Chambers,³⁹ and Rich played his usual Harlequin role. John Galliard composed the music for the serious part of *Jupiter and Europa*, and also for many other pantomimes at Rich's theatres. It is not always easy to establish who composed the comic tunes – Galliard most likely composed several, Thomas Augustine Arne wrote some for the *Rape of Proserpine* (1727). At Drury Lane, Henry Carey wrote the music for *The Miser* (1726), and he and Richard Jones composed many more for that theatre.

While some of the vocal and instrumental music from these stage shows survives today, very little of the music that accompanied the serious dancing remains extant, maybe because the dancers used repeats of chorus tunes,⁴⁰ or possibly because they used dances (and music) from previous shows, even perhaps those from the Paris Opera, with the music of Jean-Baptiste Lully and André Campra⁴¹ – baggage dances, rather like the baggage arias of fashionable singers.

V. Attitudes toward pantomime

Not surprisingly, there was a lot of opposition to pantomime from the playwrights of the day. They were appalled by the popularity of pantomimes, and they thought that the constant interruptions undermined the seriousness of their dramas. For this reason, when one reads an unfavourable account of a pantomime one must bear in mind that the critics were usually also playwrights and therefore biased against pantomimes. They were affronted by the fact that audiences preferred what theatre manager Colley Cibber referred to as "monstrous Medlies"⁴² and "Fooleries"⁴³ to their own worthy dramas. In 1731, an anonymous writer in *The Universal Spectator* bemoaned

38 For the quotation and more on this topic see Olive Baldwin and Thelma Wilson, "'Heathen Gods and Heroes.' Singers and John Rich's Pantomimes at Lincoln Inn Fields", in Joncus and Barlow (eds.) 2011, *The Stage's Glory*, pp. 157–168.

39 Ibid., p. 159–160.

40 Burden 2007, "To repeat (or not to repeat)?".

41 Moira Goff, "John Rich, French Dancing, and English Pantomimes", in Joncus and Barlow (eds.) 2011, *The Stage's Glory*, pp. 85–98, pp. 93–94.

42 Colley Cibber, *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber*, London 1740, p. 299.

43 Ibid., p. 300.

the fact that “the most applauded Pieces for some years past in our Theatres, have not been the Composition of *Poets*, but of *Dancing Masters*.”⁴⁴ Henry Fielding was another such playwright critic. In 1736, he wrote *Pasquin*, a satirical attack on both politics and pantomimes, and in 1744, *Tumble-Down Dick*, whose satirical title page (figure 9.5) reveals much about his attitude towards pantomime: “TUMBLE-DOWN DICK: OR, PHAETON in the SUDS. A Dramatick Entertainment of Walking, in Serious and Foolish Characters. Interlarded with Burlesque, Grotesque, Comick Interludes, CALL’D HARLEQUIN A PICKPOCKET.”

Despite this apparent hostility on the part of authors, attitudes of theatre managers towards pantomime were ambivalent; however much they might deplore these “monstrous Medlies” and “Fooleries”, pantomime was a financial necessity for the staging of ‘pure’ drama. In *Tumble-Down Dick*, when Fustian, an author, complains about the first and fifth act of Shakespeare’s *Othello* being cut out to leave more time for the pantomime, the Prompter reminds him that “this gentleman [Machine, composer of the pantomime] brings more money to the house, than all the poets put together.”⁴⁵

Numerous further examples might be quoted showing the opposition of writers to the dominance of pantomime on the London stage, such as the satirical poem *Harlequin Horace* (1731) by James Miller, or the many illustrations by William Hogarth around the same theme. Hogarth’s *Masquerades and Operas* (c. 1724) is a typical representation of this opposition to pantomime by purveyors of high art (figure 9.6).

On the right of the drawing, you see people going in to see a pantomime, *Harlequin Dr. Faustus*, at Lincoln’s Inn Fields, Harlequin enticing them in from the balcony. On the left you see people going in to a masquerade ball at the King’s Theatre, Haymarket, after an Italian Opera had been performed, led by a satyr and a fool. The words at the bottom mourn the fact that “the English Stage [is now] Debauch’d by fool’ries, at so great a cost”. In the middle of the illustration is a wheelbarrow containing the works of Shakespeare, Dryden, Ben Johnson and Congreve; at the top of the wheelbarrow is a sign with the words “Waste Paper for Shops”. The man leaning out of the window is thought to be Heidegger – the manager of the opera house.⁴⁶ The

44 *The Universal Spectator*, 10 April 1731, quoted in Avery and Scouten 1968, *The London Stage 1700–1729*, p. clxxv (original emphasis).

45 Henry Fielding, *Tumble-Down Dick Or, Phaeton in the Suds*, London 1744, p. 396.

46 Cf. Jeremy Barlow, *The Enraged Musician*, Ashgate 2005, p. 3.

TUMBLE-DOWN DICK:

OR,

PHAETON in the SUDS.

A Dramatick Entertainment of Walking, in
Serious and Foolish Characters.

Interlarded with

Burlesque, Grotesque, Comick Interludes,

CALL'D

HARLEQUIN A PICKPOCKET.

As it is performed at the

NEW THEATRE in the HAY-MARKET.

Being ('tis hoped) the last Entertainment that will
ever be exhibited on any Stage.

Invented by the Ingenious

MONSIEUR SANS ESPRIT.

The Mufick compos'd by the Harmonious

SIGNIOR WARBLERINI.

And the Scenes painted by the Prodigious

MYNHEER VAN BOTTOM-FLAT.

Monstr' horrend' inform.—

First acted in 1744.

C c 2

Figure 9.5: Title page of Henry Fielding's *Tumble-Down Dick* (1744); author's copy

Figure 9.6: William Hogarth, *Masquerades and Operas, Burlington Gate* (c. 1724); © The Trustees of the British Museum

real problem, one might argue, was not so much that pantomime was low-brow but that its popularity and financial success threatened the ‘purity’ of other theatre arts – in particular, poetry and music.

VI. Towards an independent dance theatre

The art most closely related to music during the period in question was undoubtedly dance. Its popularity in the theatre ensured that there was employment for musicians, both as composers and performers. The same was true for the ballroom, where the popularity of social dancing ensured the employment of many musicians, along with the dancing masters. Even in the home, publication of dance manuals along with transcriptions of the music – usually just for keyboard – created an important market for composers and the associated publishers.

Dance as a ‘theatre art’ – that is, dance open to the public at large, outside the restricted confines of the court or ballroom – became firmly established on the London stage in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. Over the succeeding decades it became an exceedingly popular component of most forms of theatre, including drama and opera. Despite this popularity, however, it struggled to define itself and to be accepted as a serious art form comparable, say, to music, poetry or painting.

One problem peculiar to the art of dance in its bid to gain entry into the pantheon of the arts was its ephemeral nature. The introduction of a notational system⁴⁷ at the end of the seventeenth century offered hopes of countering this problem and of promoting dance to a higher status. In 1714, Richard Steele reported: “I am mightily pleased to observe, that the Art of Dancing is, of late, come to take Rank in the Learned World, by being communicated in Letters and Characters, as all other parts of Knowledge have for some Ages been.”⁴⁸

Another contribution toward this goal was the theoretical writings of John Weaver.⁴⁹ Weaver was not only a dance historian, but also a teacher, and dancing master at Drury Lane Theatre in the early eighteenth century. He was the chief proponent of dance as a high art but believed that in order to establish itself as a worthy art-form, it must rid itself of its dependence on other disciplines. Weaver wanted to introduce a kind of danced drama where a story was told only through the use of dance and mime, with no spoken word, and no singing. His first production, *The Loves of Mars and Venus* (1717), was called “A Dramatick Entertainment of Dance, Attempted in Imitation of the Pantomimes of the Ancient Greeks and Romans”. This production is often referred to as the first ballet d’action, that is, ballet where mimed action replaces all words.⁵⁰ His best productions featured plots and mimed acting instead of the then-popular displays of technical virtuosity. In this sense, Weaver was an important precursor of Jean-Georges Noverre and Gasparo Angiolini, innovative choreographers who, later in the eighteenth century, would demand unity of plot, choreography and decor in their ballets d’action.

47 For an example of dance in this new notational system see [figure 9.1](#).

48 Richard Steele, *The Lover*, No. 4, 4 March 1714. Cited in Richard Ralph, *The Life and Works of John Weaver*, London 1985, p. 108.

49 Weaver’s theoretical publications are reproduced in *ibid*.

50 For Weaver and the *ballet d’action*, see Richard Ralph, “Weaver’s Contribution to European Ballet”, in Ralph 1985, *The Life and Works of John Weaver*, p. 84.

Weaver's "Dramatick Entertainments" enjoyed only a modest success, however. One reason for this lack of popularity may have lain in his belief that to have dance accepted as a high art, it must be pruned of both its comedic and its virtuosic elements. In the previous few centuries, courtiers had danced in private theatrical performances – the court masques. Included within the masque but differentiated from the high status dances of the nobility was the anti-masque, with dances that exhibited both technical virtuosity and comedy. The latter had been performed by professional dancers, performers of a much lower social status than the aristocratic courtiers. Was this association of both virtuoso dance and comedy with lower class professionals the reason these had to be excluded from Weaver's conception of high art?

That such concerns are no longer of importance today – due to complex aesthetic developments in the interrelations of dance, music and society not possible to cover here – is borne out by the comparison between the illustration of an eighteenth century fairground performer (resolutely 'low-art') showing an extravagant pose with right leg above the head (figure 9.7)⁵¹ and the characteristic, almost identical pose adopted by modern ballet dancers (virtuosic 'high-art') displaying their extraordinary leg extensions.⁵²

In 1712, Weaver justified his position by an appeal to humanistic values.⁵³ The classical humanists thought that dance and music had to be elegant, because the movements of the body were an outward manifestation of the movements of a person's soul. So comic dancing not only suffered from low-class associations; it was also a sign that the dancer's soul was out of step with the movement of the cosmos that bound heaven and earth together.⁵⁴ The inclusion of comic dance along with virtuoso acrobatic capering would surely disqualify dance from entering the pantheon of high art. Although his

51 This picture can be seen in two sheets of engravings from *Het groote tafereel der dwaasheid*, reproduced in Lynne Lawner, *Harlequin on the Moon*, New York 1998, p. 67.

52 See the numerous online images of dancers such as Sylvie Guillem or Svetlana Zakharova and their extravagantly high leg extensions, for example <https://aballeteducation.com/2014/07/29/want-extension-tilt-your-hips/> (last access 30 March 2020). While this style of dance undoubtedly reflects a change of aesthetics in the development of Romantic Ballet, it is also the case that, for example, Odile's 32 fouettés in *Swan Lake* would not have been completely out of place on the eighteenth-century fairground stage.

53 John Weaver, *An Essay towards an History of Dancing*, London 1712, chapters 4 and 6. See also John Weaver, *The History of the Mimes and Pantomimes*, London 1728. Both works are reproduced in Ralph 1985, *The Life and Works of John Weaver*.

54 Cf. Jennifer Neville, *The Eloquent Body*, Bloomington 2004, p. 91.

Figure 9.7: Dutch fairground acrobat, detail from (artist unknown), *Toverkaart of geneesmiddel voor de windbreuken* (1720)

“Dramatick Entertainments” enjoyed only limited success, Weaver’s ideas remained to influence other choreographers, culminating in classical ballet.

For much of the period in question, however, dance was most frequently to be seen either in the form of highly popular interlude entertainments in the playhouse or opera theatre, or else in the context of pantomime. It is perhaps unfortunate that the pantomimes of the eighteenth century are so frequently disregarded today, being dismissed in the same words as Cibber, as “monstrous Medlies” or “Fooleries” of no consequence; whereas, in truth, it would not be unreasonable to suggest that these multi-media extravaganzas were the true successors to the ‘spectaculars’ of Dorset Garden. Indeed, in the serious part of a Rich pantomime one might have witnessed the earliest productions of all-sung English opera. Above all, the pantomime in this period provided the public with highly-valued access to the most popular thing on the English stage in the eighteenth century: dance, in all its various guises.