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Nineteenth Annual Conference

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13-16 June 1996

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Linda J. Tomko, Compiler

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## Conflict and Harmony: some issues in the construction of meaning through dance-music relationships in Antony Tudor's *The Leaves are Fading*

Rachel S Richardson

In characteristically deprecating manner Antony Tudor once commented that ballet audiences might frequently find themselves moved emotionally in performance but that, unbeknown to them, this would often be because of the music; rather than the effect of any action on stage.<sup>1</sup> I should like to argue in this paper that, while the music scores for Tudor's ballets undoubtedly have the power to stimulate emotional responses, it is also, and equally, the choreography itself and the ways in which music and dance resonate together in his ballets, which evoke such responses in an audience.

I have chosen to focus on Tudor's late ballet, *The Leaves are Fading*, set to a selection of chamber music for strings by Dvorak, in terms of the overall structure in relation to the theme of the ballet, and in terms of specific moments in the ballet which illustrate facets of the relationship between dance and music at the level of small detail, and which contribute in some significant way to the construction of possible meanings in the ballet. I am taking the ballet to be, broadly speaking, 'about' youthful love relationships seen through the perspective of memory, and shall be considering some of the ways in which mood and atmosphere are evoked which relate to these ideas.

The theoretical framework for this study has been developed in dance analysis from the model devised by Adshead and others (1988), and in musical analysis deriving from contemporary theories of semiotics in music especially those dealing with relationships between music and speech, and the concept of auditory consciousness. The major part of the material for this paper is taken from my PhD thesis on the choreography of Antony Tudor.

The two main areas introduced in this paper are concerned with the large-scale structures of dance and music in the ballet, and some of the small details of choreography which, in conjunction with their music, create images providing cross-references through the ballet and which suggest Wittgenstein's notion of 'family resemblances' (that is of aspects of whatever kind which may contribute to a notion of relationship or 'belonging together' - Wittgenstein was discussing games; here it is the components and structure of a ballet) and the importance of context in the construction of possible 'meanings'.

The music theorist Robin Maconie (1990) explores several issues pertinent to this enquiry and I should like to begin by introducing some of these in his own words:

[Musical notation] began with the singing of religious ritual, the idea being to preserve along with the written words a correct form of intonation of a sacred text. It represented a development not so much in the interests of artistic expression as a recognition of the importance of adherence to a given pattern of pitch inflexion, emphasis, and pausation to convey an authorized meaning. Our common punctuation marks today are direct

descendants of those early forms of notation, and we interpret them in authentic fashion every time we allow the voice to rise to a question mark, change key for quotation marks, descend in pitch for a comma, and pause for a trail of full stops at the end of an unfinished line of dialogue....(p115)

He also states that

a musical composition is a proposition about the way the world is perceived. All such propositions are a balancing act reconciling perceptions of order and change, harmony and time, the vertical and horizontal co-ordinates of auditory consciousness. (p176)

Maconie goes on to suggest that different nationalities characteristically favour one or other of the vertical and horizontal perceptions in musical composition; that French music may be 'very seductive as sonority, less compelling as argument...' whereas 'by contrast, the Germanic composers, as befits a culture which puts verbs at the ends of sentences, emphasizes the horizontal by stressing the unstable and transitional nature of instantaneous harmonies...' (p177)

This latter point is interesting on a number of different levels. There are, for example, immediate parallels to be drawn with language and the complex inter-relationship of parts of speech in the construction of meaning; also, the notion of music as in some sense a 'language'; and the further fascinating possibilities of looking at dance and music together in terms of this deferral or resolution of meaning. Tudor's choice of music for his ballets reflects a preference for music of the 'horizontal' approach, which may be illuminating in looking at the notions of time, memory, human existence and so on in the development of themes in his works.

It is useful to consider some of the ways in which Tudor manipulates choreographic devices in conjunction (or even disjunction) with his chosen music in, for the purpose of this paper, *The Leaves are Fading*; making use of the sense of creating tension and resolving it and relating this to the notion of time passing and yet not having passed, and the rôle of memory in life experience.

The ballet was made in 1975 for some of the younger members of American Ballet Theatre, and it was Tudor's penultimate work. At the beginning of the ballet a solitary woman crosses the stage meanderingly, and as she leaves, dancers gradually enter and a series of dances ensues - duets, *ensembles* and solos. As the dancers begin to leave for the last time at the end, the *Walking Woman* reappears, wandering across once more.

Overall, Tudor chose late nineteenth century and early twentieth-century music most frequently for his ballets, and with a bias towards German or Austrian composers and music of the late-Romantic style in particular - prime manifestations of the 'horizontal' aspect in music as characterised by Maconie. Characteristics of this broad *genre* include the importance of melody; fluidity of tonality and use of chromaticism as expressive device;<sup>2</sup> variable rhythmic and phrasing structures. Also prominent is the use of strings or voice - strings being closest in *timbre* to human voice, and this is important in any consideration of Tudor's work; he said himself that he always wanted 'the body to sing',

and dancers have frequently described his way of working with music in terms of its melodic shape rather than counts or beats.<sup>3</sup> In some ballets the rich sweep of melody and complex harmonic structures of the music contrast strongly with a relatively austere movement style, for example in *Dark Elegies* and *Pillar of Fire*, but this distinction is much less marked, indeed is scarcely apparent in *The Leaves are Fading*.

There is, in *The Leaves are Fading*, an identifiable movement style which is shown through the shared vocabulary of all dancers. In this ballet, the basis is clearly *danse d'école*, in terms of the lifted carriage, free and soft *ports de bras* and *cambré*, combined with stretched feet and legs, usually in turn-out, and with choreography arising out of recognisable ballet vocabulary. Nowhere is there evident the sense of weight into the ground, or the 'held' arms and torso characteristic of *Dark Elegies* and, in a different manner, *Pillar of Fire*.

In comparison with *Dark Elegies*, in which the 'carving out' of strongly articulated spatial patterns is a key feature, the movement style of *Leaves* emphasises lyricism and flow, and continuous movement through space in 'singing' phrases. There is evidence of a close relationship of dance and music at a general level of phrasing - suggesting the rhythms and intonation of speech or singing in both dynamic inflection and in the sense of 'breath' rhythms, created in the dance through the phrasing, with rising and falling dynamic, 'pausation' and so on. While these things may initially seem to blur distinctions between individuals because images tend to dissolve as soon as they are formed, it is also significant in the suggestion of memories, which may indeed be fleeting, but which may also, from time to time, crystallise into something specific and evocative.

In many of Tudor's ballets significant aspects of the music are the use of fluctuating tonality and chromaticism, and asymmetry in melodic phrasing, all of which features are characteristic of much music of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries - particularly German music - and the function these devices have in the 'horizontal' aspect of music: pushing on through time, creating tension with the expectancy of its ultimate, however long-delayed, resolution, and so on. This is the case in *Leaves*, even though the degree of chromaticism and harmonic instability in Dvorák's music is much less immediately apparent than in Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht*, for example, and Tudor's manipulation of these things and creation of movement vocabulary which highlights the tension and its resolution, is also less obvious.<sup>4</sup> However, in relation to the respective themes of these ballets it is easy to see why this might be so. In *Pillar of Fire* the dramatic development towards catastrophe and *dénouement* are of central importance, whereas the structure and content of *Leaves* imply meditation rather than action and event. These things being the case, one might wonder whether the characteristics attributed by Maconie to French music, with its sonorous preoccupation with the vertical - frozen in time - might make a French composer a more expected choice for this ballet. But even though there is not the same perception of chronological time in *Leaves* as there is in *Pillar*, there are still, it could be argued, fragments of life experience suggested, which themselves exist in real or remembered time, with the attendant notion of moving through states of uncertainty or anticipation.

There are a number of different levels of structural comparison possible between dance and music. As well as looking at the large-scale structure, in terms of sections of music or songs or movements and so on in relation to dramatic or thematic choreographic structure, it is also possible to consider structural relationships on the smaller scale. Examples may be concerned with phrasing and the use of melodic and choreographic *leit-motif*, which I shall be looking at later on in this paper.

### 1. Large-scale structure

The structure of the musical score has implications for the development of the theme in a ballet. In both *The Leaves are Fading* and *Dark Elegies*, for example, the relatively loose structure offers the possibility of exploring aspects of mood or atmosphere, as opposed to a more complex interweaving of human relationships within the narrative structures of *Jardin aux Lilas* and *Pillar of Fire*. The symphonic form of the latter ballets also embodies the notion of time, of progression through events, rather than focusing on specific images or facets of experience as in *Leaves* and *Elegies*.<sup>5</sup>

The score of *Leaves* was constructed by Tudor from an assortment of short pieces, many of them linked but not all.<sup>6</sup> Tudor made the decisions about the ordering of separate pieces and any editing he wished to make. In the string quartet and quintet music used, for example, only one movement is taken from each, and in neither case is it heard complete. The *Cypresses* (which constitute the major part of the ballet's score) are very short arrangements of early love songs, and this provenance is evident in their short preludes and postludes, the lyrical melodies with breath-rhythms and recitative-like passages. Tudor arranged the score so that the key changes from one section to another would be smooth, by moving through keys which are generally closely 'related' in that they share a majority of tonal relations, so that the shift of tonality is slight. However, the progression of keys is not always predictable in this way. The outline structure (Fig 1) shows the progression of keys, and the fact that there is a tendency towards sharp tonality up to and including the solos and duet for the central couple G and J,<sup>7</sup> after which there is a sudden and complete shift - E major to E flat major - for the section entitled *Four Couples*, and a further complete shift for the *Solo Couples* and *Closing* sections. This progression of keys provides another kind of structure across the whole ballet by leading up to and away from the central *pas de deux* and solos. For example, the progression through 'sharp' tonality suggests the notion of ascending towards something (in the general trend through keys with an increasing number of sharps), whereas the reverse movement through 'flat' tonality suggests a falling away (or, indeed, a 'fading'), echoing in another way the patterns of speech inflection but in terms of over-arching structure.

The endings of Tudor's ballets can be significant in terms of the exposition of the theme, and the rôle of the music score in this is important. In both *Jardin aux Lilas* and *Pillar of Fire*, for example, the final moments of the music present an extended cadential passage, resolving in the major key after much chromaticism and predominantly minor tonality beforehand. The dramatic closing of the ballets makes use of this prolonged



resolution by allowing the *dénouement* to unfold gently but inevitably as well. *Dark Elegies* is similar, too, with its long and peaceful progress towards silence as the dancers slowly leave the stage in ordered fashion and calm resignation, and it is illuminating to compare this ballet with *The Leaves are Fading*. The manner of exit in *The Leaves are Fading* is similar in dynamic, although different in spatial design and movement vocabulary, to that in *Dark Elegies*. In the final moments of the ballet, when all the dancers have reappeared and begun quietly to leave, the Walking Woman enters, holding a flower; she looks at the central couple, G and J, as the other remaining couple leaves. After exchanging glances, the central woman steps into a *pirouette* and is caught and lifted by her partner in a 'drifting' lift, as they then leave. The Walking Woman continues her meandering across and leaves too (Fig. 2).

There is not the same sense of progression towards a new state of being as there is in *Elegies*, however, and this is due to a number of contributory factors. Firstly, the dancers' movement material is very similar in quality to that at the beginning, whereas in *Elegies* the initial tension and control has been relaxed, as the music moves through its long cadential passage. Secondly, the dancers leave in the same direction from which they came; this, and the Walking Woman who frames the action, suggests an ebb and flow rather than forward progression through time. Thirdly, and reinforcing this view, the music returns to the opening quintet movement. This return of the opening music suggests significance in terms of a sense of something cyclical, not forward-moving in time particularly but, again, an ebb and flow. In the ballet, while distinct characters emerge, it is fleetingly and elusively, denying any real sense of dramatic development, unlike the progression from *Lamentation* to *Resignation* in *Dark Elegies*.

## 2. Cross-referencing and 'family resemblances'

Some of the individual moments in *Leaves* suggest links across the ballet in terms of structure and theme - like Wittgenstein's notion of 'family resemblances', perhaps. Again, the rôle of music is an additional and significant factor in considering the construction of possible meanings. Among these, there are movements which appear and impress upon the memory in the ballet, and which are clearly related in terms of spatial design. One of these carries a 'swept-back' look, or drifting aspect, which is in keeping with the emphasis in the ballet on movement through space rather than movement into position, for example. Because of the otherwise more stable and conjunctive relationship of dance and music in the ballet, and the generally more consistently fluid movement style (than that in some other ballets of Tudor's for example), these images in *The Leaves are Fading* may be seen in terms of 'signature gestures' rather than tension-inducing devices of delayed resolution, contributing to the logical sense of the ballet and its possible meanings rather than introducing ambiguities to be resolved.

One of these drifting images occurs early on in the ballet (Fig. 3).<sup>8</sup> It is a lift which is allowed time to register as an image because of the slow pace of the movement, the multiplication of the image through five couples, and the relation of dance and music. The music is based in E minor, with many subtle chromatic shifts throughout, resulting

in a relatively fluid sense of key (and with attendant potential ambiguities) within a diatonic framework. In this bar the key seems to be shifting towards D major/minor, via that key's dominant chord of A major. As the end of the bar is reached preceding the expected modulation, there is a pause which creates a sense of suspension and heightened expectancy and, indeed, although the expected D chord ensues, there are further shifts of key before the return to E minor at the end. As the music reaches this 'question mark' point (I call it that because, in addition to the delayed resolution referred to, the melodic line itself rises in pitch to a pause, like a question in speech), so do the dancers achieve the image of the lift. Even though the image is held momentarily, the impression is of continuous movement because of the shape created by the dancers, with the women to the side of the men, legs curving around and behind, arms echoing this shape so that the total image is of a 'drifting' or transitory movement, rather than of a clearly defined, 'held' position. (In this, it demonstrates a marked contrast with moments in *Dark Elegies*, for example.)

Another related motif also occurs at a cadence, this time in the man's solo (Fig. 4). As in the previously described image, the focus and arms are directed one way, and the body spirals away from this, resulting in the sense of movement and 'drift'. In this case, there is more weight into the ground, and a more emphatic musical pulse to underline the movement and give it a greater degree of deliberation, reflecting the folk-dance inflection of this solo in both dance and music. The folk-dance connection here may also be read as a kind of colloquial intonation within the broader ballet *genre* which itself may be suddenly evocative, and the movement's 'family resemblance' to the unison lift described above contributes both to a structural coherence in the ballet but also to the notion of possible layers of meaning here through its cross-referencing - similar movement image, different musical and thematic context.

In the central duet the drifting shape appears a number of times and in different guises; most notably in the lifts. One of these (Fig. 5) is a travelling lift which occurs early on in the duet during a *crescendo* and *accelerando* in the music. The other example here is one which ends the duet where the woman is carried off-stage by her partner, so that there is indeed movement, not only the appearance of movement in both these cases. The latter lift occurs as the music dies into silence and here, as in the first example described, the music's own ebb and flow work in conjunction with the dance so that the overall effect is one of continuous but gentle forward momentum into silence and emptiness (Fig. 6).

The use of images which are related in spatial design and/or dynamic inflection constitutes part of this ballet's style, inasmuch as this 'cross-referencing' is a characteristic structural feature. It also may be seen as contributing to the notion of memory, and the fleeting, recurring and dissolving images of memory. In this way, when such an image appears in another context it may serve as a reminder, bringing to mind other, different contexts. As noted above, the examples cited occur with different music and therefore provide a particular kind of link across the ballet. Interestingly, the opposite is the case in *Jardin aux Lilas*, for example, in which the same musical idea is given different choreographic treatments at various points in the ballet, thus raising

other fascinating possibilities for investigation. The notion of 'conflict' referred to in the title of this paper might best be considered in terms of 'engagement'. The dance engages with the music, offers its own agenda which responds to that in the music but goes somewhere else as well. Maconie also commented that 'too much harmony is bad for your health' - one might say that little doses of seasoning never come amiss, and are most effective when least obvious.

The inter-relationship, then, of Tudor's choice of music, his construction of the music score, and his development of a choreographic language and structure for the ballet - working with the musical structure on many levels and extending it, counterpointing this with a complex choreographic and dramatic structure - all lead to interpretations of richness and subtlety within the parameters of the general theme of loving relationships, memory, and the significance of context in reading these.

I should like gratefully to acknowledge the support of the British Academy and the Manchester Metropolitan University in the preparation of this paper.

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Fig. 1: Outline Structure

Cast: Walking woman: Z  
Girls: M A N K E F B H G  
Boys: O R W S C J

1. **Opening** Walking woman (Z); five couples (K,R;A,O;M,W;C,N;S;H) plus three girls (E,B,F)

Quintet. Key: no sharps or flats

2. **Ensemble** Five couples plus three girls (as above, some exits)  
Cypress 7. Key: 1 sharp

3. **Pas de deux** Two girls (N F); two couples (O,M;H,W).  
Cypress 11. Key: 3 sharps

4. **Pas de deux** Girl/boy (H,W)  
Cypress 6. Key: 4 sharps

5. **Peasant dance** Ensemble  
Terzetto scherzo. Key: no sharps or flats, then 3 sharps (relative major/minor)

6. **Solo** Girl (G)  
Quartet. Key: 4 sharps (major)

7. **Solo** Boy (J)  
Quartet trio. Key: 4 sharps (minor)

**8. Pas de deux** G and J  
Cypress 8. Key: 4 sharps (major)

**9. Four couples** E,C;K,R;B,S;H,W  
Cypress 4. Key: 2 flats

**10. Pas de deux** Girl/boy (M,O)  
Cypress 5. Key: 4 flats

**11. Pas de deux** Girl/boy (E,C)  
Cypress 2. Key: 4 flats

**12. Solo couples** E,C; M,O; H,W; G,J  
Cypress 3. Key: 1 sharp

**13. Closing**

Reprise of opening music; gradual exeunt of couples; return of Walking Woman  
Quintet. Key: no sharps or flats

Fig. 2: end of ballet - notation

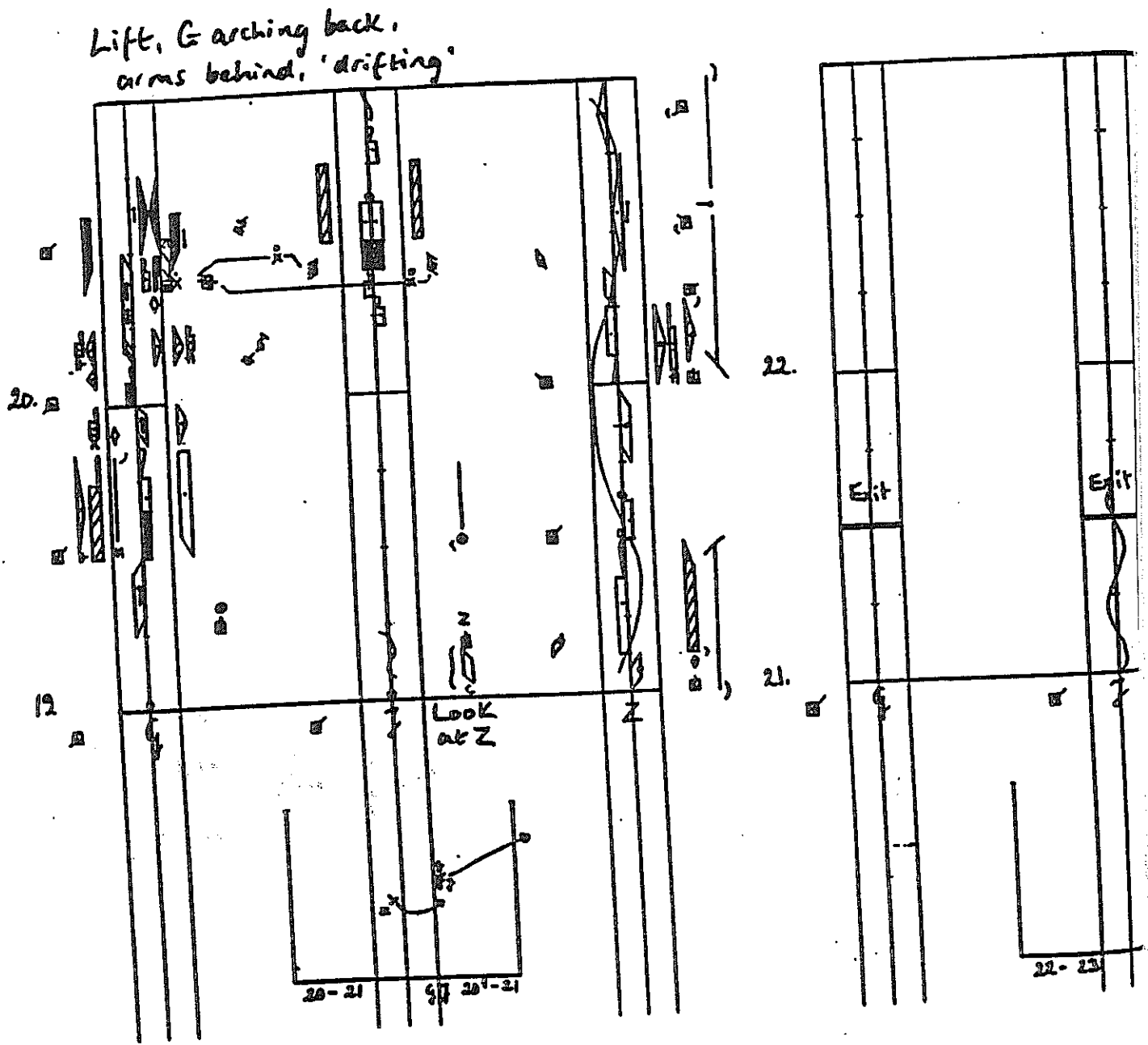


Fig. 2: end of ballet - music

The musical score consists of two systems of five staves each. The first system includes performance directions: *rit.* and *a tempo* at the top right, and *dim.* and *pp* markings throughout. The second system includes *pp*, *cresc.*, *mf*, *p*, *pp*, *pizz.*, and *arco* markings. The notation includes various note values, rests, and dynamic hairpins.

Fig. 3: couples lift - notation

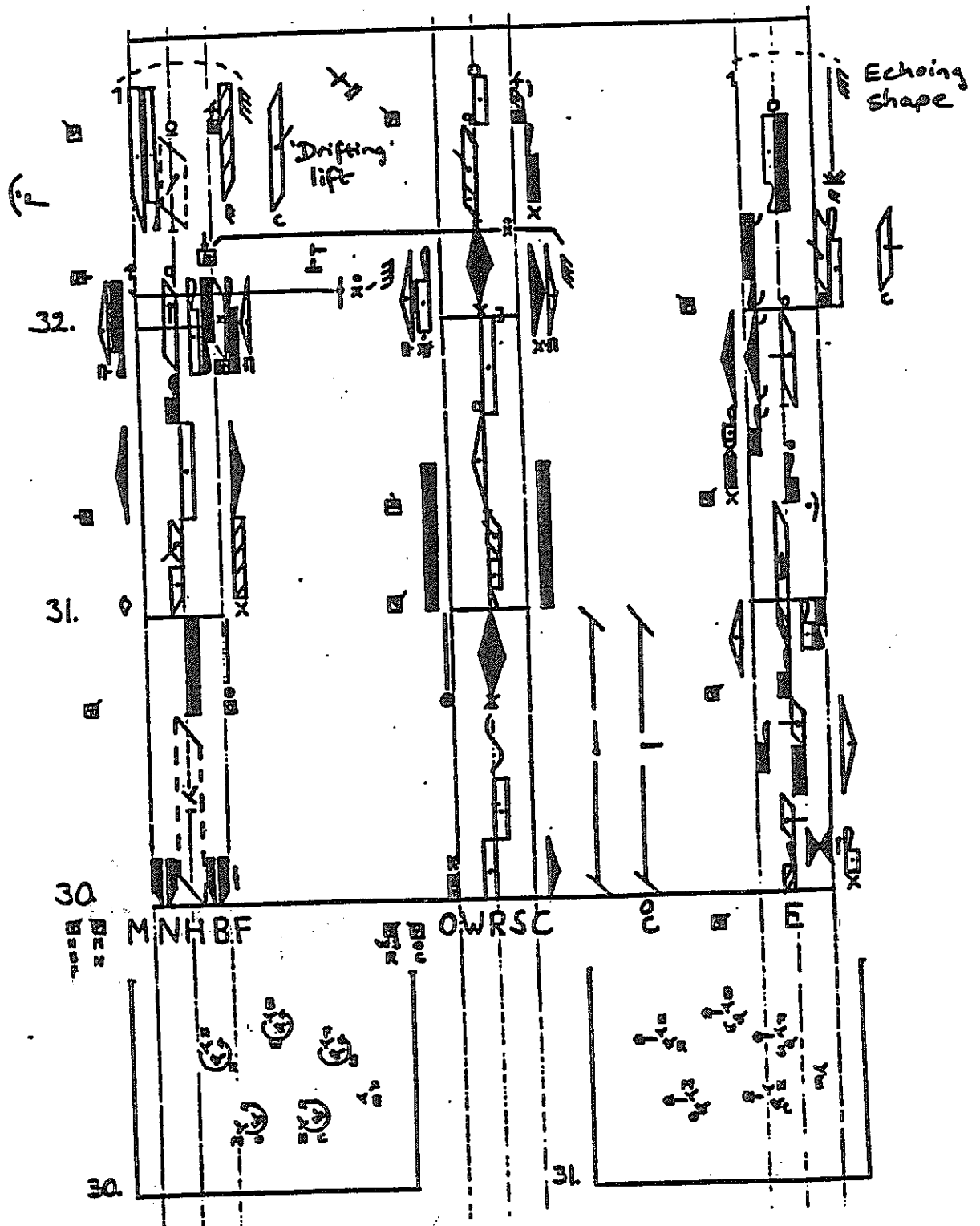




Fig. 3: couples lift - music

The first system of music consists of four staves. The top staff is a vocal line with lyrics and a melodic line. The second staff is a piano accompaniment with a rhythmic pattern. The third and fourth staves are bass and tenor lines. Dynamics include *pp* and *ppp*.

The second system of music consists of four staves. The top staff is a vocal line with lyrics and a melodic line. The second staff is a piano accompaniment with a rhythmic pattern. The third and fourth staves are bass and tenor lines. Dynamics include *pp*.

The third system of music consists of four staves. The top staff is a vocal line with lyrics and a melodic line. The second staff is a piano accompaniment with a rhythmic pattern. The third and fourth staves are bass and tenor lines. Dynamics include *pp* and *dim.*

Fig. 4: J's solo - notation

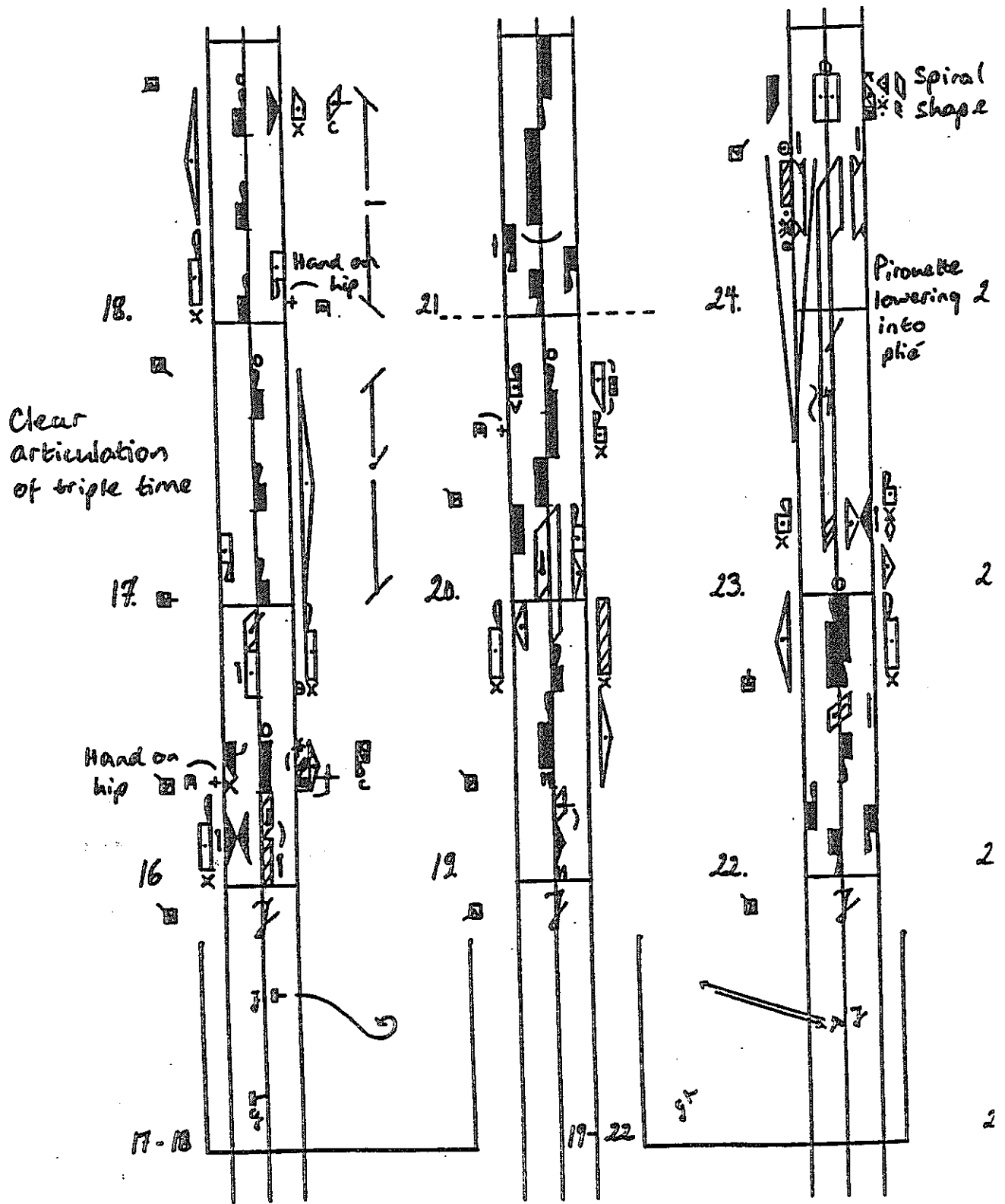




Fig. 5: pas de deux lift - notation

