

**SOCIETY OF DANCE HISTORY SCHOLARS**

**PROCEEDINGS**

**Twenty-Fourth Annual Conference  
Goucher College  
Baltimore, Maryland  
21 - 24 June 2001**

# **Proceedings**

## **Society of Dance History Scholars**

**Twenty-Fourth Annual Conference**

**Goucher College  
Baltimore, Maryland  
21 - 24 June 2001**

The Society of Dance History Scholars is a constituent member of the American Council of Learned Societies

This collection of papers has been compiled from files provided by individual authors who wished to contribute their papers as a record of the 2001 Society of Dance History Scholars conference. The compiler endeavored to standardize format for columns, titles, subtitles, figures or illustrations, references, and endnotes. The content is unchanged from that provided by the authors.

Individual authors hold the copyrights to their paper.

Printed by The Printing House, Stoughton, Wisconsin  
2001

Published by Society of Dance History Scholars

# Conference Papers Table of Contents

SDHS Conference 2001

21 - 24 June 2001

Baltimore, Maryland

Juliette Crone-Willis, Compiler

1	Peter Bohlin <i>A Fight for Women's Rights: A Moment From Stockholm, 1650, and the Coronation Festivities of Queen Christina of Sweden</i> .....	1
2	Lynn Matluck Brooks <i>Recovering Meaning: Documents and Interpretation</i> .....	5
3	Renée Camus <i>Cancan: Blurring the Line Between Social Dance and Stage Performance</i> .....	6
4	Alexandra Carter <i>Changing Views: A Critical History of Second Wave Feminist and Post-Feminist Debate and Its Manifestation in Writings on Ballet</i> .....	11
5	Elizabeth Cooper <i>Dances About Spain: Guns &amp; Castanets and Adelante</i> .....	16
6	Roger Copeland <i>Dancing For The Digital Age: Merce Cunningham's Biped</i> .....	23
7	Michelle Ferranti <i>A Different Expression: Recognizing the Work of Oskar Schlemmer</i> .....	29
8	Anita Gonzalez <i>Urban Bush Women and the Continuum of Black Performativity</i> .....	35
9	Naomi M. Jackson <i>Rethinking Humanness: The Place of Automata, Puppets and Cyborgs in Dance</i> .....	39
10	Suzanne M. Jaeger <i>Dancing in a Virtual Moment: Look Mom No Flesh!</i> .....	43
11	Angela Kane <i>American Dreams: New Frontiers in 21st Century Dance</i> .....	49
12	Nancy Kane <i>Architecture and Icon in Caroso's Nobiltà Di Dame</i> .....	55
13	Rebekah J. Kowal <i>"From Remembrance Came a Dance": The Cultural Meanings of Narrative in Donald McKayle's Early Choreography</i> .....	60
14	Allana Lindgren <i>"Pointe of Law": The National Ballet of Canada and Kimberly Glasco Legal Arbitration Case</i> .....	63
15	Vida Midgelow <i>The Erotic and the Exotic in Swan Lake as Reconceived by Shakti: Some Difficulties of Interpretation and Evaluation</i> .....	70
16	Lisa Naugle <i>Reinterpreting Choreography: Motion Capture Data as Historical Information</i> .....	76
17	Ann Nugent <i>Seeking Order and Finding Chaos in the Choreography of William Forsythe</i> .....	81

18	Gunhild Oberzaucher-Schüller	Introducing Rosalia Chladek .....	86
19	Tate Osten	Autographs. Early Works of Boris Eifman .....	91
20	Ken Pierce	Choreographic Structure in the Dances of Claude Balon .....	101
21	Tresa Randall	Populism, Avant-Gardism, and Hanya Holm: An Analysis of Dance of Work and Play (1938) .....	105
22	Val Rimmer	Collaborations Between Dance and Technology as a History of the Present .....	111
23	Jane Scott-Barrett	"Marketable Radicalness" and the Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion in Examples of American Post-Modern Dance .....	116
24	Cheryl Smith	Matrons and Patrons: Behind the Scenes in Three Canadian Ballet Companies .	122
25	Iro Valaskakis Tembeck	Of Names and Things: Image Makeovers in Some Montreal Dance Institutions.....	127
26	Sharry Traver Underwood	Narration for the Video of the Lost Dances of Ted Shawn .....	132
27	Cynthia J. Williams	Fokine's Forgotten Puppet.....	136
		Program .....	145

# A Fight for Women's Rights: A Moment From Stockholm, 1650, and the Coronation Festivities of Queen Christina of Sweden <sup>(1)</sup>

Peter Bohlin

During the Coronation festivities of Queen Christina of Sweden, there appeared in Stockholm, to the surprise of most, on November second (2), 1650, three Amazon queens: Antiope, Penthesilea and Thalestris. They had arrived to settle a dispute.

The Amazons delivered a written statement:

"Already for some time now, on the Elysian fields, there has been an argument as to which sex should be considered to be the most excellent one. We [the Amazons] have demonstrated, with irrefutable evidence, that women are born to govern and men to serve. Famous heroes resident on these fields have vehemently opposed us regarding this issue, and have in every way refused to let themselves be persuaded to acknowledge in words that, which they in their hearts are convinced to be true."<sup>(3)</sup>

For this reason the Amazons had prepared themselves to accomplish with swords what they could not achieve with words, and they had started to rally other women for a battle. But Pluto, sovereign of the Underworld, forbade them to start bringing about confusion in his realm. At the same time, though, so as not to infringe any of their rights, he allowed the Amazons to depart to earth, in order to solve the dispute. The Amazons then got to know, that the coronation of the illustrious Queen of Sweden was settled to take place in Stockholm, and they drew the conclusion that many honourable and esteemed persons, both females and males, would gather to that occasion. In short: they found no more convenient place, and no better opportunity, to have their just cause presented and tried, in the presence of so many noble and important persons. So they arrived in Stockholm to pay their respect and honour to the venerable Queen, who "has raised the repressed prestige of the female sex to levels higher than ever previously." They also wished to celebrate the whole female sex, and to endow it with additional reputation at the announced tiltings. "In combats with all chivalric weapons we are here to prove, that women are more splendid, and more proficient than men in all prominent commissions, as well in war as in peace, especially considering the fact that women are disposed more towards virtue and less towards vice, than men."

This constituted the cartel, or letter of challenge, which served as the cause, to defend or refute, by the par-

ticipants in the following equestrian games.

The presentation of this cartel, in 1650, is the moment I have selected for this conference. The Amazons' proud challenge and the homage to the pre-eminence to the female sex, with the contests to follow, are reasons why I decided to choose the title A fight for Women's Rights. This piece is so much more than just another way of flattering Queen Christina in person. At this moment in history, there was an singular opportunity to compare the sexes in favour of the female, and ask the idea to be seriously considered - and someone actually took it. The name of the author seems, sadly, not to have survived, but we know who commissioned the entertainment - three counts (4), one of them had been the commander-in-chief of the Swedish army in the thirty years' war, Magnus Gabriel de la Gardie. He turned out to be a favourite of the Queen.

## Queen Christina

When Christina's father, Gustavus Adolphus, was killed in the battle of Lützen, in 1632, during the 30 years' war, Christina was not even six years old. A regency was established, and Christina ascended to the throne in 1644, at the age of eighteen, but she was crowned only six years later, in 1650. When Christina was still very young, the regency council, the parliament and other important men of the state, counted on Christina to marry her cousin, the Count Palatine Carl Gustaf, but soon Christina started to have second thoughts about it, and before long she refused to even contemplate the matter. She herself found a solution on the question of a successor to the throne by making the parliament agree to accept Carl Gustav as her successor, and as such he was taking part already in the Coronation ceremonies.

Artists of the time dealt with her refusal to marry by depicting her, in text and images, as the chaste and virtuous Diana / Artemis. Another quality emphasized was her wisdom (quite deservedly; she was fluent in several languages and came to own one of the greatest libraries of her time), then she was depicted as Minerva / Pallas Athena, sometimes with an effigy of an owl. After the peace treaty of Westphalia, in 1648, which ended successfully for Sweden, with land conquerings and the gaining of an enormous war indemnity, she was also hailed as victorious (as Pallas Athena) and as a peace-maker (with laurels).

An excellent portrait (5), from about 1650 to 1674, by an unknown artist, depicts Queen Christina as Minerva,

with a shield and dressed to her knees in polished armour. But from there down, she is wearing a light gown, and on her feet gold-embroidered slippers. This, then, is a portrait of a woman dressed to fight if she must, but equally prepared for a life in peace. Above all, here we have a woman who is not going to let herself be dominated. The artist has admirably, I think, been able to catch several facets of her complex character.

Queen Christina's reign lasted only until 1654, when she abdicated, 28 years old, converted to Catholicism, and moved to Rome, where she was a passionate arts patron, commissioning works from composers like Corelli, Scarlatti and Stradella. She died in 1689 in Rome and was buried there, in St. Peter's Church.

In short: Queen Christina, with her life as weapon, also fought a battle for women's rights. She gave up her position and her country rather than to agree to marry, she chose to convert to catholicism at a time when it was a crime to be a catholic in Sweden, and she chose to pursue, for practically her whole life, her passionate interest in the arts (6).

Queen Christina has often been described as enigmatic, almost as often, I suppose, as the writers of her history have been men. The most provocative issues have been her abdication, her refusal to marry and her conversion to catholicism. She has also been severely criticized, by historians, for having spent large sums on diversions and pleasures. Indeed, enormous sums were spent - particularly after the return of Swedish warlords from the Thirty years' war. They brought, in many cases, enormous fortunes. Queen Christina's Swedish years were the heyday of the court ballets and entertainments in Sweden.

There are printed texts for 19 court ballets and entertainments (7). Together, they make a total of over 400 pages. 15 of the texts are French ones, 8 Swedish, and 7 German ones - some texts had versions in more than one language. The names of two maîtres de ballet are known: Antoine de Beaulieu and, from 1650, his assistant Jacques de Sonnes, also spelled des Ausne (8). Four authors have been identified: René Descartes, Hélié Poirier, Urbain Chevreux and the Swede Georg Stiernhielm - by Swedish literary historians hailed as the father of Swedish poetry. With the exception of his texts, that have been scholarly edited, little research has been done. A beautiful sort of exception is, of course, the creation (closely after *Then fångne Cupido*), by Mary Skeaping, in 1956, of the ballet "Cupid out of His Humour", which formed the start of a splendid series of historical ballets in Sweden. In the original ballet Queen Christina performed, in 1649, the part of Diana.

Beside these entertainments there were *bergeries* (shepherd and shepherdess games, often outdoors), *Schäfereien* (which seems to be a German word for much the same thing), *Wirtschaften* (dressing up for mock receptions at inns), and there were ballets without printed

texts, masked balls and other balls. Queen Christina is known to have taken an active part in these amusements, and was reported, at a masque on April 8, 1654, to have dressed up first as a moorish lady, then as a citizen's wife (9).

#### The text "Nachricht durch was Gelegenheit..." - Report on the Occasion when three Amazon Queens ...

The cartel was printed in two languages, German and Swedish, and there are actually four different versions preserved of that page only. The Swedish version seems to have been the first one, as there is one page with only two Amazons as signatories. I take that to be an early version, as all other documents have three Amazons. Then there were thirteen more text pages. The title page is an impressive one, with the letters printed in about ten different sizes. Obviously a lot of effort was made to give this page an impressive look. Seven of the other pages provide a literary motivation and dramatic foundation for the event. On several occasions, and this is an excellent example, organizers went to great lengths in order to supply a solid background for the staging. Let me call the seven pages the synopsis. It starts with Jove, finding himself one day being displeased with conditions being so calm and undisturbed in the Underworld. He decides to do something about it, summons Mercury, and sends him, dressed up as a deceased person, so as not to be recognized, to the Underworld with a letter addressed to "the most splendid sex". The consequences turn out to be just what Jove has hoped for - as indicated in the cartel. There are also in the synopsis extended discussions about which sex is the most outstanding one, and long reasons are given for travelling to Stockholm. There is also included a detailed exposition about the retinue going with the Amazons. In the end, Jove also wants to come along to see what happens, and he transforms himself into a falcon, as he does not wish to be recognized. Before leaving the Underworld, the Amazons ask Pluto if he would be so kind and let them be accompanied by creatures that once lived on earth, but are no more anywhere to be seen, so they got two pygmies, the cyclops Polyphemus, one man with a dog's head, one man with an enormous foot, one man with no head but his face in the chest (10) and one man with ears so long that they touch the ground. For security reasons Hercules was also sent, to keep an eye on these creatures.

Also included in the synopsis is a picturesque description of a pyramid, erected by the three Amazon queens to the eternal glory of Queen Christina. Four virtues personified, Prudence, Fortitude, Clemency and Temperance are described carrying a pyramid so high that its top touches one of heaven's spheres, and on top of this sphere is standing Eternity personified, holding in one hand a picture of Queen Christina, in the other an imperishable Crown to put on the Queen's head.

Two separate pages in the printed text give the order of the pageant, which was formed by no less than 35 units. It was lead by Fame followed by one Amazon beating kettle-drums and then by eight Amazons playing trumpets. The pageant included a total of 68 Amazons, some twenty gods and goddesses and classical heroes, the muses and several nymphs, 36 horses, many sheep and dogs, 8 white oxen with silver horns, 2 bears, 2 monkeys, 2 mules, 1 deer, the falcon (Jove), and there was Pan with two satyrs. Except the pyramid there were four cars. On one of them was seen Mars, the god of war, reclining at the feet of Pax and Justitia.

The only iconography of all these ballets and entertainments is a four metre long set of gouaches, attributed to Nicolas Vallari, court painter to Queen Christina from 1647. The occasion was the pageant "The Splendours of Felicity", held on October 24th, 1650, four days after the coronation. Five pieces have been published in colour (11): 1. Mars and three knights - and three dancing girls, carrying their own instruments. 2. Amor and Venus and Happiness personified on a self-propelled car. 3. The car of Felicity, drawn by four unicorns with wings and a nymph on either side of them. In the car there are four nymphs, two children and, in the back, Unity and Felicity personified. 4. Apollo and the muses on Mount Parnassus. 5. Twenty warriors.

These pageants started at the Royal Castle. When equestrian games were to follow, the goal of the pageant was the tilting ground, north of the castle. About ten years later, the ground was converted to an indoor space. On an engraving (12), in the fashion of the time, the artist made very best efforts to make the building look impressive. We may safely assume that the persons in this engraving are severely diminished in size. But there were a hundred chandeliers hanging from the ceiling (13), so the building ought to have been in impressive sight.

One must bear in mind, though, that the challenge seems to have been forgotten once the equestrian games had started. They used to include moments like catching little rings on a lance from a horse in full gallop, but not tournaments in the conventional sense of the word. The important matter after the start of the games seems to have been to crown a winner, and there were award ceremonies with special prizes, as the Ladies' prize.

The Amazon entertainment has been poorly considered in the literature. The only reference to the cartel that I have found is a full quotation of the German version, without comments, in a Swedish book from 1911 (14). I insist, of course, that the text deserves better. I hope now that I have showed, that it deserves to be included also in dance history, even if not a single dance step was performed.

## Notes

1. Five years ago I got a grant from the Board of Research and Artistic Development at the University College of Dance, Stockholm, to make a study on the text of this entertainment. I never succeeded in having the study published. Here, a part of it has been used, with additions. For my journey, the Carina Ari Foundation in Stockholm generously made me an indispensable grant.
2. The date, not on the printed text, is given by Jonas Petri, member of Parliament, for the estate of the priests. He wrote a report from the parliament session in 1650. Petri is quoted by Beijer, Agne: *Upptåg och ringrättning in Det glada Sverige; våra fester och högtider genom tiderna*, Stockholm 1947, part II, p. 780.
3. My translation here, and everywhere in this paper, is a loose one, staying close to the contents of the text. The title page was printed in German only: *Nachricht durch was Gelegenheit die berühmte Königinnen der Amazonen Antiope, Penthesilea Und Thalestris Mit etlichen Heldinnen auß den Eliseischen Feldern auff dem Creis der Erden angelanget/den Vorzug der Weiber für den Männern zuerweisen; welcher gestalt unterschiedliche Göttinnen/die Musae und die Tugende sich bey ihnen verfügt / und auff was weise diese gantze ansehnliche Gesellschaft Christina Der Durchleuchtigsten/Großmächtigsten und Hochgebornen Königin in Schweden/Bey Ihrer Crönung eine Ewige Gedechtnuß Ihrer unvergleichlichen Vollkommenheit auffgerichtet*, Stockholm, no date. The text is not paginated. My basis has been the Swedish version of the cartel.
4. The other two ones were Jakob Casimir de la Gardie (brother of Magnus Gabriel) and Gustaf af Ortala (Torstensson), according to Grönstedt, Johan: *Svenska Hoffester. I. Baletter, Idyller, Kostymbaler, Spektahler och Upptåg Uppförda vid Drottning Christinas Hof åren 1638-1654*, Stockholm 1911, p. 128.
5. Published in Rangström, Lena (ed.): *Riddarlek och tornerspel; Tournaments and the Dream of Chivalry*, bilingual exhibition catalogue, Livrustkammaren / The Royal Armoury, Stockholm, 1992, p. 154.
6. In fact, only last month, on May 30th, 2001, "La forza delle stelle" (The Power of the Stars), with scenario by Queen Christina and music by Stradella, was given its first performance in modern times - it seems not to have been established if it was actually performed at the time of its creation, around 1675. The collaboration was apparently a close one, as Queen Christina indicated which singers she wanted. See Loewe, Peter: *Premiär för verk av drottning*, Dagens Nyheter, May 29, 2001.
7. My list has been established after Klemming, Gustaf Edvard: *Sveriges dramatiska litteratur till och med 1875: bibliografi*, Stockholm 1863-1879, and Collijn, Isak Gustaf Alfred: *Sveriges bibliografi 1600-talet*, Uppsala 1942-46, and after photocopies from the originals, at the Royal Library, Stockholm.
8. Skeaping, Mary: *Ballet under the Three Crowns*, Dance Perspectives 32, New York 1967, p. 18.
9. Skeaping, pp. 26-27, quoting the Journal of Cromwell's ambassador, Bulstrode Whitelocke.
10. A nice picture was published in Rangström, Lena (ed.): *Riddarlek och tornerspel; Tournaments and the Dream of Chivalry*, Stockholm 1992, p. 155. There are also discussed German models to Swedish pageants.
11. Same catalogue, pp. 155-156.
12. An engraving by G. C. Eimmart, after Ehrenstrahl, was published by Skeaping. The size is larger in the Swedish edition, *Den svenska hovbaletten*, Stockholm 1983, p. 30.
13. Beijer, p. 784.
14. Grönstedt, pp. 129-131.

Copyright 2001, Peter Bohlin



## Printed texts for court ballets and pageants/entertainments during the regency and reign (1632-1654) of Queen Christina of Sweden.

Date	Author Title	Nr of pages
? 1638	(-) Le ballet des plaisirs de la vie des enfans sans soucy danzè deuant sa Majest. la Royne de Suede à Stockholm	(8 p.)
(Nov. 30) 1642	(-) Le balet du cours du monde danzé deuant sa Majesté la Reine de Suede ...	(10 p.)
Dec. 8, 1643	(-) Ballet, Vom Lauff der Welt, getantz für die Königl. May:tt zu Schweden...	(11 p.)
Jan. 1, 1645	(-) Balet des phantaisies de ce temps danzé à Stockholm le 8. dec. lannee M. DC. XLIII. en presence de sa maïesté	(6 p.)
June 28, 1646	(-) Balet Om thenna tïdzens fantasier ...	(7 p.)
Sept. (?) 1646 April 4, 1649	(-) Le Monde reiovi Balet, Danzé pour la Regence de sa Maïesté, à Stockholm ...	(28 p.)
Nov. 1, 1649	(-) Balet Om Heela Wårdenes Frögd förorsakadh aff Hennes Kongl. M:ts Lykelige Regeringz begynnelse / Dantsat upå Stockholms Slott / den 1 Januarij årh 1645	(22 p.)
Dec. 8, 1649	(-) Boutade [p. 1: Boutade Les effects de l'amour] Dansée à Stockholm ... en presence de sa Maïesté & de sa Cour [Note: The names of the performers have been added, in handwriting, in the copy at the Royal Library, Stockholm.]	(8 p.)
March 3, 1650	(-) L'amour constant	(17 p.)
Oct. 24, 1650	(-) Les passions Victorieuses et Vaincues Ballet. Dancé En presence de leurs Majestez à Stokholm le 4 d'Avril [Note: Also the names of the dancers are printed.]	(21 p.)
Nov. 11, 1650	(Poirier, Hélié) Le vaincu de Diane. Balet. Danzé au château Royal de Stokholm. En la prézance de la Sérénissime Rène, Mère de sa Majesté ... also printed as	(21 p.)
Dec. 8, 1649	La Diane Victorieuse. Ballet. Danzé au château Royal de Stokholm. En la prézance de la Serenissime Rene, Mere de sa Majeste ...	(12 p; with several scenes abridged)
March 3, 1650	(-) Die Überwundene Liebe. Ballet. ...	(21 p.)
Oct. 24, 1650	(Stiernhielm, Georg; Swedish version) Then fångne Cupido. Ballet.	(25 p.)
Nov. 2, 1650	(Descartes, René) La Naissance de la Pais Ballet. Danzé au chasteau Royal de Stokholm	(15 p.)
Nov. 5, 1650	(-) Des Friedens Geburts-Tag. Ballet. ...	(13 p.)
Nov. 11, 1650	(Stiernhielm, Georg; Swedish version) Freds-Afl. ...	(18 p.)
Jan. (9) 1651	(-) Les boutades ou proverbes. Balet. Danzé au Chateau Royal de Stockholm, en presence de leurs Majestez ...	(11 p.)
Dec. 8, 1651	(-) La Pompe de la felicité Conduite au couronnement de la tres Auguste Christine ...	(15 p.)
Dec. 8, 1651	(Stiernhielm, Georg; Swedish version): Lycksaligheetenes Åhre-Pracht ...	(11 p.)
Dec. 8, 1651	(-) Nachricht durch was Gelegenheit die berühmten Königinnen der Amazonen ...	(14-15 p; different versions)
Dec. 8, 1651	[also called "The Moors' Pageant"]	(1 p, but two versions)
Dec. 8, 1651	(-) Nachdem das Gerücht fast täglich etwas newes ...	(3 p.)
Dec. 8, 1651	(-) Efter såsom Ryckett snart dageligen något Nytt ...	(3 p.)
Dec. 8, 1651	(Stiernhielm, Georg) Virtutes repertae. The igenfundne Dygders Vptogh Vppå then Stormechtigste Drotning's Christinae Lycklige Crönings-fest ...	(7 p.)
Dec. 8, 1651	(-) Le parnasse triumphant ... Ce Magnifique Ballet Fut danzé devant sa Mageste, dans son Pallais de Stocolme, en la grande Salle des Machines ...	(24 p.)
Dec. 8, 1651	[Note: Includes the names of many performers]	(17 p.)
Dec. 8, 1651	(-) Der Triumphierende Parnaß ... Getantzet wurd den 9 Januarii ...	(20 p.)
Dec. 8, 1651	(Stiernhielm, Georg; Swedish version): Parnassus triumphans Ballet ...	(20 p.)
Dec. 8, 1651	(-) Einhalt des Ridderkampfes zu Fuße / Welcher Cristina, der Durchleuchtigsten / Großmechtigsten und Hochgeborenen Königin ... zu Stockholm ist gehalten worden ...	(4 p.)
Dec. 8, 1651	[Includes a list of participants]	(11 p.)
Dec. 8, 1652	(-) Spectaculum Certaminis Pedestris ...	(22 p.)
? 1653	(Chevreux, Urbain) Les liberalitez des dieux ...	(7 p.)
(Dec. 8) 1653	(-) La Masquarade des Vaudeuilles ... [Includes a list of participants]	(7 p.)
(Dec. 8) 1653	(-) Mars introduisant les Chevaliers du Combat de Barriere ...	(7 p.)

Dates within brackets are disputed and/or from other sources. Particularly important contemporary sources are letters written by the young courtier Johan Ekeblad to his father and brother, practically every week, and a diary by Jonas Petri, member of Parliament, representing the Clergy. These entertainments were performed only once. The only exception seems to have been Le vaincu de Diane / Then fångne Cupido, which was performed twice. December 8, when several of the entertainments took place, was the Queen's birthday.

# Recovering Meaning: Documents and Interpretation

Lynn Matluck Brooks

In this presentation, I urged a reconsideration of some current trends in academic history research, including dance history research. I focussed on two trends: 1) the use of jargon-laden language that made much recent work awkward to read and difficult for any but the initiated to understand; and 2) the imposition of research theories, methods, or agendas overlaid on the historical material that is purportedly the subject of the research. The former trend, I have observed, is often prompted by the latter. Recognizing, however, the powerful influences of current theories of truth, knowledge, and historical fact, I pointed to the helpful resolutions I have found in the work of Hans Georg Gadamer, whose "philosophical hermeneutics" addresses the nature of "alienation" in our encounters with art and with history—appropriate encounters for the dance historian. Gadamer's stress on "dialogue" between text and researcher provides a useful context for reconsidering the role of the historian as a translator or mediator of the past into the present.

Drawing on my own archival experiences, over the course of more than twenty years of work in both European and American contexts, I discussed the nature of encounters I have had with specific sorts of documents, including dance images, and the ways I attempted to "hear" the meanings embodied in those texts. The particular sorts of contextualizations the documents called for to make their meanings clear was a further subject of this presentation. I posed the following as appropriate questions for the (dance) historian:

1. How can I approach a document to "let it read itself" to me?
2. How can I hear what a document is telling me?
3. What sorts of questions yield which sorts of answers?
4. How critical is the role of language in penetrating meanings of documents we encounter?
5. What is the role of visual imagery (iconography) in understanding verbal documentation?
6. How does the researcher determine the contextualization necessary for bringing the document to life?
7. How can the historian translate the document's meaning into a perspective understandable to the contemporary reader?

I stressed also the importance of what we recognize as belonging to the category of history—that is, the his-

tory of something or someone—rather than fitting better into the category of a related social science—anthropology, sociology, economics, or statistics, for example. By confusing what constitutes the doing of history and the product of historical research, we run the risk of losing access to the sorts of research and findings that result only from historical study. Further, we face the error of applying theories before we have the facts to sustain them.

## Bibliography of works cited in the presentation

- Adshad-Lansdale, Janet. "Dialogue: Dance History—Current Methodologies" pt. II. *Dance Research Journal* 28/1 (Spring 1996): 4-6.
- Barzun, Jacques. *Clio and the Doctors* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).
- Barzun, Jacques, & Henry Graff., *The Modern Researcher*. Rev. ed. NY: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970.
- Bloch, Marc. *The Historian's Craft*. Trans. Peter Putnam. (NY: Random House, 1953).
- Brooks, Lynn Matluck. *The Art of Dancing in Seventeenth-Century Spain: Juan de Esquivel Navarro and his World* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, forthcoming).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Court, Church, and Province: Dancing in the Netherlands, Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries." *Dance Research Journal* 20/1 (Summer 1988): 19-28.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Dances of the Processions of Seville in Spain's Golden Age*. (Kassel, Germany: Editions Reichenberger, 1988.)
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Dancing at a Dutch University, Part II: The Franeker Dancing Master, 1682-1796." *Dance Chronicle* 9/3 (1986): 356-85.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Dancing at a Dutch University, Part I: The Franeker Dancing Master, 1682." *Dance Chronicle* 9/2 (1986): 157-76.
- Durang, John. *The Memoir of John Durang*. Edited, with introduction, by Alan S. Downer (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, for the Historical Society of York County and the American Society for Theatre Research, 1966).
- Esquivel Navarro, Juan de. *Discursos sobre el arte del dançado*. Seville: Juan Gómez de Blas, 1642.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Trans. & ed., David E. Linge. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).
- Gottschalk, Louis R. *Understanding History, A Primer of Historical Method* (NY: Knopf, 1950).
- Jowitt, Deborah. "The Critical Burden of History." *Dance Research Journal* 32/1 (Summer 2000): 131-37. From CORD panel at 2000 Feet: A Celebration of World Dance, Philadelphia, PA, 23 June 1999.
- Ralph, Richard. "On the Light Fantastic Toe: Dance Scholarship and Academic Fashion." *Dance Chronicle* 18/2 (1995): 249-60.
- Spartí, Barbara. "Dialogue: Dance History—Current Methodologies" pt. I. *Dance Research Journal* 28/1 (Spring 1996): 3-4.

Copyright 2001, Lynn Matluck Brooks

# Cancan: Blurring the Line Between Social Dance and Stage Performance

Renée Camus

During the nineteenth century, a dichotomy began to grow, differentiating dance as a social event and dance as a stage performance. The dance master Henri Cellarius in his 1847 treatise stated, "For a longtime, and even in the present day, people have confounded, or at least have not distinguished with sufficient clearness the fashionable dance from the dance of the theater. . . . In our day, . . . the drawing-room dance, according to the new character which has invested it within the last few years, is almost entirely independent of that of the theater."<sup>1</sup> One of the earlier forms of dance that was both a social dance as well as a professional entertainment was the *chahut*, danced by professional dancers in a social milieu, and more commonly known as the cancan.

The cancan has become an icon of 'Gay Paris,' in the 1890s with its chorus line of long-legged girls, kicking high into the air in perfect unison, their many white petticoats making a frothy sea of fabric around their stockinged skin. Few are aware, however, that this picture of 1890s Paris did not actually come into existence until the 1920s. The cancan of the 1890s was a dance for a few people, usually from one to four, not in a line, and not performed in unison. It was more of a social dance, performed in a social venue. This paper will explore the cancan as a dance that was simultaneously a social and a performance dance.

The term 'social dance' is a relatively recent one, in use since the end of the nineteenth century. Previously, dance masters used terms such as 'fashionable dances' or 'drawing-room dances' to differentiate from 'theatrical dances.' Toward the end of the century, as drawing-room dances became standardized and dance masters were teaching and publishing steps, 'social dance' became a universally accepted term.

Earlier social dances assumed a knowledge of complicated steps and figures to be repeated in a specified sequence. As dances evolved in the nineteenth century due to societal and political changes, the emphasis in social dances shifted from fancy footwork to group movement patterns, especially as the middle class began to join the upper classes in its pursuit of leisure. The dances grew simpler, as Cellarius stated, "having for its principal characteristic ease, nature and freedom of motion, all of them qualities that we may consider inherent in people of fashion."<sup>2</sup> This movement differed from that of dancers becoming known for their prowess in stage dancing, as dance master William DeGarmo wrote in 1875, "befitting the

genius of Taglioni, Elssler, and Grisi . . . [and] requir[ing] in its classic poses, poetical movement, and almost supernatural strength and agility."<sup>3</sup> Despite the acclaim that these dancers may have garnered, stage dancers were often thought of as little more than prostitutes, and a difference in dance movements may have been needed to appease 'people of fashion.' Again, to quote Cellarius, "why should not the graces of the drawing-room and of fashionable life differ from those of the stage, which are of necessity more studied, and in some respects of a graver character?"<sup>4</sup> All of these factors drew to the necessity for distinguishing terms.

Social dance, as defined in the *International Encyclopedia of Dance*, describes "dancing to musical accompaniment by men and women in contemporary dress on celebratory, secular occasions. They involve a variety of dances with a generally agreed upon vocabulary of steps that may be combined at will by the individual. They arise from among the more robust, less constrained layers of society to find general acceptance."<sup>5</sup> Author and historian Jack Anderson writes, "there are at least two basic kinds of dance. One exists primarily for the benefit, edification, or amusement of the dancers who perform it. Folk and ballroom dances are examples of this form . . . The other basic kind of dance assumes that its movements can be watched with pleasure; in fact, it exists to be watched. This kind of dance might be called theatrical dance . . ."<sup>6</sup>

As the nineteenth century progressed, and as social dances moved away from the set patterns of quadrilles and contredanses, improvisation became more of a factor. Improvisation is one of the major characteristics of social dance. It is often difficult to remember what one has done when improvising, unless one tries specifically to choreograph it or notate it after execution. For that reason, improvised dances are different every time. Theatrical or performance dances are usually choreographed, sometimes by the presenting dancers, but more often by an outside party, and are practiced and rehearsed the same way, many times, before being performed. As a result, each performance is essentially the same.

Social dances are usually done not on a stage, but in an open space, such as a social club, classroom, dance hall or pavilion. Performance dance is usually danced on a stage with an audience who pays for the opportunity to see that particular performance, or those particular dancers. If there are any observers in the social situation, they are probably also there with the intention of dancing, not

necessarily expecting to watch or to be entertained. They do not pay to see the performance, and the dancers, in turn, are not paid for their efforts, nor are they expecting to be the entertainment.

Professional dancers, people who are paid to dance to entertain others or who make their living by dancing, are in a different category than amateur dancers. Professionalism implies a level of specialized training or ability worthy of payment. Performance dance is often presented by professional dancers, but social dancers can be either professionals or amateurs. Audience members at professional performances expect this level of expertise, and therefore go with a critical eye. Some even go hoping or expecting to see mistakes, which was especially true in the nineteenth century. Attendees at social dances do not necessarily go with the intent of being an audience, nor do professional dancers attend social dances with the intent of performing. In fact, they go to a social dance in order to let loose and enjoy themselves, capering about in any way they please. If people choose to observe, they are not necessarily expecting the dancers to perform flawlessly. This was definitely the case with the cancan, especially as aristocratic patrons would attend dance halls like the Moulin Rouge while 'slumming it.'

One may say that there were three eras of the cancan. It began its development in the 1830s, in response to the rebellion and social unrest of the July revolution. Created by the students and working class girls who frequented the *bals* and dance halls of Paris, it was originally called the *chahut*. These dancers took the steps of the polka, popular at the time, and expanded them, making them larger and much more grandiose, incorporating kicks, leaps, and even acrobatics, to make it more interesting. With the inclusion of such large movements, female dancers felt it necessary to lift their heavy skirts out of the way. Elaborating on the polka-quadrille, a square dance using polka steps, the *chahut* was danced in quadrille formation. As the dance was based entirely on improvisation, the number and variety of people dancing had a great effect on its development.

During the Second Empire in France, dancers from the Paris Opera began attending these *bals*, and incorporated some of their fancier and more difficult steps. With the invention of the *quadrille naturaliste*, a version of the *chahut* in which partners separated, participants were allowed more room for solo improvisation. The rebellious spirit of the revolution of 1848 combined with decadence and blind-sighted idealism during the Second Empire to create larger and more dynamic steps. Many dancers invented 'signature steps' for which they became known. These steps were passed around, traded, or stolen, and incorporated into later choreographed versions, becoming some of the more familiar aspects of the dance today. However, despite the repetition of signature steps, the dance was still improvised, and therefore different every

time it was performed.

The cancan nearly died out with France's loss of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, but saw a resurgence in the late 1880s, thus beginning its second era. Adding greatly to the cancan's surge in popularity was the opening of the Moulin Rouge in 1889. Frequented by both the bourgeoisie and the working classes, this combination dance hall, cabaret, and pleasure garden offered an array of entertainment and leisure activities, from dancing or watching dancers, to eating, drinking, and socializing, and presented a variety of entertainers, including singers, exotic dancers, acrobats, trapeze artists, and musicians, even one who created music by breaking wind. The manager, Charles Zidler, was aware of the growing popularity of the *chahut* and *quadrille naturaliste* at nearby dance halls, and sought to promote it, inviting the best dancers from those balls to dance at the Moulin Rouge. As fewer men were taking part, this quadrille was often danced by four people, rather than four couples, usually three women and one man, or four women.

With the popularity of skirt dancers like Kate Vaughan, and the innovative movements of Loie Fuller, cancan dancers began incorporating skirt manipulations much more than in the earlier cancan, and often for intentional display of the frilly underclothes, the most embellished and pleasing variety yet in history, rather than for ease of movement. This dance still included fancy high kicks and signature steps such as *la roue* or the cartwheel, the *port d'armes*, a figure in which the dancer holds her outstretched ankle in her hand while hopping around in a circle, and the *grand écarts*, or split.

In both of the previously mentioned eras of the cancan, many of the dancers became stars, known for their prowess and value as entertainers, and often associated with certain signature steps. The stars of the 1890s are better known today than those of the Second Empire, thanks to the fact that many of their audience members were artists who captured their likenesses in paintings and posters of the time. These artists include Pablo Picasso, Georges Seurat, Jules Chéret, and of course, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. Lautrec, who "tried to depict the true and not the ideal,"<sup>7</sup> painted many scenes of dance halls and *bals*, many of which included cancan dancers in action. Lautrec helped to further the careers of many of the *cancaneuses*, especially after being commissioned by Zidler, the manager at the Moulin Rouge, to advertise for his club. The two most well known of the 1890s *cancaneuses* were La Goulue and Jane Avril, both favorite models of Lautrec. Just as Toulouse-Lautrec turned a conventional idiom, posters intended for advertising, into an art form, so did the social dancers he portrayed become larger than life representations of the dance hall culture.

While it is true that many of the stars of the Second Empire cancan were dancers from the Paris Opera ballet corps, many of them were not. Especially in the latter part

of the century, the cancan stars were not necessarily stars of any other sort of dance or entertainment genre. They were regular customers who happened to have a flair for the dance, and suddenly found themselves thrust into the limelight. Many of the women danced as a release from the hard working day, or to escape their unpleasant home life. The more they enjoyed themselves, allowing complete acquiescence to the music and the movement, the more they caught the attention of passing observers. At the Moulin Rouge, they also caught the eye of Zidler, who invited them back and offered to pay them to dance. In the terms of this paper, the practice of payment in exchange for dance graduates an amateur dancer to a different category, that of a professional.

The previously mentioned Jane Avril and La Goulue are both examples of amateurs turned professional. Jane Avril suffered a difficult childhood, having spent some time in an asylum, and was nearly forced into prostitution by her mother. She began dancing as an escape from her home life. She was Lautrec's favorite model, captured in more than 50 of his works. A demure, quiet woman who preferred to dance alone, often to a waltz rather than a polka, her cancan was more alluring, sensual and uninhibited, without being coarse or vulgar. Her dancing was more refined and artistic than the other *cancaneuses*, using a style more akin to skirt dancing, but she still displayed abandon and sometimes volatile acquiescence to the music. Arthur Symons described her appearance as suggesting "depraved virginity, a mixture of corruption and innocence."<sup>8</sup> Everyone respected her, including the other dancers at the Moulin Rouge, though perhaps because of the protection shown her by Zidler. She was the only dancer at the Moulin Rouge allowed to wear colored knickers, rather than the traditional white required of the other dancers. Also unlike the others, she was the only one able to avoid having a nickname, though attempts were made to call her *Mélinite*, a type of dynamite, and *Jane la Folle*, "Crazy Jane," both descriptive of her frame of mind when she danced.

La Goulue, born Louise Weber, a laundress' daughter who would often 'borrow' the fancy underclothes of her mother's wealthier clients, was known for her boisterous, provocative version of the *quadrille naturaliste*. She was a coarse woman who reveled in her individuality and strength, and was the perfect counterpart to Jane Avril. Many were taken by her, probably entertained by, or even jealous of, her brash courage and unabashed behavior, both on and off the dance floor. The cheeky (perhaps literally?) La Goulue became known for tossing her skirts over her back and flashing her *derriere* to the audience, displaying a small red heart embroidered on her knickers. She was discovered by dancer Valentin-le-Désossé. Le-Désossé, meaning "the boneless one," was the only man known for the cancan in the Belle Époque, and was also captured, though not as prominently, in the works of Toulouse-

Lautrec.

In 1896, Jane Avril traveled to England with three other dancers to perform the cancan on a music hall stage. They called themselves the *Troupe Eglantine*, named for the dancer who assembled the troupe. The dancers found that they needed to change the dance to suit this new performance space. This was the first time the cancan began to incorporate the kick line formation so well known today. The chorus line, with its precision dance style, was introduced to France by a troupe traveling from America in the 1890s. Despite the 1890s costumes that modern cancan performers wear, it was not until 1924 that the version so familiar today evolved. The resident choreographer of the newly reopened Moulin Rouge, Pierre Sandrini, is credited with developing this cancan, having adopted the regimented, unison style of the chorus line and adding it to his choreographed cancan.

As previously mentioned, the cancan developed in the open area of the dance floor at working class balls and dance halls, helping to define it as a social dance. Although the dancers were in the large parameters of the ballroom, their space was limited by their observers. This is unlike what we saw in the first video, but many descriptions and paintings of the period depict this, including many of Toulouse-Lautrec's. Despite the fact that the dancers' classification may have changed from amateur to professional, paid for their performances, they still danced in the middle of the open dance floor, just as they did when they were amateurs. As spectators stopped to watch, surrounding the dancers on all sides, they delineated the perimeters of their self-made stage. Ivor Guest quotes an observer at the *Bal Mabilille*: "The foreigners and country visitors and *gobemouches* [simpletons] would gather around, forming a wall six or seven deep leaving a space of ten to fifteen feet for the dancers."<sup>9</sup> There are accounts of passing audience members being injured by the high kicks of the *cancaneuses*.

This raises the question: how much does an audience add to a performance, especially when they are as close to the performers as they are in these dance halls, in fact, giving the 'stage' its dimensions? The closeness of the audience has an absolute impact on the effect of the performance, for many reasons. Often, the cancan dancers would involve the spectators in their performances. *Finette la Bordelaise*, a *cancaneuse* in the Second Empire, made popular the practice of kicking the top-hat off an unsuspecting observer's head, a trick which many others also practiced, including La Goulue; in fact, Nicole Kidman alludes to it in the new movie *Moulin Rouge*. A scene at the *Bal Mabilille*, described by an American observer, helps to prove several of the previously mentioned points:

A young girl, brown-eyed and with long masses of chestnut hair, then bounded to the centre of the circle, and commenced to throw herself into

the wildest and most indecent positions, in which exhibition she was soon joined by another of the group. Each fresh pose was more pronounced than those which had preceded it, and called down lively applause from the spectators. One of the women suddenly sprang into the air and then came down to the ground with both legs at right angles to her body. A shout of laughter hailed this exploit, and a dozen hands were held out to help her from the ground; but disdainful of all such aid, she sprang lightly to her feet, and both she and her companion took their places for their final effort. Deliberately gathering up their long skirts, they threw them over their shoulders and thus left themselves unencumbered and exposed to the public view from their waists to their feet. In this condition they executed all manner of capers, with the utmost ease and coolness. One of the spectators venturing to thrust his face too close, the younger girl suddenly threw up her leg and with her foot sent his hat rolling into the circle amidst the yells and laughter of the lookers-on, and without pausing a moment went hopping around the circle with her foot higher than her head.<sup>10</sup>

In the ballrooms, regardless of either the lack of spectators, or the spectators being on all sides, there was no restraint on the direction the dancers needed to face. They were able to face any direction they wished, and their movements could be observed from all sides. Part of the adoption of the kick line formation owed to the fact that the dance could no longer be observed from any direction, as the audience was in one place: the 'fourth wall.'

When considering the effect an audience has on a performance, one must sometimes take into account the audience's expectations. This may have been a problem in the initial performances of the Troupe Eglantine, with whom Jane Avril traveled to England in 1896. The audience did not react to the dancers as favorably as they may have liked. They were perhaps anticipating much more of the perceived naughtiness of France in the 1890s, combined with the kick lines of chorus girls who had preceded the Troupe Eglantine. This perception seems to have influenced the later cancan of the twentieth century.

In the ballrooms, the dancers could also be restricted by the other dancers with whom they shared the floor. Dancers would sometimes compete for space and the attention of the audience. These dancers could be professionals or amateurs, though it is believed that the amateurs did not participate at entertainment venues like the Moulin Rouge and the Jardin de Paris as much as they would at some of the other *bals*. Not all dancers, however, would compete for audience attention. Some danced more for their own enjoyment. Jane Avril was one such dancer,

trying to avoid being classified as a professional. She would often dance for no pay at halls like the Moulin de la Galette, and the Bal Bullier, public *bals* frequented by amateur dancers.

The ballrooms acted as a leveler among classes, especially with the opening of the Moulin Rouge, in which members of the elite could socialize with members of the working class. More often than not, the men, more spectators than participants, were from the upper class, and often considered themselves to be 'slumming it,' while the women, especially the dancers, were of a lower social standing. A perfect example of this is La Goulue with her working class upbringing, and her partner Valentin le Désossé, who came from a respectable bourgeois family. Toulouse-Lautrec was an aristocrat, but would spend hours every night at the Moulin Rouge sketching scenes. At the dance halls, spectators, despite their class or social status, could pay one price for any 'seat' in the house. If they were unhappy with their location, they could move until they found a better one. In addition, they could see a variety of performances, either different dancers performing their own interpretation of the cancan, or other acts.

With many of the performers, the show did not end when the dancing finished. This was especially the case with La Goulue, whose very personality became part of her act. She flirted with and insulted customers, challenged other dancers, and even tossed back some of the patrons' drinks, living up to her nickname "the Glutton." The nickname was probably also given for her voracious sexual appetite, and it was well known that she actually preferred women. La Môme Fromage, "the cheese kid," another *cancaneuses*, was her lover, and they were often seen together, sometimes fighting, in public. In one well-known painting by Lautrec, she is seen entering the Moulin Rouge arm in arm with La Môme Fromage, wearing, especially for that period, a very low-cut gown, under which it would have been impossible to wear a corset. At that time, women who did not wear corsets were considered loose, in more ways than one.

When the cancan took on the chorus line formation in its development as a stage dance, it lost some of the spontaneity it had in the dance halls. This is due in part to forgoing improvisation in lieu of choreography, which is needed to maintain the precision and unison necessary for the chorus lines. This is often a problem when placing social dances on a stage, as staging a social dance for performance automatically makes it a contradiction in itself. As mentioned earlier, a major difference between social dance and performance is improvisation and spontaneity. With choreographed dances, there is the risk of the dances becoming staid or uninteresting to the dancers as it is repeated and practiced many times the same way, especially something that requires as much energy and stamina as the cancan. This, combined with the distance between the performers and the audience, can result in a lack of

the energy that improvised social dances have. Perhaps to make up for the drop in energy, the later cancan choreographers tried to create a spectacle by choreographing for large numbers of dancers.

All dances develop and change over time, and many can be said to be simultaneously performance dance and social dance. The cancan was one of the first since the separation of social and theatrical dance. As we have seen, it incorporates aspects of both forms, especially in its origins as a social dance and its eventual metamorphosis into one for performance. Often performed in a social milieu, a cafe or dance hall rather than on a stage, the 1890s cancan was steeped in improvisation as a social dance, but danced for an audience. Cancan dancers were amateurs turned professionals, admired for their skill and paid for their performances. They created an intimate atmosphere for their audiences, who were appreciative and paid money, either intentionally or inadvertently, to see them. In its transformation into a stage performance – the style more commonly envisioned today – the dance became more a reflection of Hollywood in the twentieth century than that of the nineteenth century. Despite the fact that one can see the necessity for adopting the chorus line formation as the dance was geared more for audience enjoyment, one should still be aware of the differences seen in the early cancan, the dance that truly was a social dance and a performance in one.

#### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Henri Cellarius, *The Drawing-Room Dances* (London: Damrell & Moore, 1847), 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>3</sup> William DeGarmo, *The Dance of Society: A Critical Analysis of all the Standard Quadrilles, Round Dances, 102 Figures of Le Cotillon ("The German"), &c.* (New York: Wm. A. Pond & Co., 1875), 13.

<sup>4</sup> Cellarius, 11.

<sup>5</sup> Don McDonagh, "Twentieth Century Social Dance Before 1960," *International Encyclopedia of Dance*, edited by Selma Jeanne Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 1998), 5:626-27.

<sup>6</sup> Jack Anderson, *Dance* (New York: Newsweek Books, 1974), 8.

<sup>7</sup> T-Lautrec: *The Posters of Toulouse-Lautrec*. San Diego Museum of Art, 1996. <[www.sandiegomuseum.org/lautrec/quotes.html](http://www.sandiegomuseum.org/lautrec/quotes.html)>

<sup>8</sup> As quoted in David Price, *Cancan!* (New Jersey: Farleigh Dickenson University Press, 1998), 51.

<sup>9</sup> Ivor Guest, "Bal Mabille," *Ballet* [London], 3/2 (February 1947): 42.

<sup>10</sup> An American observer reported by Ivor Guest, as quoted in David Price, *Cancan!* 42.