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COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE DIFFERENT VERSIONS OF THE PASSACAILLE OF ARMIDE

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INTRODUCTION

This comparative study of the different versions of the Passacaille of Armide aims to examine the work of two different choreographers on the same music piece, using the following parameters:

- 1) Floor patterns and spacing
- 2) Step vocabulary
- 3) Choreographic phrasing
- 4) Rhythmic phrasing
- 5) Notation

My considerations on the different choreographies are essentially the result of my personal experience in reconstructing dances of this period; I think that an analytical look at the notation can help us understand the choreographic esthetics of this kind of repertoire, much like the analysis of a musical score will help a musician or a conductor choose his own standpoint before interpreting. I believe that analyzing a choreography in its spatial and dynamic aspects should be a preliminary process to the actual reconstructing of the dance.

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

"*Armide*", Jean-Baptiste Lully's *tragédie lyrique* in five acts based on a libretto by Philippe Quinault was premiered at the Paris Opera in 1686 and kept in the theatre's repertoire for many years.

Even though we are not dealing at all with the opera as a whole, knowing at which point in time in the plot the Passacaille takes place might help in understanding the character.

The story is taken from Torquato Tasso's heroic poem *La Gerusalemme Liberata*, composed between 1565 and 1575.

The plot takes place in Damascus, at the time of the first crusade. The Syrians, guided by Hidraot and his niece Armide - who are both powerful magicians - have won over the Christians, among whom is Renaud, the most valiant and invincible warrior, who eventually succeeds in setting all of the Syrian prisoners free. Trying to defeat him, Armide falls in love with Renaud, and compels him to love her through her magical power. Feeling guilty, though, she calls Hatred to help her, but eventually refuses her aid; Hatred predicts that she will be forsaken. In the fifth act, where the Passacaille takes place in the first scene, Armide and Renaud are together in her palace. Although they are in love with each other, Armide fears that the Hatred's prediction might come true, so after a very passionate love duet she decides to go "*consulter les Enfers*", consult with the evil spirits, thus leaving Renaud with some demons disguised as "*Amants Fortunés et Amantes Heureuses*", who entertain him and sing the choir following the instrumental passacaille.

Meanwhile, Renaud's fellow warriors find him and break Armide's spell; Renaud realizes his desertion and follows them, thus forsaking Armide, who destroys her palace and herself.

Chaconnes and passacailles

There are eleven choreographed chaconnes and six passacailles according to Francine Lancelot in the theatre repertoire between 1700 and 1725 (LANCELOT, Francine, *La Belle Danse, Catalogue raisonné fait en l'an 1996*, Van Dieren Editeur, Paris, 1996, p.LVII-LVIII); an additional chaconne example is to be found in a multipartite form ballroom dance.

Chaconnes and passacailles are often assimilated and follow the same principle of musical composition, but where chaconnes usually have an upbeat of two quarter-notes and are played more lightly - at *tempo léger* - passacailles have no upbeat and are played more slowly.

Within the ballet *entrées* repertoire, chaconnes and passacailles are long and elaborate pieces that hold a privileged place and are often danced by the best soloists.

Musically, these pieces are characterized by the same sustained bass line of four measures, formed by the tetracord descending from the tonic to the dominant. Melodic phrases of four to eight bars - often repeated - are composed on this bass line, which is also subject to variation and may become less recognizable in trio passages or brief modulations. The first phrases are usually characterized by the use of dotted rhythms, while the following may contain any other rhythmic forms. The piece as a whole may develop continuously or repeat some large sections, thus sometimes joining the *rondeau* form.

Although some common choreographic features can be identified in the corpus of chaconnes and passacailles, it is difficult to state any composition rule, given the heterogeneity in the length and in the technical level of the pieces. Choreographically as well as musically the treatment of contrasts appears to be the common feature in chaconnes and passacailles, together with the repetition of two- to four-measure motifs within the phrases. Technically speaking, it is good to point out that the steps named *contretemps de chaconne* and *pas de passacaille*, although sharing their denomination with that of the dances, are used in the same way as many other steps belonging to the Baroque Dance step vocabulary and not just in chaconnes and passacailles.

OUR CORPUS

Our corpus is composed of three dances, namely:

1) *Passacaille / pour une femme / dancée par Mlle. / Subligny en Angleterre / de l'opera darmide.*

Source: NOUVEAU RECUEUIL de Danse de Bal et celle de Ballet

GAUDRAU, Michel

Paris, Gaudrau, P. Ribou, (1713), 2nd part, p. 79-86.

149 bars

Musical source: LULLY, Jean-Baptiste

QUINAULT, Philippe

Passacaille

Armide, tragédie,

Paris, Christophe Ballard, 1686

V, 1, p.220-231.

149 bars

In *La Belle Danse*: FL/1713.2/32

In *La Danse Noble*: 6560

2) *A Passacaille by Mr. Labbee*

Source: AN ESSAY for the Further IMPROVEMENT OF DANCING
PEMBERTON

London, J. Walsh, Hare, 1711, p. 1 - 8

149 bars

Musical source: same as 1)

In *La Belle Dance*: FL/1711.1/10

In *La Danse Noble*: 6480

3) *Passacaille of Armide / by mrs Elford et mrs. Santlow*

Source: A New Collection of Dances...by Mr. L'Abbé

LE ROUSSEAU, François

London, Barres, Rousseau, (c. 1725), p. 7 - 16

149 bars

Musical source: same as 1) and 2)

In *La Belle Dance*: FL/1725.1/02

In *La Danse Noble*: 6520

1. FLOOR PATTERNS AND SPACING

To begin with, we will take a look at how the three choreographies are organized and divided in pages.

The Pécour solo consists of 8 pages, divided as follows:

page 1: bars 1-16 (16 bars) : this page matches page 1 of L'Abbé's solo

page 2: bars 17-33 (16 bars)

page 3: bars 34-53 (20 bars) : end matches page 3 of L'Abbé's duet

page 4: bars 54-69 (16 bars) : end matches page 3 of L'Abbé's solo

page 5: bars 70-85 (16 bars) : end matches page 6 of L'Abbé's duet

page 6: bars 86-101 (16 bars) : this page matches page 7 of L'Abbé's duet

page 7: bars 102-125 (24 bars)

page 8: bars 126-149 (24 bars)

The L'Abbé solo consists of 8 pages, divided as follows:

page 1: bars 1-16 (16 bars): this page matches page 1 of Pécour's solo

page 2: bars 17-45 (29 bars) : end matches page 2 of L'Abbé's duet

page 3: bars 46-69 (24 bars) : end matches page 4 of Pécour's solo

page 4: bars 70-92 (23 bars)

page 5: bars 93-100 (8 bars)

page 6: bars 101-124 (24 bars)

page 7: bars 125-141 (17 bars)

page 8: bars 142-149 (8 bars)

The L'Abbé duet consists of 10 pages, divided as follows:

- page 1 : bars 1-20 (20 bars)
- page 2 : bars 21-45 (25 bars): end matches page 2 of L'Abbé's solo
- page 3 : bars 46-53 (8 bars): end matches page 3 of Pécour's solo
- page 4 : bars 54-61 (8 bars)
- page 5 : bars 62-73 (12 bars)
- page 6 : bars 74-85 (12 bars): end matches page 5 of Pécour's solo
- page 7 : bars 86-101 (16 bars): this page matches page 6 of Pécour's solo
- page 8 : bars 102-117 (16 bars)
- page 9 : bars 118-135 (18 bars)
- page 10: bars 136-149 (14 bars)

Looking at how the choreographies are formally divided shows very few matching points; there are only two cases of exact correspondence in terms of bars in a page, i.e. page 1 of both solos and page 6 of Pécour's solo with page 7 of L'Abbé's duet. In all other cases, only the end of a page coincides, i.e. a choreographic figure comes to an end on the same cadence.

In general, it looks like Pécour was more concerned by formal proportions than L'Abbé, because his choreography is organized in figures that contain multiples of 4-bar phrases, to match the musical structure of the passacaille even in the graphic outlook of the page. Unlike him, L'Abbé organizes his pages more freely and apparently without worrying about balancing the contents of each page.

Now, let's look at the choreographies from a simply spatial point of view. In baroque dance we have the privilege of being able to get a general idea of how the dance is spaced just by looking at the notation, the Feuillet system providing this kind of information at first glance.

When depriving the notation of all the step signs, we can read the spacing of the dance, the path along which the choreography develops.

However, when two lines of the same floor pattern overlap, the Feuillet notation system allows to create some virtual space through the use of dotted lines, in order to have room for more step notation. Therefore, a page of a choreography reconstructed and actually danced generally eventually looks somehow different from the idea originally suggested by its graphic outlook. Also, when reconstructing a floor pattern, we should consider that in the Feuillet notation system there is no different way to notate steps taking place on the spot and travelling steps. Therefore, sections of the choreography containing steps that need space for notation but do not require movement in space should be carefully considered.

We will now look at the floor patterns of the three versions of the Passacaille of Armide before and after eliminating the virtual space from the notation.

The Pécour solo is composed essentially along straight lines, curves appearing only in page 4 and 6 and just for short sections, mainly to connect two straight lines. There are no circular figures, nor diagonal lines. The space appears to be organized in rectangles, mainly oriented along the longitudinal axis, thus privileging the downstage-upstage direction. When deprived of the virtual space, the spacing still looks somewhat consistent with the original outlook of the notation. However, the upper loop of page 2 disappears and reveals a floor pattern in the shape of a cross, somehow concealed by the horizontal dotted lines in the original notation ; the snail-shaped motif

is still easily recognizable in page 3, and page 4 reveals how the U-shaped figure happens twice along the same curve and in the center, instead of along two symmetrical curves on both sides of the stage. The following pages do not present any noticeable difference between the floor patterns as they appear in the notation and the actual spacing of the dance.

The L'abbé solo is also composed along straight lines and privileges the longitudinal axis, but curves appear more often here, and for longer portions of the choreography, namely in pages 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 and 7. Among these, pages 5 and 7 feature a mainly curved path for the whole figure and the others have longer curved sections. Pages 3, 4, 6 and 7 also feature the use of diagonal lines. When deprived of the virtual space, the floor path reveals simple figures -the only exception being page 3, that still looks like a labyrinth- some of which were difficult to see in the original score. This is the case with page 4, where a U- and a 7-shaped motifs appear, and with page 6, where the two short, symmetrical curves actually form a sort of 8. In page 8 the path is reduced to the simplest straight line.

The duet by L'Abbé is composed, like every other dance for a couple in this period, on both sides of the central axis of the stage, the two partners dancing exactly the same steps like in a mirror. This allows a different way of exploring and dividing space, because straight lines and curves are easier to read, since they are amplified by symmetry. The center line being left free throughout the dance, the choreography develops in the stage right-stage left direction much more than in either solos. Curves and straight lines are mixed: pages 3, 4, 7, 8 and 9 feature very curved floor patterns, while the rest of the pages are mainly choreographed along straight paths. The notation does not show much use of virtual space, actually none in pages 3, 4 and 5 and very little everywhere else; therefore, the real spacing of the duet looks very much like in its original notation.

In general, L'Abbé seems to have made a richer use of the space than Pécour, his floor paths looking more elaborate and airy. Carol Marsh states how the solo choreography seems to have been adapted from the duet (MARSH, Carol G., *French Court Dance in England, 1706-1740: a Study of the Sources*, diss., City University of New York, 1985), and although it looks like some major changes were necessary, the last five figures of the duet are still recognizable in the solo. Unlike this, page 3 of the solo practically contains in its intricated paths pages 3, 4 and 5 of the duet.

2. STEP VOCABULARY

It is difficult to define the step vocabulary used in our corpus of dances, given the fact that passacailles require the choreographer to use the widest possible range of steps. Feuillet's "*Tables où sont la plus grande partie des pas qui sont en usage dans la danse*" being our main reference (FEUILLET, R.-A., *Chorégraphie, ou l'art de décrire la danse...*, Paris, 1701, p.47-86), there seems to be a limited use of simple step units such as *demi coupé*, *coupé*, *pas de bourée*, *jetté*, *contretemps* and other basic steps of the baroque technique. In all three choreographies the use of step combinations that do not appear in the "*Tables*" seems to have been the rule; some music bars contain up to three or four step units. Even though, as we will see, L'Abbé indulges a little more than Pécour in repeating choreographic phrases, I believe that the invention of an

appropriate step vocabulary, which would show both the dancer's and the choreographer's abilities seems to have been one of Pécour's and L'Abbé's common concerns in choreographing these pieces.

3. CHOREOGRAPHIC PHRASING

Choreographic phrasing is each choreographer's own way to establish a relationship between steps and space, to express his taste and inspiration. Some choreographers emphasize how bodies move around in space, designing elaborate floor patterns with more or less complicated steps, while others are more interested in exploring a body's possibility to move, to coordinate the movements of different limbs while occupying one portion of the space; many, though, operate between these different standpoints, creating as many different styles.

We may say that all three versions of the Passacaille of Armide are pieces in which the choreographer was more interested in inventing movement than in designing space. We will make a brief description of the most outstanding features of each page. Unfortunately, the time at our disposal will allow us to demonstrate only very short sections.

Pécour's solo

Page 1: opens with a side to side theme that will be developed throughout the dance. Here it features a *rond de jambe* in the first bar; later in the page, in a variation on this theme, the *rond de jambe* shifts to the second bar and then develops into two half *pirouettes*.

Page 2: opens and closes with a *pas de bourrée*; variation of *chassés* closed by an *assemblée*; side to side theme developed with different steps.

Page 3: opens with an ornamented step (*contretemps battu*); phrases closed by *assemblés*, followed by a *2-demi coupé* theme used also in page 7 to mark a suspension between two phrases.

Page 4: features the first long repeated phrase of this dance (unlike the solo by L'Abbé) with *pas de passacaille*, until bar 60. From bar 60 to bar 101, three pages of continuous invention, where no step looks like any other; long, rich phrases. Floor patterns are not very reliable in this section of the dance, because many of the steps require a lot of space for the notation, but do not require any -or very little- movement in space.

Page 5: variation on opening theme; from bar 78 on, long travelling phrase overlapping on the next page.

Page 6: end of the travelling phrase of page 5; same variation on opening theme; "*batterie*" phrase at the end.

Page 7: contrasting phrase at the beginning; two variations on opening theme; second repeated phrase.

Page 8: third repeated phrase with *battus* and turns; short phrase with two *pas de passacaille*; finale with a turn section, and *batterie*; ends with 3 *jettés* and a *pas de bourrée*.

L'Abbé's solo

Page 1: repeated phrase before and after the central 3-bar phrase; other repeated phrase, made of *pas de bourrée-contretemps-glissades* with different endings.

Page 2: variation on the *pas de bourrée vite* theme; two long, repeated phrases on longitudinal axis with linking steps allowing the repeat with the other foot; two-*pirouette* theme announced at the beginning and developed at the end of the page.

Page 3: 1st phrase of 2 *pas de bourrée vite* and *pas de passacaille*, repeated and closed with *assemblé*; travelling figure with 7 *pas de bourrée vite*; from bar 61 on, very rich vocabulary for the next 40 bars, like in Pécour (the end of the page and of the figure matches).

Page 4: variation of jumping steps (*jettée*, *assemblés*, *contretemps*), with very few non-jumping bars used to create the necessary contrast (73-*coupé pointé*, and 76, 86, 87, 89, 91-*pas de bourrées*); 2 different versions of the *assemblé*.

Page 5: 3 versions of the *jetté* (*à la seconde* with linking *rond de jambe*, at the end of the *pas de bourrée vite*, *en arrière* and *en avant*, within the *jetté*-step combination); U-shaped floor path.

Page 6: variation on the *pas de bourrée en présence* theme; 8-shaped floor path; two *assemblés* separating the phrases; *pirouettes*, the last of which takes place within the *assemblé*.

Page 7: more bars on the *assemblé-pirouette* theme; circular figure of travelling steps with one bar of *chassées*, that will be developed later.

Page 8: opens with *chassés*; double dot in notation in bar 145 (ball of the foot); floor path is a straight line; ends with a *pas de bourrée vite* and an *assemblé* in the 1st position with no jump.

L'Abbé's duet

Since L'Abbé's duet and solo share the same steps and the same music, the phrasing should be the same too. However, as suggested by the formal division, the choreographic phrases have a different spatial organization in the two dances; therefore, even though they match the end of the musical phrases, they do not follow the same division of the figures in pages.

It is difficult to draw a conclusion from the comparison of these pieces. However, we can say that both choreographers show great virtuosity in matching the ever-changing character of the music and that if the solo by Pécour seems slightly more elaborate and technically challenging, the solo and the duet by L'Abbé seem to use the repetition of choreographic phrases for a more complete use of the space.

4. RYTHMIC PHRASING

Although it is a very important and necessary moment in reconstructing a piece of repertoire, it is not within the aims of this study to analyze the rhythmic correspondence between the music score and the choreography; we will mainly look at the rhythmic solutions used by the choreographers in organizing the steps within the music bars. Rhythmically speaking a choreography can become challenging for the dancer when the choreographer attempts to put more than one step unit in the same music bar; this happens significantly more around bars 60-100 in all three choreographies. This is when the most irregular rhythms are found, more in terms of many movements to perform on the same beat or in the same bar than in terms of complicated rhythmic figures.

Two interesting examples can be found in Pécour's solo:

1. Page 3, bars 34-37: the 2-bar step combination *contretemps battu-rond de jambe* is made into a one-bar step combination when it is repeated, the *rond de jambe* taking place within the first bar and leading to the *assemblé* in the second.

2. Page 7, bars 116-119: the phrase is repeated twice and is made of 4 step units: *tombé*, *assemblé*, 2 *demi coupés*. The phrase begins on beat 3 of bar 116. During the following bars the *tombé* shifts from beat 1 of bar 116 to beat 3 of bar 118, and so do all other step units, thus creating a 2-beat pause at the end and an interestingly ornamented rhythmic phrase

5. NOTATION

It is beyond the limits of this lecture-demonstration to extensively examine the differences in the way the choreographies are notated, since this would imply a study of the changes that Feuillet's *Chorégraphie* undertook when it was exported to England; however, it is interesting to take a look at how some similar or identical steps are notated. I have found some interesting examples, most of which concern some steps as they appear in L'Abbé's solo and duet; the last one is a comparison between two short phrases coming from the solos. I think that in general it can be said that when compared to the solo, the notation of the duet looks richer in details, but not necessarily more dynamic.

1. bar 1

The step is identical; the action of the left foot is notated with a dot in the solo and with a *piéd en l'air* sign in the duet; the 5th position *élevé* is marked on both feet in the duet and only on one in the solo.

2. bar 17 and 23

Variations on the *pas de bourrée en présence* theme: in bar 17 -solo the dancer is on a horizontal path and there is no position sign, in bar 17-duet the dancer is on a vertical path and the 5th position is clearly marked with a *glissé* and a *plié* sign, in bar 23-solo the 5th position bears no signs.

3. bar 28

The *pas de bourrée en tournant* is identical, but in the solo the notation is more "compact", since the foot flags of the positions before and after the jump are on the same position sign; in the duet the notation shows clearly that the *pas de bourrée ends* in the 5th position, and then we have another sign to show the position of the feet after the jump.

4. bar 63

The *demi coupé* has two dots on the 5th position and a *glissé* sign in the notation of the duet, unlike the solo, that looks simpler; the second part of the bar features a *plié* sign on the step and a jump before the *jetté* in the duet.

5. bar 65

The notation of the *pas de bourrée vite* to the side looks once again more "compact" in the solo; in the duet the *jetté* to the side is described with two signs.

6. bar 93

The notation of the solo looks more dynamic; in this case the left foot going through the 1st position after the *jetté* is described with a movement sign in the solo, and with a position sign in the duet.

7. bar 119

This time we can make the opposite consideration; the position sign of the solo corresponds to a movement sign in the duet.

8. bars 38-41 in Pécour's solo and bars 34-37 in L'Abbé's

The phrase is almost identical, but develops over 3 bars in Pécour's solo and over 4 in L'Abbé's. The *assemblée* is profile in Pécour and *en face* in L'Abbé, the *coupé* is profile in both, and the *rond de jambe* is *en face* in Pécour and profile in L'Abbé; the *assemblée* also has a 1/4 tour in L'Abbé's choreography. The only difference in the notation, however, is the position sign (Pécour) versus the step sign (L'Abbé) before the *rond de jambe*.

CONCLUSION

A comparative study of different choreographies does not add new data to our historical knowledge, but it sure can stimulate us to reflect on the methods we use in reconstructing the baroque repertoire, or at least it did for me: how much does the choreography really tell us at first glance? To what extent did the person notating the dance actually re-compose it? How much hides behind the notation, even before we start interpreting?

A careful, analytical look at the choreography will allow us to identify the choreographic phrases, the themes and variations that the choreographer took the time to notate, and that therefore deserve to be recognized, much like we study a poem, a theatre script or a musical score not only by heart, but also in their structure, in the form that contains all the hidden meanings that only the original author could explain.

The time at our disposal not allowing us the chance to dance both of them, it was difficult to choose the one version of the Passacaille that I would dance, and in the end I decided once again for Pécour's; hopefully, knowing how different the same solo can be will help me dance better!

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