3. MUSIC AND DANCE AS A WHOLE

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Abstract: *There is a deep relationship between music and dance, because music performance may be considered as a kind of dance, usually performed by the instrumentalist's arms, hands and fingers, and the movements performed by dancers may be considered as a source of sound and music. In performing works belonging to specific genres dancers and music performers interact, whereas in other works one kind of professionals fulfills all the required tasks. This article aims at exploring how the relationship between dance and music evolved over time, highlighting the most interesting genres and forms based on these two art forms.*
Key words: *music, dance, synchronization, coexistence, visual aspects of music, musical aspects of dance*

Introduction

According to Vsevolod Meyerhold, dance can be defined as movement of the human body in the sphere of rhythm (Leach, 2004); as a consequence, also facial expressions, gestures and scenic movements enacted in a performance may be included under the term "dance". Basing on this broad-range definition of dance, this article aims at exploring if and how the relationship between dance and music evolved over time, highlighting the most interesting genres and forms based on these two art forms. The relationship between music and dance has been investigated in two main directions: some researchers focused on the role of body motion in music perception (Carroll-Phelan & Hampson, 1996; Peretz, 1993), others focused on the different roles of dancers and music performers in the production of artistic events (Cadoz & Wanderley, 2000; Friberg & Sundberg, 1999; Hieronimus, 1998; Gilbert & Lockhart, 1961). This article is ideally related to the second line of research.

Music and dance are closely linked, occur in tandem and are intertwined. In some languages, like Greek, there is just a single word covering music, poetry and dance: in ancient times, poetry was chanted, often with instrumental support, and dancing went with the song (Herington, 1985). Also today music and dance are often seen as inseparable. In fact, according to Dewey, the eye and the ear complement one another in terms of perception, creating an illusion of oneness (Dewey, 1987). On one hand, music performance may be considered as a kind of dance, usually performed by the instrumentalist's arms, hands and fingers; on the other, dancers may be considered as percussionists making music by means of the beat of their feet.

In the course of time, the authors of works combining music and dance assigned the performative tasks following different criteria: first of all it should be distinguished between art products in which actors and dancers do not coincide with music performers, and art products in which the performing artists act at the same time as actors, dancers, and music performers. In the first category, in which pieces are performed by two different kinds of artists, music

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and movement may be synchronized, as it occurred in Renaissance, Baroque and classical ballets, or not synchronized, as it occurs in many works created in the twentieth century. In the second category, in which dance and music are performed by the same artists, some works entrust both tasks to dancers, while others assign them both to music performers. As a general rule, dancers can give origin to the sounds which form the arrangement for the dance in performing on small percussion instruments, stamping their feet, clapping their hands, singing, or starting and stopping preregistered music. As for music performers, they can perform their part in a very theatrical way, combining the specific gestures which give origin to sound with facial mimicry, other expressive gestures, and movements on and off stage.

1. Ballet music from the Renaissance to the 19th century

Ballet is a form of dance performed for an audience, usually choreographed and enacted in a theatre setting. The beginning of ballet can be traced to the Italian Renaissance courts of the fifteenth century: the dukes who ruled Florence and other Italian city-states promoted the arts, commissioning art products as paintings, sculptures, music pieces, architectural works, and dance performances. As Catherine de' Medici, a member of the ruling family in Florence, became the queen of France in 1547, this form of dance spread to the French court, where it was developed further (Lee, 2002).

During the first times the dancers were not professionals, but noblemen and –women of the courts, who danced to please the sovereign. Attending dance lessons was part of the usual education of aristocrats, but court dance participants might be neither young nor in trim; for this reason, court dance steps should be quite uncomplicated and relatively easy to be memorized and performed. To this end, the choreographies followed strictly the basic features of the music piece, such as pace, meter, rhythm, accents, and melodic contour.

In 1661 King Louis XIV, who greatly enjoyed dancing, founded the Royal Academy of Dancing where professional dancers developed high skills thanks to a rigorous training (Wiesner-Hanks, 2013). This gave choreographers the chance to insert more complex steps in their works; as a consequence, musicians were released from the duty to write in a style which they perceived as excessively linear in comparison to coeval vocal and instrumental music. Although in ballet music melodies should still be not too complex, meters be clearly perceptible, and phrases include periodic breaks in order to give the dancers appropriate rest times, musicians had now the opportunity to write more multifaceted compositions.

Whereas in the early centuries the story lines of dance spectacles told about ancient Greek myths or dramas, in the 19th century people became interested in stories telling about dreamlike worlds. In order to look like heavenly beings, female dancers expanded their technique dancing on their toes, and expressing character and emotion with the entire body (Anderson, 1992). These developments in dance were paralleled by the rise of appropriate accompanying music, which took a "dancing" character, in order to provide the rhythm to guide

the dancers in designing harmonic and well synchronized body movements, without renouncing to a certain degree of sophistication. In fact, music was deemed able to tell the action and support the dancers in the expression of their characters' feelings: each situation, each passion which came momentarily to predominate, required a new rhythm, new motifs, changes of tone and phrasing. This means that much of the burden for making ballets understandable to the spectators laid on the shoulders of the composer (Maes, 2002).

Until the beginning of the twentieth century, music and dance interacted mostly through synchronization: the dancers' movements corresponded with the music in terms of meter, rhythm, structure and development; for example, high notes in a melody may be combined with light movements high into the air. In this way music created expectations in the audience about the dance, and dance did the same with respect to music. Moreover, aesthetic theories prominent in the nineteenth century affirmed that messages combining two mediums might stimulate either aural or visual perceptions, intensifying the emotions elicited in the audience (Rella, 1997).

The Russian composer Tchaikovsky, born in 1840, followed this principle in his ballets. He studied at St. Petersburg Conservatory, focusing on the Western compositional practices, in particular those of the eighteenth century. Yet his personal interest was above all in the Russian folk songs: in his view, these songs were able to induce strong emotions in listeners, and represented a source of patriotic themes greatly appreciated by the aristocracy. He wished to consolidate these two aspects, writing music with a strong technical basis, and rich in passion, which could be experienced by the listeners on a cognitive and an emotional level. Feeling that ballet music would comply with his inspiration, he wrote three ballets: *The Swan Lake, The Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker*. In these works he acted both as standard-bearer and as innovator, enriching the tradition of ballet music more than anyone else of his time (Holden, 1995).

Until the beginning of the 1890s, ballet scores were usually written by "specialists": the aim of their music was to support the dancers' movements without distracting the audience from the dance itself. Therefore, they wrote light, decorative, melodious, and rhythmically clear scores, with a simple instrumentation generally based on violins and other strings. Unlike specialists, Tchaikovsky wished to write much more complex ballet music, rich in melody, rhythm, and harmony, continuing on the path set by Delibes in the ballets *Coppelia* and *Sylvia*, and by Adam in *Giselle*. Tchaikovsky's first ballet, *The Swan Lake*, can be considered quite traditional in rhythm and instrumentation, but already here the composer used the Leitmotiv. The Leitmotiv is a recurring musical theme aimed at reinforcing the dramatic action, *providing psychological insight* into the characters, and suggesting to the listeners extramusical ideas relevant to the dramatic event. Using this technique in his ballets, Tchaikovsky acted as an innovator, because at that time Leitmotivs appeared only in much more complex musical genres, as operas and symphonic poems.

The second ballet *The Sleeping Beauty* was the result of a strict collaboration between Tchaikovsky and the choreographer Marius Petipa: the latter gave

detailed instructions regarding the characteristics he wished in the score, and backed the musical choices taken by the composer, even if the dancers were concerned about the unusual complexity of the music. On the other side, Tchaikovsky tried to meet the requirements of the choreography, producing a score which was inventive and rich in melody and orchestration, but minimized the rhythmic subtleties usually present in his compositions.

The ballet shows some characteristics which do not break radically with tradition: in the first act the music for the ballerina is accompanied by solo violin, or legato strings and harp glissandos: these soft timbres represent the translation in sounds of the gentle, delicate and ethereal movements by the danseuse. But in the third act Tchaikovsky introduced a "new" instrument in the ballet orchestra, the piano, whose percussive timbre presents a strong contrast to the timbre of the strings. In this way the composer linked his music to the one of the 18th century, where the harpsichord continuo was usual in operas and ballets, and in the same time characterized his choice as strikingly modern. *The Nutcracker* shows other innovative choices, as advanced harmonies and a wealth of melodic invention; however, the most appreciated novelty is perhaps in the instrumentation. In the second act Tchaikovsky introduced the celesta, a keyboard instrument "having a heavenly sweet sound", invented in 1886. Due to its timbre, the composer considered the celesta the most appropriate to accompany the solo of a sweet character, the Sugar Plum Fairy (Wiley, 1991).

2. Ballet music in the 20th century

During the first half of the twentieth century, some composers and choreographers developed new conceptions regarding the relationship between music and dance: Henry Cowell developed an elastic form of accompaniment in response to American modern dance (Cowell, 1934), and Igor Stravinsky began to collaborate with the choreographer George Balanchine following the principle of mutual independence. In their ballets *Apollon, Orpheus,* and *Agon*, they clearly based on the same artistic heritage and ideals, but set aside the principle of synchronization between music and dance, abandoning the traditional rule of expressing similar concepts in the same phrasing, either through sounds or through movements (Riom, 2010).

An even more radically innovative conception was pursued by the composer John Cage and the choreographer Merce Cunnigham. Rejecting the notion that dance and the music must be expressive of the same continuum of ideas, they just agreed on the duration of each piece, and explored the possibility of coexistence. Applying the Zen Buddhism precept of accepting simultaneity, Cage and Cunnigham aimed to reflect the lack of linearity of real life. For instance, in *Sixteen Dances for Soloist and Company of Three* (1951) music and dance use the same amount of time, but develop independently from one another: the score is indeterminate, so that dancers cannot count on the sounds as cues, and have to rely on their own dance timing (Pritchett, 1993).

As mentioned before, in modern and post-modern dance, synchronization between music and dance is no more the unique organizational principle: in

some works music and dance are almost totally independent, in others, principally those based on improvisation; they may converge in some moments and diverge in other ones, depending on the musical performers' and dancers' creative flair. In other works, movements and music may be consciously chosen in order to be totally opposed to one another. This contrast may correspond to the wish to create surprise in spectators and stimulate different interpretations of the dramatic development. An example thereof is the use of Carl Vine's Piano Sonata, a quite percussive work, as music for the ballet *In the company of Angels* by Helen Herbertson (McCombe, 1994).

3. Dancers as music performers

In African traditional music each member of the performing ensemble is involved in each layer of the artistic event: often dancers wear sound producing earrings, bracelets and anklets, and their costumes are provided with sonorous decorations. Research highlighted that the Igbe religious group of Urhobo dances without arrangements made by songs or instrumental music. However, the percussive sounds produced by the beat of their feet have a strong rhythm, and act as leader drums (Nabofa, 1990). Sometimes dancers play little percussion instruments, and sing, with their voice being amplified by masks which have both a visual and a sonorous function (Aluede and Eregare, 2006).

As a consequence, dancers can be considered to be also music performers, as hand clapping, foot stamping, singing or yodeling, and chest drumming are in all respects forms of musical accompaniments.

Also in Western dance spectacles the music sources may be controlled by dancers. In her dance-theater piece *Bluebeard* (1977) choreographer Pina Bausch set a tape recorder playing a recording of Béla Bartók's *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* at the center of the stage, giving dancers the opportunity to act on the visible source of music. In her ballet *Breaking the silence* (1993) Helen Herbertson included a section of vocal music with pieces composed by Tom Waits, John Cage, and Ros Bandt, sung by the dancers during the performance. Since 1995 Robert Wechsler developed dance projects based on the use of EyeCon, a video-based motion sensing system which allowed performers to generate or control music and stage lighting by means of their movements in space (Wechsler, Weiss, and Dowling, 2004).

4. Music performers as actors and dancers

In the course of time, the visual aspect inherent in musical events has been variously interpreted: in some genres music performers are hidden from the listeners' view, in others they act at the center of the stage as actors or dancers. Among hidden performers there may be the instrumentalists in the orchestra pit, the vocalists in hidden choirs, and often also organists. Yet, since the second decade of the twentieth century, many musicians rejected the separation of sound from its production, emphasizing the "theatrical performance" character of the sound production (Stravinsky, 1937).

Already László Moholy-Nagy, who built on the experience of Futurism and Dadaism, postulated a *Theater der Totalität* aimed at combining events in different media into a theatrical whole (Moholy-Nagy, 1925). Some years later, Antonin Artaud expressed an even more detailed view: from the beginning of his artistic career he was interested in using sound as an active component in theatre (Hollier, 2004). In *The theatre and its double* he stressed the similarities between the performance of music and that of movement: he mentioned the physical rhythm of movements and their crescendo and decrescendo, and the need to consider, on one hand, musical instruments as part of the set, and, on the other, the actor's voice as a musical instrument. As a consequence, he established a profound similarity between the role of a music performer and the one of an actor (Artaud 1958).

This point of view may lead to giving visual aspects the main role in the performance: this can be obtained, for instance, by means of unusual playing techniques, whose sonorous effects however do not differ from those which could be obtained by means of usual playing techniques. In these cases, the visual aspect is stressed, pushing the acoustic aspect into the background. An example may be considered a performance of John Cage's *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* (1958), in which the pianist crawled around among the pedals of the piano in order to knock on the sounding-board from below: a spectator told that although the knocking in itself was not loud enough, the visual show added very much to the whole event (Thomson, 1972).

Enhancing the visual aspect may even lead to the complete suppression of real sound, in favor of a purely imaginary sound. This occurs, for instance, in Alvin Lucier's *Action Music for Piano, Book I* (1962): the graphic notation indicates approximate pitch and rhythm, dynamics and fingering, yet the performance instructions state that the piece shall be played performing the indicated movements not on the keyboard, but above it, without producing any sound. The same instructions recommend to play an imaginary pizzicato over the grand piano strings (Lucier, 1967). Although also the score of 4'33'' (1952) by John Cage instructs the performer not to play his or her instrument, in my opinion this piece expresses a partially different point of view: here the audience should listen to the sounds of the environment, realizing that what they usually consider silence is indeed full of accidental sounds. Vice-versa, the piece by Lucier alludes to imaginary sounds, which each listener "perceives" in his or her mind according to the sonorous reminiscences evoked by the pianist's gestures. In any case, in both pieces the music performer acts as an actor on the stage, stressing the motor and visual aspects of the performance.

Also the Polish composer Piotr Lachert often assigns performers tasks which enhance the motor and visual aspects of the performance, sometimes ironically alluding to disagreement or quarrels between performers, or between performers and the public: this occurs, for instance, in *Sinfonietta pour ensemble et public* (1976), *Per Anka kitsch music* (1984), and *Telefono Valse e Fuga* (2012). Sometimes the involvement of music performers on the stage is due to a creative decision which is not taken by the composer, but rather by the

choreographer. For example, in *Fugue – in pursuit of flight* (1994) the choreographer Sue Haley involved a brass ensemble in her choreography, assigning great artistic importance to the interaction between music performers and dancers.

Concluding remarks

Since antiquity, music and dance have been linked to one another. In both traditional and modern art forms, such as ballets and music performances, professionals of dance and music (such as musicians and choreographers, music performers and dancers) interact, sharing aesthetic views and cooperating in organizing and fulfilling performances. A positive interaction can contribute in facilitating the tasks of the involved professionals, and give them the chance to acquire skills and knowledge both for personal development and career advancement. Moreover, as the expressivity of shared works is enhanced, audience will experience a deep cognitive and emotional involvement, contributing with their enthusiasm to the growth of the arts sector.

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