

The Shock of the New: Ben Jonson's antimasque of witches 1609

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Preamble

This paper represents a joint presentation introducing a video of the recreation of the two antimasque dances in *The Masque of Queens*. The video presented a work-in-progress as part of Anne Daye's doctoral thesis, with guidance from Jeremy Barlow on the music (see details below). The premise is that an attempt at reconstruction will raise questions not apparent in theoretical approaches alone, and that, if done with as much respect for the evidence as possible, will give a modern audience an impression of the original aesthetic. The following paper will be more discursive than time allowed on the day, in default of viewing the video.

Introduction

The Masque of Queens 1609 was the first occasion on which an antimasque was presented at court requiring the contribution of twelve adult professional performers as dancers. As the masque had been the prerogative of the courtier, this intrusion by dancing professionals was potentially scandalous, so the promoters of the masque took steps to forestall problems. In Ben Jonson's case, the means adopted was to cite copious classical authority for the presentation. This procedure, alongside the libretto itself and the existence of several documents relating to the performance, has resulted in an unusual quantity of information on the two dances to furnish a recreation. The first record of the dance was Jonson's holograph manuscript presented to Prince Henry with detailed marginalia and interpolations giving the classical and continental sources for the presentation of the queens and witches. This was said to be at the request of the prince who was preparing to make his masque debut in 1611. This precious work is on permanent display in the British Library exhibition hall, one of the few dance documents on show. That text with its notes was printed as the quarto edition of 1609 and the folio editions of 1616 and 1640. In addition, a rare survival for the masque is the outline proposal submitted to the Lord Chamberlain in advance for approval, which provides useful evidence of the thinking behind a major innovation.

Designs by Inigo Jones for the noble part of the masque exist in the surviving drawings that form the Chatsworth collection. These comprise the House of Fame (the throne on which the queens first appear) and most of the costumes and head-dresses for the queens. We rely on Jonson's verbal description for the presentation of the witches, although in 1640 Jones prepared sketches of furies, that are in the same vein. There are a few eye-witness comments and a few details of expenditure (Herford & Simpson, 1932–1966). The most valuable survival is the music: it is possible to identify all the dance music in the surviving sources and one song. This is secured by the knowledge that there was not another masque of the period with queens and witches as dancers. The pattern of replication of the music for the witches' dances suggests a special interest in these compositions at the time. (See bibliography for sources)

A significant aid in working on this particular masque is the subject matter of witchcraft. Jonson drew on an extensive literature, founded on classical authors and developed in the

sixteenth century on the continent, as well as in England, that gave him material to play with. All these authorities are available today, and the topic of Early Modern witchcraft has been thoroughly explored by scholars resulting in the publication of original sources, as well as secondary sources seeking to make sense of witchcraft practice and motivation (see Purkiss, 1996, as indicative of an extensive literature). We can trace Jonson's route through these sources, and develop an understanding of which works were most important. This procedure has led me to propose that King James' text on witchcraft was more significant than Jonson implies, so that the work draws on his encounter with the witches of Berwick who were reputed to have raised magic against him. The surprising result of investigating the witchcraft material is that all authorities agree that the dancing of witches in covens was not known in England in the first half of the seventeenth century, but was part of continental and Scottish lore. The English witch was a solitary being with no social life, whilst the notion of moving around objects anticlockwise to raise evil was not current in England until the latter half of the century. This means that *The Masque of Queens* introduced the dancing witch to English culture, and was strikingly significant in the development of the imagined witch in fiction, and possibly in real life. It has been known since the first days of serious Shakespeare scholarship, and maintained in reappraisals since, that the Hecate and dancing scenes of *Macbeth* are interpolations of the posthumous revivals of the second decade of the seventeenth century, probably capitalising on the popularity of dance on stage triggered by the masque (see Frost, 1968, as indicative of this discourse).

The performers of the witch scenes are not identified, but we can be fairly confident in deducing that they were drawn from the players' companies with court patronage. They have to speak, and dance was a required professional skill on the public stage. The eleven witches open the masque by appearing from a hell. This poses the first staging problem, as little serious consideration has been given to this by theatre historians. Having ascertained that the Mystery Play concept of the hell-mouth was still current, if rare, I have taken the view that the witches appeared through a cavern-like entrance, a cleft in the rocks, but whether this was three-dimensional, possibly forming the base of the House of Fame structure (a *machina versatilis*), or whether it was a painted scene on shutters later withdrawn to reveal the House of Fame (a *machina ductilis*) I am not competent to decide. Rocks were a cliché of masque staging, being used in Elizabethan and Jacobean scenes. Each witch is both a hag and a personification of a particular vice that undermines good fame. Jonson implies that they were vizarded. The eleven are joined by their Dame who also represents Mischief. Her appearance is described, showing that she was presented as a classical fury. Jonson's text tells us that they were heavily accessorised with snakes, rats, discordant musical instruments and broomsticks. In searching for guidance to performance of the scenes, it becomes apparent that there are no precursors for dancing in masks on the public stage, nor for representing these vices in action and gesture, nor for speaking and dancing in a group of twelve. The sense of a major theatrical innovation becomes stronger.

The first witches' dance

My thesis that the introduction of the antimasque to the English court was contentious colours the interpretation of the information given about the two entries (Daye, 1999). That other interpretations are possible is demonstrated by Jeremy Barlow's comments below. It is very plain that each dance was cut short, so that the witches did not complete a dance. I propose that each dance was tightly planned to arise directly out of the preceding action. For

the first entry, the witches arrive singly and in groups until they fall into a dance of greeting, the whole delivered through one consecutive piece of music. Jonson writes:

His majesty, then, being set, and the whole company in full expectation, the part of the scene which first presented itself was an ugly hell, which flaming beneath, smoked unto the top of the roof. And in respect all evils are, morally, said to come from hell, as also from that observation of Torrentius upon Horace his Canidia, *quae tot instructa venenis, ex Orci faucibus profecta videri possit*, these witches with a kind of hollow and infernal music, came forth from thence. First one, then two, and three, and more, till their number increased to eleven, all differently attired: some with rats on their heads, some on their shoulders; others with ointment pots at their girdles; all with spindles, timbrels, rattles or other venefical instruments, making a confused noise, with strange gestures. The device of their attire was Master Jones his, with the invention and architecture of the whole scene and machine. Only I prescribed them their properties of vipers, snakes, bones, herbs, roots and other ensigns of their magic, out of the authority of ancient and late writers, wherein the faults are mine, if there be any found, and for that cause I confess them.

These eleven witches beginning to dance (which is an usual ceremony at their convents, or meetings, where sometimes also they are vizarded and masked) on the sudden one of them missed their chief, and interrupted the rest with this speech. (Orgel, 1969 p.123)

The First Witches Dance has three sections: A and B are built out of unmeasured notes and snatches of galliard metre; section C is closer to a conventional eight bar strain in courante measure. I propose that sections A and B are the music supporting the entry of the witches, and section C is the dance they fall into, which is cut short by the first speaker.

Section A starts with two long notes which are quite unsuitable for dancing steps. They function instead as a call bringing on first one, and then a second hag, who each present themselves to the audience and greet each other. This interpretation takes account of the fact that the musicians would be placed in boxes at the side of the stage, whilst the performers enter from behind the scenery with sight restricted by masks. Without modern intercommunication systems, the music acts as the aural link. The dancers then have two cinquepassi to the rhythmic notes of bars 3 to 6. Bars 7 and 8 offer two long notes for the entrance of another two witches followed by music for one cinquepassi and a half measure in bars 9–11. Section A could be repeated to bring on four more hags. Section B commences with music for two cinquepassi in bars 1–4, followed by two long notes for entrances at bars 5 and 6. However, bars 1–4 cadence on bar 5, which gives a disturbing effect. Bars 7–8 support a single cinquepasso with one unmeasured note at bar 9, followed by two cinquepassi and a half measure at bars 10–14. Section B could be repeated. This proposal for using the long notes as entry points for each hag gives up to fourteen opportunities. If the single long note at B bar 9 is used for mimed gesture, this leaves twelve entries. It is possible to have the penultimate long note for the arrival of the eleventh hag, and use the last one to signal the non-arrival of the twelfth.

So far, the overall effect is of a highly disjointed piece of music and action, created by the extremely short passages of galliard metre, with half measures. A conventional galliard in England gives three strains for four galliard cinquepassi each, which with conventional

repetition provides for twenty-four steps. According to choreographies by Negri, half measures can be used for extra capriole or short honours. In preparing the recreation, this disjointed feature was very challenging for the dancers, who were used to continuous steps; but this would also have been the experience of the first performers.

Section C could be repeated *ad lib.* for a 'dance'. The eight bars of courante metre are still disrupted by bars 3 and 4 where the rhythmic movement is suspended. The pattern of steps decided on was one double, followed by a greeting action, then by two more courante doubles. A dance form had to be chosen to suit the action whereby one of them discovered that the Dame was missing. I chose a linear hay, initiated by one hag, who once she had worked down the line would realise that there was no twelfth man. A hay is also suitable as a dance of popular culture, as well as the court, and evocative of the reels of the Scottish witch. Six repeats of section C provided enough music for this, with the sixth broken off in mid-strain. This heightened the sense of discomfort created by the scene.

Entry of Dame

The hags then intoned three charms to encourage their leader to come. Her entrance is described thus in Jonson's libretto:

At this the Dame entered to them, naked armed, barefooted, her frock tucked, her hair knotted and folded with vipers; in her hand a torch made of a dead man's arm, lighted; girded with a snake. To whom they all did reverence, and she spake, uttering by way of question the end wherefore they came: which, if it had been done either before or otherwise, had not been so natural. (Orgel, 1969 p. 125)

Before they proceeded with their reports, the Dame calls them out one by one, giving an opportunity to identify each vice: Ignorance, Suspicion, Credulity, Falsehood, Murmur, Malice, Impudence, Slander, Execration, Bitterness, Rage and herself Mischief. Jonson's pedantic note makes plain the staging of this moment:

In the chaining of these vices, I make as if one link produced another, and the Dame were born out of them all;...(Orgel, 1969 p.530)

The Dame incites them to work mischief, and then calls them to narrate their recent actions, and the materials brought to work harmful charms. Each hag has a short speech to declare these. The Dame has a second magnificent speech of defiance against the present occasion. After demanding proof that they are all bare-footed, she leads a series of malevolent chants to summon evil. After each one, they pause to see the effect.

The Second Witches' Dance

The sixth charm of this series (and the ninth when added to the three to summon the Dame) takes up a regular metre, equivalent to nine duple time double steps:

About, about and about,
Till the mist arise and the lights fly out;
The images neither be seen nor felt;
The woolen burn and the waxen melt;
Sprinkle your liquors upon the ground
And into the air, around, around.

Around, around,
 Around, around,
 Till a music sound
 And the pace be found
 To which we may dance
 And our charms advance.
 (Orgel, 1969 p. 133)

The metre of these words is the same metre of section A of the music called The Second Witches' Dance. This suggests that the hags would begin to move their feet while chanting, and the music would start up as the words finished making a smooth and inevitable transition into dance. Jonson goes on to provide the most substantial information on choreography of any masque libretto:

At which, with a strange and sudden music they fell into a magical dance full of preposterous change and gesticulation, but most applying to their property, who at their meetings do all things contrary to the custom of men, dancing back to back and hip to hip, their hands joined, and making their circles backward, to the left hand, with strange fantastic motions of their heads and bodies. All which were excellently imitated by the maker of the dance, Master Hierome Herne, whose right it is here to be named.

In the heat of their dance on the sudden was heard a sound of loud music, as if many instruments had made one blast; with which not only the hags themselves but the hell into which they ran quite vanished.... (Orgel, 1969 p. 134)

In his notes, Jonson gives supporting references from the writings of Remy, Bodin and Elich.

These words and the charm suggest a circle formation. The phrasing of Section A of The Second Witches' Dance supports the sequence of two doubles, two singles and one double, strongly reminiscent of the common pattern of 'go two doubles round, set and turn single' of the country dance, always repeated. Sections B, C and D form a second strain, which could be repeated. Section B comprises two unmeasured notes, suitable for gesture: in the recreation, the action of 'Sprinkle your liquors upon the ground/And into the air...' was followed. Section C is very interesting, as it seems to be a short strain of 3/2 metre like a hornpipe or 9/8 like a slip-jig. The hornpipe was recognised as a Northern and Scottish metre in the early seventeenth century; the link is made overt in *The Triumph of Peace* 1634, and introduced then as a complimentary reference to Charles I's recent coronation trip to Scotland. The steps of the hornpipe and jig are lost to history, but are likely to have featured beaten and shuffled footwork. Such action would accord with the emphasis on the bare foot addressing the ground, as part of the demonic practices of witches, and the summoning of evil from below. A short canario sequence was therefore used. Section D is given a time signature for fast duple metre in the source manuscript. This matches the fast duple metre found in battle dances when the choreography demands one double twice as slow as usual (Caroso: La Barriera) or two doubles twice as fast as usual (Arbeau: Branle de la Guerre). These are rare examples of the double danced out of its usual measure, to signal the disorder of strife.

The last section E is in compound duple time in phrases that match the common pattern of two singles and a double, repeated. This forms again a 'dance' of a more conventional type, which the hags needed to be in the midst of, before they were interrupted by the blast of loud music, announcing the appearance of the queens on their throne of The House of Fame. A whirling circle in an anti-clockwise direction seemed likely to create an exciting finale. As with The First Witches' Dance this piece shows the combining of unmeasured notes that cannot support normal steps with brief snatches of dance metre that disconcertingly thwart the flow of dance action. Both strategies prevent the dancers from 'falling into their pace'. They establish an anarchy, destroying the aural and visual relationship of harmonious measure, that was the principal aesthetic of social dancing and the main masque entries.

Summary

This analysis of the music of the two dances in relation to the words reveals the flouting of conventional measure to produce two fractured and uncompleted dances. This serves two purposes, one artistic and one diplomatic. The expressive goal was the creation of a scene of malevolence which could be defeated by the virtue of the queens. The diplomatic one was the introduction of dancing by professionals, that would not seem to impudently undermine the prerogative of the court dancers. As Jonson says in his introduction to the masque text:

And because her majesty...had commanded me to think on some dance or show that might precede hers and have the place of a foil or false masque...[I] devised that twelve women in the habit of hags or witches....should fill that part, not as a masque but a spectacle of strangeness...

By these means a dance that was not a dance was created. The campaign was successful, as the antimasque became an important feature of the Stuart masque, after a little resistance, and grew to be the forum for the development of expressive dance, not solely as a foil to the main masque. The practice of the antimasquers quitting the scene before the noble dancers descended to dance prevailed throughout the period, showing that the English court remained sensitive to the issue of status in masque dancing.

The use of short sections of varied metre became a feature of antimasque music in the ensuing years, with the two Witches' dances being the first exemplars. There is no real precedent for this new genre (see also Chan, 1980; Sabol, 1982; Walls, 1996). It might be argued that such music may have been developed already on the public stage, but there was no dancing of this type on the stage, which used conventional social and theatrical forms.

The novelty of the whole presentation is clear from the evidence. I would argue that rarely in dance history can the sense of innovation be so strong, with so little preparatory experiment. Like the Paris audiences of Diaghilev's modernist campaign of the early twentieth century, the court audience of February 2 1609 must have distinctly felt 'the shock of the new' (Hughes, 1991).

In the following section of the paper, Jeremy Barlow explores an alternative interpretation of the evidence, with a commentary and transcription of the music for the two dances.

Jeremy Barlow's alternative musical scenario for the witches' entrance

Anne Daye based her reconstruction of the witches' entrance on the assumption that their appearance 'with a kind of hollow and infernall musique' would have been made to the music of *The First Witches Dance*. This is also the assumption made by Sabol (1978) p. 568. As our collaboration proceeded, I came to envisage a different matching between Jonson's text and the music. My own scenario is that the music of *The First Witches Dance* does not begin until the start of Jonson's next paragraph: 'These eleven Witches beginning to daunce'. I suggest that the description 'hollow and infernall musique' is of a separate piece that does not survive, played by musicians who were out of sight, and that it is unrelated too to the 'confused noyse' of the 'spindells, timbrells, rattles, or other *veneficall* instruments' held by the witches as they enter (in my paper on 'Mockmusick' (2002) I had, mistakenly I think now, presumed that the venefical instruments were a description of what Jonson meant by hollow and infernal music).

The following description summarises my current imagined relationship between Jonson's description of the witches' entrance and the sounds which accompany it:

- 1 The witches enter one by one to music (now lost) of a hollow and infernal character, played by musicians who are invisible to the spectators. The word 'infernal' might, as Dessen and Thomson (1990) suggest (p. 120), not only mean 'hellish', but also, from the original Latin meaning of 'infernus', describe music that sounds as if it is coming from below; the adjective 'hollow' too is appropriate for music that is being played out of sight.
- 2 As they enter, the witches contribute further to the aural atmosphere with confused (uncoordinated) noise from their venefical instruments (instruments of sorcery).
- 3 When eleven witches are present, they begin to dance to the music of *The First Witches Dance*. This music would be played by the violin band (string orchestra) normally present at masques; later in his description of the *Masque of Queens* Jonson mentions separate ensembles of violins and cornets (p. 315 in Herford and Simpson).

The music

Authorities agree that whoever copied the 140 masque tunes and their basses in BL Add. MS 10444 had access to material that related closely to the music as actually performed at the masques; see Sabol (1978) pp. 31–33, Holman (1993) pp. 186–194, and Walls (1996) pp. 29–30. However, music for the violin band would have been performed in five parts, whereas the masque music in Add. MS 10444 consists only of treble and bass partbooks (the music in each is in different hands). The first and second witches dances are nos 25 and 26.

Sabol, Holman and Walls acknowledge Pamela Willets' article 'Sir Nicholas Le Strange's Collection of Masque Music', *British Museum Quarterly*, 29 (1965), pp. 79–81. Willets originally believed that Le Strange copied the treble volume when studying at Lincoln's Inn, perhaps in late 1620s; more recently she has suggested that they may have been assembled before 1620, at Gray's Inn, where he had been admitted in 1617 (Walls p. 30). Holman suggests that the music may have been copied from a dancing master at court, and that only the top and bottom parts were taken down because, as happened later with Lully's dance music at the court of Louis XIV, a *parties de remplissage* process took place whereby middle parts were added shortly before the actual performance took place; as Holman writes 'the two-stage method of composition and arrangement was a practical and efficient way of

The first [of the] witches dance

The musical score for 'The first [of the] witches dance' is presented in six staves of treble clef notation. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4. The score is divided into three main sections: Section A (first staff), Section B (second staff, marked with a double bar line and a sharp sign), and Section C (third staff, marked with a double bar line and a 6/4 time signature). The notation includes various note values, rests, and bar lines, with some notes marked with a sharp sign.

getting lengthy works into rehearsal and on to the stage' (p. 193). Our performance sticks to the top-and-bottom format of BLAdd. MS 10444, with the addition of harpsichord continuo.

I have transcribed below the treble parts of the first and second witches dances from BLAdd. MS 10444 with the minimum of editorial interference. Some of the changes have been forced on me by the limitations of my musical notation software. The lettering of sections is editorial.

The first witches dance

In the title the bracketed words occur in the bass part only. The key signature should have an extra sharp. Time signatures in the original are **31** and **61** respectively. The 6/4 sections in both dances use 'black note' notation which has been modernised in the same way as in successive editions of Playford's *Dancing Master* (see Barlow, 1985 p. 5 fn 3). Barring is editorial, apart from a barline after the initial upbeat in the 6/4 section and the double bars. The latter have dots between the two barlines in the MS. Such dots should be regarded as embellishments; they do not necessarily indicate repeats (see Barlow, 1985 p. 5, and 1990 p. xiv). In the performances of both dances repeats have been made at all double bars. The semibreve at the end (penultimate note) should probably be dotted, even though it creates an irregular bar. The tie between it and the final minim represents a conventional means then of indicating a first and second time bar at a repeat. The semibreve probably represents a second time bar and the minim the first time bar. Pauses in the performance, not indicated in BLAdd. MS 10444, have been taken from the version of the dance in BLAdd. MS 117786-91 (see the concordances listed in Bibliography 1).

The second witches dance

The musical score for 'The second witches dance' is presented in five staves of music. The first staff is labeled 'A' and contains eight measures. The second staff contains eight measures. The third staff is labeled 'B' and contains three measures, with a curved line over the first two notes. The fourth staff is labeled 'C' and contains three measures, with a 3/4 time signature. The fifth staff is labeled 'D' and contains four measures, with a 6/4 time signature. The sixth staff is labeled 'E' and contains four measures. The music is written in a single treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat).

The second witches dance

The b flat key signature is editorial. The $\frac{3}{4}$ time signature is **31** in the original; its absence is indicated by a sharp placed under the b at the end of bar 3 in the original. The split common time signature at the start of the fourth stave is reversed in the original, indicating a much faster tempo (see Barlow, 1985 p. 5, fn 4). Barring is editorial, apart from a barline after the initial upbeat, and another after the initial upbeat of the $\frac{6}{4}$ section. The remarks above about double bars and repeats apply to this dance too. The ties at the start of the third stave are ungrammatical for the period. They should be interpreted as pause marks, to be placed over the dotted minims; there are several places in the MS where a curved line, looking like a tie or slur, is placed over or under a particular note, and is clearly a pause sign lacking the usual dot under the curve. The final bar, which I have interpreted as a tied f, is unclear in the original.

Video. Credits for *Antimasque of Witches*

‘..whose right it is here to be named.’

Research and direction	Anne Daye	Music direction	Jeremy Barlow
Dancers			
Mischief	David Lee	Ignorance	David Wilson
Suspicion	Peter Taylor	Credulity	Chris Saunders
Two-faced Falsehood	Chris Blades	Murmur	Peter Ede
Malice	Peter Greener	Impudence	Henry Lee
Slander	Andrew Torrington	Execration	Maurizio di Donato
Bitterness	Vasco Otero	Rage	Johnny McCann
Musicians			
Violin	Shelley Britton	Bass Viol	Jennifer Bullock
Harpsichord	Ibi Aziz		
Production			
Video	Alexander Daye	Recording Engineer (Trinity College)	Kit Venables
Masks and costumes with	Frances Campbell Nicky Cortiglia	Anne Daye	the cast
Set construction	Tim Carruthers		
	Funded by Middlesex University and Trinity College of Music		

Bibliography 1. Sources for *The Masque of Queens*

Texts

Royal Ms. 18.A.xlv	Ben Jonson’s holograph manuscript copy, presented to Prince Henry, with full annotation at his request, justifying the theme and its realisation. 1609
Quarto edition	Published 1609, with the notes
Folio editions	Published 1616 and 1640, with the notes
Harley MS. 6947	The Invention of the Masque, submitted in advance

Music item 1. First witches dance, six concordances.

The first witches dance	Brit. Lib. Add Ms. 10444 treble f 21r, bass f 74v early 17th century collection including many masque tunes, possibly collected from the copies used in performance.	Sabol 76
The witches dance in the <i>Queenes Maske</i>	Robert Dowland Variety of Lute Lessons 1610 f P2v	Sabol 246
The Wytches Dawnce	Trinity College, Dublin Ms. D.1.21 p.65 ‘William Ballett’s Lute Book’ 1590–1610	
The Wiches Daunce	Brit. Lib. Add Ms. 38539 f.4 ‘The John Sturte Lute Book’ after 1613	
The wyche	Brit. Lib. Add Ms. 117786-91 early 17th century collection	Sabol 247

Music item 5. Tenor song: When all the ages of the earth

If all the ages of the earth

Alfonso Ferrabosco
Ayres 1609 no. 23 Sabol 13

Music item 6. The queens' third dance.

The Queenes Masque the second

Brit. Lib. Add. Ms. 10444 Sabol 53
treble f 11v - 12 r, bass f 66v

Music item 7. The queens' fourth dance

The Queenes third Masque

Brit. Lib. Add. Ms. 10444 Sabol 54
treble f 12v - 13r, bass f 67r

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