

Ian Payne, *The Almain in Britain, c.1549– c.1675: a dance manual from manuscript sources*. Ashgate, Aldershot, 2003. ISBN 0-85967-965-9. xxi+268 pp, £42.50.

This book is in essence an extended study of the ‘Old Measures’ and of the seven manuscript sources in which they are described. Payne focuses especially on the English Almain, for which these manuscripts afford the only information, but neglects none of the associated dances, whether they are formally part of the Old Measures or not. He provides reconstructions of most of the dances described, using a deliberately plain style, and makes informed comments about the available music. The whole corpus is presented in the context of his personal view of the development of social dance in Britain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Unfortunately, the author is not equally well equipped for every part of his task, with the result that the book inevitably invites comparison with the Curate’s Egg. For the sake of the reader’s digestion the reviewer must use his spoon to display those parts that are undoubtedly excellent, while also drawing attention to those parts that give off a whiff of sulphur.

There is much that is of undoubted value. This is the only publication to include reliable transcriptions of all seven of the featured manuscript sources, with a full supporting bibliographical apparatus and commentary (Chapters 1, 18-25). This in itself justifies a large part of the purchase price. The suggested reconstructions of the dances (Chapters 7-17) are sensible, though open to some disagreement, as is always the case and is illustrated later in this review. Of particular interest to those dancers who are not well versed in the contemporary music is the detailed discussion of the Almain/Allemande and its music (Chapters 5-6). Payne not only lists and describes a large number of pieces that are either explicitly or presumably Almain music, but seeks to show which are dance-music in a practical sense and which are simply art-music in Almain form. His principal criterion lies in the regularity (or not) of the phrase structure in the music, which would have to match that of the dance as performed. This is obviously true, but it can be argued that there is more room for irregular phrasing in the dances themselves than he is prepared to admit.

It is in the more general discussion of Almans and Country Dances and their origins that many will feel that Payne has lost his way. He knows the works of Dolmetsch and Wood; he is familiar with Arbeau and with Playford; and he has read anything that has been written about the Old Measures. Apart from that he knows little about Historical Dance and its literature, though he has benefited from being directed to a number of relevant publications by Madeleine Inglehearn, whose help he gracefully acknowledges. His views are unconventional, but, given how scanty our evidence is for all kinds of dance before 1675, they should not be dismissed out of hand. They can sometimes be refuted from the evidence we have, however, and I shall pay him the compliment of troubling to do this below.

Let us now look at a number of key topics.

### Connection with the Inns of Court

As far as Payne is concerned, Measures are found in masques, and masques were performed at the Inns of Court, and that is all that needs to be said on the subject. The possibilities that Measures could be performed in other contexts, and that masques were put on variously by courtiers and by country gentlemen in places other than the Inns of Court, seem not to have been considered. He knows of the work of John Ward, both on Measures in general (e.g. 1986) and on the Old

Measures in particular (1993) and he is prepared to accept Ward’s conjecture that the Old Measures constituted a standard beginners’ course in the dancing schools. From this it seems to follow that, as far as Payne is concerned, no one went to a dancing school and made notes of what he was taught unless he was already at the Inns of Court or was a child with aspirations to do so. In truth, as Ward has cogently argued, for most of the manuscripts in which the Old Measures are recorded, any connection with the Inns of Court is either tenuous or non-existent.

### Dating of the manuscripts

When the contents of a commonplace book do not form a continuous sequence and are not explicitly presented in chronological order, it is notoriously difficult to know in what order the various entries were made. To assume that there is strict chronological order is not a rigorous procedure and can often be shown to be mistaken.

*Source A* is such a commonplace book. It bears the name of ‘Eliner Gunter’, but is now thought to have been used by her brother Edward. Fifteen dances are described on fols 10r-11r. Payne makes much of the fact that, beginning on fol 24r, there is a copy, made by the same hand using identical ink, of an oration given in March 1565 (1566 N.S.). On the other hand, as Ward points out, the entry immediately preceding the dances (fols 8v-9r) is a copy of another oration given in 1575. This only goes to show that such dates merely establish the approximate period of use of the book. More to the point is the fact that one of the dances is ‘My lord off Essex measures’. The Earldom of Essex was in abeyance from 1554 until May 1572. I agree with Ward that this makes it likely (though not completely certain) that this dance came into existence not before the mid-1570s and therefore that the date of *Source A* can be placed around 1575 at earliest. At this point, the dances later known as the Old Measures were not ‘old’ at all, but were fully current. It is only twenty years later, as dance styles developed, that certain of the simpler dances were retained for teaching purposes, when they had indeed begun to look ‘old’.

*Source D* is another commonplace book, that of John Ramsey. Nineteen dances presented under the heading ‘Practise for Dauncinge’ formed part of an elaborate educational scheme he devised c.1607 for a future son. Surrounding entries happen to be of similar date, but nevertheless do not determine it.

*Source C* is not even a commonplace book: two sheets bearing dances are bound into a miscellaneous collection of handwritten papers conventionally dated c.1575/1625. Payne has made a considerable advance here, by studying the watermark on the first of the two sheets. Although the mark is currently unique, it is sufficiently close to known English marks with a date-range from 1611 to 1621 to suggest a date not much earlier than 1620.

Other datings are uncontroversial, though it is worth noting that the inferred date of c. 1633 for *Source E* (notes made by Elias Ashmole as a schoolboy) is far removed from Ashmole’s admission to the Middle Temple in 1657.

### The English Almain

I fully support Payne in his identification of the English Almain as being a dance that is distinct from the Allemande as described by Arbeau.

This interpretation is based on Source A, in which Gunter consistently distinguishes between processional sequences comprising ‘a duple forward hoppe iiii tymes’ and figures specific to the individual dance, that were composed of singles, doubles and other steps, all without mention of hopping. The characteristic ‘German’ step used for procession resembles that in Arbeau, except that in Arbeau the hop was optional (i.e. the free leg was raised, but the supporting leg did not necessarily leave the floor). According to Cotgrave (1611) the English for ‘*Trois pas, & un saut*’ was ‘*The Almonde, or Alman, leape*’ and this term is used in non-dancing contexts in such a way as to suggest that at least some dancers were quite exuberant in its execution. There is nothing to suggest that singles should ever be given the same treatment as the doubles.

What is distinctive about the English Almain is the insertion of figured sequences that make use of much the same repertoire of movements as early Country Dances, though without the standardised introductions that are found in so many of those.

It has to be said that none of the later sources for the English Almain refers to a hopped step. Either it was a well-established convention, not needing to be specified, that procession in the Almain used a distinctive step, or this custom became disused as fashions changed. The latter seems more probable. Already in Source B of 1594, it is possible to run the procession and the figure together to yield a sequence of ‘5 *doubles forwarde, & a double backe*’ in *The Queenes Almaine*; all these doubles must surely be made in the same way, which on my interpretation would be without the hop. (I acknowledge, however, that the argument could be reversed, to show that the Almain figures were actually hopped just like the processional doubles.)

### Putting the steps to music

I have two main quibbles with Payne’s reconstructions of dances: sometimes he abandons the use of alternate feet for no obvious reason, and not infrequently he makes use of a ‘slow single’, for which the reasons are indeed stated but not necessarily cogent.

A glaring instance of the former misdemeanour occurs in Lady Layton’s Measures where, after making two doubles forward ‘beginning with the Left’, the following four steps are all made with the left foot. There is nothing in the original text to suggest this; there is no difficulty of execution that requires it, and no explanation given in his own introductory remarks. I should assume sloppy proofreading, if it were not that the rest of the dance continues in much the same manner.

The reasons for using a slow single (taking the time appropriate to a double) are easier to perceive. In the first place, Payne believes that the Almain is derived from the French Basse Dance, so he feels comfortable with a step that can be thought to echo the Basse Dance *desmarche*. And then, he needs to find some way of reconciling certain sequences of steps with music that is organised in strains with an even number of bars.

The only place where I feel happy with a slow single occurs in Lady Layton’s Measures, where a special step of some kind is described as a ‘*longe stepp*’. There is no knowing what this means, but a slow single (or *passo grave*) is a reasonable interpretation that works well in performance. Elsewhere in Lady Layton’s Measures, the second half of the dance begins

with ‘*one S forwards and a d backwardes*’. In this case I believe it is justified to take ‘S’ as a scribal error and emend it to ‘d’. The sequence of ‘a double forward and a double back’ is such a widespread form of introduction to sixteenth-century dances of all kinds that a single here is wholly inappropriate.

But what is to be done in other places where a single is found in a position where the available music allows for a double? One answer would be to find other music. Payne states that

apart from the music of The Earl of Essex’s Measure . . . , I know of no music actually identifiable with a known country-dance, measure or almain choreography that is composed of anything other than strains with even numbers of bars (p. 122).

The words in this statement are very carefully chosen, but we are bound to remember that he has already systematically discounted Almain music including strains with an uneven number of bars from being considered genuine dance music, so the argument is in grave danger of appearing circular.

It may help if we look at a Pavan—you can hardly have music that is more regular than that. In *The Long Pavan* there is a sequence of ‘*a duple forward one single back twyse*’. Inevitably, Payne specifies using a slow single; otherwise, how could it ever fit a piece of Pavan music? And yet, unknown to Payne, such music does exist and it fits *The Long Pavan* perfectly, because the relevant strain *does* have an uneven number of bars. This is an untitled piece (no 5) in the *Dublin Virginal MS*, and all honour to whoever realised where it fitted. Similar discoveries may yet be made in relation to Almans.

### Origins

I have already mentioned Payne’s belief that the Almain is in some sense ‘derived’ from the Basse Dance. I do not find this sort of vocabulary helpful. I doubt very much if any dance can be said to be derived from any other. What happens is that one dance succeeds or supersedes another because it better meets the needs of fashion, especially novelty. Musicology may be different. It may well be that the music for the Pavan was derived from the music for the Basse Dance Commune, for it is organised in a similar manner both in phrasing and in tempo, and it displays similar mannerisms. But I should never agree that the Pavan as a dance was derived from the Basse Dance Commune; it simply followed the same trend (of simplifying the step-sequence) more effectively, and thereby took over its position in the repertoire.

In what way is the Almain supposed to be derived from the Basse Dance? There is an answer to this: it used the same steps. According to Payne, the terms ‘single’ and ‘double’ were totally unknown in English as a way of describing steps until Robert Copland translated the relevant French treatise into English and published it in 1521. Obviously, any dance using these steps is therefore derived from the Basse Dance. This is so wrong-headed and displays such ignorance of the primary sources for fifteenth-century dance that it almost defies logical argument! ‘Single’ and ‘double’ steps were in fact the common currency of all known dances in western Europe in the fifteenth century. This is shown by the fact that they occur in dances contemporary with the Basse Dance, but of different form, in written records in Italy, Spain, France and now even in England. The English source was admittedly only recognised in 1995, but initial publication and early discus-

sion of the 'Gresley' dances took place in specifically musicological journals (Fallows 1996; Nevile 1998). Further discussion in the pages of *Historical Dance* (Nevile 1999; Wilson 1999) should not have come too late to be noticed. *Singlis* and *doblis* were current in the last decades of the fifteenth century in Derbyshire in dances that bear no resemblance either in steps or choreography to the Basse Dance. Nor indeed do they greatly resemble Almains or Country Dances. There is much that we do not know about dancing in the earlier sixteenth century.

There are many resemblances between Almains and Country Dances in the elements of which they are composed, and in some cases the Almains are more clearly described than the Country Dances are, aiding their interpretation. From my perspective, I see this as indicating that they were both drawing on a vernacular tradition that was common to much of western Europe (Wilson 1998).

The history of the English Country Dance is virtually impossible to trace before 1575, but it is not quite as hazy as Payne seems to think. He quaintly assumes that all the dances found in Playford's *The English Dancing Master* (1651) were Playford's own creation, so earlier dances must have had a different character. He is left with Turkeyloney and Basileña. My own approach would be quite different. I have no doubt that the dances published by Playford were not new, but had already been current in London society for quite a long time. Dances described as 'country dances' bearing names that are identical with those found in *The English Dancing Master* are mentioned in a play called *Misogonus* (1577) and one of them was actually performed on stage. We cannot be sure that it had the same form as the dance published by Playford, but it seems more likely than not that it did. The scene in the play was a low tavern, but we also have a good description from the same year of an after-dinner dancing party in a well-to-do household that I am not alone in thinking described country dancing. After galliards and a few other traditional dances, they proceeded to clear the floor for a real dancing session. What kind of dancing this was is not stated, though it was clearly all the rage and they went on past midnight (Breton 1577).

Pierre Rameau, *The Dancing Master*, translated by Cyril Beaumont. Dance Books, Alton, 2003. ISBN 1 85273 092 7. Paperback. xx + 150pp, illus. £12.50

Pierre Rameau's *Le Maître à Danser* of 1725 remains one of the standard works on the technique and style of early eighteenth-century French and English dance as taught for the ballroom. Cyril Beaumont's translation of the work into English was first published as a volume in 1931, subsequently reissued by Dance Horizons in New York in 1970, and is now republished by Dance Books. It is a faithful reprint of Beaumont's original introduction and translation, with nothing added and nothing removed.

The virtue of this volume is that it is inexpensive and now easily available once more; thus it retains its appeal for the syllabus booklists of dance history courses, while to a new generation of general readers and to dancers wanting to work on early eighteenth-century dance it provides an attractively illustrated introduction to an important treatise on the subject. Unfortunately it goes no further than that, and in its present form cannot do so. Beaumont provided notes to guide readers

And to it then; with set, and turn about,  
Change sides, and cross, and mince it like a hawk;  
Backwards and forwards, take hands then, in and out;  
And, now and then, a little wholesome talk ...

The poet then elaborates on the individual dancing styles of all the women! If this really is Country Dance, then it was little different from what Playford's collaborators described some seventy years later.

We are traversing country here that is not well-known, and Payne and I are using different maps. He has much to say that is of genuine interest, but the parts of his book that will have lasting value are the transcriptions of the choreographic sources and the review of the Almain music.

David Wilson

#### References

- Breton, N. *The Workes of a young Wyt*. London, 1577.  
 Cotgrave, R. *A Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues*. London, 1611.  
 Fallows, D. The Gresley dance collection, c.1500. Royal Musicological Association, *Research Chronicle*, 1996, 29, 1-20.  
 Nevile, J. Dance in early Tudor England: an Italian connection? *Early Music*, 1988, 26, 230-44.  
 Nevile, J. Dance steps and music in the Gresley manuscript. *Historical Dance*, 1999, 3 (6), 2-19.  
 Ward, J. M. The English Measure. *Early Music*, 1986, 14, 15-21.  
 Ward, J. M. Apropos 'The olde Measures'. *REED Newsletter*, 1993, 18, 2-21.  
 Wilson, D. The missing link. In: Parsons, D. J. (editor) *On Common Ground 2: Continuity and Change*, Proceedings of the Second DHDS Conference, London, 14 March 1998. Dolmetsch Historical Dance Society, 1998, 99-104.  
 Wilson, D. Performing Gresley dances: the view from the floor. *Historical Dance*, 1999, 3 (6), 20-22.

towards the most accurate information that was available to him in 1931 but, seventy years on, many readers aware of more recent findings will expect to see revisions to those notes, an up-to-date introduction and bibliography, and informed guidance to the sources that Beaumont used (particularly for the forty seven illustrations of dance poses, none of which derive from any of Rameau's own editions of the treatise). The expectations of dancers, teachers, researchers and general readers have changed a lot since 1931, and it does less than justice to the achievements of Beaumont himself to reissue his work without any editorial comment. However, even a reprint without commentary is still something to value if it widens access to a primary source, for that in turn might encourage the research necessary for the new editions, popular or scholarly, that we really need.

Jennifer Thorp

---

## Book Reviews

---

Jean-Georges Noverre, *Letters on Dancing and Ballets*, translated by Cyril Beaumont. Dance Books, Alton, 2004. ISBN 1 85273 100 1. Paperback xiii, 169 pp. £12.50.

The facsimile reprint of Cyril Beaumont's translation of Jean-Georges Noverre's *Lettres sur la danse et les ballets* recently published by Dance Books continues their practice of reprinting important sources for dance history, using editions which are now out of copyright as well as out of print and can thus be made available again at a reasonable price. This paperback volume costs only £12.50. Beaumont's original edition of 1930 was, of course, a hardback, printed on cream laid paper, with its illustrations on thin coated paper for good quality reproduction. The facsimile reproduces Beaumont's text and illustrations on white wove paper, with the text actual size but the illustrations slightly larger than in the original. The pages have margins which are as generous as Beaumont's, useful for those who like to make notes in their books, and the volume is sewn in sections, so that it should withstand repeated reading and reference use. Beaumont's translation was previously available in the paperback edition published by Dance Horizons in 1966, which reached a second printing in 1975 but is now presumably out of print. So, this edition by Dance Books makes an important text accessible to a new generation of students and researchers, as well as those with a more general interest in dance history.

Jean-Georges Noverre (1727-1810) probably made his debut at the Opéra-Comique in 1743. He created his first ballet, *Les Fêtes Chinoises*, in 1748, and his first serious pantomime ballet, *Le Jugement de Paris*, in 1751. Noverre travelled to London for the first time in 1755, to work for the actor-manager David Garrick at Drury Lane, but the engagement was a failure because of anti-French riots. By 1757 Noverre was in Lyon, and in 1760 he moved to Stuttgart. His *Lettres sur la danse et les ballets*, written during his stay with Garrick in London, was published in Lyon and in Stuttgart in 1760. In the treatise, written as a series of letters to an unnamed correspondent, Noverre proposed reforms for every aspect of the ballet of his time. He subsequently tried to put his ideas into practice in Vienna, in Milan, at the Paris Opéra (where he failed), and again in London (where he enjoyed success). He finally retired from the theatre in 1794. Beaumont's introduction to *Letters on Dancing and Ballets* summarises Noverre's career and appraises his importance as an innovator.

*Lettres sur la danse et les ballets* appeared in several editions between 1760 and the early years of the nineteenth century. Noverre's works were anonymously translated into English and published in three volumes in London in 1782-1783, with the *Lettres* divided between volumes one and two. In his introduction Beaumont referred to this English edition, but for his own translation he used the French text of the *Lettres* which appeared in volumes one and two of the four-volume set of Noverre's works published in St Petersburg in 1803-1804. This was, as Beaumont explains, a 'revised and enlarged version,' and he also included Noverre's preface to the St Petersburg edition, in which the *maître de ballet* declared his aims and reviewed the achievements of his long career. Beaumont's frontispiece was the portrait of Noverre

by J. K. Sherwin first published in the 1782-1783 London edition, as it was re-engraved for the St Petersburg edition.

Cyril Beaumont was a bookseller, publisher, and writer on dance, whose career has most recently been examined by Kathrine Sorley Walker in the three issues of volume twenty-five of *Dance Chronicle*, with a bibliography of Beaumont's works in the first issue of volume twenty-six. He was bilingual in English and French, and took a keen interest in printed works which illuminated dance's history. Beaumont began publishing important works in translation in 1925 with Arbeau's *Orchesography*, which he followed with Lambranzi's *New and Curious School of Theatrical Dancing* (translated by Derra de Moroda) in 1928. His intention was to make such works from the past accessible to students of dancing. He had no doubts about the importance of Noverre's *Lettres*, writing in his introduction that 'no book has exerted so incalculable an influence for good on the manner of production of ballets and dances.' Beaumont's enthusiasm reflected his own hopes for ballet's future, following the innovations of Diaghilev. There is thus every reason to make his translation available again, not least because it is now itself a valuable part of dance's history.

Given the importance of Noverre's *Lettres sur la danse et les ballets*, and the significance of Beaumont's work as a publisher and dance historian, it is a shame that Dance Books were not able to add a new foreword to the reprint with a summary of recent research on Noverre as well as some information about Beaumont. Some annotation of the text would have been useful, for example to correct some of the dates Beaumont gives for events in Noverre's life and career, and to bring some of his footnotes up to date. A bibliography (including a listing of the various editions of the *Lettres*) and an index would also have been helpful. However, the decision to present Beaumont's original text without such additions is understandable. There is, or should be, room for another rather different edition of Noverre's *Lettres*, in fact for a new English translation (or perhaps a facsimile reprint of the English edition of 1782-1783) with full scholarly apparatus. Why is there no such edition already? Why is there no modern English-language biography of a figure as important as Noverre? And why are these gaps not being filled by publishers? Many of the answers lie with the low status of dance history. Even in university dance departments the subject is hardly taught at all, so it is not surprising that interest is diminishing rather than growing. The dance world should be ashamed of this neglect. If dance history is not taught, not only will students, dancers, researchers, and the general public remain ignorant of its riches, but no serious works of any kind will be published on the subject because there is no market for them. Criticism of Dance Books and their reprint of Beaumont's translation of Noverre's *Lettres* is misplaced. They should instead be congratulated for doing their best to bring dance's history to a new and wider audience.

Moira Goff