
Book Review

Maggie Marsh, *Mr Noverre's Academy: A Georgian Dancing Master in Norwich*, Norwich Early Dance Group/Running Angel, Norwich 2005. ISBN 0-9549898-0-5. 28 pp., illustrated*

This beautifully illustrated booklet with text by Maggie Marsh was published by Norwich Early Dance Group / Running Angel and partly funded by Norwich City Council and the H. J. Sexton Norwich Arts Trust. Such collaborations, in which dance becomes the focus of a local history initiative, are to be welcomed. This small study looks at the life and career of Augustin Noverre, younger brother of the choreographer Jean-Georges Noverre. Augustin came to London in 1755, when Jean-Georges was engaged by David Garrick to mount his ballet *The Chinese Festival* at Drury Lane. The venture was a fiasco, for performances were halted by anti-French riots at the theatre. Augustin wounded one of the rioters and was said to have fled to Norwich to escape punishment. Aware of the contradictions between her main sources, Maggie Marsh suggests a different but no less interesting story.

In the first section she sets out the competing histories of Augustin's early years in London, without trying to reconcile them. In the second, she discusses the one book of dances by him to survive from his time in London as a dancing master, investigating the composers of the music and the dedicatees rather than the dances. Then, she tries to disentangle the evidence for Augustin's career in Norwich using parish records and local newspapers with some success. Using the same types of sources, with rather more success (later records

survive in greater numbers and are often more informative), she outlines the career of his son Francis Noverre and describes some of Francis's rivalries with other Norwich dancing masters. She traces the Noverre family into the nineteenth century, as far as the succession in 1837 of Francis's son Frank to what had become the family business. For her final section, Maggie Marsh returns to Augustin in Norwich, ending with his obituary which praised him as 'the most finished, elegant and gentlemanly minuet dancer' and referred to his 'private exercise of his profession as a Master'. She notes that the 'private exercise' may be the reason that there is virtually no evidence that Augustin ever plied his trade as a dancing master in Norwich.

This is a most welcome little book which addresses a sorely neglected part of dance's history. I am sorry that the text could not have been longer, allowing more detail about the Norwich context which the Noverres entered and carrying the story further into the nineteenth century. I wonder if, with more time and resources as well as space, Maggie Marsh might have been able to undertake the research needed to unravel the details of Augustin Noverre's London career and pursue some of the private pupils he taught beyond the capital. I hope that, in time, *Mr Noverre's Academy* will inspire a larger and more detailed history of dancing in and around Norwich.

Moira Goff

* Since this book was published Maggie Marsh has continued her research. The results can be seen on the Norwich Early Dance web site (www.norwichearlydance.org.uk) by following the link *The Noverres of London and Norwich*.