

**The Making of Dance History: two additional resources for study**

Nevile, J. (editor) *Dance, Spectacle, and the Body Politick*, 1250–1750. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN, 2008. ISBN 978-0-253-21985-5, 375 pp., several ills. Paperback \$24.95

Burden, M. & Thorp, J. (editors) *Ballet de la Nuit*. Pendragon Press, Hillsdale, NY, 2009. ISBN 978-1-57647-143-2, x + 201 pp., 129 colour plates. Hardback \$86

As Jennifer Nevile indicates in her introduction, dance scholarship is a recent academic discipline lacking the range of publications found in other fields of the humanities. Two new additions to the body of resources from principal scholars in the field are therefore very welcome. Between them they characterize two requirements in building up a body of knowledge for the specialist and more general readership: informed and authoritative secondary sources and high-quality primary material, particularly facsimiles.

*Dance, Spectacle, and the Body Politick*, 1250–1750 deliberately targets a wide readership seeking up-to-date insights into the nature and milieu of Renaissance and Baroque dance, by providing a series of essays by leading experts. The value of the collection is enhanced by a thoughtful introduction and overview by Nevile, drawing on a full complement of recent and older resources in books, journals and conference proceedings. Each group of essays is also provided with an introduction, while each essay is followed by recommended reading. A list of dance treatises, a glossary and a full bibliography will enable the reader to extend their understanding. Illustrations, notation and diagrams are used within the texts, but no list of illustrations is supplied. It would enhance the collection to have good quality colour images, but we have to resign ourselves to the problem of cost in this marginal field of academic publishing.

While the pan-European nature of dance culture is outlined, dancing in France and Italy predominates, with only one essay on dance in the eighteenth century London theatre, and none on Germany, Spain or other centres of court and city culture. This in itself is indicative of the nature of the discipline, making it hard to get good coverage of Europe for the whole period. The essays are organised thematically into five groups: readers can easily select across the collection if seeking insights into a particular country or chronological period. The earliest topic is dance in late thirteenth century Paris by Karen Silen. Fifteenth century Europe is represented by David Wilson on the French basse dance and two essays on Italy by Jennifer Nevile. Sixteenth century France and Italy are discussed by Margaret McGowan and Katherine Tucker McGinnis. French belle danse attracts the fullest treatment with essays by John S. Powell, Ken Pierce, Julia Prest and Linda Tomko, whilst Jennifer Thorp contributes on England. An interesting group of essays takes a broader look at the contextual thinking of Renaissance Europe, with Graham Pont on Plato and dance, Alessandro Arcangeli on moral views and Nevile on the geometric concepts shared between

dance, architecture and garden design. All the essays are well worth reading, sharing thorough knowledge and source-based research in a fluent and substantial manner. The collection more than fulfills its goal of opening up pre-1750 dance studies to a general readership, but will also be of interest to the more informed dance historian.

*Le Ballet de la Nuit* remains one of the most significant dance works of the past, while the costume design for Louis XIV as Le Soleil became an iconic image in its own day and ever after. This image of absolute monarchy has entered western cultural consciousness, pervading all the arts, not least classical ballet, so that the original finale of *The Sleeping Beauty* referenced the gloire, the apotheosis of Louis as Apollo at the climax of *Le Ballet de la Nuit*. One of the problems with ballet de cour of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries (common to the masque and the intermedii) is the scattered nature of the sources for each production, which might comprise costume and set designs, the livret, records indicating the sequence of the work in performance, the verses offered to the principals, the music and songs, lists of participants and artists and financial records. Only when all these are brought together can the most complete view of a dance work be arrived at. This publication, edited by Michael Burden and Jennifer Thorp, is the first to achieve such a collation, so that our initial understanding of the work can be deepened and extended.

The publication centres on the designs and livret for the ballet formerly belonging to Louis de Hesselin, the ballet's producer, acquired by Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild for his collection at Waddesdon Manor. These are placed alongside a modern edition by Lionel Sawkins of the surviving music. Supporting information and analysis for the political, cultural and dance contexts of the work are provided in essays by the editors and David Parrott and Catherine Massip. This valuable publication is enhanced by the quality of the facsimile reproduction of the livret and the full-colour images of the costume and set designs. The editors acknowledge the financial support of New College, Oxford and the Ludwig Family Charitable Trust for the photography, while the publication is fifteenth in the Wendy Hilton Dance and Music Series of the Pendragon Press, from which imprint has come a number of invaluable sources. This book will delight and inform all readers, but more importantly provide seminal resources with which future scholars can extend understanding of French ballet de cour.

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