

Eric McKee. *Decorum of the Minuet, Delirium of the Waltz: A Study of Dance-Music Relations in ¾ Time*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2012. ISBN 978-0-253-35692-5, vii+262 ppm b/w illustrations, hardback, £31.00

Eric McKee explores the interdependence of dance, music and social setting in the minuet and the waltz; he writes that 'if one wishes better to understand the musical structures and expressive meanings contained in these dances, it is helpful to be aware of the bodily rhythms of the dances upon which they are based and the social contexts in which they were performed.' The book forms part of a series *Musical Meaning & Interpretation*, so Eric McKee has the musician in mind rather than the dancer or dance historian; he provides copious musical examples and expects an understanding of harmonic language and other compositional processes. Nevertheless, his investigation of historical and social background to the dances may interest the dance specialist too.

The first two chapters focus on the minuet, during the first and second halves of the eighteenth century respectively. In the first chapter McKee uses Kellom Tomlinson's *The Art of Dancing* (1735) as a basis for describing the step-units of the minuet; he discusses the views of dance historians on an apparent inconsistency between the engraved plates in the book, which show a close correlation between choreography and music, and Tomlinson's instruction elsewhere that ballroom dancers, having made their reverences during the opening music of the minuet, do not need to wait for the start of the next musical section to begin dancing; instead they should start on the next two-bar phrase, regardless of its position in the music. This procedure appears to go against the notion of a close relationship between the dance and its music. McKee then takes four contrasting minuets from Bach's French Suites and shows how physical elements of the dance inform Bach's phrasing and structure, even though the music is primarily for keyboard players, not dancers.

In Chapter 2 McKee analyses the musical character of Mozart's minuets composed for the ballroom. Many have noted that in Mozart's concert minuets – those from symphonies and chamber works – the trios often have a waltz-like character, with what McKee calls an 'oom-pah-pah' accompaniment. He points out that this contrast between minuet and trio occurs in many of Mozart's ballroom minuets too, when dancers would certainly not have interrupted their minuet to break into a waltz for the trio section. But McKee also shows that these trios have a different musical character from Mozart's *Deutsche* and *Ländler* (proto-waltzes) for the ballroom; despite the oom-pah-pah accompaniment that both may have in common, the latter have shorter musical phrases.

Chapter 3 explores the waltzes of Joseph Lanner and Johann Strauss Sr. Again, McKee brings a new perspective to familiar views, by refuting the notion that the role of the

spectator became less important as the waltz supplanted the minuet. With illustrations and contemporary quotes, McKee shows that, for men especially, the spectacle of the waltz among the upper ranks of society was an important aspect of its attraction.

McKee devotes the remaining three chapters to Chopin's waltzes: first, their historical background; then the ways in which Chopin 'translates physical motions into musical gestures', and finally, how Chopin's approach to waltz form changed during his life. The latter chapter takes us from Chopin's youth in Warsaw, through his short spell in Vienna – where the influence of Lanner and Strauss Sr. makes itself felt – to the distinctive pianistic take on the dance that he developed during his final eighteen years in Paris. All three chapters provide fresh insights into the influences behind the varied character of Chopin's waltzes, though for full understanding one needs an edition or recording of the music to hand as well as the musical examples.

A problem for McKee is the difficulty in describing through words how dance movements imbue musical expression. A book by itself cannot be an adequate medium for demonstrating the symbiotic relationship between dance and music in the minuet and the waltz; what one really needs is an accompanying DVD of the dances and a CD of the musical examples, or an online link to such material.

The use of academic jargon does not always aid McKee in his musical analyses. For example, he writes that Chopin 'problematizes the final return of the opening theme' near the end of the *Grande Valse brillante*, Op. 18. and the *Valse* in E minor. All that Chopin does in each case is to bring back his opening theme and then abruptly interrupt it before going into a coda.

At other times, McKee mixes jargon with subjective impression. In discussing the waltzes of Lanner and Strauss Sr., he states that 'the result of their appropriation of teleological compositional techniques from art music is that the musical representation of feminine beauty becomes subdued and subsumed within overarching tonal processes.' Apart from the question of what constitutes feminine beauty and its representation in music, McKee's acadamese translates as saying that Lanner and Strauss Sr. use techniques borrowed from art music to provide a sense of continuity and direction to their sequences of waltz melodies.

It's a shame that the author's valuable insights have to be dug out from a discourse that seems aimed at fellow academics, rather than at those with a general interest in the history of dance and its music. Regrettably, those academics will probably be too busy writing books couched in similar language to read his.

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