
Masquerade for the Pike

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The Context

'We're having a festival in the summer. It's going to be historical and we thought a bit of dancing after dinner would be nice.' On probing further one elicits a few details about the proposed event, which is to be dated about 1615: a banquet is to be held in the local 'big house', celebrating the birthday of the eldest son who has come home from Gray's Inn and is destined for a military career. The organisers would like an appropriate dance to be devised to form part of the entertainment. Requests such as this are only too familiar to those known to have any knowledge of early dance. Not only do they pose practical difficulties; they also highlight one of the major dilemmas for those working in the field. Can there be any legitimate grounds for even contemplating undertaking the task, given that there is no known choreography and little direct evidence on which to proceed? One knows from bitter experience that someone will provide a dance, whether or not they have the appropriate knowledge, but is there a body of evidence that can be used to inform the invention of a dance for such a event?

Setting oneself the task of devising dances for a particular context, for example the creation of masque dances for Oberon during a Dolmetsch Historical Dance Society Summer School (DHDS 1991), has helped to foster understanding of what they might have been like. Provided that a clear distinction is made between what is the factual basis and what has emerged from the imaginative use of contemporary information, it might be argued that engagement in such an activity can make a contribution to the development of understanding of historical dance. This is not to deny the dangers and pitfalls that can ensue, and one must respect the school of thought which would question the value of the exercise on the basis that the records available to us 'serve more to stimulate the imagination than to direct the feet' (Ward 1976 p.142). To proceed on any rational basis necessitates finding answers to some of the following questions: what was the nature of contemporary entertainments? what could be appropriate themes? what dance vocabulary and structures might be appropriate?

Entertainments involving professional and amateur players were regular events during the given period, and many have been well documented (e.g. Sabol 1978; Orgel and Strong 1973). They occurred not only in royal palaces but also at the homes of many of the gentry; for example there are accounts of elaborate entertainments mounted in the provinces during Queen Elizabeth's progresses (Nichols 1823 p.430 et seq.). Gentlemen at the Inns of Court would have considered it a disgrace not to be able to dance (Cunningham 1965 p.3) and often paid well for the privilege (Prest 1972 p.153 et seq.). They would have taken this expertise back with them to the various parts of the country whence they came. Woodfill (1969 p.262) cites examples of the employment of dancing teachers in the homes of, for example, the Pelham and Howard families. Evidence such as this indicates that the inclusion of dance within an entertainment such as that requested for 1615 would not have been inappropriate.

Entertainments frequently had symbolic or allegorical functions as well as serving to reinforce notions of wealth and power (Orgel & Strong 1973 vol.1 p.9). Dance was an

important feature of many of these entertainments and its significance is emphasised by Daye (*this publication*). There is evidence that some entertainments during the Stuart period had their starting point in everyday events and that the entertainment itself often served to make a social or political point about a particular aspect of contemporary life. So, for example, *Hymeneai*, presented in 1606, was much more than a formal wedding masque: it was a 'dramatic and symbolic representation of the union of the kingdoms' (Gordon 1943 p.127). Orgel & Strong (1978 vol.1 p.381) include drawings, possibly for use in an antimasque for *Neptune's Triumph*, 1624, for the theme of The Contents of a Cooking Pot, and in the same year there was an antimasque that portrayed the illegal activities of 'projectors' who obtained crown monopolies in defiance of a statute of 1624 (Orgel & Strong 1978 vol.2 p.65). Spectators would have been expected to be knowledgeable about the events to which entertainments alluded. Thus Jonson at the beginning of *Love's Triumph through Callipolis* (1631) says:

'all representations, especially of this nature in court, public spectacles, either have been or ought to be mirrors of man's life, whose ends ... ought always to carry a mixture of profit with them no less than delight' (Orgel & Strong 1978 vol.1 p.405)

It should therefore follow that representations in the dance should not lose touch with the conventions of the theme which underlies their invention.

Given that the celebration is to be for a young gentleman with a military future it seems appropriate to look for evidence which would support choosing a martial theme. Notwithstanding the earlier date, Arbeau (1596 f.97 et seq.) gives details of how to perform *Les Bouffons*, a sword dance in which the dancers wore mock-classical costumes with 'fringe epaulets' and 'helmets ... of gilded cardboard' (Sutton 1967 p.183), attire associated with entertainment rather than social dance. Arbeau (1596 f.77) also includes a dance called *Branle de la Guerre*, although the given tablature does not feature any warlike elements. Orgel and Strong (1978 vol.1 p.170) include illustrations for an Oriental Knight carrying a long stave or pike, and having a sword at his side, a design probably intended for the 1610 *Barriers*. Also for 1610, the drawing of an Escort of the Duke of York (*ibid.* vol.1 p.201) (most probably used in *Tethys' Festival*) shows a long stave-like object disappearing off the side of the page. It is possible that this is a pike. Slightly later, in France, designs for the Court Ballet of Louis XIII (McGowan 1987) provide further evidence of images of soldiers used in entertainments; for example, designs 58, 59 and 60 show soldiers holding staves, and design 182 shows a halberd. Much later, in 1716, Lambranzi's *New and Curious School of Theatrical Dancing* includes a plate (Beaumont 1966 part 2, plate 7) in which 'This Switzer performs the whole of the pike exercise and dances after the manner of his country. But one must be well versed in the use of the pike' (*ibid.* part 2 pp.1-2). One of the grotesque figures at the foot of the plate is demonstrating a pike drill position very similar to 'Charge your pike for horse and draw your sword' in the 1607 manual by de Gheyn (Blackmore 1986 p.233). The other grotesque is balancing a pike on his forehead, a drill which does not feature in the

manual. On the basis of the above evidence it would therefore seem not inappropriate to include within the proposed festival a dance for performers carrying a weapon, the pike being the chosen implement.

Resources for the Dance

An authoritative source for 17th century pike drill is Jacob de Gheyn's (1607) *Wapenhandelinge van Roers Musquetten ende Spiessen* published as *The Exercise of Armes* by Blackmore (1986). As the original was intended to reinforce the instruction given to soldiers, the text is minimal; the drill postures and sequences are illustrated by well executed and detailed plates. Some of the pike manoeuvres have been used in the dance: 'The pike shouldered and carried sloping' (ibid. p.205), 'The pike ordered' (ibid. p.185), 'Advance your pike' (ibid. pp.187-191), 'Charge your pike' (ibid. p.211) and 'Charge your pike for horse and draw your sword' (ibid. p.233).

The music selected is *The Earle of Oxfords Marche* attributed to William Byrd (Maitland J.A.F. & Squire W.B. 1899 pp.402-404), a popular piece which appeared in various sources as either 'Maske' or 'Marche' (Sabot 1978 pp.595-596). Various features of the music make it suitable for a dance with a military theme: the phrasing in groups of four bars; the frequent repetition of notes in the melody; the melodic motifs similar to trumpet calls. A simple arrangement in four parts is included in *Dances for Tudors and Stuarts* (DHDS 1994 pp.26-28).

Having established the starting point for the dance it is necessary to make decisions about its vocabulary and structure. In the absence of English sources of information about dance steps and their performance one looks to Europe. Caroso (1600) and Negri (1602) provide a substantial amount of material that is of potential use. They both refer to a precision of style that would be appropriate for the theme. For example, the body should be carried upright and the head raised (Caroso 1600 p.42); the legs should be kept straight and the knees well-braced (Negri 1602 p.37). This aspect of style is confirmed satirically by Lupton (1632) when he says they (the English) 'must when they dance be stiff in the hams'. In addition both Italian sources indicate that the arms are carried naturally, Negri (1602 p.37) indicating that they should be 'held level with the sides, able to move a little'. These movement characteristics would be appropriate for the portrayal of the military theme. It has been shown (Smith & Gatiss 1986) that it was possible (but not yet demonstrable) that the Negri text was available in England in 1604. Negri included some dances which had been designed for entertainments, for example, the *Brando detto Alta Regina* for four nymphs and four shepherds (Negri 1602 p.291) performed at the end of the *Intermedii of Armenia Pastorale*. His instructions for these theatre dances use the same step terminology as for the social dances, and these step descriptions have been adopted for the invented dance below (although there is no evidence that such terminology would have been used in the English provinces in 1615).

Aspects of the above resources have been used to compose a pike dance in which the figures have been kept very simple, since complicated designs would have been potentially hazardous to perform carrying a long implement. The dance starts in a double file and travels forward, so that the movement of advancing the pike has the effect of a salute to the Presence. The more dramatic movement of charging the

pike is emphasised by modifying a type of step which has been seen performed by pike regiments during re-enactments of 17th century engagements. Bars 25-27 repeat bars 21-23, a kind of symmetry that is typical of contemporary dance designs, but in this case the pattern occurs facing the back of the room; dancers use the same foot to initiate step patterns but the audience sees the action going to the opposite side. The second begins in the same way as the first but the original rear rank leads the action. Following the dramatic flourish of 'Prepare for horse and draw your sword' the dance ends with countermarching and an ordering of the pike. Throughout there is a need for the rhythmic and spatial precision that is the hallmark of the dances described by Negri and his contemporaries.

The Invented Dance

A dance for four soldiers, suitably attired, wearing swords and carrying pikes. They enter with their pikes shouldered and carried sloping and arrange themselves in two ranks, one behind the other.

Figure One

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|------|-------|--|
| Bars | 1-2 | 2 spezzati ordinarii L, R |
| | 3-4 | 1 seguito ordinario L |
| | 5-6 | 2 passi puntati R, L |
| | 7 | order the pike |
| | 8 | pause |
| | 9-10 | front rank only: advance the pike |
| | 11-12 | rear rank only: advance the pike |
| | 13 | front rank only: ripresa L |
| | 14 | rear rank only: ripresa R |
| | 15-16 | 1 seguito ordinario L, changing places
i.e. the front rank moves backwards and the
rear rank moves forwards. |
| | 17-18 | (new) front rank only: charge the pike |
| | 19-20 | (new) rear rank only: charge the pike |
| | 21-22 | 4 strong steps forwards, each time leading
with the L foot and dragging the R foot in
behind it |
| | 23 | 2 trabuchetti L, L |
| | 24 | 1 ripresa R, making half turn clockwise to
face back of room.
(Pivot on the R foot during the ripresa.)
The hands remain in their positions on the
pike, and the point of the pike is moved in a
vertical arc so that it returns to the charge
position at the end of the ripresa. |
| | 25-27 | Repeat bars 21-23 on the same foot. |
| | 28 | 1 ripresa R, making half turn clockwise to
face front of room.
(Pivot on the R foot during the ripresa.)
During the ripresa the point of the pike is
raised slightly and the pike is shouldered in
the sloping position. Rear rank use the
ripresa to line up behind front rank. |

Figure Two

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| Bars | 1-16 | as Figure One |
| | 17-18 | front and rear ranks: prepare for horse and
draw sword |
| | 19-20 | front and rear ranks: recover and shoulder
pike sloping |
| | 21-26 | counter-march for 12 steps |
| | 27 | ripresa L |
| | 28 | order the pike |

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Charge your pike



Charge your pike for horse and draw your sword

From D.J. Blackmore, *The Exercise of Arms. A Seventeenth Century Military Manual*, Greenhill Books, London, 1986. Reproduced by permission of the publisher.



The pike ordered



The pike advanced