
The “London” Dupré

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On 2 March 1717 the first performance of *The Loves of Mars and Venus*, John Weaver’s “New Dramatick Entertainment of Dancing after the Manner of the Antient Pantomimes”, took place at the Drury Lane Theatre. The cast was led by John Weaver himself as Vulcan, with Hester Santlow as Venus, and “Mr. Dupré, Senior” as Mars.¹ There has been much speculation about the identity of Dupré; most writers on the history of dance, including Selma Jeanne Cohen, Peter Brinson, Clement Crisp, Ivor Guest, and Marian Hannah Winter, have accepted that he was Louis “le grand” Dupré who was later a leading dancer at the Paris Opéra.² In his book on John Weaver, Richard Ralph was more cautious and wrote that the identification “can be neither proved nor satisfactorily disproved”.³ Biographical information about both the “London” Dupré and Louis “le grand” Dupré is hard to come by, so any attempt to prove or disprove that they were one and the same must rely on a detailed comparison of their respective stage careers in London and Paris. Such a comparison proves conclusively that there were two dancers named Louis Dupré in the early eighteenth century, one working in the London theatres and the other at the Paris Opéra.

The “London” Dupré’s career can be traced through *The London Stage*.⁴ The first mention of a dancer named Dupré is on 22 December 1714, when the advertisements for Lincoln’s Inn Fields include him; Dupré featured regularly among the dancers there throughout the 1714–1715 season.⁵ Very few of the advertisements give details of his dances, but his repertoire included “Harlequin and Two Punches” (2 May 1715) and a “Grand Spanish Entry” (24 May 1715). Dupré was granted a benefit at Lincoln’s Inn Fields on 7 April 1715 and his last performance that season was on 14 June 1715.

For the following season of 1715–1716 Dupré moved to the Drury Lane Theatre, where his repertoire included two duets with their leading dancer Hester Santlow, a “Spanish Entry” (24 October 1715) and a “Harlequin” (25 May 1716). Dupré also took part in a number of group dances and exercised his choreographic skills with, among other works, “Harlequin and Two Punchanellos, composed by Dupre and performed by him, Boval, Dupre Jr” (24 October 1715).⁶ Dupré enjoyed a benefit at Drury Lane on 10 April 1716. He remained at Drury Lane for the 1716–1717 season, during which he played Mars in *The Loves of Mars and Venus* and appeared in “Dame Ragundy and her Family, in the Characters of a Harlequin Man and Woman, Two Fools, a Punch, and Dame Ragundy” (18 October 1716). Dupré was accorded another benefit on 19 March 1717 which was “By Command. For the Entertainment of the Young Princesses”, i.e. the granddaughters of King George I.

Despite his successes at Drury Lane, Dupré moved back to Lincoln’s Inn Fields for the 1717–1718 season. He began the new season on 25 October 1717 partnering “Mlle Gautier, from the Opera at Paris, being the first time of her appearing on the English stage”, and he was billed with her again on 1 November 1717 when their dances included a “Chacone” and a “Harlequin”. His departure from Drury Lane may not have been entirely amicable, for on 23 November 1717 he appeared as Mars in *Mars and Venus; or, The Mouse Trap*, a burlesque of the work by Weaver in which he had per-

formed only a few months before. Dupré evidently got on better with John Rich than with the triumvirate of actor-managers at Drury Lane, for he spent the rest of his career in Rich’s company.

Central to Dupré’s work for Rich were his appearances in the highly successful pantomimes produced at Lincoln’s Inn Fields. On 24 January 1718 he created the title-role in *Amadis; or, The Loves of Harlequin and Colombine*, on 19 October 1723 he added the role of Leander (Mars) in *Jupiter and Europa; or, The Intrigues of Harlequin*, and on 20 December 1723 that of a Harlequin Man in *The Necromancer; or Harlequin Doctor Faustus*. Every important pantomime which Rich produced during the 1720s had a dancing role for Dupré: on 21 January 1725 he danced a Fury in *Harlequin a Sorcerer*, on 14 January 1726 he was a Spaniard in *Apollo and Daphne*, and on 13 February 1727 he appeared as a God of the Woods, a Demon, and the element Earth in *The Rape of Proserpine*. These roles were the mainstay of Dupré’s career until his last season on the stage.

Despite the difficulties in identifying individual dancers in the London theatres at this period, Dupré’s career has a distinctive pattern. Although he was occasionally absent (notably during the seasons of 1719–1720 and 1721–1722) he usually danced throughout each season, dividing his performances between entr’acte dances, for which he was sometimes billed as the choreographer, and a variety of pantomimes; he regularly received benefits. His status in the Lincoln’s Inn Fields company is partly indicated by the advertisements, where he is almost always billed first among the men until the mid-1720s. It is also shown in the two account books for the theatre which survive from these years:⁷ in 1724–1725 Dupré was invariably listed immediately after Francis Nivelon and received between £1 and £3 each week to Nivelon’s £5;⁸ in 1726–1727, when Francis Sallé was also a member of the company, Dupré was always listed after both Nivelon and Francis Sallé and was paid much the same as before, while Sallé received between £2.13.4 and £4 and Nivelon’s salary had risen to £6. Although he was an important and versatile member of Rich’s company (for his repertoire included both serious and grotesque dances), Dupré was not its leading dancer. Dupré’s last appearance on the stage was apparently on 8 May 1734 at Covent Garden, when he danced a supporting role in *Pigmalion* and shared a benefit with Ray and Dukes.⁹ The “London” Dupré apparently died some time between this performance and a benefit given on 1 December 1735 which was for “Dupre’s widow” among others.¹⁰ No burial record for him has yet been found, but parish registers show a marriage between a Lewis Dupré and a Jane Williams on 3 July 1720 at Saint Benet Paul’s Wharf, and the baptism of Elizabeth, a daughter of the same couple, on 31 July 1722 at Saint Martin in the Fields; these entries may refer to the “London” Dupré.

Dupré was recognised by his fellow dancing-masters as an important dancer on the London stage. Anthony L’Abbé choreographed dances in the serious style for him and four of these were recorded in Beauchamp-Feuillet notation by F. Le Roussau; Dupré was also listed among the subscribers as “Mr. Louis Dupré”.¹¹ These dances reveal Dupré’s strong technique: the “Chacone of Amadis” includes multiple *entrechats droit à 6*, *double pirouettes*, *pas tortillés* and *cabrioles*

– all steps which clearly belong to virtuoso theatrical dancing. In the grotesque genre Dupré was well known for his performances in the role of Harlequin, and Le Roussau paid tribute to “Mr Louis Dupré” in the dedication to his notation of *A Chacoon for a Harlequin* where he wrote “My chief Design being to discribe [sic] on paper, ye postures wch: are most in practice for the Harlequin, I have endeavour’d to represent some of yours: but however without pretending (by these figures) to demonstrate ye Excellency of your motions, ye Exactness & subtilty [sic] of wch: surprizes so agreeably”.¹²

The career of Louis “le grand” Dupré is more difficult to document, although it can be partially reconstructed with the help of the *Dictionnaire des Théâtres de Paris*, and fresh scholarly research into his life and career is badly needed.¹³ It is difficult to be sure that the Dupré listed in supporting roles at the Paris Opéra before 1718 is “le grand” Dupré. After that date the identification is more certain, for the “Paris” Dupré regularly appeared as a soloist until he disappeared from the cast lists in 1724. By the time he returned to the Opéra in 1730 there was another Dupré dancing there, but the two are easy to distinguish since “le grand” Dupré appears as a leading soloist while the other Dupré dances only among the supporting ensembles.

The “Paris” Dupré seems to have made his debut at the Opéra on 29 November 1714 (18 November 1714 O. S.).¹⁴ He appeared in *Télémaque* by Destouches, dancing among the supporting ensemble of male dancers as a *Prêtre* in act II, a *Berger* in act IV, and a *Grec* in act V.¹⁵ He apparently made his first appearance as a soloist in Lully’s *Amadis de Gaule* on 26 April 1718 (15 April 1718 O.S.), when he danced a *Berger* in act II and may have partnered the Opéra’s leading female dancer Françoise Prévost.¹⁶ By 1720 Dupré was regularly listed among the principal dancers in performances at the Paris Opéra; thereafter he often appeared as a soloist, as well as dancing duets with others such as Blondy and Mlle Dupré.¹⁷ By the 1720s, according to the evidence provided by cast lists, Dupré had become a leading dancer at the Paris Opéra, appearing in a variety of roles, the true range of which has yet to be investigated. As well as making regular appearances as a *Berger* he also danced as a *Démon*, for example in act III of Destouches’s *Sémiramis* (4 December 1718, 23 November 1718 O.S.) and in act II of Rameau’s *Hippolyte et Aricie* (1 October 1733, 20 September 1733 O.S.), and he often appeared as a *Magicien*, for example in act IV of Baptistin’s *Polydore* (15 February 1720, 4 February 1720 O.S.) and in act IV of Lully’s *Omphale* (22 January 1733, 11 January 1733 O.S.). Dupré did not appear at the Opéra from 1725 to 1729, and his whereabouts during that period are unknown, which, with the resemblance between their repertoires, led to the idea that he was the “London” Dupré. Louis “le grand” Dupré returned to the Paris Opéra by 21 December 1730 (10 December 1730 O.S.) when he danced in Lully’s *Phaëton*, as an *Indien* in act II and a *Furie* in act III, both were probably solos. From then on Dupré appeared at the Opéra regularly, and began to build the reputation that allowed him to succeed Blondy as *maître de ballet* in 1739, and to acquire the soubriquets “le grand” Dupré and “dieu de la danse”. None of “le grand” Dupré’s dances are known to survive in notation. Louis “le grand” Dupré officially retired from the Paris Opéra in 1751 and died in December 1774.

Between them, *The London Stage* and the *Dictionnaire des Théâtres de Paris* provide enough information to allow

the careers of the “London” Dupré and the “Paris” Dupré to be compared between 1715 and 1734. In assessing the evidence which emerges from such a comparison one other factor needs to be taken into account—the difficulties of travel between London and Paris in the early eighteenth century.¹⁸ The journey had three stages: one was by road between London and Dover (or by boat to Gravesend and thence by road), a distance of about 72 miles; the next was by boat across the Channel, usually the Dover-Calais crossing; and the last was by road again between Calais and Paris, a distance of about 170 miles. On both sides of the Channel roads were poor in the early 1700s, and travel was quickest on horseback although a coach was more usual. The Channel crossing, by packet boat or merchant ship, was subject to unforeseeable delays imposed by unfavourable winds and stormy weather. Contemporary testimony indicates that the journey between the two capitals took five or six days at best, and often longer. John Locke visited France between 1675 and 1679; on his outward trip in 1675 he took three days to get from London to Calais and a further six days to reach Paris by way of Boulogne, Abbéville and Beauvais, and his return trip to London in 1679 from Boulogne, via Calais and landing at Leigh-on-Sea in Essex, took five days.¹⁹ Other sources suggest that by 1750 travel by coach from London to Dover took at least a day and a half, the journey from Calais to Paris would necessarily have taken more than twice as long.²⁰ In good conditions the Channel crossing took between three and five hours, but delays could stretch it to several days.²¹ It would thus have been impossible for “le grand” Dupré to appear in both London and Paris without adequate time between performances to allow him to travel, recover from an exhausting journey, and undertake even a minimum amount of rehearsal. He could not have guaranteed his arrival on a specified date, even by allowing a full week for the journey.

The table at the end of this article shows the dates on which the “London” Dupré and the “Paris” Dupré were appearing, at Lincoln’s Inn Fields and the Paris Opéra respectively, either on the same day or within a day of each other; for the “Paris” Dupré, the Old Style dates will here be given before the New Style dates, to allow the performance dates for the two dancers to be compared more easily. A comparison of these performance dates proves conclusively that the Louis Dupré who danced in London could not have been Louis “le grand” Dupré. The “London” Dupré who began his career at Lincoln’s Inn Fields had a virtuoso command of *belle dance* style and technique but was also a gifted exponent of grotesque dance. He became the leading male dancer at Lincoln’s Inn Fields immediately after his debut there, but, although he remained an important member of John Rich’s company until his last season in 1733–1734, from the mid-1720s he took second place initially to Francis Sallé and later to Leach Glover. The “London” Dupré deserves closer study than he has yet been given. By contrast, the early career of Louis “le grand” Dupré saw a relatively gradual rise to the status he later enjoyed. Only in 1718, over three years after his debut at the Paris Opéra, did he attain soloist status. Until his temporary departure from the Opéra in 1724, he remained subordinate to Marcel and Blondy whenever they appeared in operas and *opéra-ballets*. On his return in 1730 “le grand” Dupré immediately attained the rank of principal dancer at the Paris Opéra and thereafter his continuing (and increasing) success was assured. His repertoire, despite a range of roles

from the pastoral to the diabolical, did not extend beyond the *belle danse* technique to the grotesque. Louis “le grand” Dupré also merits close attention from dance scholars, for his life and career are yet to be thoroughly investigated.

References

- 1 Dupré is named thus in the Description published in London in 1717, see Richard Ralph, *The Life and Works of John Weaver*, Dance Books, London, 1985, p. 745.
- 2 This identification appears in: Selma Jeanne Cohen’s essay on John Weaver in Ifan Kyrle Fletcher, Selma Jeanne Cohen and Roger Lonsdale, *Famed for Dance: Essays on the Theory and Practice of Theatrical Dancing in England, 1660–1740*, New York Public Library, New York, 1960, p. 42; Peter Brinson and Clement Crisp, *Ballet for All*, Pan Books, London, 1970, p. 12, repeated in *A Guide to the Repertory: Ballet and Dance*, David & Charles, Newton Abbot, 1980, p. 11; Ivor Guest, *The Dancer’s Heritage*, 4th edition, reprinted, Dancing Times, London, 1973, p. 21; Marian Hannah Winter, *The Pre-Romantic Ballet*, Pitman Publishing, London, 1974, pp. 32, 56; Lillian Moore’s essay on “le grand” Dupré in *Echoes of American Ballet*, Dance Horizons, New York, 1976, p. 20; Lincoln Kirstein, *Four Centuries of Ballet: Fifty Masterworks*, Dover Publications, New York, 1984, p. 94.
- 3 Ralph, op. cit., p. 56. Philip H. Highfill (Editor). *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers & Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660–1800*. 16 vols. Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, Ill., 1973–1993, entry for M. Dupré, also throws doubt on the identification.
- 4 All details of London performances and casts and all quotations from advertisements are taken from Emmett L. Avery (Editor). *The London Stage 1660–1800: a Calendar of Plays, Entertainments and Afterpieces*, Part 2: 1700–1729, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, Ill., 1960, Arthur H. Scouten (Editor). *The London Stage*, Part 3: 1729–1747, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, Ill., 1965, unless otherwise stated.
- 5 In early eighteenth-century London, the theatres opened in September each year for a new season, and performances were given continuously until late May or early June the following year; the main season was sometimes followed by a summer season which might last until late August.
- 6 This article is not concerned with other dancers named Dupré who appeared on the London stage during this period. Dupré Junior featured as a dancer in Drury Lane advertisements between 1715 and 1717. The *Biographical Dictionary* suggests that he was Dupré Senior’s son,

A comparison of performance dates for the “London” Dupré and the “Paris” Dupré

The “London” Dupré

| Date O.S. | Performance Details ²² |
|-------------|---|
| 18 Apr 1715 | Dancing. By Newhouse, du Pre, Moreau, Boval, Sandham, Miss Russell, Miss Schooling |
| 1 Nov 1717 | Dancing. By Dupre and Mlle Gautier, particularly a <i>Chacone</i> and a <i>Harlequin</i> |
| 16 Apr 1718 | Dancing. By Dupre, Thurmond Jr, Boval, Moreau, Tully, Cook, Cook Jr, Pelling, Newhouse, Mrs Bullock, Mlle Gautier, Mrs Moreau, Miss Smith, Miss Schooling |
| 25 Nov 1720 | Dancing. By Dupre and Mrs Cross |
| 10 Dec 1730 | <i>The Rape of Proserpine</i> (God of the Woods; Demon; Earth) |
| 23 Mar 1731 | <i>Apollo and Daphne</i> (Spaniard) |
| 6 May 1731 | Dancing. <i>Chacone</i> by Dupre and Mrs Pelling |
| 4 Jun 1731 | <i>The Rape of Proserpine</i> (God of the Woods; Demon; Earth) |
| 2 Dec 1732 | <i>Perseus and Andromeda</i> (Infernal) |
| 3 Apr 1733 | Dancing. <i>Scottish Dance</i> by Glover, Mrs Laguerre, Dupre, Mrs Pelling, Legarde, Mrs Ogden |

The “Paris” Dupré

| Date O.S. (N.S.) | Performance Details ²³ |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| 18 Apr 1715 (29 Apr 1715 N.S.) | <i>Les Plaisirs de la Paix</i> (I: <i>Forgeron</i> ; II: <i>Buveur</i> ; Mascarade: <i>Masque sérieux</i>) |
| 29 Oct 1717 (9 Nov 1717 N.S.) | <i>Camilla</i> (<i>Volsque</i>) |
| 15 Apr 1718 (26 Apr 1718 N.S.) | <i>Amadis de Gaule</i> (<i>Berger</i>) |
| 24 Nov 1720 (5 Dec 1720 N.S.) | <i>Thésée</i> (I: <i>Sacrificateur</i> ; III: <i>Habitant des Enfers</i>) |
| 10 Dec 1730 (21 Dec 1730 N.S.) | <i>Phaëton</i> (II: <i>Indien</i> ; III: <i>Furie</i>) |
| 23 Mar 1731 (3 Apr 1731 N.S.) | <i>Idoménée</i> (II: <i>Suivant de la Jalousie</i>) |
| 6 May 1731 (17 May 1731 N.S.) | <i>Endymion</i> (III: <i>Faune</i>) |
| 3 Jun 1731 (14 Jun 1731 N.S.) | <i>Les Fêtes Vénitienes</i> (II: <i>Vénitien</i> ; III: <i>Maître de Danse, Autre Masque</i>) |
| 3 Dec 1732 (14 Dec 1732 N.S.) | <i>Isis</i> (I: <i>Divinité des Richesses</i> ; IV: <i>La Guerre</i>) |
| 3 Apr 1733 (14 Apr 1733 N.S.) | <i>L’Empire de l’Amour</i> (II: <i>Dieu de Ciel</i> ; III: <i>Génie</i>) |

- but he could equally well have been a younger brother, or even no relation at all since there were many Duprés living in London at this period. The *Biographical Dictionary* also identifies a James Dupré who was listed as a dancer in advertisements for Lincoln's Inn Fields and Covent Garden between 1725 and 1751; he may have been the same man as the separately identified Dupré Junior.
- 7 British Library, Egerton MSS. 2265, 2266, Lincoln's Inn Fields accounts for 1724–1725, 1726–1727. The dancers, including Dupré, appear as a group towards the end of each night's accounts.
 - 8 The *Biographical Dictionary* identifies Nivelon as Francis Nivelon, although a number of writers have assumed that he was the Louis Nivelon who first appeared in London in 1699.
 - 9 Ray and Dukes were both relatively minor members of Rich's company at this time. The *Daily Advertiser*, 8 May 1734, names "Mr. Dupre, Sen." as one of the recipients of the benefit.
 - 10 British Library Egerton MS. 2267, accounts of Covent Garden Theatre 1735–1736, f. 47v describes a performance on 1 December 1735 as "For Mrs Dupre and others". British Library Additional MS. 32251, a volume of transcripts of playbills for the London theatres which are no longer extant, compiled by Frederick Latreille during the nineteenth century, includes entries for performances on 1 and 2 December 1735 at Covent Garden: that for 1 December 1735 has "Tickets delivered out by the Widow Dupre & others will be taken this day", f. 285v; that for 2 December 1735 has "Tickets delivered out for the benefit of Monsr Dupre's widow & others that could not be admitted last night will be taken this night", f. 286r.
 - 11 Anthony L'Abbé, *A New Collection of Dances, containing a Great Number of the Best Ball and Stage Dances*, Barreau and Roussau, London, c. 1725. The four dances are: "Saraband' of Issee performd' by Mr Düpré & Mrs Bullock" (pp. 31–36); "Jigg by ye same" (pp. 37–39); "Canaries performd' by Mr La Garde & Mr Düpré" (pp. 40–45); "Chaconne of Amadis performd' by Mr Dupré" (pp. 57–64). Dupré is represented by the same number of dances as the leading English dancer Hester Santlow.
 - 12 F. Le Roussau, *A Chacoon for a Harlequin*, Author and Barrett, London, c. 1729. The notation is embellished with drawings showing some of Harlequin's "postures".
 - 13 François and Claude Parfaict, *Dictionnaire des Théâtres de Paris*. 7 tom. Lambert, Paris, 1756. All information about performances by "le grand" Dupré is from the *Dictionnaire* unless otherwise stated. The accounts of Dupré's career in modern sources are confused, although the entry for him in the *International Dictionary of Ballet*. 2 vols. St James Press, Detroit, 1993, includes a fairly accurate list of his roles probably taken from Émile Campardon, *L'Académie Royale de Musique au XVIIIe siècle* 2 vols. Berger-Levrault, Paris, 1884, I, pp. 286–290.
 - 14 In the early eighteenth century England still used the Julian calendar and Old Style dating, whereas France had already adopted the Gregorian calendar and New Style dating. Until 1752, when Great Britain changed to the Gregorian calendar, Old Style dates there were eleven days behind those in France. C.R. Cheney (Editor), *Handbook of Dates for Students of History*. Reprinted. Royal Historical Society, London, 1981. For "le grand" Dupré's performances Old Style dates will be given immediately after New Style dates.
 - 15 Dupré may have already appeared at the Paris Opéra as a child, for a dancer called "le petit Dupré" is listed in 1702 as an *Ethiopien* in act II of Lully's *Phaëton* and in 1703 as *L'Amour* in act III of Rebel's *Ulysse*.
 - 16 Cast lists in the *Dictionnaire des Théâtres* are not explicit about solos, duets and group dances, and various interpretations of them are possible.
 - 17 On 5 December 1720 (24 November 1720 O.S.) Dupré danced in Lully's *Thésée*, partnering Blondy in act III as an *Habitant des Enfers*. On 11 November 1721 (31 October 1721 O.S.) he partnered Mlle Dupré in the act IV entry for "L'Été" in Lully's *Phaëton*.
 - 18 I am deeply indebted to Jennifer Thorp for the information and references used in this paragraph, all of which she generously provided.
 - 19 John Lough (Editor), *Locke's Travels in France 1675–1679*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1953, pp. 1, 274.
 - 20 John Armstrong, "Transport and Trade" in Rex Pope (Editor), *Atlas of British Social & Economic History since c.1700*, Routledge, London, 1990, p. 98.
 - 21 Joan Parkes, *Travel in England in the Seventeenth Century*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1925, p. 115.
 - 22 All of the performances by the "London" Dupré listed were at Lincoln's Inn Fields. All information is from *The London Stage*; only those details of the programme which involve Dupré are given. Full entries may be found in *The London Stage* under the performance dates.
 - 23 All information is from the *Dictionnaire des Théâtres de Paris*; only the title of each work and the roles danced by Dupré are given. Full entries may be found in the *Dictionnaire* under the title of each work.