

QUEEN ANNE'S DANCING MASTER

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“The late Mr. Isaac, who had the Honour to teach and instruct our late most excellent and gracious Queen when a young Princess, first gained the Character and afterwards supported that Representation of being the prime Master in *England* for forty years together: He taught the first Quality with Success and Applause, and was justly stiled the *Court Dancing-Master*”

So wrote John Essex in the Preface to his translation of Rameau's *Maître a Danser*¹ in 1728, and his statement has been accepted as fact ever since. Most histories of dance cite Isaac as court dancing-master, but was he?

King Charles II was restored to the English throne in 1660 and married Catherine of Braganza in 1662. In the following year, the Frenchman Jeremy Gohory was sworn in as a Groom of her Majesty's Privy Chamber and the Lord Steward's 'Kitchen Ledgers', listing the servants attending the Queen at Tonbridge, includes '6 musicians for ye Chappel, Mr. Bannister and 6 musicians, Mr. Gourie the Dancing M^r.' In 1665 a warrant was issued by the Treasury for payment of an annuity of £140 a year to Gohory 'for his office of attending and Teaching the art of dancing to the King and Queen at all times when he shall be required.'²

Gohory was now established at court, but it seems to have been an empty honour, for in 1666 Jeremiah Goerrie and Andrew Gallway 'grooms of the Queen's privy chamber' petitioned the King for livery and board wages because 'they have received nothing during their three year's attendance as the rest of the grooms have.' Their petition was noted and within the month the Exchequer signed a warrant for payment to them of 3s.4d. per day in lieu of board wages.

Unfortunately Charles II's extravagant life style resulted in the Court becoming bankrupt by the end of the 1660s, when many Court servants made compulsory 'loans' to the Exchequer. Gohory seems to have been one of these and in July 1671 he received a payment of £8.80, being 6% interest on one year's outstanding salary. In the margin of this entry is the note 'Paid in full of the Principal, 13th May 1687' i.e. 16 years later!

In spite of this apparently precarious existence, Gohory obviously decided to make his home in England and in 1672 he and his wife Frances applied for denization. Their application states that they are 'natives of Orleance in France', and the Signet office records the granting of their naturalisation papers. One possible reason for their desire to become English citizens was the fact that from time to time, the Government imposed a Poll Tax on all citizens to cover some major expense. For example, in 1667 a tax was voted by Parliament 'to raise money for the present war. In this case, the charge on ordinary citizens was 1 shilling in the £1, but aliens were charged double. Gohory, therefore, had to pay 2 shillings in the £1, or £14 on his annual salary of £140³.

In the 5th edition of Chamberlaynes *Angliae Notitiae or the Present State of England*⁴ Gohory is listed as being 'of the Duke of York's Court, Dancing Master' and later in the same edition he is included as one of the 'Officers and Servants belonging to the Lady Mary' with a salary of £200 as Dancing Master. James, Duke of York, brother of

King Charles, had two daughters, Mary, born 1662 and Anne born 1665. In February 1675 the two Princesses took part in the masque *Calisto or the Chaste Nymph* by John Crowne with music by Nicholas Staggins. On 15th December 1674 the diarist John Evelyn⁵ wrote 'Saw a comedy at night at Court, acted by the ladies only, among them Lady Mary and Ann, his Royal Highness's two daughters, and my dear friend, Mrs. Blagg, who having the principal part, performed it to admiration. They were all covered with jewels.' The date of this entry has caused some confusion, but it is now thought that what Evelyn saw was a dress rehearsal, and Samuel Pepys described another rehearsal on 2nd February 1675 in which six women and six men 'did dance admirably and most gloriously'⁶. The twelve dancers Pepys saw were probably the courtiers themselves including the two young princesses, and at that time they would have been 12 and 9 respectively, and Mary at least had been receiving dancing lessons from Gohory for three years.

Earlier in 1674 the Lord Chamberlain sent Mr. Harris, yeoman of the Revels, a list headed 'These are the Names of such as are admitted to come in at ye Dore behind ye Scenes and none other' Among the names are the group of professional dancers who eventually took part in *Calisto* alongside the courtiers, including 'Mr. Isaak', and this is the earliest reference to him in English records. Evelyn Boswell in her book on the Restoration Court Stage⁷ believes that *Calisto* was repeated on several subsequent occasions, and it was not until 27th May 1675 that Nicholas Staggins was paid £221 'for himself and the persons named in the list hereunto annexed for their services and attendance in the Maske at Whitehall'. On the list were seven men described as French dancers who received £5 each, and another group described simply as dancers who were also paid £5 apart from Isaac who received £10 for extra attendances. It may be that this additional fee was for teaching the two little princesses their dances. Boswell records an entry in the Treasury Books of a payment of £100 in September 1675 to 'John Preist for his services in the late ballet', and she suggests that he was the choreographer for *Calisto*.

There is no other record of payments to Isaac from Court sources, and in 1690 when Isaac wrote to Katherine Booth's mother reporting on her great success dancing at Court before Princess Anne, he said 'I could wish that my interest att Court was great enough to make her obtain what she so Justly deserves'⁸. This suggests that his standing at Court was not very high. The dances by Isaac were published between 1706 and 1716 but, as Carol Marsh has pointed out, the music for several of them appears in collections of a much earlier date. For example *The Favourite* is in *Apollo's Banquet*, 6th ed 1690⁹. It is possible, therefore, that the dances were composed very much earlier than the publication dates of the notations, but this still does not mean that Anne herself danced any of them. Between 1683 and 1696 Anne had 12 pregnancies, and in the four years between 1696 and 1700 she had another five miscarriages. The result was that although only in her 30s, her health suffered greatly and, by October 1698 she wrote to a close friend describing herself as 'a perfect cripple' It is more likely that Isaac's dances were created to be danced by star pupils like Katherine Booth as entertainment on the occasions of Anne's birthday balls.

As for Gohory, however, he appears to have been well established as dancing master to the Court in general, because in succeeding years, he is referred to as 'King's Dancing Master' as well as 'in the household of Queen Catherine of Braganza', whilst, in 1677,

after Princess Mary's marriage to William of Orange, he is listed under the Household of the Duke of York as Dancing Master to the Dutchess and to the Lady Anne. According to Pemberton in the dedication of Part 2 of his *For the Further Improvement of Dancing*, Gohory also taught the future Dutchess of Buckingham and Normanby, who was the Duke of York's illegitimate daughter by Katherine Sedley¹⁰. She was born in 1682 and must, therefore, have started her dancing lessons with Gohory at an early age if, as seems likely, he retired in 1688, or it may be that later in her life she liked to boast she had had the same dancing master as the Queen. She was, apparently, very proud of her royal connections; was known as the haughty Dutchess; and described by Walpole as 'more mad with pride than any Mercer's wife in Bedlam'. She was the third wife of the Duke of Buckingham and Normanby who, in 1683, as mere Lord Mulgrave had had a mild flirtation with Princess Anne herself and been packed off to Tangier to get him out of the way while a more suitable match was arranged for her with George of Denmark¹¹.

There is a mysterious entry in the Lord Chamberlain's records for 1681 when a warrant was sworn to 'admit Francis Thorpe his Majesty's servant in ordinary to teach their majesties the art of dancing after the decease of Jeremiah Gohory'. There is no other reference to Francis Thorpe either before or after this entry, and in spite of it, Gohory continued to be listed as dancing master to Princess Anne until her marriage to Prince George of Denmark in 1683. Was this later Jeremy Gohory the same man or his son? There are certainly precedents for the son's of dancing masters taking over their father's position at court on the death of the parent, but in these cases a new warrant was issued, transferring the salary to the son. There is no such record of a transfer in Gohory's case.

Charles II died in 1685 and it was left to his brother James to begin sorting out his massive debts. He began by transferring payments to court servants from the Exchequer to the Treasurer of the Chamber, and by imposing a tobacco and sugar tax he was able to raise funds to pay some of his brother's debts, including arrears of salaries. This was continued by William and Mary but even so, some of the debts took 20 years to settle. In 1686 'A book of Entry of warts for payment of arrears due to the late King Charles the Second Servants' was opened. This book records several payments to Gohory, for example on 7th June 1686 £2,146.13.4d, on 20th June £682.14.2d, on 23rd October £641.13.4d. and on 6th May 1687 £756.14.7d. It would seem, therefore, that Gohory was lucky enough to get his arrears paid off quite quickly, but one does wonder how he and his wife managed to live in the 1660s and 70s if arrears of this proportion had mounted up.

The Treasurer continued payments of £200 to Gohory as his annual salary in the establishment of the Queen Dowager Catherine of Braganza. After the Glorious Revolution of 1688, however, the payments ceased and it seems likely that, with the accession of William and Mary, he retired. The new King and Queen, having no children, and no great interest in dance, there was no place for a court dancing-master.

Of the many children born to Princess Anne only one survived for more than a few months. This made the young Prince William doubly precious to his loving parents, and his poor health was a constant source of worry to them. In 1694, when he was five years old the family moved to Twickenham where they thought the air would be better for him, and at about that time Jenkin Lewis, the young prince's manservant reported 'The Princess thought it high time to have him taught to walk regularly, so by degrees to

dance; and as he had not yet boldness enough to address himself properly to people of quality, her Highness appointed Mr. Gory, an old rich French dancing-master, to attend him on Mondays for that purpose. He was finely made for those accomplishments, and soon learnt to walk well; though I heard him once call his master “old dog”, for straining his joints a little’¹².

This is our last glimpse of Mr. Gohory. Lewis does not indicate how long Prince William’s dancing lessons continued. The boy was never very strong and died in 1700 at the age of 11. By 1711 Pemberton is referring to Gohory in the past tense and writing his obituary: ‘He held the Honour to teach eight or nine Crown’d Heads, and likewise most of our Quality during the Minority of Mr. Isaac. He never let Art run beyond Nature, therefore cou’d not be guilty of the Folly of Affectation, but all his Scholars mov’d with a Grandeur suitable to their Quality, till with Age having lost that Evenness of Temper purely requisite in a Master, he laid down...’

There is no doubt that Anne must have admired him a great deal to want him to take over her son’s training even though he was old and Isaac was by then better known. She had seen Isaac’s pupils dancing and had praised Katherine Booth highly and, by implication Katherine’s dancing master also, but she still did not call on Isaac to teach her son.

By the time Essex wrote his preface Gohory had probably been dead over 20 years and Isaac about 8 years, so that Essex’s statement must have been based on hearsay only. In the context of the Conference, therefore, I would like to propose that, while we continue to give Isaac due recognition as a professional dancer, a well loved teacher of the gentry and the creator of some very fine choreographies, we should change the concept of him as Court dancing-master and give the very much overlooked Gohory his rightful place in dance history.

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