

An echo of the past? Le Roussau's Harlequin and *Le Malade Imaginaire*

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Preface: Charpentier and *Le Malade Imaginaire* 1673–1685

[The conference session included a pictorial presentation by John S. Powell on the music sources and libretti for productions of *Le Malade Imaginaire* between 1673 and 1685. This preface summarises the evidence relating to the music from its Premier Intermède subsequently used by Le Roussau for his *Chaconne for Arlequin*. Details of the early productions of *Le Malade Imaginaire*, and the complicated changes to music, plots, and staging of the Premier Intermède in particular, are given in Powell, J.S. *Music and theatre in France 1600–1680*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, particularly ch.17, and tabular descriptions of Charpentier's verbal notes and the *Theatre François* score appear on pp.386,395. The chaconne music from the *Theatre François* score is printed in Powell, J. (editor) *Marc-Antoine Charpentier music for Molière's comedies*. Wisconsin: A-R Editions Inc., 1990, pp.74–75.]

The music for Le Roussau's *Chaconne for Arlequin* comes from the Premier Intermède of Marc-Antoine Charpentier's music for *Le Malade Imaginaire*, the “play mixed with music and dances” first staged by Molière in 1673. Even after Molière's death the work continued for many years in the repertoire of his Company, despite the restrictions imposed by Lully to limit or prohibit the inclusion of singers and dancers in it. The Premier Intermède was particularly affected by these restrictions, since in all but one of its versions it took the form of a farcical commedia dell'arte situation revolving around Polichinel's love-life and his altercations with an all-singing all-dancing Night Watch (called Archers in the scores and libretti), and both its music and staging therefore underwent several major changes between 1673 and 1685.

The score of the Premier Intermède was never published in Charpentier's day, but much of its music appears in the anthology of incidental music known as *Theatre François* vol. II (now in the Bibliothèque-Musée de la Comédie Française in Paris). This manuscript volume dates from after 1734 but contains music both from original productions and subsequent revivals. The music used by Le Roussau for his *Chaconne for Arlequin* appears right at the end of the running order of music for the 1673 Premier Intermède of *Le Malade Imaginaire*, but whether that means it was performed in 1673 (the relevant libretto makes no mention of it), or was simply added later to that page in the volume, is open to debate. It was certainly used in the 1685 version of the Premier Intermède, because Charpentier's verbal annotations to his autograph scores known as the *Mélanges* (now in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris) refer to the Intermède opening with “Entrée of the Polichinelles chased by the Harlequins as before to the chaconne”. So in the 1685–6 season the Premier Intermède now *opened* with a chase scene, set to the chaconne music, and although the words “as before” indicate that such a chase had also happened in an earlier production, it is not clear whether it had been to this music, or to some other music, or even to no music at all. What is clear however

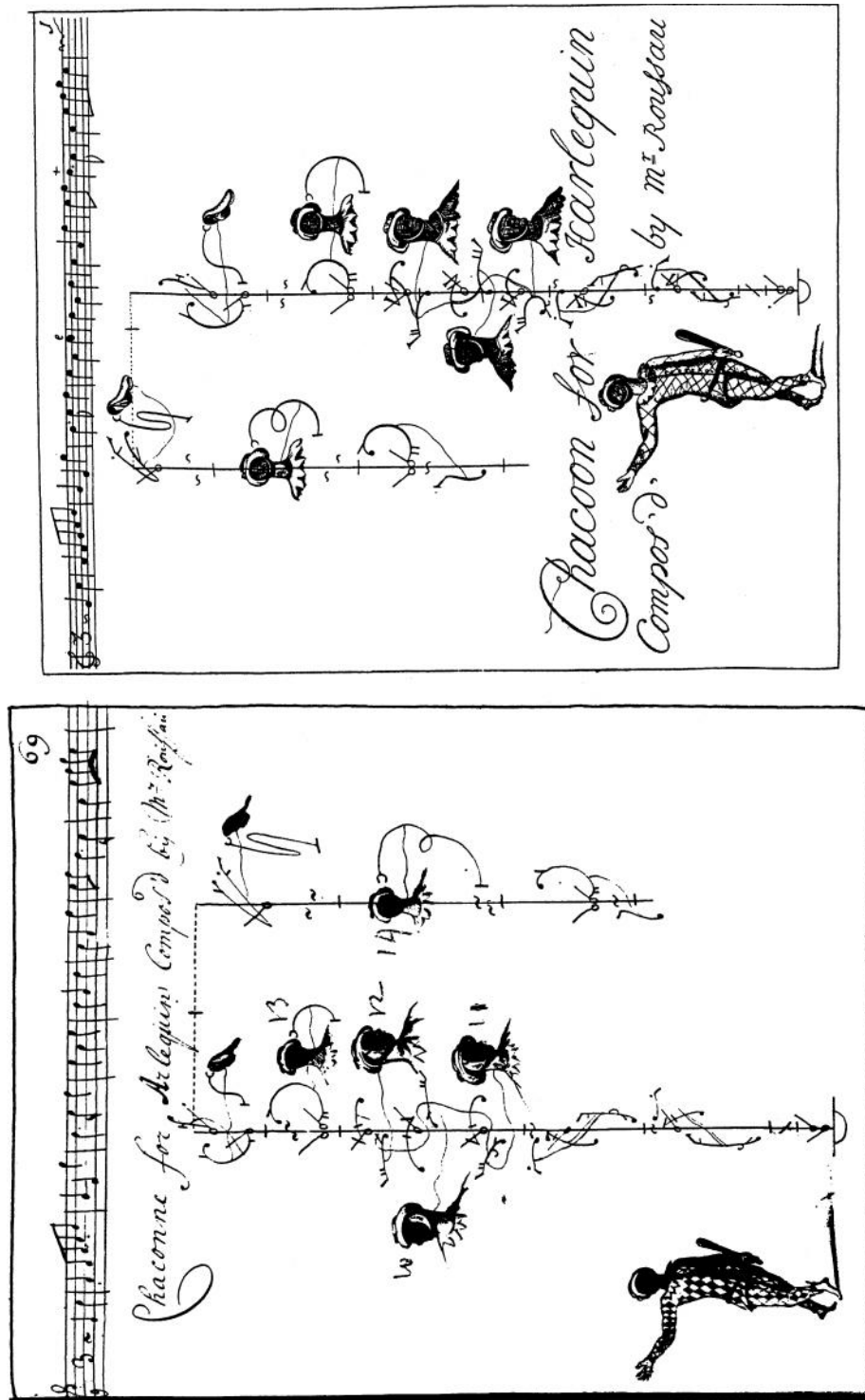


Figure 1a. First plate of Le Roussau's manuscript
Chaconne for Arlequin, 1720
(Edinburgh, University Library La.III.673)

Figure 1b. First plate of Le Roussau's engraved
Chacon for a Harlequin
(London, British Library K.1.i.13)

is that by at least 1685–6 audiences in Paris were hearing this music, and associating it with harlequins chasing polichinelles, in one of the interludes to one of Molière's constantly popular staged works.

F. Le Roussau and his *Chaconne for Arlequin* of 1720

Very little is known about the French dancer F. Le Roussau, except that he was working in London between at least 1720 and 1727¹, where he was commissioned by the leading London choreographer Anthony L'Abbé to notate and publish his *New Collection of Dances*².

As a performer however, Le Roussau's interests lay strongly with comedy and character dancing. His own workbook of manuscript dance notations, compiled in 1720³, exploited his reputation as a character dancer by including an illustrated notation of his *Chaconne for Arlequin* and written instructions on movements of the head, arms, and use of the hat (see Figure 1a). These were included again in the engraved version of the dance which he published a few years later (see Figure 1b) and dedicated to Louis Dupré for "the neatness with which you perform ye Character of Harlequin", as the dedication puts it⁴.

[Le Roussau's *Chaconne for Arlequin* was then danced].

Le Roussau seems to have been particularly associated with the Haymarket theatres, which lay very close to where he lived in St Albans Street. In the Haymarket the King's Theatre provided a venue for visiting troupes of commedia actors and dancers from the Paris fairs, some of whom may have had connections with Le Roussau. And Le Roussau had friends among the King's Theatre staff, even giving a benefit night for John Rudd, box-office keeper of the King's Theatre, on 12 March 1724⁵. Across the road from the King's Theatre was the new Little Theatre, opened by John Potter in 1720⁶, which became a venue for ad hoc troupes of actors and child-performers. Le Roussau and two of his scholars performed there on several occasions between January 1723 and March 1724, one of their dances being a *Shepherd and Shepherdess* duet, while he danced *Pierrot courting a Bottle or The Drunken Pierrot*⁷. Given the evidence of such performances, the nature of some of the dances in his workbook, and the range of contacts he seems to have developed in London⁸, a picture begins to emerge of Le Roussau as a gifted character dancer, with a liking for commedia-type dances, who was well known within both the serious and comic dance worlds, and who – if he trained in France – may well have learned his art from someone of a similar background in Paris.

The Guénégaud Company and the work of Pierre de La Montagne in Paris

We tend to think of theatrical dance in late-seventeenth and early eighteenth-century Paris as being dominated by the Paris Opéra. This however overlooks those commercial companies which managed to survive despite Lully's efforts to wipe them off the map. One such was Molière's troupe which, after the split with Lully and Molière's death in 1673, moved to the Hôtel Guénégaud and continued as the Guénégaud Company before turning into the Comédie Française in 1680. Despite the difficulties it had to face, dance remained an important part of this Company's productions.

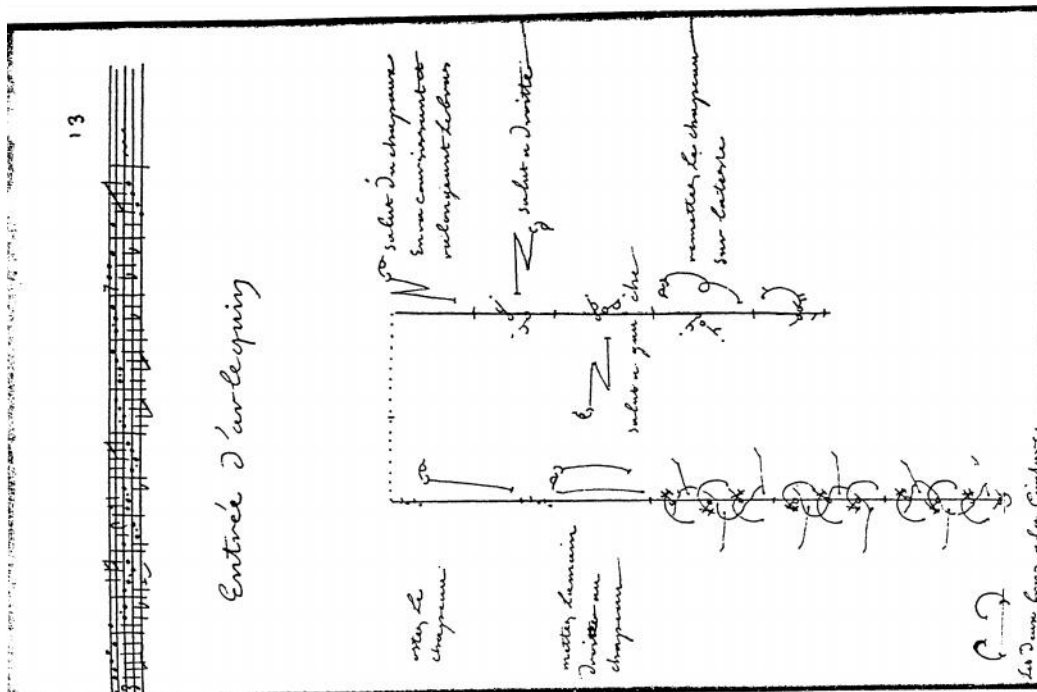


Figure 2b. First plate of Feuillet's manuscript
Entrée d'arlequin
(Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale Fr.14884/2)

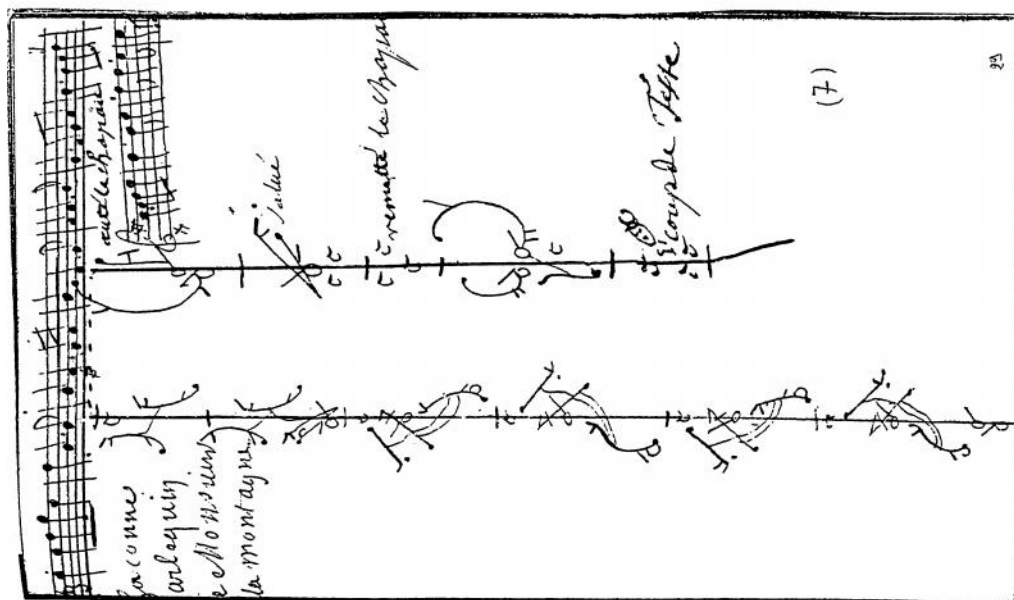


Figure 2a. First plate of La Montagne's manuscript
Chaconne Darlequin
(Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Opéra Rés.817/7)

In 1670 the Paris dancing-master Pierre de La Montagne⁹ joined Molière's theatre company, and within a few years became in turn the company's music director, and leading stage "assistant" or "marcheur" (euphemisms used by the Guénégaud company for its dancers in the 1670s when Lully's ordinances forbade their appearance on stage). Ultimately La Montagne became the company's main choreographer¹⁰, and the company archives include his name in connection with dance every year from 1674 to 1689. During those years he both performed and devised the dances for, among other works, revivals of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* and *Le Malade Imaginaire*¹¹. Even if the revised Premier Intermède of *Le Malade Imaginaire*, with its opening chaconne in which harlequins chase polichinels round the stage, dates from no earlier than 1686, there were still three or four years of regular public performances by La Montagne or of his work, which could have been seen by Le Roussau as a child or young apprentice before La Montagne left the Company.

Comparison of the steps in La Montagne's and Le Roussau's harlequin dances

Given the significance of La Montagne in productions of Molière comédie-ballets, I decided to take a closer look at the *Chaconne Darlequin de Monsieur dela Montagne* (see Figure 2a), another harlequin dance notated as a male solo. Both dances are 56 bars long, although of different musical structures, La Montagne's being set to music from Lully's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* whereas Le Roussau's is set to music from Charpentier's *Le Malade Imaginaire*. For completeness I also looked at Feuillet's *Entrée d'Arlequin* (see Figure 2b), which is set to the same *Bourgeois Gentilhomme* music as La Montagne's dance¹². While it was not my intention to carry out a full comparison between these two dances and Le Roussau's *Chaconne for Arlequin*¹³, I was intrigued to find out whether La Montagne's harlequin choreography might have influenced Le Roussau's in any way, and the extent therefore to which Le Roussau's dance might have borne any resemblance to what happened on stage in the Premier Intermède of *Le Malade Imaginaire*.

There are many ways of comparing dances, but since the performing venues and circumstances, and even the music of La Montagne's and Le Roussau's harlequin dances were quite different, I opted to avoid comparisons of such aspects as the use of stage space, or the use of cross-rhythms within the music, and concentrate just on steps. And rather than looking at individual steps, which do not in themselves reveal very much, I looked at short sequences of steps (usually between 2 and 5 bars long).

The results are summarised in Table 1, under the headings of identical, similar and related step sequences. For the purposes of this analysis, "identical" is defined as the exactly same steps, following the same path and body direction(s), although there can be minor differences such as putting weight onto the heel, or the toe, or unspecified; "similar" is defined as a shortened, or re-ordered, or differently timed sequence of steps; and "related" is defined as a sequence which includes variants of steps from within the relevant step-category (for example different types of *chassé*), and can also be a shortened, re-ordered, or differently timed sequence. The Table omits any comparisons of the arm and head movements described in the three notations, which would provide additional similarities between all three dances. However, this is to be expected, since they form part of Harlequin's characterisation through gesture.

Table 1. Comparison of step sequences

Description (in Le R)	Identical	Similar	Related	Absent
Step, beat, place heel	Le Roussau Bars 1-2 La Montagne Bars 1-2			Feuillet
3 jetés, assemblé			Le Roussau Bars 3-4 Feuillet Bars 3-4	La Montagne
Harlequin salutation	Le Roussau Bars 5-8 La Montagne Bars 7-10			Feuillet
Anticlockwise run	La Montagne Bars 40-44 Feuillet Bars 12-16		Le Roussau Bars 9-12	
contretemps, chassés, (x2), assemblé		Le Roussau Bars 17-21 La Montagne Bars 12-15		Feuillet
jeté, coupé, contretemps & hop, 3 chassés, (x2) assemblé		Le Roussau Bars 25-32 Feuillet Bars 16-23	La Montagne Bars 49-53	
fall, contretemps, assemblé		Le Roussau Bars 33-36 La Montagne Bars 24-28		Feuillet
4 sauts, tour en l'air	Le Roussau Bars 37-39 La Montagne Bars 35-37			Feuillet
3 hops + 3 chassés		La Montagne Bars 46-48 Feuillet Bars 24-27	Le Roussau Bars 41-44	
contretemps, chassés & spring, pas de bourrée		Le Roussau Bars 46-48 La Montagne Bars 19-21	Feuillet Bars 45-48	
turned in/out sauts			La Montagne Bars 22-23 Feuillet Bars 27-28	Le Roussau

Identical step sequences

Three sequences are identical, in steps, body direction, and timings, in Le Roussau's and La Montagne's dances. These are the opening two bars¹⁴ of the dance (in which Harlequin makes an elaborate beaten *coupé* and placing of the heel alternately turning to stage right and stage left); the complex Harlequin salutation (*coupé soutenu* backwards on the left foot as the hat is removed, the right foot beaten rapidly in front of the left while the hat is flourished, the hat replaced, *pas assemblé* to jump the feet together and a step forward on the left foot); and the four *sauts* (jumps with feet together to right, left, forward, back) followed by a *tour en l'air*.

Feuillet's dance by comparison has no identical step sequences to Le Roussau's, although it does have one sequence – the anticlockwise run – that is identical to La Montagne's but uses a different step to Le Roussau's (six rapid running steps to each bar of music, as opposed to Le Roussau's *pas de bourrée vite*).

Similar step sequences

Three sequences in Le Roussau and La Montagne are similar. The first is the series of *contretemps* and *chassés*, followed by *pas assemblé*, which in Le Roussau's dance takes five bars of music, faces front the whole time and moves sideways to stage right and left (*contretemps*, three *chassés*, *contretemps*, three *chassés*, *pas assemblé*) while in La Montagne's it crosses the barlines to take four bars of music, and faces alternately stage left and right while moving directly downstage (*demi-contretemps*, two *chassés*, *demi-contretemps*, three *chassés*, *pas assemblé*). The second is the repeated sequence of *échappé* (fall), beaten *contretemps*, *pas assemblé* and pauses, which in Le Roussau's dance takes four bars of music, crossing the barlines with the *contretemps*, and in La Montagne's dance takes four bars but puts the pauses in different places so that each *contretemps* falls within one bar of music. The third (which arguably might be classified as related rather than similar, since some of the steps are so extensively modified as to become different steps) is Le Roussau's three-bar sequence of *contretemps* with a beat, two *chassés* travelling backwards and spring the feet together, *pas de bourrée* forwards, which in La Montagne's dance appears as a beaten *coupé* forward, three *chassés* travelling backwards and spring the feet together, and a modified *pas de bourrée* forward in the form of two *pas marchés* and a jump onto the toes on both feet.

Feuillet's dance by comparison has only one sequence similar to Le Roussau's. This is Le Roussau's eight-bar sequence of *jeté* beaten *coupé* facing stage right, beaten *contretemps* turning and hop, three *chassés*, *pas assemblé* and pause, all repeated, which in Feuillet's dance is *jeté* beaten *coupé* facing stage right and left, three *chassés*, *pas assemblé* and pause, all repeated. No equivalent occurs in La Montagne's dance.

Related step sequences

Here the picture is less clear. There is a recognisable relationship between some of Le Roussau's step sequences and both La Montagne's and Feuillet's: for instance, the anti-clockwise run, which follows the same path but uses different steps and timings, or the repeated sequence of three hops and three *chassés* which appear in La Montagne and Feuillet as three hops (*en tortillé* in one, turned out in the other) and *pas assemblé*. The *contretemps/coupé*, *chassés*, and *pas de bourrée/pas marché* and spring sequence has already been mentioned as a similar sequence in Le Roussau and La Montagne.

Feuillet's dance by comparison shows, in its sequence of six *jetés* over two bars of music at or near the beginning of the dance, a discernible relationship to Le Roussau's three *jetés* and a *pas assemblé* at the same point in the dance, but neither sequence occurs at all in La Montagne's dance. The very distinctive series of *sauts* with legs turned in and out, which occur in La Montagne (with straight legs) and Feuillet (with bent legs and different timing) are entirely lacking from Le Roussau's dance.

The sequences noted in Table 1 indicate – in terms of steps, at least – that whereas Le Roussau's step sequences can also be recognised, to a greater or lesser degree, in La Montagne's dance (six instances) or in Feuillet's (two instances), Feuillet's and La Montagne's dances by comparison share only three such instances, only one of which bears no resemblance at all to anything in Le Roussau's dance. This suggests that there are more and closer similarities between La Montagne's and Le Roussau's dances, albeit set to different music, than there are between La Montagne's and Feuillet's dances to the same music. However, the idea that one dance *directly* inspired another needs great caution. There could have been

more subtle influences at work – if Le Roussau was a child when he saw La Montagne’s choreography for the final revision of *Le Malade Imaginaire* in Paris during the late 1680s, he might simply have remembered the nature of the dance – the sense of aggression or flight indicated by some of the steps, or the final chase round and off the stage – rather than precisely recall the steps themselves. If he also saw La Montagne’s choreographies for *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, or even studied the solo *Chaconne Darlequin de Monsieur la Montagne* while he was an apprentice, he would have gained insights to La Montagne’s use of steps and characterisation, which could have come out in his own work some years later.

Could modern recreators of the Premier Intermède’s chase scene draw inspiration from Le Roussau’s dance?

As well as the similarities of certain steps, there are other characteristics of Le Roussau’s *Chaconne* that could be exploited if one wanted to make it the basis for the chase scene in the Premier Intermède of *Le Malade Imaginaire*. I first noted these long before I knew of John Powell’s work on Charpentier or of this intermède in particular, when I was teaching Le Roussau’s dance to Anne Daye’s students at Middlesex University a few years ago. Because there were 24 of them and time was limited, we learned the dance as one large group, and I was particularly struck when watching them all pounding off towards the same exit at the end of the dance that they looked just as if they were chasing each other off stage. Seen *en masse*, the circling runs and the increasingly demented hops and *chassés* of this dance can come across as being quite belligerent, while the *sauts* and the jerky head movements of bars 37–39 suggest at least nerviness, or possibly an actual fight breaking out.

So – bearing in mind that there were eleven dancers in the 1685 Premier Intermède, and today you’ve just got two – we will try to show you now what *could* be suggested for a rivalry and chase scene simply by turning Le Roussau’s dance into a duet with a little characterisation added. Obviously by taking greater liberties with the choreography, and by using more dancers in different groupings, one could devise a more imaginative scene, but that would take me outside the scope of my research into Le Roussau’s notations, and so I leave those practicalities to another time.

[The duet was then demonstrated.]

Notes

I should like to express my gratitude to Ken Pierce for demonstrating the dances for and with me at this conference, and to John S. Powell for his insights to the musical sources for *Le Malade Imaginaire*.

1. He appears in rate books between 1720 and 1727 as a resident of St Albans Street, off Pall Mall: Westminster Archives Centre, parish of St James Piccadilly rate books 1720–1727 (reference D1421–1429), and also had rooms at York Street near St James’s Square from which he sold copies of dance notations.
2. *A new collection of dances...by Monsieur L’Abbé...put in characters and engraved, by Monsieur Roussau* [c.1725]. Described in Little, M. & Marsh, C. *La danse noble: an inventory of dances and sources*. New York: Broude Bros, 1992, p.123.

3. F. Le Roussau, *A collection of new ball- and stage dances, 1720*: GB-Eu La.III.673. For a facsimile of the manuscript, with notes on Le Roussau's work and commentary on the dances, see Thorp, J. *Harlequin dancing-master* (forthcoming).
4. *A chacocon for a harlequin*, GB-Lbl K.1.i.13, dedication leaf. For a discussion of the identity of Louis Dupré as the dedicatee, see Goff, M. The "London" Dupré. *Historical dance*, 1999, 3 (6), 23–26. A reproduction of the entire dance in its engraved form appears in Beaumont, C. *The history of harlequin*. London: Beaumont, 1929.
5. Avery, E (ed). *The London stage 1660–1800*. Part 2 1700–1729. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1960 [hereafter *London stage*], p.764.
6. It is not marked on John Rocque's map of London 1747 but is shown (on its original site) on Richard Horwood's map of London 1813: Laxton, P. *The A–Z of Regency London*. London and Lympne: Guildhall Library and Harry Margary, 1985, plate 13, grid Ad.
7. On 31 January, 14 March, 16,17, 23 December 1723, and possibly 3 January 1724; 9 and 12 March 1724: *London stage* Part 2, pp. 708, 714, 750–753, 764.
8. Including the Paris Opéra dancer Dangeville, who appeared at the King's Theatre in 1720, and may have influenced some of Le Roussau's choreographies, and the Duke of Montagu, whose patronage Le Roussau probably sought: see Thorp, J. Serious and comic dance in the work of F. Le Roussau. In: Okamoto, K. (compiler) *Structures and metaphors in baroque dance*, Proceedings of a Conference at the University of Surrey Roehampton 2001. University of Surrey Roehampton, Centre for Dance Research, 2001, 10–20. Le Roussau was also successful enough as a dancing-master to have his own dancing rooms (perhaps in York Street?) which he occasionally hired out to others, including the very colourful performer of 'medleys', Anthony Aston, for a benefit night on 4 March 1724: *London stage* Part 2, p.763.
9. He first appears in the official records in 1660 when he took on an (unnamed) apprentice for 4 years, to teach him the arts of dancing and playing the violin: Massip, C. *La vie des musiciens de Paris au temps de Mazarin, 1643–1661*. Paris: Picard, 1976, p. 143, citing Archives Nationales, Minutier Central des Notaires LXX.165.
10. But not sole choreographer – Pierre Beauchamps retained occasional links with the Company after 1673, and Antoine Desbrosses also choreographed dances for at least one Guénégaud production: Powell, J. Pierre Beauchamps, choreographer to Molière's Troupe du Roy. *Music and letters*, 1995, 76 (2), 185; Clarke, J. *The Guénégaud theatre in Paris 1673–1680*. New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1998, p.140.
11. He directed the music, provided the choreography, or danced in *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* in May 1674, September 1677, August 1678, July 1679, and in *Le Malade Imaginaire* in May 1674, March 1680, January 1686, November 1688, May 1689: Powell, J., *op. cit.* 185 n.87. The accounts of the Maison du Roi for court entertainments additionally note that a Sieur de La Montagne (probably the La Montagne referred to as "danseur ordinaire de loppera" in 1688) was the dancing-master for a revival of *Le Malade Imaginaire* at Versailles in January 1707: Benoit, M. *Musiques de cour*. Paris: Picard, 1971, pp. 115, 211. Since there is no evidence that Pierre de La Montagne was ever employed at the Paris Opéra, it seems likely that these references are to his son, who had appeared as a child dancer with the Guénégaud company in 1675, would have been in his late teens by 1688, and in his thirties by 1707.

12. *Chaconne Darlequin de Monsieur dela Montagne* F-Po Rés.817(7); and *Entrée d'Arlequin* F-Pn FR. 14884(2), which is attributed to Feuillet in another copy now in private hands: see Lancelot, F. *La belle dance, catalogue raisonné*. Paris: Van Dieren, 1996, p. 312.
13. A comparison which has already been started by others: see Unfried, H. & Kroemer, J. Grotesque dancing – a key – (experience) to the baroque serious stage dancing style. In: Tomko, L. (compiler) Proceedings society of dance history scholars 21st annual conference, University of Oregon 1998. California, Society of Dance History Scholars, 1998, 99–108.
14. I have treated Le Roussau's dance as beginning bar 1 on the first bar on which the dancer moves (the musical structure thus being (1) + ABACADA in 8-bar strains); the published Charpentier score however counts the preliminary bar as Bar 1: Powell, J. (editor) *Marc-Antoine Charpentier music for Molière's comedies*. Wisconsin: A-R Editions Inc., 1990, pp.74–75.