

## The Minuet in Early Eighteenth-Century Dublin Society

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This paper seeks to examine the role of the minuet in early eighteenth-century Dublin, primarily between the years 1730–1745. It will focus on both social and theatre presentations of the minuet in the city at that time. Before discussing the minuet in either a social or theatre context, it is fitting to sketch an overview of the city.

Dublin can be ranked among the top European capitals of the early eighteenth century, and its position and status should neither be underestimated nor forgotten. As the home of the Vice-regal Court, the Irish Houses of Parliament and the country's law courts, Dublin was the political, administrative and judicial centre of the country. The law terms, parliamentary sessions, and times of residence of the Lord Lieutenant ensured that the city played host to the country's most powerful and important people, namely the nobility and gentry, whose affluence transcended underlying economic trends. It was the presence of this genteel society in the city, during both parliament and non-parliament winters, that ensured that the city enjoyed its share of balls, assemblies, plays, concerts of music, and gambling tables. The members of this class were vital to the economics of the city's high life. Dublin also had the advantage of being a geographically well-positioned and established port, which by the mid-eighteenth century had emerged as the major point of export and import for the country. It was therefore home to a wealthy merchant class, a sector that expanded with the city's population growth during the eighteenth century, fueling in turn the emergence of strong banking and financial services in the capital as commerce developed. Finally, Dublin housed the country's only university, Trinity College Dublin, making it also the education centre of the country.<sup>1</sup>

The role of dance within this social framework was very much to the fore. To the nobility and gentry, quite apart from being viewed as a pleasant theatre diversion, dancing was perceived as both an essential element of education as well as a panacea for good health. Instruction and knowledge of dancing, however, was not confined to the nobility and gentry. Anyone who could afford dancing-masters' fees could receive tuition at one of the many dancing schools dotted about the city. These dancing schools were particularly important to any wealthy merchant or banker who was moving up the social scale during the eighteenth century.

The role of the dancing-master in eighteenth century Dublin society is crucial. As with other European cities, the dancing master was concerned with the education of the young, and executing the minuet became the yardstick by which accomplishment in the art of dancing was measured. For a young noble man or woman, dancing a minuet at a State Ball at Dublin Castle, during a parliament winter was one of the tests of this education as well as being one of the high points of the social calendar. There is fortunately, the very beautiful depiction of such a Ball, van der Hagan's painting entitled *State Ball at Dublin Castle*, which, it is thought, dates from 1739.<sup>2</sup>

In the painting the ballroom is brilliantly lit and the performers are clearly dancing the minuet, the dance that opened Balls at Dublin Castle during the early eighteenth century. The ladies are seated on a raked platform, with those at the back practically touching the ceiling, some gentlemen are seated while most stand and survey the scene. The Lord Lieutenant and his wife preside over the occasion from elbow chairs. The number of Balls held at Dublin Castle depended largely on the characters of the Lord Lieutenant and his wife, if lovers of the dance, as with Lady Carteret in the seventeenth century, there were Balls 'once a week'.<sup>3</sup> If however the Lord Lieutenant's wife was

‘of a quiet spirit’, as was the case with the Duchess of Dorset, there were fewer.<sup>4</sup> The required annual State balls never suffered. There were four very significant, official occasions every year that were afforded full pomp and ceremony: the anniversary of the Coronation (October 11); the King’s birthday (October 28); the birthday of Frederick Prince of Wales (January 20); and, the birthday of Queen Caroline (March 1).

In addition to van der Hagen’s painting, there are other written sources detailing State Balls at Dublin Castle during the seventeen thirties. Mary Delaney delighted in illustrating Dublin life, as experienced by her during her eighteen month stay in Ireland from 1731–1733. She wrote to family and friends of the many balls attended by her, both private and at the Castle, noting particularly that there was ‘French dancing in abundance’.<sup>5</sup> In March 1732, she wrote to her brother, Bernard Granville, of a State Ball. The account compliments the setting as depicted by van der Hagen:

“The Ball was in the old beef-eaters hall, a room that holds seven hundred people seated, it was well it did, for never did I behold a greater crowd. We were all placed in rows one above another, so much raised that the last row almost *touched the ceiling!* The gentlemen say we looked very handsome, and compared us to Cupid’s Paradise in the puppet-show. At eleven o’clock minuets were finished, and the Duchess went to the Basset Table. After an hour’s playing the Duke, Duchess, and nobility marched into the supper-room, which was in the council chamber.”<sup>6</sup>

Two winters later, also during a Parliament winter, *The Dublin Evening Post* described a similar scene:

“The Great Hall below Stairs, was fitted up for the Ball, in a most Magnificent manner, the Sides were covered with Hangings, painted in perspective, at the Entrance stood two Obelisks, on which were Coronets, and other devices in Candles, the Seats were rais’d, one above the other, but at the End, the Seats rose almost to the Top of the Room, with Pillars between Stuck full of Candles, and placed at such proper distances as to deceive the Sight, and make the Hall appear much longer than it was. The lights were very numerous, and placed with great Taste and Order. At the upper End of the Room the Duke and Duchess were seated in two Elbow Chairs, towards the lower, a bar was fixed to keep a Space free for the Dancers, the Ladies were seated on the Benches before mentioned, and tho’ the Number was exceedingly great, yet there was full room for everyone, and the Gentlemen stood on the floor. When her Grace went to Baset [sic] the Company dispersed and a new Set began Country Dances in another Room where there were four Rows of Seats one above the other, on one Side for the ladies, and on the other, a Side-Board with all sorts of Wine, and at the End in a Gallery, a band of Musick [sic] attended for that Purpose. About twelve, the Doors of the Council Chamber where the Supper was laid out were open’d.”<sup>7</sup>

As with Mrs. Delaney’s account, the ball began with minuets, afterwhich the company withdrew to the card tables, country dancing and then to supper, with country dancing following to the early hours. Supper was not always fixed, on other occasions, including state balls, it was ‘ordered after the manner of a masquerade, where everyone went at what hour they liked best.’<sup>8</sup> Before leaving State Balls at Dublin Castle, it is known that one young lady fell while dancing a minuet in 1741, occasioning the following verse in Faulkner’s *Dublin Journal*:

“On a pretty young Lady’s suddenly falling as she was dancing a Minuet in a grand Assembly.

As Iris danc'd at C\_\_tle Ball,  
By dire Event she got a Fall,  
No Beau was there but in a Fright  
For, on her Face she fell downright,  
(Invert the Posture, Gods divine  
Methinks the Thought is quite Sublime!)  
She nimbly rose, fell to it again,  
Which spleen'd the Women, charm'd the Men;  
Expressing sweetly in her look,  
I'll dance my Dance without Rebuke  
'Tis not a Fall against my Will  
Shall ever make me to be Still.”<sup>9</sup>

Minuets were not confined to Balls at Dublin Castle, they also featured at the grander private balls, such as that given by Lord Mountjoy to celebrate St. Cecilia's Day in November 1731. This was a select affair with only twenty-four couples invited, and Mrs. Delaney adds to our knowledge of the affair by commenting that one gentleman in attendance, the Hon. John Percival, would 'not condescend to dance more than minuets'.<sup>10</sup> The only other non-dancers on the occasion were the Duchess of Dorset and Mrs. Clayton, 'who thought it beneath the dignity of a Bishop's wife to dance.'<sup>11</sup> Mary Delaney's account does pose one question. When introducing the ball she wrote that twelve couples danced at a time, when they had danced two dances, the other twelve took their turn. She also noted that before the dancing began "the company were all served with tea and coffee; at 9, every lad took out his lass. At 11, those who were not dancing followed the Duke and Duchess up stairs to a room where was prepared all sorts of cold meats, fruits, sweetmeats, and wines, placed after the same manner as the masquerade."<sup>12</sup> In view of the fact that it is known that minuets were danced, and that Delaney writes that twelve couples danced at a time, did the minuet section of the ball follow this pattern too, were minuets danced in groups of twelve at such private affairs?

The fashionable Ridottos of the seventeen thirties and forties also concluded with dancing, and minuets played their part here, again the ubiquitous Mrs. Delaney can be thanked for confirming this. In March 1732, she attended one of the first Ridottos in Dublin, at the New Music Hall in Crow Street, and wrote as follows to her brother: "On Monday Phill and I went to the ridotto with Mrs. Wesley ... it began with a concert of music, the Duke, Duchess, and Lady Caroline were there; they went away when the music was over, and after some hideous minuets, we went to country dances."<sup>13</sup> When the Theatre Royal, Aungier Street was fitted up to include Ridottos during the winter of 1735–36, two of its seven managers were of the dance fraternity, the dancing master John Delamain, and the stage dancer Anthony Moreau.<sup>14</sup>

The importance of minuets at social gatherings outside Dublin becomes apparent when summer diversions, such as Race meetings and time spent at the Spa, drinking the waters are examined. Dancing was very much a part of the entertainments on offer, practically every advertisement pertaining to the more significant race meetings ends with a sentence to the effect that there would be a Ball every night for the entertainment of the Ladies. The Mallow Spa, in Co. Cork was particularly prestigious, it boasted "there will be Balls, Ridottos and Musick meetings and all other diversions as are at Bath, Tunbridge, .. Aix-la-Chapell and the German Spaw."<sup>15</sup> It was advertised that Mr. Murphy, who took the Long Room for the season of the spa, would take particular care to provide "the best Teas, Coffee, Chocolate and' that Dublin Newspapers would

be available, it was also noted that “the said Mr. Murphy will make a new Minuet for every Ball Night if required.”<sup>16</sup> It would also appear that in the summer, country parties sometimes commenced earlier than winter parties. One report concerning a ball given at the Long Room at Mallow, in August 1739, by the Gentlemen of Mallow to the Ladies, noted that “the ball begun at Six, and at Eleven the Buffets were opened.”<sup>17</sup>

As noted earlier, dancing masters were key to the state of dance in Dublin during the early eighteenth century. It is however hard to quantify the number working in the city at the time. The names of dancing masters are rarely encountered, and when they are, it is to inform the public of a move from one location to another, as with Mr. Sloan, who transferred from St. Mary’s Abbey to Back Lane, in 1707, to the house where “Mr. Deney, dancing master formerly did live.”<sup>18</sup> The establishment of a new school could also throw up a name, as when Mr. Davy’s new school in Leixlip took pains to advertise that Mr. Rogers, a dancing master based in Thomas Street, would teach there twice a week. All too often, the names of more prominent dancing masters are only documented in the subscribers lists of intertational publications, and are not otherwise encountered. Two such names are Smith of Dublin, who subscribed to Siris’ translation of Feuillet in 1706<sup>19</sup>, and Delamain of Dublin who subscribed to Weaver’s *Orchesography* in 1706<sup>20</sup>. Both Delamain and Smith subscribed to Weaver’s *Collection of Ball Dances perform’d at Court ... All compos’d by Mr. Isaac*, of 1706<sup>21</sup>. It can be safely assumed therefore, that a certain sector of Dublin society was being kept very much abreast of continental trends in dance.

The overlap between dancing masters and dancers on the Dublin stage was great. At least five of the most prominent Dublin stage dancers during the seventeen-thirties were also eminent dancing masters in the city then: Cummins, Delamain, Walsh, Leigh and Lalauze. The last named performer, Lalauze, performed in Dublin for three seasons during the seventeen thirties (from 1729–30 to 1731–32), working with Signora Violante and her troupe. He was to work for Garrick near the close of his career in London.<sup>22</sup> When Charles Lalauze announced his availability to teach dancing in Dublin he took care to suggest that the curious might view “a Young Boy and Girl his Schollars” and therefore “his ability of Instruction” at the theatre booth where he performed<sup>23</sup>. He noted in his advertisement in Dickson’s *Dublin Intelligence*, that young gentlemen and ladies would be taught “after the newest and best Manner Practis’d at Court, Assemblies, Operas or Schools.”<sup>24</sup> It is tempting and indeed very plausible to suggest that one of the young scholars mentioned could have been the young Peg Woffington, who that year performed the role of Polly in *The Beggar’s Opera* at the Booth (as part of a troupe of child performers). Performances by scholars was not unique to Dublin. A country dancing master, Dennis Leech of Galway city, advertised his annual Ball, in 1736, ‘in order to show the performance of his Scholars.’<sup>25</sup> The dancing was ‘to the great Admiration of the Spectators, .... Parents, and .... Friends; considering their tender Years, the eldest not exceeding 5 or 6 Years old.’<sup>26</sup> The public were informed that they ‘justly observ’d Figure, Time and Measure.’<sup>27</sup> In view of the fact that a knowledge of minuets was imperative to any young lady or gentleman, it must be assumed that they featured in the evening’s bill of fare.

When turning to the Dublin theatre of the early seventeen-thirties, it is evident that audiences were very familiar with the vocabulary of dance presented on stage at the time. The entr’acte dancing, which comprised each night’s theatre programme, assumes much greater importance. There is evidence to suggest that those who attended closely the teachings of dancing masters, particularly the dancing beaux of Dublin Castle, also paid acute

attention to the slightest changes in style, or the latest innovation to appear on the city's stage. One prologue of 1730 related, that the: "Pig-tail'd Beaus to win the like Applause/Take for their Patterns Phillips and Lalauze."<sup>28</sup> Phillips and Lalauze were the latest visitors to the city during the winter of 1729–30. Lalauze, being the Charles Lalauze already mentioned. Conversely, an earlier poem dedicated to Lady Carteret the Lord Lieutenant's wife during the seventeen-twenties, and written upon her return to Dublin at the beginning of a parliament winter, noted that since the arrival of her ladyship, the dancing beaus would "Ne'er more to Dian . . . with her admired Consort fam'd Moreau", to view their performances on the Smock Alley stage, but would resort instead to Dublin Castle.<sup>29</sup> The "Dian" in question was Diane Moreau, the Dublin stage dancer, who performed in Dublin from 1719 until the close of the seventeen thirties. She was married to Anthony Moreau, the dancer and manager of the Ridotto, already mentioned. Lady Carteret as noted, was a keen dancer.

The minuet did feature in the repertory performed on the Dublin stage during the seventeen-thirties and forties. However, sadly for dance, very few names of specific dances are noted, particularly during the seventeen-thirties. More often than not, only the names of the most important dancers were documented. It is significant that only the most prominent Dublin based performers, or visitors to Dublin, performed the Minuet, and then it was usually mounted with the Louvre. It is as if this combination were a test of the dancers' credentials. For example Moreau and Mlle Roland mounted the Louvre and Minuet in May 1744;<sup>30</sup> Mons Picq and Mlle Chateaufneuf performed the Louvre and Minuet in July 1743;<sup>31</sup> Barbarina, who visited the city with David Garrick in the summer of 1742, danced the Louvre and Minuet with Henry Delamain;<sup>32</sup> and earlier, in February 1737, Peg Woffington and Willaim Delamain danced the Minuet and Louvre, for the latter's benefit.<sup>33</sup> These performers were all the leading dancers of their day, the Minuet and Louvre were never entrusted to apprentices starting out on their career.

Finally, it is fitting to return to the ball setting, to a love poem that chose the minuet as its backdrop. It appeared in *Faulkner's Dublin Journal*, in 1741.

On Celia's Dancing.

While you bright Celia, tread the Minuet's round,  
 And rise and fall obedient to the Sound;  
 Each Limb so artfully performs its Part,  
 Not This, not That, but all invade my Heart;  
 At once I feel the Conquest, and th' Alarm,  
 While the whole Woman is a moving Charm.  
 Long did my Soul, with easy Freedom rove,  
 Nor felt the Breathing of an anxious Love;  
 To me the sparkling Eye, the heaving Breast,  
 Soft looks, and tender Sight, and all the rest  
 Fond Lovers die for, seem'd an idle jest.  
 Ah! Then 'tis just –  
 To pour the sweet abundance of Distress,  
 And with the fair Profusion to oppress.  
 I own, I own your Pow'r, my Passion grows,  
 And thro' each secret Vein the Poison shows:

Then take me, take me, bleeding to your Arms,  
What give the Wound, shall give the Cure, your charms.<sup>34</sup>

## References

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