

Metrical Structure of the Minuet: Relationships between Dance and Music in the Eighteenth Century

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As all practitioners and researchers know, dance and music were tightly linked during the classical period. It was the convention for dance manuals to explain the execution of steps in relation to musical beats, and choreographies in the eighteenth century were notated with barlines that coincided with their musical counterparts. Dance and music around the turn of the eighteenth century shared the same timeframe, such as beats, bars, and in most cases, even phrases. However, there were some exceptions, and the metrical structure of the minuet was one of them. A minuet step takes 6 beats, in contrast with 3 beats of a musical bar; furthermore, the *pas de menuet* in early eighteenth century France formed hemiola in relation to the music, while the music often produced hemiola on its own. In the second half of the eighteenth century step rhythms no longer formed hemiola, whereas musical hemiola became almost indiscernible due to the strong pulsation of 3-beat patterns, characteristic of minuet music from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. This paper will examine changing relationships between dance and music in eighteenth-century France, with particular focus on the treatment of hemiola. The changing nature of the choreo-musical relationship indicates not only the stylistic shift of the minuet but also an aesthetic transition, in respect of the relationship between the constituent elements of the composite arts.

The mathematical notion of hemiola (a Greek term meaning ‘the whole and a half’) was applied to metrical theories of music from the fifteenth century, to theorise the alternation of two ratios of metre – between the division of a unit into three notes and into two. In terms of dance, Marin Mersenne described the metrical feature of the courante using the Latin synonym of hemiola, *sesquialtera*.¹ Although the minuet’s metrical characteristics are not analysed in any extant documents, the notion of hemiola was prevalent enough in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to be granted inclusion in the major dictionaries.² A shift of metrical ratio commonly occurred at the end of phrases in French triple-metre music at the time; the minuet was no exception in this regard.

Examples from the first half of the eighteenth century

While the music forms hemiola, the minuet choreographies of the early eighteenth century produce similar effects, in relation to the music, as well as in the alternation of the *pas de menuet* and the *contretemps de menuet*, the two representative step-units of minuet choreography. The difference between the *pas de menuet à deux mouvements* and *à trois mouvements* lies in their second halves; the effect of hemiola is weaker with three movements, but the metrical structure is determined by the first two steps, the timing of which is the same in these two forms. When the music is written with the time-signature 3/4, the *pas de menuet* forms 3/2 with step rhythms as described by Rameau and Tomlinson,³ whereas the *contretemps de menuet* forms 6/4, or 3/4 (Diagram 1).

There is a significant difference between musical and choreographic hemiolas: the 3/2 section appears only at the end of some phrases in the music while the main part of the choreography is in 3/2. This raises the question, how do musical and choreographic hemiolas correlate with each other?

<i>Pas de menuet à deux mouvements</i>	3/2	> >	>	♪	♪	♪	♪	
(Rameau, <i>Maître à danser</i> , 1725, 78)		<i>p</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>p</i>				
(Rameau, <i>Abbrégé</i> , c.1725, 104)	3/2	> >	>	♪	♪	♪	♪	
<i>French Step</i> (Tomlinson, 1735, 104)		<i>p</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>p</i>				
<i>Contretemps de menuet</i>	6/4 (3/4)	> >	>	♪	♪	♪	♪	
		<i>p</i>	<i>p</i>					

Diagram 1. Rhythms of representative minuet steps

Let us take Marin Marais’s ‘Premier menuet’, in his *tragédie en musique Alcide*, as an example (Example 1).⁴ Its formal structure is AABB’, and hemiola occurs at the end of sections B (bars 26–27) and B’ (bars 34–35).

Pécour choreographed a ballroom minuet to this music, entitled ‘Le Menuet d’Alcide’ (1709).⁵ The notator Feuillet changed the time-signature from 3 to 6/4, in order to contain the 6 beats of the minuet step in a bar. As can be seen in Example 2, he re-barréd both the A and B sections at their repetition, to place the cadential note on the primary beat and to accommodate the musical hemiola within a single bar in the B’ section. I refer to the bar numbers of this dance according to Marais’s score, in order to avoid the confusion caused by this barring.

Example 1. Marais, ‘Premier menuet’, *Alcide* (1693), V, 3.

Transcription by the author.



Example 2. Feuillet's music notation

The step-unit in bars 27–28 is the *contretemps de menuet*, which emphasises with its initial hop the first beat (27¹) that is suppressed by the musical hemiola. At this point musical and choreographic hemiolas collide against each other (Diagram 2).

Similar collisions of hemiola can occur in the generic ballroom minuet, because choreographic hemiola constantly merges musical bars 1 and 2, 3 and 4, and so on, whereas musical hemiola combines bars 4 and 5 of a 6-bar phrase, or bars 6 and 7 of an 8-bar phrase. A collision occurs only when two parties function independently of one another, and the ballroom minuet in early eighteenth-century France demonstrates that music and dance independently form their own metre, without relying on each other. The formation of choreographic hemiola itself suggests the independence of dance from music, and I regard the collision of their hemiolas as the

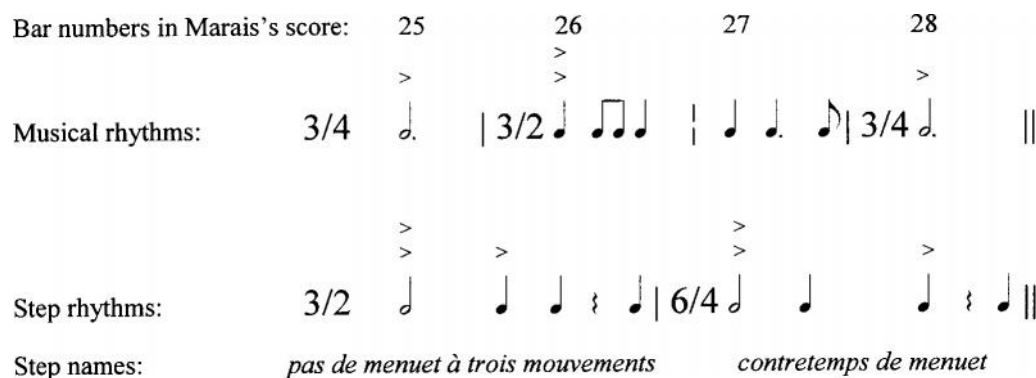


Diagram 2. Multiple hemiolas



Example 3. Le Menuet de Mr Ballon

Transcription by the author. Bar numbers are parenthesised at the repetition.

manifestation of their equality. Despite the collision of their metrical features, the music and dance achieve a unity of composite arts by applying the same metrical concept. This is a kind of polyphonic harmony, for which the dance functions as a ‘voice’.

Conversely, the choreography of the theatrical minuet can vary from the ballroom minuet, and the treatment of hemiola may be different, too. The next example is ‘Le Menuet de Mr Ballon’, preserved in an anonymous and undated manuscript, which was likely to have been created before the death of Ballon in 1744.⁶ The origin of this dance is unknown, but this male solo, composed of a variety of steps with constant jumps and turns to contain only one *pas de menuet* (bars 1–2), is distinctively theatrical. Its musical source has not been identified, hence the bass is not known to us, but hemiola is discerned in the melody alone, at the end of the B section of its AABB structure (Example 3).

The choreography responds to the repeated musical hemiola in different ways. The first time round it stresses with the *assemblée* the first beat of bar 27, which is suppressed by hemiola, as if to complement the weakened beat in the music. The second time round, however, the notation shows symbols which look like a group of rest signs before a step sign of the *jeté* (see Example 4).

Although these small hand-written symbols are hard to identify, they appear to me to indicate that the *jeté* does not occur on the first beat of bar 39. As the notation leaves space for symbols that are clearly not step-signs, it is feasible to regard them as rests (Diagram 3). Assuming this, the step rhythms in bars 38–39 match the shifted musical metre, applying a rest in the choreography to the beat that is suppressed in the music. The second B section appears

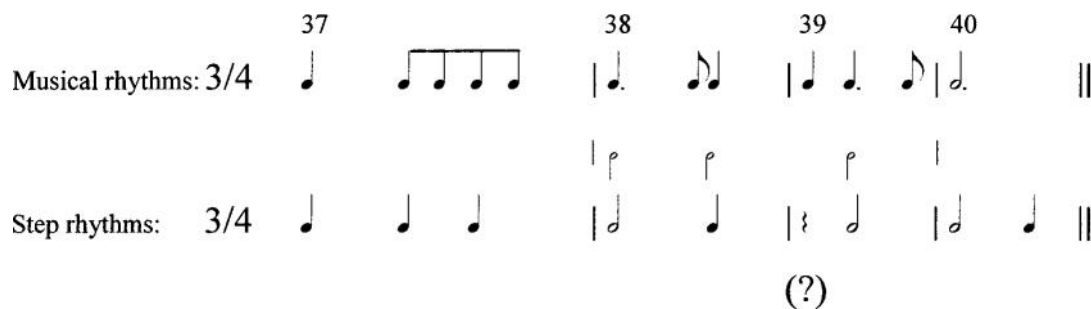
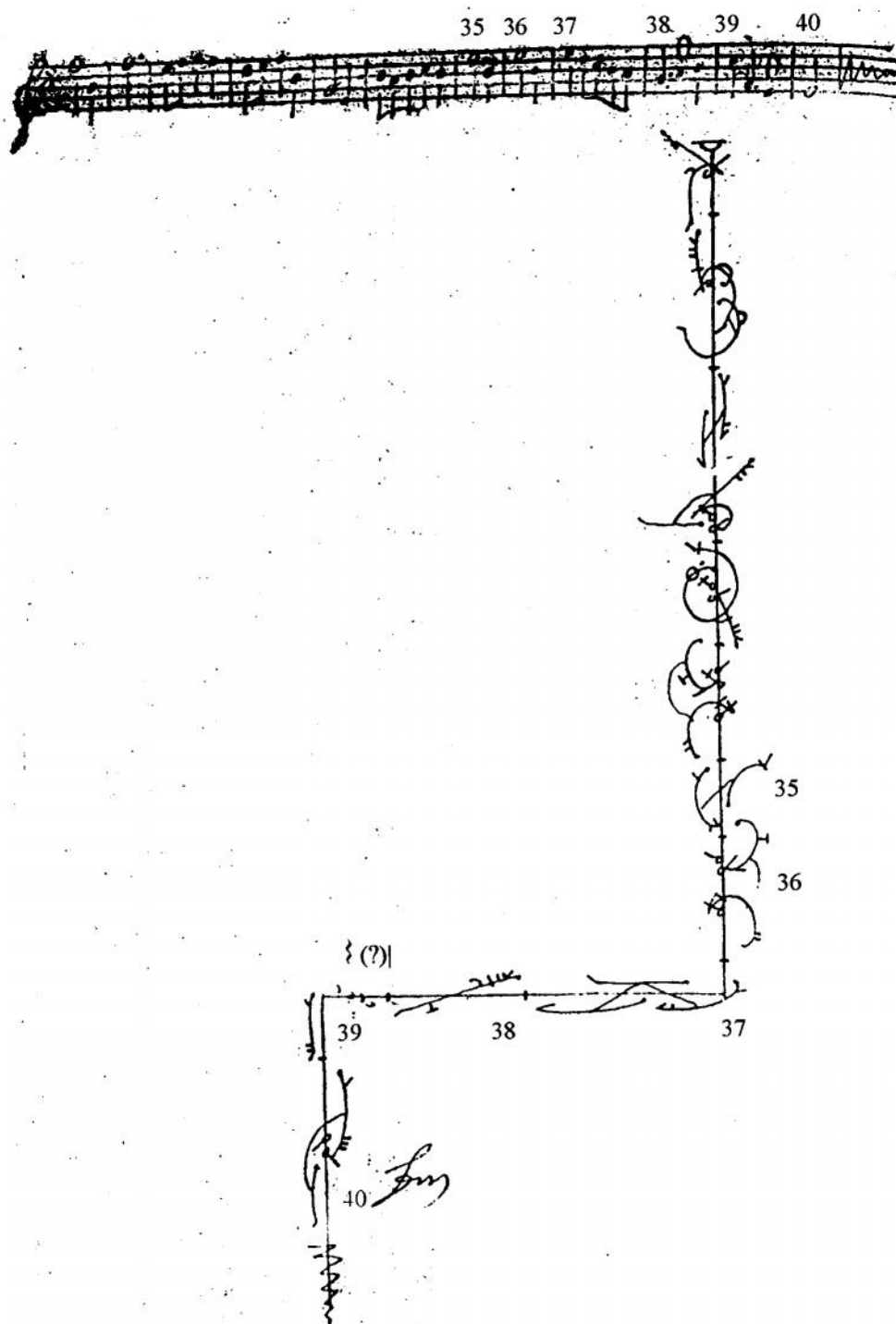


Diagram 3. Bars 37–40

to demonstrate the choreography's conformity to the music, rather than the collision against the latter's metrical feature.

The choreography's conformity to the music's shift of metrical framework suggests a hierarchical congruence between these two arts, instead of their equality. This example seems to me to suggest a sign of transition in the dance-music relationship, from the equal to the hierarchical.



Example 4. Figure 3 of Le Menuet de Mr Ballon

Microfilm, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris. Analytical signs by the author.

Examples from the second half of the eighteenth century

In the second half of the eighteenth century ballroom dance manuals by Magny and Malpied indicated that the first constituent step of the *pas de menuet* should be sustained for 3 beats, to articulate the beginning of both 3-beat units with the vertical movements of sink and rise.⁷ This step timing forms simple triple metre, while the musical hemiola at the end of phrases also diminishes. The persistence of hemiola is recognised in some music, but it had lost the power to distract from the sense of regular pulse due to the following features of compositional style in the period: the 1-bar pace of the pulsating harmony; the typical harmonic pattern (subdominant – dominant – tonic) at the cadence; the emphasis laid by the rhythmic division on the first beat of the penultimate bar; the constant 2-bar units of melodic and rhythmic figures in a phrase consisting of an even number of bars. These features prevent the two cadential bars from functioning as a single extended bar of hemiola. For instance, the melodic rhythms of ‘Mrs Baily’s Minuet’ (c.1780) produce an unmistakable hemiola at the cadence, yet in effect it does not sound as it looks in the notation, on account of the emphasis on the first beat of the penultimate bar laid by the rhythmic division of the bass, and the definitive harmonic progression from dominant (bar 14³) to tonic (bar 15¹), which is soon followed by the typical cadential harmony: subdominant – dominant – tonic (Example 5).

The compositional style of this minuet, composed for actual dancing, is effectively the same as the minuet movements of Viennese symphonies. Neither music nor dance produced distinct hemiola as a common feature of the minuet in this period,⁹ consequently, the metrical relationship between the two arts was simple and straightforward.

The dance notations published in the second half of the century were all for the ball, while theatre dance was dropped from the notation. Choreography also departed from the prescribed dance forms, because the music of the conventional dance types was considered to ‘signify nothing’ and ‘express nothing’ for the drama.¹⁰ Despite this view of the dance forms in general, the minuet acquired symbolic connotations in the vaudeville-comedies, representing youthful love, its seduction, or a dance lesson.¹¹ In 1782 Auguste Ferrère recorded the dances from eight theatrical works, none of which is labelled as a traditional dance type.¹² Nonetheless, one, in the *ballet pantomime Le Peintre amoureux de son modèle*, is marked as ‘Tempo di minuetto’, a marking that was widely used for instrumental music in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This is a rare example of the demising theatrical minuet. The music is composed of 8-bar phrases, each of which is made up strictly of 2-bar motifs, without creating hemiola, a

Example 5. Mrs Baily’s Minuet⁸

Tempo di minuetto

Violino

Basso

(10) 5 [45] (15)

(50) 20 (55)

25 (60) 30

35 40

Fine

D.C. al Fine

Example 6. *Le Peintre amoureux de son modèle*, no.6

Transcription by the author.

Bar numbers are in parentheses at the first repetition, and in brackets at the second.

style typical of the late eighteenth-century minuet. It is written in 3/8, which was a common time-signature among Italian minuets (Example 6).

The choreography does not draw the typical floor patterns of the minuet, but contains three *pas de menuet à un seul mouvement*¹³ in bars 17–22 (figure 3). The choreography is dominated by beaten jumps and *ronde de jambe en l'air*, common techniques for solo dancers in the Beauchamp-Feuillet repertoire. Even more characteristic of this choreography is its narrative depiction.

This pantomime ballet is a comedy about a painter drawing a female nude, and his jealous wife. The painter brings his favourite model to his studio while his wife is out, but, being suspicious, she returns. The model sneaks out of the studio and the painter hides his picture, pretending that he has been painting a landscape.¹⁴ In the dance of ‘Tempo di minuetto’ the husband and wife initially draw symmetrical floor patterns harmoniously (figures 1–5), but this harmony is soon to be broken. In figure 6 the wife alone approaches the easel, finds the portrait, and seizes it while the husband performs gymnastic steps. Figure 7 is largely pantomimic: the wife holds the portrait behind her back while putting a finger to her nose (bars 57–58); the husband and wife turn to face each other (59) and smile (60); she calls him to her (61), and does so once again (62); the husband approaches her jauntily with a *pas de bourrée* (63) before concluding the dance with reverence to the audience (64). These gestures are verbally described between the barlines, indicating that they are set to particular moments of the music. Pantomimic solo dances without steps had existed prior to this example, but they were not notated, suggesting the strong possibility of their improvisational nature.¹⁵ Ferrère introduces a different type of pantomimic dance here, the gestures of which are precisely set to the music.

Lacking steps, the last section of this dance no longer forms rhythms, beats, or phrases, and it relies on the music for the formation of a timeframe. For narrative purposes the choreography gives priority to pantomimic gesture over steps and geometric design, and the notation indicates verbal descriptions of gestures between the barlines that match their musical counterparts. This demonstrates a hierarchical relationship between constituent arts, granting a first priority to dramatic depiction. It can be said that the music provides the structural backbone, allowing the choreography to concentrate on telling the story and expressing the emotions of the characters. Moreover, the dance type of minuet serves as a parody of love; parodied music was frequently used for ironic character-picturing at the time, and this dance connotes the deception of love. When hearing this music in the minuet form, seeing dance with the minuet steps, the eighteenth-century audience would have instantly understood the irony of the scene.

The importance of dramatic effects in musical theatre and the principal role of the libretto were agreed on by Enlightenment thinkers. In the mid-eighteenth century Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Jean-Philippe Rameau argued about the expressive properties of music, but the hierarchical relationship between poetry, music and dance was beyond doubt for both of them.¹⁶ The principal reformers of opera and ballet, Gluck, Angiolini and Noverre, discussed the primacy of dramatic expression at musical theatre, all agreeing that a hierarchy of the component arts was essential to achieve dramatic coherence.¹⁷ Jean Georges Noverre wrote in 1760 as follows:

Music is to dancing what words are to music; this parallel simply means that dance music corresponds, or should do, to the written poem and thus fixes and determines the dancer’s movements and actions. [...] consequently dancing with action is the instrument, or organ, by which the thoughts expressed in the music are rendered appropriately and intelligibly.¹⁸

This attitude during the Enlightenment presents a stark contrast to the classical ideals since the Renaissance, whereby all forms of art were attributed to a single ancient principle: the imitation of nature. In this tradition poetry, music and dance were considered to be equally autonomous, each representing nature in its own right, with musical theatre created through their harmonious interplay.

The late seventeenth to the early eighteenth century was a transitional period for aesthetics, from the classical to early modern models, and the choreo-musical relationship reflected this aesthetic shift, no matter whether for the theatre or the ballroom. Noverre summarised the change that had taken place since the seventeenth century.

Everything then [Lully's time] was wonderful, the music was composed for the dance and *vice versa*. But what was compatible then is no longer so.¹⁹

Within the course of this aesthetic transition, ancient and modern models co-existed alongside hybrids of various shades. The extant sources of the minuet in the eighteenth century demonstrate a shift in the dance-music relationship, echoing the changing aesthetics of the composite arts of the time.

Notes

- 1 Mersenne, M. 'Traité de la voix et des chants', *Harmonie universelle*. Paris: Sebastien Cramoisy, 1636, rp. Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1963, **2**, 170. There are two kinds of hemiola, the major and the minor, and those commonly found in the courante and the minuet are the major hemiola. See: Corrigan, V. 'Hemiola in the Eighteenth Century', *Johann Sebastian: A Tercentenary Celebration*. Benstock, S. L. (editor) Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 1992, 23–32.
- 2 Either 'hémiole' or 'sesquialtere', or both entries, is found in: Furetière, A. *Dictionnaire universel*. Paris: Arnout & Reinier Leers, 1690, **3**, no pagination; M.D.C. (Corneille, T) of the Académie française, *Le Dictionnaire des arts et des sciences*. Paris: Jean Baptiste Coignard, 1694, **4**, 397; Brossard, S. de, *Dictionnaire de musique*. Paris: Christophe Ballard, 1703, no pagination; Grassineau, J. *A Musical Dictionary*. London: J. Wilcox, 1740, 104; Rousseau, J. J. *Dictionnaire de musique*. Paris: La Veuve Duchesne, 1768, 245. Rousseau's articles in Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* (Paris: Samuel Faulche, 1765) also discuss this notion: 'hémiole' (**8**, 113); 'sesqui-altere' (**15**, 127).
- 3 Pierre Rameau provides two different accounts for the timing of the *pas de menuet à deux mouvements*: a verbal description in his *Maître à danser* (Paris: Jean Villette, 1725, 78) and a notation in the *Abbrégé de la nouvelle méthode* (Paris: Jacques Josse, c.1725, 104); the latter is the same as Kellom Tomlinson's verbal description of his 'French Step' in *The Art of Dancing* (London: Author, 1735, 104). The earlier minuet step notated by Jean Favier functions as 6/4 without producing hemiola (*Le Mariage de la Grosse Cathos*. 1688, 69, in: Harris-Warrick, R. and C. G. Marsh. *Musical Theatre at the Court of Louis XIV*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 261).
- 4 Marais, M. *Alcide, tragédie*, V, 3. Paris: Christophe Ballard, 1693, 234.
- 5 Feuillet, R. A. *VIIIe Recueil de dances*. Paris: Author, 1709, 9–20.
- 6 F-Pn: Ms.fr.14884, 212–214.
- 7 Magny, C. M. *Principes de chorégraphie*. Paris: Duchesne et de la Chevardière, 1765, 126. Malpied. *Traité sur l'art de la danse*. Paris: Bouin, c.1770, 100.
- 8 *Six Minuets for Two Violins, Oboes and Horns [...]*. London: C. Weiss, c.1780, 14 (GB-Lbl.b.53.t.3). The original orchestration is for two horns, two oboes and two violins in six staves, which have been reduced to two staves by the author.

- 9 Hemiola did not disappear in music, but its appearance and allocation became freer, moving away from its traditional spot of the cadence, say, to the opening of a piece, as found in the minuet movement of Mozart Symphony no.40.
- 10 Grimm, B. F. M. von. 'Poèm lyrique', *Encyclopédie*. Diderot and D'Alembert (editors) Paris: Samuel Faulche, 1765, **12**, 835.
- 11 Charlton, D. *French Opera 1730–1830: Meaning and Media*. Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2000, 156–191.
- 12 Ferrère, A. *Partition et Chorographie*, 1782, F-Po Rés.68, 3–4.
- 13 This step is categorised without definition in: Feuillet, R. A. 'Supplément des tables', *Chorégraphie ou l'art de décrire la danse, [...] Seconde Edition, augmentée*. Paris: Author, 1701, 80.
- 14 For a synopsis of the ballet and the description of this dance, see: Harris-Warrick, R. and C. G. Marsh, 'The French Connection', and Goff, M. 'Steps, Gestures, and Expressive Dancing: Magri, Ferrère, and John Weaver', in *The Grotesque Dancer on the Eighteenth-Century Stage: Gennaro Magri and His World*. Harris-Warrick, R. and B. A. Brown (editors) Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 191–192 and 217–225.
- 15 For instance, Jean Favier omits pantomimic dances without choreography from his notation of *Le Mariage de la Grosse Cathos* (1688), while providing choreography for other dances. See: Harris-Warrick and Marsh, *Musical Theatre*, 46–48 and 56, 64.
- 16 For comparative discussions of the Rousseau-Rameau dispute, see: Verba, C. *Music and the French Enlightenment: Reconstruction of a Dialogue 1750–1764*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, 8–30; Christensen, T. *Rameau and Musical Thought in the Enlightenment*. New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 120–123 and 248–251.
- 17 Christoph Willibald Gluck's remarks are found in the 'Dedication' to his opera score *Alceste*. Vienna: Giovanni Tomaso De Trattner, 1769, fol.2r, trans. Blom, E. in *Source Readings in Music History*, Strunk, O. (editor) New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1965, **4**, 100; 'Lettre de M le Chevalier Gluck sur la musique', in *Music and Aesthetics in the Eighteenth and Early-Nineteenth Centuries*, Huray, P. le and J. Day (editors) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, 149. Gasparo Angiolini's remark is found in the programme of his ballet *Don Juan, ou Le Festin de Pierre* (1761), translation by Marsh, C. G. and R. Harris-Warrick in: 'Putting Together a Pantomime Ballet', *The Grotesque Dancer*, 261, n36.
- 18 Noverre, *Lettres sur la danse et sur les ballets*. Stuttgart: Aimé Delaroche, 1760, trans. Beaumont, C. W. of the 1803 edition, New York: Dance Horizons, 1966, 60.
- 19 *Ibid.*