
Book Review

Hillary Burlock, Ian Newman and Mark Philp (editors) *Dance and Sociability in the Long Eighteenth Century*. Bloomsbury Academic, London & New York 2026. ISBN 978-1-3504-9892-1 (hardback); 978-1-3504-9894-5 (eBook), ix+261 pp, illustrated

This fascinating and very readable new book explores various aspects of dancing as a sociable activity during the long eighteenth century. The thirteen essays have been contributed by dance and literary scholars, musicologists and social historians (brief biographies appear at the front of the volume); and between them they cover a wide range of relevant subjects. These include aspects of training in dance and deportment, attitudes to appropriate (and inappropriate) fashions in dress and behaviour in the ballroom, and the dancers' own reactions to appearing in public and private dance spaces where older social dance types were giving way to new and sometimes challenging dances, not least the innovatory waltz in its diverse manifestations. A useful bibliography and detailed index complete the book.

The essays are clearly presented, well-documented, and cover a wide range of dance activities and geographical locations. They take us from London to Edinburgh, Brussels, Christiania (now Oslo), Vienna, Philadelphia and the Caribbean. In each instance the authors discuss recurring themes of social attitudes towards dance, allowing insights to the nature of sociability and, more widely, to the place of the individual within societies that embraced public assemblies, private dance assemblies, and links with the theatre. It is refreshing that, in this coverage, polite society and genteel manners do not always dominate. One essay which stands out in this respect compares contrasting social genres in which the characters and dance-related plots associated with Jane Austen's writings are cannily juxtaposed with the rumbustious antics depicted in Pierce Egan's *Life in London* (1821), where his heroes sample the highs and lows of social dancing at London venues from Almacks to 'All-Max' and elsewhere. Nor are the relationships between ball dances and the stage ignored. One essay invites examination of the impact of an English performer-turned-dancing master in Philadelphia in the 1790s. Another addresses the often hidden but thought-provoking connections between

costume, somatic experience of dance and other dynamic exchanges between ballet and social dance on stage and in the ballroom in early nineteenth century London.

Alongside succinct discussions drawn from the evidence of well-known dance manuals and associated sources of the time, there is also much new contextual information about balls and ball-dancing, garnered from eighteenth and early nineteenth century journals, memoirs and correspondence. I particularly liked the reminiscence of attending that rarely-documented event, a children's ball, in Christiania in 1790. Also the insights to Lord and Lady Borington's determination to run successful balls at their Devonshire mansion by locating likely dancers beforehand and providing training in cotillons and waltzes for them 'as regular as a race horse at Newmarket', before letting them loose in their ballroom. Inevitably, minuets and waltzes dominate many of the essays, but there are also discussions of other dance types of significance, and their contribution to different aspects of social dance culture in the long eighteenth century. In that respect, the well-balanced essay which teases out the differences between 'German' and 'Viennese' waltzes is particularly valuable.

Bloomsbury Academic has published a very attractive glossy coloured cover to this hard-back book, but it is regrettable that the grey-scale illustrations inside the book do not all benefit from the same commitment to quality. There are some welcome exceptions, but in general the images are too small, poorly-reproduced, and in two instances almost illegible. For such a highly visual subject as dance, this is not good news. Fortunately, the quality of the essays goes a long way to compensate for such shortcomings. *Dance and Sociability in the Long Eighteenth Century* is an important collection of essays for an important subject.

Jennifer Thorp



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