Selected papers from
'An International Celebration of Enrico Cecchetti'

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A full proceedings featuring further papers and including DVD will be available at a later date including:

Enrico Cecchetti and the restoration of the danseur in ballets presented on the London stage at the end of the nineteenth century

Jane Pritchard

Commentators on ballet in the late nineteenth century frequently describe the period as one in which no male danseurs of talent performed in theatres outside Russia. This paper will look at the impact of Cecchetti's performances and those of his contemporaries suggesting that 25 years before the arrival of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes there was a resurgence of interest in the male performer.

Enrico Cecchetti's stage career is most often remembered because he created of the roles of both Carabosse and the Bluebird in Marius Petipa's original production of *The Sleeping Beauty* for the Imperial Russian Ballet in St Petersburg in 1890. These roles drew attention to his ability as an expressive mime, as a virtuoso danseur, and as an able partner. Other roles he created or performed are less widely discussed so this paper helps to fill that gap and focuses on another aspect of Cecchetti's career as a performer. These are the roles he danced in ballets in London at roughly the time of *The Sleeping Beauty*'s creation. This discussion places his performances in the context of other virtuoso male dancers who appeared in London in the 1880s and 1890s. In so doing it shakes up some of the general perceptions of late nineteenth-century ballet and dancers in Western Europe. A quartet of danseurs provide the focus for this discussion; in addition to Cecchetti they are Luigi Albertieri, Georgio Saracco and Vittorio di Vincenti. Cecchetti was the most influential of the four, and the pioneer, but the careers of these danseurs in London were interlinked and they often succeeded one another in major roles.

Looking at ballet productions in London, as in many other European cities, in the two decades (1880s and 1890s) under discussion reveals that the virtuosity of Italian dancers was not restricted to ballerinas: their male counterparts are equally worthy of note. Indeed more attention needs to be given to the genre of Italian *ballo grande* and its performers. The *ballo grande* was enormously popular throughout Europe in the 1880s but because it is so often ignored – or despised – by dance historians it is necessary to begin with some discussion of the genre. In terms of theatre-dance it was one of the biggest ballet-crazes ever to capture the popular imagination. The most important of the *ballo grande* including Luigi Manzotti's *Excelsior* (1881) achieved the success that now greets top musicals, complete with new theatres (most notably the Eden-théâtre, Paris) being built specifically to stage the works. Following their acclamation at home in the 1880s, Italian ballets were presented throughout the continent of Europe and over the Atlantic in both North and South America. It was to dance in the stagings of Manzotti's ballets, and in the local productions that followed them, that Italian male dancers found themselves as much in demand as the ballerinas. Companies went out from Italy to present the ballets in major theatres, both opera houses and popular theatres. Manzotti's ballets were not presented by one organisation for he licensed his productions which were staged by a team of repetiteurs (most of whom took part as mime artists in the first performances of the

productions in Italy) and these producers were often assisted by notation. It may, however, be convincingly argued that the international success of the Italian ballet in the late nineteenth-century paved the way for the Russians a few decades later. This observation does not, however, claim that *ballo grande* made a lasting impact equivalent to that of the Ballets Russes. It never achieved the *gesamtkunstwerk*, the total unity of choreography, drama, music and design into a single organic work, that gave ballet the status it acquired under Serge Diaghilev's supervision of the Ballets Russes but the *ballo grande* of Manzotti and his contemporaries captured the spirit of the imperialistic late nineteenth century.

As its name suggests, *ballo grande* was the term given to the grand or elaborate productions which presented vast numbers of dancers and extras on the stage as well as spectacular scenery. Where French ballet of the nineteenth century tended to be more poetic in a post-romantic style, the Italian *ballo grande* was brash. The Italian corps de ballet, in which the women tended to be more scantily clad than their French counterparts, was responsible for colourful kaleidoscopic effects moving in formal lines and geometric patterns. In this they were similar to the corps de ballet in most music-hall productions. Displays of patriotism and symbols of progress were favoured over the other-worldly fantasies that continued to be created in France. *Pointe* work for women was developed in Italy concurrently with the development by Italian shoe-makers of the more heavily blocked shoes which assisted the ballerina with her sustained balances and multiple turns. Such 'tricks' would become an obligatory feature of every ballet whether or not they were appropriate to the drama. Technique became an end in itself and the ballerinas were frequently described as having 'pointes of steel' (a phrase which itself is indicative of the industrialised urban societies in which the ballets were presented). In a number of Italian ballets (including, of course, *Excelsior*) the ballerina became a symbolic figure rather than the heroine of a drama. Significantly the Italians also continued to develop virtuoso male dancers and, for certain productions, their distinctive male corps de ballet or '*tramagnini*'. The danseurs held the stage in their own right not simply to serve as porteurs for the ballerina. Indeed the virtuoso danseurs often played character roles rather than the romantic lead or hero. Dancers would portray slaves or exotic characters; a survey of Enrico Cecchetti's dancing roles along side those danced by Vaslav Nijinsky for the Ballets Russes would reveal a significant number of parallels.

Many of the *ballo grande* were rooted in history, mythology or literature. The more political productions, such as those celebrating Italian history and Italy's recent unification were not performed abroad, but a number of ballets could be localised for international consumption. To take just one obvious example, although in the original production of *Excelsior* the tutu of the ballerina who represented Civilisation was decorated with the symbol of Milan (where the ballet was first presented), when the production was presented in other countries the bodice of the ballerina's tutu incorporated the flag of the nation in which it was being performed, enabling the audience to believe that they were the civilising power.

Many of the elements promulgated in *ballo grande* including structure and subject matter were picked up and adapted by music hall managers in London who increasingly employed Italian choreographers to create spectacles that would appeal to British audiences. *Ballo grande* productions with their detailed narratives were not suitable for

presentation in British venues operating under music hall licences as these prevented the presentation of *ballet d'action* or story ballets. In the 1860s there had been a shift from presenting independent ballets in opera house setting to creating dance-productions for large music halls in which all narrative productions were illegal. This restriction remained in force until the act was repealed in 1912 impacting on the whole history of music hall ballet. *Excelsior*, the ballet in which the thirty-five year old Cecchetti made his London debut, was therefore presented at Her Majesty's Theatre, in the West End, where its eventual success was such that it established a record for a continuous long run that has yet to be broken (Matthew Bourne's *Swan Lake* has received more performances but over several runs). In the London production of *Excelsior*, staged by Carlo Coppi (who later became an important choreographer for the Alhambra); it was the men (both the *tramagnini* and soloists) who excited the audiences. *The Daily Telegraph* (23 May 1885) praised Cecchetti as 'one of the best male dancers that has been seen in this country for many years', while *The Times* of the same date commented on his 'remarkable agility' as the newly liberated slave. Cecchetti played both a character role and a virtuoso part. The first was the boatman, Valentine, in the scene relating to the discovery of steam-power; the virtuoso role that of the freed slave in the scene set by the Suez Canal. Here he also partnered the ballerina Adelina Rossi (later in the run Giovanna Limido and Signora Besesti) in a challenging pas de deux. Playing two contrasting roles in *Excelsior* enabled London audiences to appreciate Cecchetti's versatility, in much the same way as playing two roles in *The Sleeping Beauty* emphasised his range to audiences in St Petersburg.

Coppi's production of Manzotti's *Excelsior* was unlike other ballet productions presented in London Theatres in the 1880s, not least because it was initially performed to fill a full evening at the Theatre. As the *Graphic* (30 May 1885) observed, 'A spectacular ballet in three parts, and lasting a whole evening is…a dancing experiment upon the taste of the town, regarding the permanent success of which prophecy would be rash'. Whatever the perception of nineteenth-century ballet is now, it was unusual for ballets outside of Russia and Eastern Europe to be full-evening works as they were generally presented with operas or other entertainments. *Excelsior*'s success was all the more phenomenal as long runs of any productions were only beginning to become a feature of London theatres.

Once it had settled down after a difficult first night at which it was clear that the production had had insufficient stage rehearsal, *Excelsior* was recognised as one of 'the pleasantest entertainments at present accessible in London'. *The Dramatic Review* (17 October 1885) went further claiming

> the purely artistic character of the spectacle, the designers of which have absolutely ignored that section of the public which degrades the ballet by regarding it as a mere exhibition of female beauty; and the novelty and success of the attempt to set people thinking by a form of entertainment to which we had all but lost the habit of bringing our brains, are doing much to raise the character of the art of dancing to something of its ancient dignity. The bright Italian colouring, and the amazing spins of Signor Cecchetti, with the lively but not unrefined music, are only minor points of excellence in a very hopeful performance.

Excelsior opened just shortly after the management of the rebuilt Alhambra in Leicester Square restored independent academic ballet to a central position in its programme. In 1884 its policy shifted from presenting operetta and féerie productions incorporating ballet to variety bills dominated by full-scale independent ballets, initially by the Belgian choreographer Joseph Hansen. With the appointment of the Austrian-born Katti Lanner as ballet mistress/choreographer at the Empire in 1887 it followed its rival Leicester Square theatre to focus on the presentation of ballet. In London in the 1880s as in many other cities there was a distinct ballet boom. Although no other *ballo grande* originating in Italy was performed in central London (adaptations were presented by the Kirafy's in their shows at Olympia) the influence of the genre can be detected in the creations by Italian choreographers Eugenio Casati and Coppi for the Alhambra. One of the most obvious influences of the *ballo grande* was the employment at the Alhambra and the Empire of virtuoso male danseurs.

Cecchetti's success in *Excelsior* quickly impacted on the Alhambra. When there were cast changes in the long-running ballets, *Melusine* and *The Swans*, the hero ceased to be played by a woman en travestie. In June 1885 Miss Matthews was replaced by Giorgio Saracco. Although the use of travesty dancers did not disappear, indeed the majority of heroes were still played by women, but for the next decade, male danseurs played conspicuous, often *demi-caractère,* roles in ballets in London. Luigi Albertiere, Cecchetti's protégé, came to Britain to understudy his mentor in *Excelsior*, and then became a leading player during Katti Lanner's early seasons at the Empire, while Vittorio di Vincenti found a home at the Alhambra, particularly during the period for which Casati was Ballet Master. Vincenti later moved to the Empire. While Albertieri and Vincenti chose year-round employment in Britain, Cecchetti's appearances after *Excelsior* were of a more seasonal nature. In London theatres and music halls operated throughout the year most while Continental opera house and theatres operated on a seasonal basis. Thus many dancers found themselves unemployed during the summer months. This accounts for how 'summer theatres' attached to amusement parks and pleasure gardens attracted a high calibre of artists and why Cecchetti's performances at the Empire, London, in 1888, 1891 and 1892 all take place in the summer months.

At the Empire Cecchetti was described as having 'been gifted by nature with India-rubber limbs, and bounds about the stage to the admiration of all and conquers entirely the English prejudice against the male dancer'. (*Daily Telegraph* 22 May 1888) His most important roles were Folletto in *Rose d'amour* (1888), the Gnome in *Dolly* (1891), and Malignity in *Orfeo* (1991). As Folletto Cecchetti was called upon 'to perform feats of diablerie and scare the rest of the silent dramatis personae. Thus Folletto interrupts a bridal toilette and carries all before him until he is exorcised somewhat after the manner of Gretchen's Mephistophelean enemy.' (*The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* 26 May 1888).

Cecchetti's role in *Orfeo* is particularly interesting as in it he appears to repeat some of the business he performed in *The Sleeping Beauty* in St Petersburg the year before. This suggests that there was a greater interchange of ideas between the popular music hall productions and those at opera houses than is generally acknowledged although a lot of stage business becomes pretty universal. To be precise Eurydice's death appears to amalgamate details from Nikya's death in *La Bayadère* with Carabosse's presentation of the

spindle to Aurora at her sixteenth birthday celebration in *Beauty*. The synopsis for *Orfeo* reads Malignity is 'disguised as an old peasant, carrying a basket of roses which he offers to Eurydice. She smiles her thanks, and is about to take some, but throws them away, terror stricken, as a venomous snake concealed in their midst inflicts a mortal wound. Pluto and guests advance menacingly on Malignity, who throws off his disguise, and sinks through the ground in flames'. Cecchetti's role combined mime and dance for as the *Era* (30 May 1891) observed he 'did some marvellous pirouetting, and made the part stand out by appropriate gesture and action'.

Cecchetti's final performance in the London music halls of the 1890s came in June and July 1892 when he took over from Vincenti on 7 June the role of Prevot in *Versailles* at the Empire enabling the latter to dance at the Palace Theatre, Manchester. Although I have found no published acknowledgement of its source, the synopsis and reviews of *Versailles* reveal it was clearly inspired by an incident in Alexandre Dumas's novel, *Louise de la Vallière*, one of the *Three Musketeers* series. Prevot was not a major role in Cecchetti's career, nevertheless according to the *Era* (9 July 1892) 'Cecchetti is once more to be seen pirouetting as gaily as of yore'. By 1892 the public's interest in danseurs was beginning to wane, their tricks, jumps and spins had been seen too often. Cecchetti would not return to London until he was teaching and appearing in character roles with the Russian ballet troupes of Anna Pavlova and Serge Diaghilev two decades later. It was then he worked as a respected teacher who contributed so much to the training of dancers in Britain. The story in this earlier period therefore shifts to his colleagues for Italy whose careers were enhanced by working in London.

Luigi Albertieri benefited from the maestro mentoring his early career as a dancer when he accompanied Cecchetti to London. He later became a choreographer and teacher in his own right. Albertieri had been a juvenile star from the age of nine and worked in Spain, Italy, France, Belgium, England, Russia and Italy, before settling as a teacher in the USA, where he was employed by the Metropolitan Opera House and also opened his own school. In *The Art of Ballet Technique Technical Vade Mecum* (1948) Edouard Espinosa, one of the few writers to do justice to the Italian virtuoso dancers he watched in his youth, described Albertieri as having 'outstanding ability in general work', noted for his turns, agility and ability as a partner. A review of his performance as The Demon of Avarice in *A Dream of Wealth* noted that 'Albertieri, showed a certain amount of dramatic power, and performed feats of agility such as pirouettes on one leg, the other extended at right angles from the body – which were certainly astonishing, but not examplifications of that "poetry of motion" which is the chief raison d'être of the ballet.' Although Albertieri took over Cecchetti's roles in *Dilara* and as a wonderful whirling and nimble Folletto in *Rose d'amour*, at the Empire he was far more than Cecchetti's understudy or second cast. Albertieri also became Lanner's assistant.

Albertieri created the role of the agile Pan in *Diana* (1888), Pharam in *Cleopatra* (1889) in which it was said that his 'gestures are eloquent, and his dancing is extremely agile and artistic', and he danced the Tarantella in *The Paris Exhibition*. He also danced The Demon of Avarice in *A Dream of Wealth*, The Dancing Master in *Cecile* (1890) and, after a break from the Empire company, The Gnome in *Dolly*. Albertieri was sent out by Lanner to stage her ballets in the regions and overseas. He gained considerable experience when he staged five of them – *Cleopatre, Cecile, Dolly, The Paris Exhibition* and *A Dream of Wealth* for

the newly opened Palace Theatre, Manchester (1892-93). He also performed there in all but *The Paris Exhibition* and, immediately after his spell in Manchester, he began staging Lanner's ballets on the Continent. He briefly returned to London to appear at the Palace Theatre when it first turned to variety programmes including ballets, and to partner Virginia Zucchi in the 'Grand Fish Ballet Revels under the Sea' in the lavish pantomime, *Robinson Crusoe* at Drury Lane, Christmas 1893.

Giorgio Saracco, the third of the quartet of danseurs also became an important producer-choreographer staging ballets by Marius Petipa and Joseph Hansen in Italy and elsewhere. Saracco promoted the career of Carlotta Brianza and he provides an intriguing link between La Scala Milan, the Eden-Théâtre, Paris, the Alhambra, London, and the theatres of St Petersburg and Moscow. He worked at the Monnaie, Brussels and, between 1910 and 1916, was *maître de ballet* at Monte Carlo. He staged important Russian, French and Viennese ballets for La Scala including *Sylvia*, *La Maladetta*, *Coppélia*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, *Javotte* and *Il Carillon*. Saracco had a notable international career having toured the United States of America with the Kiralfy brothers' production of *Excelsior*.

From reviews it appears that as a performer Saracco was the least technically impressive dancer of the quartet although he was noted for his turns – in *Melusine* he 'execute[d] pirouettes in a phenomenal fashion' - and was a strong partner. A review in the *Era* when he first appeared at the Alhambra indicates his strengths a young man.

> As male dancers in grand ballet have recently, through a notable example, come a little way into fashion again, the Alhambra directors, resolved not to be caught napping, having recently engaged Signor Saracco, who on the Continent has made a great reputation, and that deservedly, judging by what we now know of him…. He is young and good looking, and is nearly as light as the air he, in common with ordinary mortals, has to breathe. He comes on at first sword and shield in hand, and seemingly disposed to be defiant; but he is soon put under a spell by the graceful movements of Mdlle. Palladino, who trips more charmingly than any fairy who has ever come under our notice. …Signor Saracco very soon lays down his armour, and actually allows the lady to pose herself upon the tips of her toes upon his foot, and then advancing backwards, as an Irishman might say, he conveys her from one side of the stage to the other. Then he has a turn on his own account, indeed he has many turns, for he makes of himself a human teetotum, and twirls in a way that becomes almost dazzling to the beholder.

At the Alhambra Saracco appeared as the hero in several productions, roles that during the rest of the run of the productions were performed by a woman (surely interesting examples of roles not being gender-specific in performance). In July 1889 he played Elio, a shepherd, in *Astrea* until his sister was available to take on this part. At this time the *Entr'acte* (13 July 1889) considered Saracco as 'not very graceful'. The review went on to praise British dancers, John D'Auban and George Lupino and wondered why it was necessary to employ 'foreign produce'. The British dancers referred to were agile 'leg dancers' and although, at times, the difference between the British and Italian dancers is hard to detect, Lupino, for example, was noted as a pirouettist, essentially the Italians were stronger in the *danse d'ecole* while British virtuosity was based on nimble step-dancing.

Saracco danced briefly at the Empire as the Demon of Avarice and took over from Albertieri in *Cécile* but his visits to London were relatively brief and of the four dancers discussed here made the least impact on ballet in Britain.

Vittorio de Vincenti possibly challenged Cecchetti in technical ability as a danseur, but his career was limited to dancing, he did not become a notable producer or teacher. Unfortunately he focused on virtuosity over artistry, nevertheless in his heyday he was one of the dancers Espinosa placed in the category of 'Outstanding ability in General Work'. He danced in *ballo grande* at the Eden-théâtre, Paris, before working in Britain. He was at the Alhambra for three years (1889-91) and then for a further four years at the Empire (1891-95). George Bernard Shaw described Vincenti as 'a little man with a big grin, and, in the matter of agility, and Italian Hop-'o-my-Thumb'. H. G. Hibbert admired him as a 'wonderful pirouettist' praising his 'mad whirls round the stage and record beating leaps into the air'. Ivor Guest dismissed him as a 'brainless virtuoso of the Italian school' because in an interview in the *Era* in 1905, when he returned to London to dance at the Lyceum and the London Coliseum, he said nothing about the interpretation of his roles. Instead he maintained that for the danseur 'grace is out of the question. He must make great physical efforts and perform moves [sic] which people think the human anatomy incapable of.' As for most of his twenty-year-long career Vincenti had been cast in roles designed to show off his dancing rather than any acting ability he had become type cast; the victim of his audience's expectations. Certainly some earlier reviews suggest an interpretative artist. Describing Vincenti's performance in *Asmodeus* (1899), the critic of the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* (4 January 1890) claimed he was 'beyond doubt the best male dancer who has been seen in London since the palmy days of ballet, when Perrot was Supreme'.

> Signor de Vincenti is not merely an accomplished dancer, but also an accomplished actor. His facial expression is so eloquent as to compensate for the absences of spoken dialogue; his acting has the charm of spontaneity, and the pirouettes and other saltatory feats which he often introduces, through wonderful displays of strength and skill, seem almost out of place.

Prior to his employment in London Vincenti, who had been encouraged to dance by his father who worked in commerce but was a balletomane, danced in Milan, Turin Nice and Paris frequently partnering the ballerina, Angelina Spotti. In May 1888 he appeared with Sofia Coppini and Pierina Legnani in Luigi Manzotti's *Rolla* at the Eden-théâtre, Paris, where his 'extraordinary agility' was commented on; Vincenti's jumps and bounds being wonderful'. After dancing in Manzotti's *Amor* in Turin in 1889 he embarked on a long spell in Britain where, on arrival at the Alhambra, it appears that he so overshadowed ballerina Emma Bessone that she broke her contract and left the theatre, Legnani being employed as her replacement.

At the Alhambra Vincenti stood out in the roles he created in *Asmodeus*, *The Sleeping Beauty* (1890) and *Salandra* (1891). In the title role of Asmodeus, 'the Spectator' in the *Star* (24 December 1889) described Vincenti as giving a 'jumping frog performance', while as the Evil Genie in *The Sleeping Beauty* the critic for the *Era* (20 December 1890) wrote that he danced with 'truly marvellous agility and lightness of foot. The way in which he whirled

round the stage fairly electrified the house, and he was hailed with plaudits of a tumultuous description.'

Vincenti first danced at the Empire in November 1891 when he took over from Enrico Cecchetti as 'Malignity' in Orfeo when he was praised in the *Era* (31 October 1891) for a wonderful series of pirouettes and throughout it is for jumps and turns that he is regularly praised. As Prevot in *Versailles*, however, the *St James's Gazette* (24 May 1892 p.6) noted that his 'neatness of execution could hardly be surpassed'. Other roles choreographed by Katti Lanner for the Empire that he created were Sovyek, the Guardian of the Treasure in *Nisita*, Antonio, Marietta's fiancé, in *By the Sea* (1892), Ramzeedad in *The Girl I Left Behind Me* (1893). He also took over the roles of the Lord Chamberlain in *Katrina*, L'Etoile in *La Frolique* and Tambourino in *On Brighton Pier* and appeared as the Demon of Avarice in *A Dream of Wealth* when it transferred to the Palace Theatre, Manchester, while Cecchetti (available in the summer months) took over his roles at the Empire in London. Vincenti's last appearance at the Empire was in 1895 representing India in the final scene of Round *the Town*.

That there was sameness to the choreography Vincenti performed in all his roles is evident from the comments in the *Entr'acte* (18 May 1895) after his departure from the Empire. 'As Signor Vincenti does not take part in *Faust*, I suppose he has left the Empire. A very able dancer is this muscular, though diminutive performer. Perhaps I am ungrateful, but while I have great admiration for such practitioners as Cecchetti and Vincenti, I own that there is a considerable sameness in all they do. Very wonderful are their performances, but there is more formality than grace in them.' It would be interesting to know how far Vincenti's roles were actually choreographed for him or how far he just re-arranged his favourite steps for each part. He may well have been responsible for at least some of the variations in which he was praised.

After London Vincenti returned to Italy where in 1896 he partnered Carlotta Brianza at La Scala, Milan, in Giorgio Saracco's stagings of *Coppélia* and *The Sleeping Beauty*. The next year he created the Jockey in Manzotti's new ballet, *Sport,* where in 1902 he appeared in Manzotti's *Amor*. Unlike the other three dancers discussed here he did not move on to mount productions or teach, indeed he continued to perform as premier danseur at San Carlos, Naples, at the Olympia and Folies-Bergère in Paris and in St. Petersburg and Barcelona. As already noted he returned to London in 1905 to dance the Slave in the up-dated revival of *Excelsior* at the Lyceum Theatre and, after the production had been less successful than anticipated, danced in the divertissement *Spring Magic* at the London Coliseum.

For about a decade from the mid 1880s Cecchetti, Saracco, Albertieri and Vincenti captured the attention of London's dance-going public although, as Vincenti's career epitomises, just to dance virtuoso roles (and then night after night) can become tedious. However the contribution to the ballet stage by the four dancers reveals that London had not been entirely bereft of talented male dancers in the late nineteenth century. The premier danseur may have been cast in spectacular incidental roles rather than necessarily being a partner for the ballerina but this, as already noted in respect of Cecchetti, seems to prefigure the exotic roles that were created for Vaslav Nijinsky suggesting that the history of dance should be looked at as a more linear evolutionary process that an art

experiencing revolutions. The careers of Enrico Cecchetti and his three Italian colleagues reveal that male dancers did excite audiences in late nineteenth-century London although that excitement and interest diminished when it became clear that their repertoire of steps on which their performances depended was limited. For about fifteen years interest in the male danseur waned in London although British step-dancing character artists never lost their appeal. Only in the second decade of the twentieth-century was this interest to be re-awakened with the arrival of the chameleon-like artist, Vaslav Nijinsky, the Polovstian hoards led by the virile Adolph Bolm and the danseurs of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes.

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Cecchetti, Carabosse and *The Sleeping Beauty*

Helena Hammond

The character of Carabosse in The Sleeping Beauty is, of course, one of the most famous mime roles created by Cecchetti. This paper begins by looking at the iconography of the role in the original 1890 production in order to argue that Carabosse, and hence the part played in the creation of the ballet by Cecchetti, constitute central and strategic significances in the evolution of The Sleeping Beauty, ones that have been overlooked in the literature on the ballet. It then moves to consider the Ballets Russes' 1921 version of the ballet for London, The Sleeping Princess. I suggest that this production, which included Cecchetti's recreation of the role of Carabosse in a highly charged single performance, to mark his fiftieth anniversary as a performer, extended in significant ways the iconography, associations, and symbolism which together characterised the figure of Carabosse in the original 1890 production.

The Sleeping Beauty occupies an unparalleled position within British Ballet history. As the signature work of the national company, the Royal Ballet, it secured the status of that company at home and abroad. Charged with awakening the Royal Opera House from its wartime slumber as a Mecca dance hall and marking the return of Covent Garden to its pre-war status as the country's premiere lyric theatre, the Sadler's Wells Ballet's celebrated 1946 production of *The Sleeping Beauty* served as alpha emblem of Britain's post-war cultural revival. With the tour of the 1946 production to America in 1949, and the sensation surrounding the opening of *The Sleeping Beauty* at New York's old Metropolitan Opera House in particular, the international reputation of the Sadler's Wells Ballet was secured. And, buoyed up by this success, on its triumphant return to its new Covent Garden home, the company rapidly went about cementing its position as a keystone of the British cultural establishment. In the words of American dance critic Arlene Croce, *The Sleeping Beauty* was 'the ballet in which Margot Fonteyn reached international stardom, pulling the company up after her. Fonteyn was *Beauty*. *Beauty* was the Royal.'[1] It is not hard to see how, within this context, the identities of the company and Fonteyn were easily collapsed into that of Aurora and how, in turn, *The Sleeping Beauty's* identity as a ballet rapidly became synonymous with the role of Aurora even if, as Croce again reminds us, 'musically and dramatically, the ballet is a duel between the Lilac Fairy and Carabosse.'[2]

The role of Carabosse, one of these twin poles around which *The Sleeping Beauty* revolves, was created in the original 1890 production by Enrico Cecchetti, and numbers among his most famous mime roles. The discussion of the role presented here, extracted from a fuller research and publication project,[3] offers, first, a new reading and interpretation of

1 Arlene Croce, After Images, London: A & C Black, 1978, p. 371

2 Croce, p. 372

3 This paper forms the natural corollary to research I have presented elsewhere investigating the historiographical turn through which I propose The Sleeping Beauty mediated and articulated its highly specific vision of French Early Modern history for a late nineteenth-century Russian audience. I am very grateful to Lynn Garafola for responding, as chair, to the presentation of

the iconography, or symbolism, of Carabosse in the original production, in order to argue that the figure of Carabosse, and consequently the part played in the creation of the ballet by Cecchetti, constitute central and strategic aspects of *The Sleeping Beauty*, ones that have been highly overlooked in the literature on the ballet. One index of the importance which Cecchetti himself attached to the role of Carabosse was his decision to mark, in 1922, the fiftieth anniversary of his earliest performances in major roles by recreating the role of Carabosse in a single performance of *The Sleeping Princess*, the Ballets Russes' version of *The Sleeping Beauty* which Diaghilev's company mounted in London in the winter of 1921-22. Drawing on contemporary accounts, this article will end by suggesting that the handling of Carabosse's iconography in the 1921 *Sleeping Princess* worked in significant ways to extend the pivotal status which, I propose, is already invested in the role by the creators of the original 1890 production.

But first some history: the status of The Sleeping Beauty as a history ballet

Despite the richly textured vision of early modern France and of the court of Louis XIV in particular which, as will be shown, *The Sleeping Beauty* mobilizes for its audience, this aspect of the ballet has not been an area of major focus in recent literature on the ballet. Important recent scholarly discussions include Sally Banes's highly suggestive reading of female agency in the ballet. While Banes recognises in *The Sleeping Beauty* the expression of 'deeply conservative' or 'reactionary' royalist politics', her primary interest lies not in recuperating the ballet's complete ideological imagination and the full historical vision which it furnishes, but in reclaiming its important critique of marriage and in identifying in the role of Aurora especially the embodiment of female agency.[4]

For American dance historian and Russian scholar Tim Scholl, any possibility that *The Sleeping Beauty* amounted to a grandiloquent paean to its Romanov tsarist patrons cast in the image of French Valois and Bourbon kings is closed off. Writing in 1994, Tim Scholl agrees that the ballet's 'allusions to the court of Louis XIV…amount to much more than decorative stylistic features to Versailles or gratuitous visual splendour' but reads these primarily as markers that signpost 'classical dance's roots' rather than history per se. [5] Although Scholl concedes as 'defensible' those interpretations that see the ballet as having been planned consciously planned by 'Vsevolozhsky (with Petipa)…as an elaborate tribute to the tsar and his family', Scholl maintains that ultimately, 'the ballet's libretto suggests otherwise.'[6] This, he says, 'clearly celebrates court life', but 'the court in question

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this research at Re-thinking Practice and Theory, conference of the Society for Dance History Scholars/Congress on Research in Dance, Centre National de la Danse, Paris, June 2007 and to the Humanities Research Centre of the Australian National University for providing two further opportunities to present this research in seminar format (July and August 2007). For an abridged digest of the present paper see Hammond, 'Cecchetti, Carabosse, and Beauty', Dancing Times, May 2007, 32-35, which triggered a corroborative letter from Arlene Croce in support of the line of interpretation I present here, published in Dancing Times, July 2007.

4 Sally Banes, Dancing Women: Female Bodies on Stage, London and New York: Routledge, 1998, 42.

5 Tim Scholl, From Petipa to Balanchine: Classical Revival and the Modernization of Ballet, London: Routledge, 1994, 29

6 Scholl (1994), 36

is hardly a model for emulation'.[7] Instead for Scholl, *The Sleeping Beauty* is essentially a rich essay in *dance* history and any broader interpretation of the ballet's presentation of history as 'a tribute to enlightened despotism' (namely that pursued by its tsarist patrons) is treated by him with skepticism.[8] By alerting the Kirov Ballet to the existence of the Stepanov notation of the Imperial Russian *Sleeping Beauty* housed in the Nikolai Sergeyev papers at the Harvard Theatre Collection, Scholl went on to play a seminal role as enabling catalyst in the Kirov Ballet's 1999 *Sleeping Beauty*, a monumental recension production of the original 1890 Maryinsky Imperial Russian Ballet staging. Scholl subsequently charted the complex history of the ballet's reception in a monographical study of *The Sleeping Beauty*.[9]

In this most recent discussion, Scholl consolidates his earlier position as far as reading any broader significance into the ballet's elaborate staging of court society is concerned. Any 'political role the ballet allegedly played' is explicitly discounted on the grounds that *Sleeping Beauty's* potential to generate entente cordiale between Russia and France, given its French court setting, would have fallen on deaf ears in view of the diplomatic attrition between the two countries in 1888, as the ballet was being conceived.[10] For Scholl, the way in which, by the time of the ballet's first performances, Franco-Russian diplomatic relations were about to improve diplomatically, was merely a fortunate coincidence. Instead Scholl chooses to understand the ballet's status predominantly in terms of its heavily Wagner-inspired staging of fairytale fable as universal myth. Consequently Scholl's reading has tended to downplay a possible alternative reading of *Sleeping Beauty*, as a sophisticated and extremely articulate representation of history. It is with the reclamation of this alternative reading that my research is most concerned. Through tracking how the figure of Carabosse is mapped across *The Sleeping Beauty's* design and choreographic texts, I argue that the role amounts to a densely textured and highly nuanced representation of history, one that has radical implications for the ballet's handling of, and engagement with, history as a whole.

In view of his involvement with the 1999 Kirov staging especially, Scholl clearly writes on *The Sleeping Beauty* from a privileged position, to which his inclusion of an 'insider' account of that staging in his monograph especially testifies. Indeed certain aspects of the analysis I present – in the section which immediately follows, for instance - are enabled by the monograph, and in particular by the cache of reviews of the 1890 *Sleeping Beauty* which it makes available in English translations. However, for this writer at least, the same Kirov recension of the 1890 original *Sleeping Beauty* seems to contradict Scholl as far as one fundamental aspect of the ballet is concerned. The image of *Sleeping Beauty* that emerges from the 1999 reconstruction is not of a ballet resistant to any significant, rigorous and thoroughgoing engagement with historical subject matter but of a work especially preoccupied by, and invested in, the representation of the monarchy of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France, a representation within which the role of Carabosse plays a pivotal part.

7 Scholl (1994), 36

8 Scholl (1994), 36

9 Tim Scholl, 'Sleeping Beauty': A Legend in Progress, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004, reviewed by the present writer in Dancing Times, December 2005, 55.

10 See Scholl (2004), especially 31-34.

Retrospective by design: The representation of history in the original 1890 Sleeping Beauty

Having devoted over half of his review of the original 1890 *Sleeping Beauty* to a consideration of the production's visual elements, as opposed to its music or choreography, Dmitry D. Korovyakov justified this concentration on design to his readers by pointing out how 'as you can see, in speaking about the new ballet, one must speak first and foremost about its staging, which, in fact, occupies a predominant place'.[11] Korovyakov was clearly espousing a view shared by many of his fellow St. Petersburg critics. Having closely echoed Korovyakov's description of 'silk, velvet, plush, gold and silver embroideries, wonderful brocades, fur, feathers and flowers, armor and metallic adornments'[12] in his own account of the ballet, another St Petersburg critic ultimately found these materials 'even too luxurious perhaps…they seem heavy for ballet'. A third writer suggested the production be renamed "'*Sleeping Beauty or the Triumph of the Art of Sewing*'", and a fourth termed the ballet 'a museum of props and nothing more!".[13] As Tim Scholl has made clear, comments such as these, in their acknowledgment of the centrality of design within the production, are representative of contemporary critical responses to the ballet as a whole. To quote Scholl, 'the visual components of the ballet received as much attention in the press as its music',[14] even if for most critics the new centrality ceded to design was viewed with anxiety, as chief culprit in the creation of a ballet in which 'dance now existed solely for the costumes'.[15]

In his review Korovyakov proceeded to identify Matvei Shishkov's design for one of the backdrops for Act Three as a "completely accurate" depiction of the esplanade of Versailles. Significantly, for Korovyakov, it is the ballet's design elements which unambiguously locate the final act's wedding festivities in the pleasure gardens of Louis XIV's palace at Versailles. And having already commented in his review on how 'the hunt scene of Desiré (Act II) takes us right to the golden age of Louis XIV', Korvyakov conflated 'the ballet's King Florestan XIV with Louis XIV', referring 'to the ballet character alternately as "The Sun King" and "King Louis"'.[16] As Scholl points out 'only Korovyakov, of *Beauty's* first critics, attempts to explain the aims of the ballet's visual designers: how the costumes and sets reflect the passage of time and how the decors and stage machinery are used to produce the ballet's transformation scenes.'.[17] One critic, then, was willing to ascribe special agency to the ballet's design elements as potent bearers of historical meaning and allusion.

It is within the context of the special significance which Korovyakov ceded to design, as a key factor that enabled the representation of - and engagement with - history to emerge as special features of the original 1890 production of *The Sleeping Beauty*, that I wish to introduce discussion of Carabosse's costume. This discussion is made possible by the Kirov Ballet's 1999 production of *The Sleeping Beauty*, mounted as an elaborate and highly

11 Scholl (2004), 28
12 Scholl (2004), 13
13 Scholl (2004), 21
14 Scholl (2004), 13
15 Scholl (2004), 22
16 Scholl (1994), 28
17 Scholl (2004), 13

detailed recension of the original 1890 production. Costumes and sets for the 1999 production were painstakingly reconstructed from surviving designs and photographs from the 1890 production. For the present writer, one of the most arresting aspects of the 1999 recension *Sleeping Beauty*, when the Kirov first brought the production to London, in the summer of 2000,[18] was the ballet's representation of Carabosse, and the ways in which her costume and iconography unambiguously characterize Carabosse in terms that conjure up the image of Catherine de' Medici (1519-1589), the Italian-born wife, and subsequently dowager queen, of Henry II of Valois (1519-1559), Renaissance king of France.

Carabosse as Catherine de' Medici and the politics of historical representation in The Sleeping Beauty

When the rendering of Carabosse in the ballet is compared with portrait images of the French Italian-born queen, striking similarities rapidly become apparent. Both figures are clad in full-length black gowns of very similar design and proportion, and the highly distinctive black hood-like headdress which Catherine de' Medici is consistently shown wearing in portraits, as an additional marker of her widowed status as dowager queen, is adopted by Carabosse also. The sombre tone of Carabosse's costume is relieved by a yellow 'apron' onto which the silhouettes of two black cats are dramatically appliquéd. As well as fastening notions of malevolent female sorcery to Carabosse's costume, the colour and symbolism of the cats also conjure up the night, and are therefore redolent of associations of advanced age and widowhood which again work to tie Carabosse to Catherine de' Medici. At first glance, this identification of Carabosse with Catherine de' Medici would seem to work very neatly to endorse Tim Scholl's observation, namely that The Sleeping Beauty's interest in, and engagement with history, lie principally with the representation of dance history - with the revisiting of what Scholl, as quoted above, terms 'classical dance's roots' - so that the ballet amounts to a kind of danced dance history, albeit a highly elaborate one. 'In choosing the Louis XIV style for [Act Three of the] Sleeping Beauty,' Scholl writes, 'Vsevolozhsky referred not only to the zenith of the court ballet tradition, but also to ballet's traceable origins.'[19]

As Mark Franko has observed in Dance as Text: Ideologies of the Baroque Body (Cambridge University Press, 1993), ballet's roots lie in the court entertainments of the French kings, where, it 'was initially conceived of as a composite entity that included the other major art forms and was intended to illustrate the political unity of the late Valois dynasty.'[20] Franko has expressly in mind precisely those court ballets mounted by Catherine de'Medici as an integral component of the Fontainebleau-based Valois court festivities which surround her in the famous Valois tapestries of the 1570s. At one level then, Carabosse's costume, by conjuring so vividly the iconography of the French queen, operates in precisely the terms suggested by Scholl, as part of the primer in dance history which The Sleeping Beauty offers to its audience. Transported to the royal court at Fontainebleau at the ballet's start, we are returned also to a key chapter in ballet's history,

18 The 1999 recension production was also staged as part of the Kirov's London summer season in 2001.

19 Scholl (1994), 27.

20 Franko, 8.

namely its founding moment as a key token of the cultural economy of Renaissance court society.

If the distillation of this historical moment about Carabosse's costume and the Prologue setting is probed more fully however, it soon becomes clear that through the figure of Carabosse, The Sleeping Beauty mobilises a much fuller historical vision. As Franko reminds us, Valois court ballets constituted a grandiose but ultimately abortive attempt to 'equilibriate a precarious political and religious conflict of enormous European consequence. The evangelical movement of the early sixteenth-century survived in the later efforts of the politiques, Catherine de' Medici chief among them, to reconcile the extreme Catholic and Protestant factions' which threatened and eventually succeeded in plunging France into the Wars of Religion and the century of Civil War and seditious misrule which followed in their wake.[21] As Franko succinctly puts it then, in this context 'the leap from the dancing body to the body politic is also something more than a cliché.'.[22] In other words, as far as Catherine de'Medici and the birth of ballet are concerned, it is impossible to speak of dance history without at the same time talking of the fraught French historical moment with which the queen and her court were inextricably linked. With the unexpected death of her husband, Henri II, in 1559, as the result of an injury sustained in a jousting accident, the widowed Catherine suddenly assumed the role of Dowager Queen. In this role and as Queen Mother throughout the reigns of her three sons, she repeatedly and unsuccessfully attempted to intervene and prevent the ensuing French Wars of Religion (1562-1598), and the French Civil Wars which followed.

The Massacre of St Bartholomew's Day on August 18, 1572, when the 'Paris mob ran amok, killing three or four thousand Protestants over the next two days. [And] Lesser massacres occurred in about a dozen other towns as the news spread, despite royal attempts to prevent this', marked a new watershed in terms of the brutality unleashed by the wars.[23] Even if Catherine de' Medici was, in reality, much more conciliatory in her policy of mediating between Catholic and Protestant factions than popular legend allows - as evidenced by the Massacre itself, made possible by the large numbers of Protestant nobles drawn to 'Catholic' Paris for the 'marriage of reconciliation between [Catherine's daughter] Margaret and [the Protestant] Henri of Navarre' - her reputation was forever tainted by the events of August 18, and by royal responses to them.[24] Implicated - even if erroneously, as modern historians have sought to demonstrate - in the slaughter and carnage, Catherine was rapidly demonized in the historical imagination as the figure responsible for France's subsequent descent into a century of social strife, regicide and rebellion, one that culminated in the Fronde, the mid-seventeenth-century revolt of the corporations of royal officers which together constituted the French civil service.

The identification of Carabosse with Catherine de' Medici and, by association, with the century of misrule which plunged France into darkness, works in highly appropriate ways

21 Franko, 33-34
22 Franko 33
23 Robin Briggs, Early Modern France 1560-1715, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, 22.
24 Briggs, 22.

within the libretto for The Sleeping Beauty which was devised, like all the costume designs for the ballet, by Ivan Vsevolozhsky, Director of the Imperial Russian Theatres. Making him an especially likely conduit for this fusion of Carabosse's identity with that of the French queen, Vsevolozhsky's previous diplomatic posting in Paris (1876-1881) and status as a Francophile, steeped in French history, art and culture, are both worth mentioning here. The malevolent death spell which Carabosse brings as her gift to the ballet's opening Christening, commuted by the benevolent, ameliorating powers of the Lilac Fairy to a sentence of sleep from which the court will emerge once a hundred years have passed, can be read as a reworking in theatrical terms of the same century of sedition and revolt for which Catherine de' Medici is conventionally held responsible.

And this conflation is borne out by the arresting parallels that exist between the iconography with which the Italian queen was rapidly identified in standard accounts of French Renaissance history and that attached to Carabosse in the ballet. The same bellicose associations of war, massacre and bloodshed fastened to the Catholic, foreign dowager queen by her French contemporaries – and by the Protestant factions within their midst especially – resonate very clearly in the havoc which Carabosse wreaks in the ballet as her actions similarly commit the apparently lifeless bodies of the courtiers, like all the other subjects in the kingdom, to a century of slumber. (And in this context it is worth remembering that if Sleeping Beauty's focus is on court society, this is not at the exclusion of the other estates which together constitute the kingdom, as evidenced in the Act I peasant waltz and in the Act II peasant farandole.) Striking iconographic parallels exist, for example, between an image of the Massacre of Saint Bartholomew's Day probably created by a Protestant artist, which represents Catherine de' Medici presiding over the gruesome littering of corpses in the courtyard-setting of a castle (this image is reproduced in Leonie Frieda, Catherine de Medici, London: Phoenix 2003, between pages 373-374) and the palace garden-setting at the end of The Sleeping Beauty's first act when the court is put to sleep for one hundred years.

Within this context, Carabosse's scuttling, squabbling retinue of pages, acknowledged by writers on the ballet as her court, constitutes another mark of Carabosse's royal status. It is also possible to argue that the pages function as a theatricalisation of the maladministration of the Fronde that succeeded the Wars of Religion as competing elites sought to assert their authority in the power vacuum left by the Wars and for which Catherine has therefore also conventionally been held responsible. As costumed in the 1999 recension, the courtier-pages' dress recall as much the robes of the seditious frondeurs, the mid-seventeenth-century warring factions of civil servants, as they do the court garb worn by Catherine's exact contemporaries. The grotesquerie embodied in the movement quality of Carabosse's courtiers offers a parody of court etiquette which conjures up a court society out of control and plunged into the chaos of civil war. The contorted bodies of the pages, like the casting of Carabosse as a role en travesti, can be read - according to those no longer palatable conventions of nineteenth-century theatre which saw no moral obstacle in characterizing malevolence in terms of bodily and age difference - as further symbols of a royal authority that has become grotesquely distorted and subverted; as in some significant way transgressive. This distortion is inscribed also in Carabosse's very name, which means hump, and in her bent-double figure which requires the aid of a similarly gnarled stick for support. Grotesquerie registers as well in the denial to Carabosse of classical dance as an expressive vehicle and the consequent

establishment of her character exclusively through mime. Carabosse's withered age and sombre dress also work to recall Catherine's widowhood. These parallels between malevolent fairy and Renaissance queen appear yet more finely drawn when they are considered in relation to the settings against which Carabosse wreaks her havoc in the Prologue and Act I of the ballet. These evoke the interior and exterior settings of Fontainebleau, the most celebrated of the Renaissance château-palaces created by the Valois kings, and consequently Catherine de' Medici's natural orbit of authority, every bit as fully as the designs for Act III reproduce exactly the pleasure gardens at Versailles. And chronologically, of course, the century of misrule which Catherine de' Medici is 'credited' with having triggered is an exact fit for the ballet's jump - bridged by the intervening century of slumber - from her Renaissance, sixteenth-century era to the seventeenth-century court of Louis XIV, with which The Sleeping Beauty ends.

The Sleeping Princess, Diaghilev's abortive staging of The Sleeping Beauty, and only the second staging in the west after 1890, was mounted in London at the Alhambra Theatre in 1921. Opulent sets and costumes were as much a feature of this production as they had been of the 1890 original. The Sleeping Beauty had 'reputedly exhausted' one quarter of Imperial Russian Theatre's annual budget,[25] much of it taken up with outfitting the production, and Diaghilev's determination to match the splendour of the Imperial original ended in financial disaster. In the words of Cyril Beaumont, 'The Sleeping Princess was Diaghilev's Moscow'.[26] The presence of the royal family at a performance was not enough to resuscitate a production conceived to run for six months in order to recoup its costs but which badly misjudged a British audience grown used to Diaghilev's avant-gardist one-act offerings and not yet ready to stomach evening length ballet on an Imperial Russian scale. Despite its failure and the huge financial loss incurred, as Lynn Garafola has pointed out, The Sleeping Princess, performed 105 times in the winter of 1921-22, still probably constitutes the longest run of consecutive performances of The Sleeping Beauty.[27] Carlotta Brianza, cast as Aurora in the original 1890 St. Petersburg production, performed the role of Carabosse at all but one performance but the presence of Cecchetti in London, where he still intermittently taught class for the Ballets Russes during the company's London seasons, makes almost certain his input into Brianza's recreation of the role, as Ursula Moreton's recollections imply. The one remaining performance of the role, on January 5, 1922, was reserved for Cecchetti himself to celebrate the jubilee of his debut in main roles and culminated in the dancers' presentation to him of gifts and of a scroll commissioned by Beaumont, who movingly describes the whole ceremony in Bookseller at the Ballet. Having championed The Sleeping Princess in previous issues, Philip Richardson, calculating that Cecchetti had performed in The Sleeping Beauty 165 times, announced the jubilee performance in January's Dancing Times. To commemorate the event, a portrait photograph of Cecchetti featured as the February issue's front cover.

25 Scholl (2004), 55, and also 12.

26 Cyril Beaumont, Bookseller at the Ballet, Memoirs 1891-1929, London: C.W. Beaumont, 1975, p. 286.

27 Lynn Garafola, Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 222.

Leon Bakst was the production's designer. The extreme lavishness of the sets and costumes and their use of the finest materials - Cyril Beaumont remembered some costumes costing forty to fifty pounds apiece, a large sum at this period'[28] - probably contributed to the production's financial disaster. In the programme notes for The Sleeping Princess Bakst claimed to have seen the original 1890 Sleeping Beauty, even crediting his vocation as a designer to a meeting with Tchaikovsky which, he maintains, occurred at that performance. Despite the dubiousness of this claim, it does point to the huge impact the 1890 production clearly had on Bakst, an impact that emerges nowhere more clearly than in his 1921 costume for Carabosse. In mapping multiple moons on to the dark robe, the design fuses the same associations of night, darkness and widowhood as the 1890 costume. And Bakst even worked to extend the iconography of majesty which, I have tried to suggest, was a vital element in the 1890 characterisation of Carabosse. Original 1921 production photographs show Carabosse wearing a crown and that each rat attendant in Carabosse's personal mini-court was equipped with one as well. The specificity of the crown makes explicit Carabosse's royal identity in Diaghilev's realization of the ballet. Cyril Beaumont seems to have had precisely this aspect in mind when, recalling 'that magnificent first scene of the Christening', he remembers how 'life moved at a stately pace until suddenly interrupted by the appearance of the Wicked Fairy, who arrived in her coach drawn by rats. But she, too, had dignity, she was majestic even in her wrath' (italics are the present writer's).[29]

And Carabosse's queenly Medici associations were to endure. For Ninette de Valois, The Sleeping Princess was a crucial yardstick by which to measure her own company's productions of the ballet. Ursula Moreton, who danced in the 1921 production and went on to teach for de Valois for many years, must have been especially instrumental in transmitting a vision of Carabosse that was true to Cecchetti's original conception of the role, one that Arlene Croce was possibly unwittingly responding to when lamenting the loss, from subsequent Royal Ballet stagings, of the 1946 production's 'idea of Carabosse as a heavily aged, insulted old queen.'[30] In the case of Russia, meanwhile, one only has to look back - with fresh eyes newly attuned by the Kirov's 1999 recension Sleeping Beauty - to S.B. Virsaladze's designs for Soviet-era Kirov and Bolshoi productions of The Sleeping Beauty, to recognise there too, very palpably, in the costume design for Carabosse, the same endurance of Catherine de' Medici's highly distinct dress and iconography.

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28 Garafola, p. 222.

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Working with the Cecchetti Method: Technique and style in contemporary ballet training

Toby Bennett

This paper investigates some of the principles underlying the Cecchetti Method and questions how they might be relevant today. Cecchetti's particular use of the torso and the arms, as well as his approach to gravity, are examined and posited as areas which are relevant to contemporary training and which can be used to promote a physical understanding of movement through principles of total body integration akin to those described by Irmgard Bartenieff. Many aspects of Cecchetti's technique are intimately associated with its style which is rooted in romantic ballet, however, far from being a barrier to the acceptance of Cecchetti's work to contemporary training, the stylistic connections can be seen as a valuable part of a diverse training where students are explicitly made aware of stylistic choices available in ballet.

Introduction

The Cecchetti Method is a fascinating relic of earlier dance practice derived from the teaching of Enrico Cecchetti (1850-1928) who, towards the end of a long and illustrious career, settled to live and teach in London (1918-1923). It was during this time that the dance writer and publisher Cyril Beaumont (1891-1976) instigated a project to record his teaching and was instrumental in setting up the Cecchetti Society (1922). Without Beaumont, Cecchetti would no doubt still be known to ballet historians as an important dancer, mime and pedagogue, but he would probably be a minor figure and little would be known about how and what he actually taught. As a result of Beaumont's efforts, assisted by many of Cecchetti's own pupils and successive generations of teachers, Cecchetti's teaching has survived and continues to form the basis for the syllabi of various teaching organisations which still employ some of the very enchaînements that Cecchetti taught. But ballet has changed remarkably since the 1920's, and Cecchetti's teaching was likely to have been rooted in an even earlier romantic style from his native Italy. In addition, surely we have been able to develop more effective teaching practices than Cecchetti's over the intervening years! In the light of these concerns, of what relevance can the Cecchetti Method be today, other than to inform scholars about earlier styles of dancing?

The fact that the Method continues to be taught indicates that some people do still consider it relevant, and the well known Cecchetti teacher and dance writer Richard Glasstone argues a case for this in an article entitled 'Into the Future with Cecchetti'(1990, 695). Glasstone and other Cecchetti teachers believe that what they call Cecchetti's 'principles' offer something special to today's dancers, but what are those principles and exactly how are they relevant today? Unfortunately, there is little literature which characterises the Method in anything but very general terms, and the exact nature of the principles of the Cecchetti Method remains somewhat vague. For Glasstone they are 'rooted in the human potential for harmonious, balanced, flowing, rhythmic movement'

(ibid.), and for Raymond Lukens (another well-known Cecchetti teacher) they 'give the dancer purity of line, coordination, speed, stability, breadth, flow and harmony of movement' (1995). But surely we could say this about all classical ballet. Can we point to facets of Cecchetti's work which are particular to the Cecchetti Method apart from the fact that they are stylistically of an earlier period?

The issue of style is important. Geraldine Morris argues that 'all training systems produce dancers with a particular way of articulating ballet's codified movements' (2003, 18) and that 'the presence of style in all training systems affects the dancers' bodies in a variety of different ways' (p. 17). The question, therefore, arises whether the Cecchetti Method is becoming increasingly irrelevant as a result of changing taste, contemporary practice moving ever further away from Cecchetti's aesthetic. In other words: is Cecchetti's work appearing more and more 'old-fashioned'? Glasstone counters this argument saying that 'There is, of course a sense in which [Cecchetti's enchaînements] are locked into the style and taste of an historical period; but the exciting thing about so much of Cecchetti's work is the way it can and does transcend its time and its stylistic boundaries' (1990, 695). Lukens goes even further suggesting that 'the method is based on universal principles that transcend the specific stylistic boundaries of romantic, classical, neoclassical and even contemporary ballet' (1995). Both Glasstone and Lukens seem to be acknowledging that there is a style problem but that the underlying principles of Cecchetti's work can somehow be distinguished from the style. But in what ways are style and technique distinguishable and what does this mean for the practical application of Cecchetti's work today?

The relationship between style and technique is a complex area which I do not intend to investigate in detail, however, for the purpose of this paper I will follow Morris' lead and consider them to be two inseparable facets of the same thing; in other words it is impossible to have one without the other, and each is fundamentally dependent on the other. I suggest that this indivisibility of style and technique even extends to factors that one might consider to be purely in the realms of stylistic adornment rather than technique, such as the mime-related ports de bras frequently seen in Cecchetti's enchaînements. Rather than being superficial elements which can be removed at will, these elaborate ports de bras appear to be important initiating and coordinating factors in the dynamic and spatial characteristics of the movement (Bennett and Poesio, 2000). An example is the 'blowing a kiss gesture' where the arm uncurls forwards taking the hand from the lips out to the edge of the dancer's kinesphere. In so doing the arm movement projects energy into space as the kiss flies to its target. The degree of spatial intent which results from this movement is not possible with a more academic port de bras where the arm circles around the body at the periphery of the kinesphere. To replace a kiss gesture with an academic port de bras is to fundamentally change the movement, especially where it accompanies a transfer of weight.

This paper is stimulated by my own experience of the Cecchetti work. I was trained initially in the Cecchetti Method and later in largely RAD (Royal Academy of Dance) based training at the Ballet Rambert School. Later still, I was taught by various teachers in both French and Russian styles. This background has left me with a deep respect, indeed love, for Cecchetti's work, but also a realisation that aspects of it differ greatly in many respects from what/how I was taught by non-Cecchetti teachers; I will try to articulate

some of these differences here. In addition, over the last ten years I have taught ballet technique in the UK university sector (mainly at Roehampton University) and this teaching has allowed me to explore the work in greater depth to search for ways in which aspects of Cecchetti's work can be applied in contemporary pedagogy. The practical basis of this research is important: it is grounded in doing, teaching and watching rather than a purely theoretical analysis; getting to grips with the movement and exploring what it looks and feels like is at the core of my understanding.

The aim of this paper, therefore, is to present an analysis of certain features of the Cecchetti Method and consider their relevance to contemporary training in the light of their stylistic consequences.

Cecchetti Principles

To attempt to make a comprehensive study of Cecchetti's principles of movement is far beyond the scope of this article; therefore, I have selected three areas for study: the torso, the arms and gravity – interestingly they turn out to be interrelated.[1]

The Torso

One thing which is immediately surprising, when looking at Cecchetti's work from the perspective of contemporary ballet training, is the frequent occurrence of movements involving large displacements of the whole torso. Examples of these include 'crescent bends' or attitudes penchées (the torso is displaced forwards and sidewards with a strong backward arch), à la seconde lines with the torso tilted away from the leg in second, and arabesque allongée lines. In all of these the torso is held more or less parallel to the ground and there is little sense of 'keeping the back up' (in the sense of attempting to maintain verticality). Further examples are more dynamic, and include renversé turns (the torso bends side-back-side in a sweeping, circling movement as part of a turn), and movements where the torso swoops quickly down towards the ground and back up again. In an extreme example of the 'swooping torso' the dancer lands in first arabesque from a jump, swoops down quickly 'as if to pick something up from the floor'[2] and uses the impetus from this movement to recover and make a three-quarter turn ending on relevé in croisé devant. [3]

The renversé en dedans is probably the most extreme of Cecchetti's torso movements and one which, like many others, is almost entirely lost from contemporary practice other than in the Cecchetti syllabi; here a complex movement of the torso is the principal initiator of a turn. The movement is difficult to analyse and teachers seem to explain it in different ways, but in essence the dancer starts in arabesque and brings the arabesque leg into retiré at the same time tilting over to the side of this leg and bringing the arms in; the torso and leg movements together initiate a full turn with the torso continuing by arching

1 In a previous article I have also considered some aspects of Cecchetti's technique in the use of the leg, including the bent-legged jumping technique (Bennett, 2003b)

2 This an image employed by many Cecchetti teachers.

3 Glissade derrière, jeté to arabesque croisé, dégagé en tournant, entrechat six (Craske and de Moroda, 1979, 42-43)

backwards and tilting to the other side to maintain the momentum (the supporting leg does not bend at any time). The movement ends with a sudden opening of the arms and the leg to the side with the final torso tilt (away from the aerial leg) maintained. For the dancer this is an extremely difficult movement where equilibrium is challenged in a way that can take some time to perfect – I have heard it described as feeling as if you are turning yourself inside out! Once mastered, however, the renversé en dedans gives you a wonderful sense of the core of your body powering the movement as the body gathers in and turns about itself, followed by the energy radiating from the centre as the body and limbs open out suddenly to halt the movement suspended at a precarious angle on relevé.

All these movements are notable for their large and deliberate displacements of the torso from the vertical. They are also unfamiliar to most contemporary dancers who can find them very disconcerting as they challenge both their conception of the invariable uprightness of ballet, and their physical sense of equilibrium and safety in ballet technique. But not all non-vertical uses of the torso in the Cecchetti Method are so large; others are more subtle and pervade the work. In particular, the use of the inclined head technique is frequent; again, those not trained in the Method find this movement alien.

The inclined head technique is used in many contexts where other methods might use épaulement, for example: jetés from one leg to the other. Although épaulement is used in Cecchetti's work (and is often considered to be a characteristic feature) a survey of the recorded enchaînements suggests that the inclined head technique may be more characteristic. (This may be an area where practice in the oral tradition may have changed with épaulement sometimes replacing the use of the inclined head in contemporary teaching[4].)

The inclined head movement can be seen as a mechanical aid to jumping as the head is lifted to vertical (to aid propulsion into the air) before inclining to the other side on landing to absorb some of the landing energy and prepare for the next jump; Cecchetti teachers often use the imagery of throwing a ball up into the air and catching it on the other side, the ball representing the head. Particularly in larger jumps, the head inclination appears also to include a degree of torso movement and the throwing of the head and upper torso upwards and from side to side represents a significant engagement of the upper body weight in order to coordinate and give power to jumps. This is entirely different from épaulement which involves a rotation of the shoulder region and counter-rotation of the head with no vertical, lifting component to the movement at all.[5] In épaulement, although the torso may be important in coordinating turning movements as one side moves forwards in relation to the other, the lack of any vertical component to the movement means that it has little value in engaging the body in elevation.

The inclined head (often including some torso component) is also used in Cecchetti's work to lead the weight of the body in travelling as it inclines in the required direction.

4 For example, some teachers now appear to teach épaulement for assemblés dessus whereas Craske & Beaumont (1946, 15-16) only make mention of the inclined head.

5 Actually épaulement does sometimes include a slight inclination of the head (and often does in the Cecchetti Method) but the inclination component is small and appears to be reduced or absent in much contemporary training.

Again, épaulement cannot do this in the same way since there is no directional displacement of the whole torso from the vertical.[6] Such a use of the head/torso can be seen in Cecchetti's temps levé, chassé to second, where the head leads the travelling motion to the side, and in his brisés dessus, where the torso inclines to the diagonal in the direction of travel.

Although not ostensibly to do with the use of the torso, an aspect of Cecchetti's use of the arms also has important implications for the torso's use – ironically this is the frequent minimal use or absence of arm movements. In ordinary pirouettes the Cecchetti teaching tradition holds that the leading arm should not initiate the turn by opening with the second arm chasing in to meet it; rather the 'leading arm' should not be used at all and the second arm should merely close in front. In some diagonal turns, such as posé turns, the arms merely move from demi-seconde position to a very low fifth en avant, [7] and in some pas de bourrées en tournant the arms are not used at all. In many jumps there is either no arm movement (they are just held in fifth en bas) or simply a slight opening of the arms to demi-seconde closing again in fifth en bas upon landing.

This absence of arm movements might appear somewhat stark to today's eyes, but it does open the way for the torso to become both a potent source of movement initiation and a powerful site for expression: In turns, the arms are not used to gather energy, rather the torso is strongly engaged in order to initiate the movement; and in some jumps the use of the head and torso to coordinate movement (both through the inclined head and épaulement) is emphasised by the absence of more peripheral arm movements. The effect is that neither the eyes of the observer nor the intent and sensation of the dancer are distracted from the torso by extraneous arm movements – the focus is on the torso as an organising factor and an expressive element. The Tuesday enchaînement *Relevé, petits battements, posé, petits battements, pas de bourrée to fourth position, pas de bourrée with allongé* (Craske and de Moroda, 1979, 20-21) provides a perfect example of this in Cecchetti's work: the arms are held low throughout (in fifth en bas) but the body turns repeatedly from corner to corner with an upper torso initiated épaulement. The delicate repeating pointe work sequence continues below, but the eye is drawn to the play of the shoulders as they turn 'with a swinging movement' (p. 21) from one éffacé line to the other.

In summary, the use of the torso in Cecchetti's work represents, at one level, a different approach to line rooted in the aesthetic of an earlier age where the importance of verticality in the body alignment appears less than in contemporary practice: lines such as the arabesque allongée and the attitude penchée are stylistically valued and are quite different from the more upright lines of the torso seen in much contemporary practice. On another level this is not just an aesthetic change: many of these torso displacements

6 Epaulement can of course give some directional impetus for travelling but only in combination with a turning movement where one side is stabilised in space and the other moves forward in relation to it. The effect is likely to be quite different and the travelling component much reduced in comparison to the torso displacement under discussion.

7 See *Series of tours en diagonale* (Craske & Beaumont, 1946, 94). This may be a problem with the written description and a low third position (one arm so the side in demi-seconde the other in a low position in front) may be what was performed before opening the front arm to demi-seconde, nevertheless this remains a very low position with the use of the arms much reduced in comparison to contemporary practice.

are functional and lie at the root of Cecchetti's coordinated movement, and these movements may represent fundamentally different ways of using the body from those promoted in contemporary teaching.

The Arms

When looking at the use of the arms in Cecchetti's work there appears to be a contradiction. De Valois, who studied with Cecchetti for several years, considers that in the Italian School 'the 'curve' of the limbs (ending in a marked roundness in the general line and execution of the dancer) is accentuated[8]' (de Valois, 1937, 239), but other evidence suggests much longer arm lines. *The Manual* seems to be ambiguous on this matter: some of the line drawings[9] seem to show some distinctly curved lines, however, it also states that 'Whenever an arm is rounded in front of the body, as in first fourth or fifth positions, it should be extended as much as possible (always preserving a rounded appearance)' (Beaumont & Idzikowski, 1932, 25). Some of the 1925 photographs of Margaret Craske (Richardson, 1925) also appear to support much longer arm lines[10] as, perhaps, does Glasstone when he states that Cecchetti's 'famous ports de bras develop enormous breadth of movement' (Glasstone, 1990, 695). What is going on? Is de Valois wrong? Are Craske's long arms her personal style rather than Cecchetti's? Are the line drawings wrong? Perhaps the long lines are a result of later 'contamination' of the Cecchetti Method from the Russian School in which, according to de Valois (1937, 240) 'a considerably extended line is noticed and a complete denial of Italian "roundness"'. It is also possible that by this stage of his life, Cecchetti himself had started to adapt his own teaching in the light of changing tastes. It may be, however, that both these things are true, and that some arm movements (most likely the mime-related ones) do employ some distinctly curved/bent arms whilst at other times extended lines predominate.

These observations illustrate some of the difficulties in reconstructing earlier Cecchetti practice. Fortunately, some underlying principles in Cecchetti's use of the arms are more open to analysis through a study of his two sets of ports de bras and his exercise for the eight directions of the body. These exercises are, perhaps, most responsible for developing a Cecchetti-style use of the arms, and they exhibit two features which will become key to my argument: the balance and connection of the arms across the back, and the integration of the torso with arm movements[11].

In Cecchetti's work it is rare for one arm to remain static whilst the other moves[12]. The arms should move at the same time and in balance, either mirroring each other in lateral

8 Note that she applies this to both arms and legs.

9 See, for example, fourth port de bras (Beaumont and Idzikowski, 1932, plate XIV figs. 60 & 61).

10 Craske was one of Cecchetti's principal disciples and inheritors of The Method and these photos were published only two years after he left for Italy.

11 Cecchetti's 'Theory of ports de bras' is usually considered part of the Cecchetti principles.

12 This is in contrast to much contemporary practice where, for example, in a change from à la quatrième devant to éffacé devant, one arm might lower and then rise via the front to above the head whilst the other is held motionless in second position. In Cecchetti's work one arm would move directly up to above the head at the same time as the other lowers in a balanced movement to the characteristic demi-seconde position.

symmetry or in opposition as if making one line which pivots around the centre of the shoulders[13] (Beaumont and Idzikowski, 1932, 28). A feeling of widening the front of the upper chest as the arms pass through second position is also an important stylistic feature in Cecchetti's ports de bras. Perhaps this openness of the chest and the continuity of arm lines encourages the dancer to feel the breadth of the movement (as Glasstone points out) and leads to a greater extension of the arms particularly as they move through second position.

If we look at the way the torso is used during these ports de bras movements we can see that this coordinated, broad movement of the arms is probably achieved through the mediation of the torso, this is supported by Lukens who claims that 'To correctly execute [Cecchetti's] ports de bras the dancer needs to have a deep understanding of how the head and arm movements organically grow out of the use of the spine and shoulder girdle' (1995). An example is found in the exercise for the eight directions of the body when the dancer changes from Cecchetti's croisé derrière line to croisé devant[14]; not only do the arms balance and move more or less as one as they pass through second position (the upstage arm rising from the low demi-second line and the other lowering from above the head to reverse the arm line), but as they do this the torso tilts slightly in the same direction of movement, from one side to the other. It is important to note that the arms do not just articulate independently at the shoulders with a neutral, vertical torso maintained; rather, the torso is integrated in the movement of the arms through its own side-to-side inclination. Interestingly, the current ISTD (Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing) Cecchetti syllabus even contains an exercise where the 'eight directions of the body' are performed with the arms held neutral, the fact that this has been included suggests the primary importance of the torso as the origin of the movement rather than something following on from the arm movements or simply added as stylistic decoration.

Again we see a theme emerging of the torso being the fundamental organising factor in Cecchetti's movement: in port de bras the torso initiates arm movements, and in jumping and travelling it is involved in both elevation with a ballon quality, and rapid directional displacements of weight. The arms often grow out of these torso movements but they seem neither to be the primary initiators nor move independently of the torso as we see in much contemporary practice.

Gravity

The earthy under-curve of Cecchetti's chassé is seen by many as an important characteristic of his technique. Guest suggests that when dancers not trained in ways similar to Cecchetti's are asked to perform Cecchetti style under-curve chassés, they frequently revert, in performance, to over-curve movements which are more similar to their training (Guest, 1997, 823). What is different about this training goes deeper than just not being familiar with under-curve chassés; I believe it has its origin in a different relationship with gravity which underpins the technique.

13 For example, if one arm moves forwards the other must balance it by moving backwards, and if one moves down the other must move up

14 A similar arm movement is found in Cecchetti's fourth port de bras.

In contrast to today's training, which appears to stress the vertical with an unremittingly upwards pull, Cecchetti allows the 'down' to play a strong role as well. The low centre of gravity of the Cecchetti chassé, with the weight being allowed to lower temporarily during a transfer of weight, is only one result of this. The reduced emphasis on the vertical dimension that we saw earlier in Cecchetti's use of off-vertical torso movements is another. His frequent use of low, quarter pointe relevés and his many falling 'tombé' movements are also dependent on this relationship with gravity, as is the particular quality of downward movements of the arms found in the Cecchetti work. It appears to be characteristic that the arms should often drop through *giving in* to gravity rather than being *put* in a new position[15]; these weight sensing movements of the arms are subtly different from the more rigidly held and placed arms of contemporary practice. It seems, therefore, that Cecchetti plays with gravity: he holds the weight high and low, he overcomes and he gives into gravity, he accesses different dynamic qualities through relaxation, falling and dropping, contrasted with the more familiar qualities of balance and muscular resistance to the downward pull of gravity. In doing this he adds extra texture to movement and increases the dancer's range.

Connections

What is interesting to me is the way that all of these features (Cecchetti's use of the torso, his use of the arms, and his approach to gravity) are connected. Molly Lake appears to have been aware of this when she said that Cecchetti's movement had '…that flow, continuity and coverage of ground, that almost animal quality joining one movement to the next…', and 'above the waist a lightly lifted, poised, almost airborne quality [which] enabled the dancer to take his or her weight right over the feet no matter in what direction or with what speed the dancer moved' (Lake, 1976). Lake also claims that Cecchetti used to say about jumping, 'Use the floor, the floor is your best friend ... Sink into it as far as you would go over it and stand in the air' (ibid.). I think she is talking about the very things revealed in this analysis – the torso is a mobile element which shifts in order to guide the body's weight, and a lowered centre of gravity is used to allow lower body strength from the floor to support the movement of the upper body as well as to support elevation.

An observation by de Valois suggests that not only was the torso important for Cecchetti but that he himself recognised it as the origin of his movement – she claims: 'You had to learn the whole step with your shoulders, body and head first, before adding the feet. If the top knows where it is got to go for each movement, I can't tell you how easy it is for the feet to follow afterwards' (de Valois, quoted in Glasstone, 1990, 695).

Irmgard Bartenieff's theories of total body connectivity provide a useful theoretical framework from which to view these features[16]. The most important thing to note is that, in line with Bartenieff's theories, Cecchetti's work does seem to rely on a connected body

15 I am reminded of Wilson's exhortation 'not put, drop' when trying to get me to lower the arms to fifth en bas with the correct quality (1998).

16 Bartenieff has six patterns of 'total body connectivity' which she believes underlie efficient human movement: breath, core-distal, head-tail, upper-lower, body-half, and cross-lateral. See Hackney (1998) for a discussion of Bartenieff's theories.

powering and dynamically coordinating movement from the centre. In terms of particular patterns of connectivity, we see a strong upper-lower patterning supported from the lower body: the weight is able to lower giving a stronger sense of grounding, and this grounded lower body supports the movement of the upper body allowing it to be carried in different directions as an aid to movement (exactly as Lake observed). We also see a body-half patterning in the inclined head/torso technique: the side to side movement can be seen as one side of the body being moved in relation to the other, the two sides working by alternating patterns of stabilisation and mobilisation. There may also be a core-distal patterning in renversés en dedans as the body closes to and opens from the centre, and I have previously suggested a head-tail organisation in a different kind of renversé turn in Cecchetti's work[17] (Bennett, 2003a).

This analysis points to a rich use of the body/torso and weight that may be quite different from much contemporary ballet practice. This is certainly my experience as a dancer, and I am reminded of two examples of teaching which seem to add weight to this idea. In the first a teacher told a class how she taught younger students to hold a position by pretending to spray them with 'statue paint'. In the other example, I am told that some teachers talk about the torso as a 'Cornflakes box' and suggest that you must not move the box for fear of crushing its contents. In both these examples the dynamic, integrative nature of the torso seen in Cecchetti's work seems to be denied at the expense of a model where the torso is a strong, but static foundation for the articulation of the extremities which move independently of both the torso and each other.

Contemporary Relevance

I am interested in the rise in various 'somatic' practices in much dance teaching (particularly in contemporary dance), which emphasise approaching the body as a whole, and investigating its connections in movement[18]. The analysis I have presented here suggests that certain principles of Cecchetti's technique are doing the same thing. I suggest, therefore, that this is an area in which the study of Cecchetti's principles can make a real contribution to teaching of ballet in line with contemporary ideas about dance training.

Once fully embodied, the ways of moving promoted by the features of Cecchetti's work I have described give particular ways of coordinating the body and develop in the dancer a physical awareness of bodily connections which, I believe, can be maintained through other approaches to ballet movement. This awareness can allow the dancer to inhabit the movement more fully, to become an integrated being moving through and relating to space rather than a set of body parts held in particular places to produce set body designs such as retiré and arabesque. The movement becomes more meaningful to the dancer (and the viewer?) both through the kinaesthetic sensing of the connected body in motion, and through spatial and dynamic relationships which are articulated more clearly through whole body engagement and the use of gravity.

17 In *Coupé dessous, fouetté, coupé dessous, fouetté en tournant, coupé dessous, pas de Basque, tour en attitude renversée* (Craske and de Moroda, 1979, 101-103)

18 Examples include Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen's 'Body Mind Centering' and some release-based approaches to technique.

Style

But what of the style? If the Cecchetti Method produces dancers who move in an 'old-fashioned' way then what use is that? To give but two examples, the inclined head technique is little used nowadays and neither are the very open 'attitude' lines seen in Cecchetti's fourth port de bras, so of what use are these stylistic elements to contemporary ballet students?

As we have seen previously, Morris argues that all ballet training is infused with stylistic consequences. She also suggests that as a result of the failure of teachers to recognise the stylistic implications of what they are teaching, contemporary ballet training does not equip dancers with an awareness of stylistic factors. She continues that such awareness, if specifically addressed in teaching, would give dancers the means to make more informed expressive and interpretative choices as artists, something that she feels is generally lacking in contemporary ballet training (2003). Morris makes a compelling argument for a diverse, style-aware training in ballet, according to her 'students need to be encouraged to become aware of the stylistic consequences of different training methods and to realise that there can be a variety of ways of approaching ballet's codified steps' (p. 27).

So if there are stylistic consequences from learning to move in Cecchetti's way (which there most certainly are, as for any other training method or system) then these can be valued, rather than glossed over or watered down, and a study of Cecchetti's work can enrich the development of dance *artists* as part of a varied training. The other side of this argument is, however, that the traditional Cecchetti work alone is not enough to provide such a style aware training.

A Changing Tradition

Like all training systems Cecchetti's work has changed through time and been adapted due to changing artistic and pedagogic ideas and shifting tastes in dancing. At one level this is essential and inevitable, all dancers and teachers are products of their time and will interpret the work in their own ways to keep it alive, indeed this has certainly enriched The Method in many ways. But there is also a potential problem here: if the Cecchetti's enchaînements are allowed to continually evolve in their manner of performance then how do we know that the style and the movement principles have not been lost?[19] Are we really teaching his principles? This section looks at how change takes place and the sources that are available to try to understand what has changed.

The three Cecchetti manuals[20] are, of course, the main textual sources; however, they are also very problematic. One only has to look at the illustrations in *The Manual* (Beaumont and Idzikowski, 1932) to see their lack of anatomical accuracy and for alarm bells to be sounded. More seriously, the texts are sometimes incomplete (for example omitting detail

19 Laura Wilson (1901-1999), an early teacher of the Method, was of the opinion that this is the case, and that the performance of the work has changed in contemporary teaching of the Method (Bennett, 2003a).

20 Beaumont & Idzikowsky (second edition 1932, first edition published 1922) known as The Manual; Craske and Beaumont (1946); and Craske and de Moroda (1979, first published 1956)

found in the oral teaching tradition) and mostly lack important timing information; they are, therefore, not very useful for a revealing analysis or reconstruction[21]. However, if the manuals are considered in conjunction with information from the oral teaching tradition, many of the gaps can be filled in and we can begin to generate a fuller picture of Cecchetti's enchaînements and their style of performance. But the oral tradition often reveals different versions of the work which cloud our view: which version should we use to fill in a particular gap? It is possible that some of these differing versions may have their origin in Cecchetti's own adaptation of the enchaînements, either over time or to suit different dancers, whilst others may have developed since Cecchetti's time; the distinction is important as the former may provide more information about Cecchetti's own approach whilst the latter may obscure it.

An example of one of Cecchetti's own adaptations may be in the enchaînement *Temps levé, développé, temps levé, fouetté, jeté en attitude, gargouillade volée, deux jetés* (Craske and de Moroda, 1979, 29-30). In the written record, and in most of the oral tradition, the arms are held in fifth en bas throughout the enchaînement. However, a version reported to be from the teacher Molly Lake[22] (1899-1986) has 'Pavlova arms' when, at the end of the gargouillade volée, they uncurl from the shoulders and reach forwards as the head and upper back reach backwards. It is well known that Pavlova studied extensively with Cecchetti: did he teach her this version or just allow her to do it like this because it suited her? On the other hand, perhaps someone else added these arms later, calling them Pavlova arms because they were linked stylistically with her.

An example of a change in the work since Cecchetti's time may be in Cecchetti's 'Mercury' attitude croisé arm position. Some early images (e.g. Beaumont and Idzikowski, plate VII, fig.35 and Margaret Craske in Richardson, 1925, 288[23]) show a distinctly upward sloping line of the arms with a pronounced curve of the front arm, whereas a recent photograph shows a much more elongated arm line which is much nearer the horizontal (Glasstone, 2001, 86, fig.24). These two versions are very different in their body and spatial characteristics. The later photograph is of the renowned dancer and choreographer Michael Clark: are we merely seeing his personal interpretation or is this a change in the performance of an element of The Method?[24]

Such change in the oral tradition since Cecchetti's time results in part from conscious or unconscious 'updating' where changes in performance are adopted as a result of changing perceptions of what ballet 'should' look like. If the dominant images of dancers in the media, on the stage and in the classroom portray a particular look or way of doing things, teachers will be naturally drawn to teach their students to look like this – they do want them to get jobs after all! Whether the work is 'updated' by teachers in this way, or just

21 I am reminded of a conversation with an important figure in the Japanese dance world (who had been a dancer himself) who told me of how he once bought a copy of The Manual in order to learn about The Cecchetti Method but was unable to make any coherent reconstruction based on its instructions.

22 Lake was a key early teacher of the Cecchetti Method.

23 These images show this arm line in both the full attitude body position and in Cecchetti's second port de bras respectively.

24 I examine some other changes which may have occurred in the teaching of The Method in a previous paper (Bennett, 2003a).

taught slightly differently because of the vagaries of human memory and varied interpretation (or even a one off whim of a particular teacher which gets passed on as the traditional version by their students), these changes will accumulate through the generations as the work is handed on; and if this process carries on with no anchor to the origins, this will lead to significant change and the multiple versions whose relationship to earlier versions is increasingly unclear. The textual references in the Manuals can help us understand this variation, however the variation in the oral tradition is often in areas about which the manuals are vague or silent. The memories of older teachers also have an important role to play, but as the generations pass this link with the past becomes ever weaker. Fortunately, there are more recent and lasting records which attempt to record the work in more detail, for example Linda Pilkington's Benesh notation of Nora Roche's teaching of the work (Pilkington, 1978) and Sheila Kennedy's word-based notes which expand on the detail given in the Manuals (Kennedy, 2006). Dr Ann Hutchinson Guest and I are also preparing a Labanotation-based record and analysis of the work to try to make sense of some of this rich variation (Guest and Bennett, in preparation[25]).

It is only through attention to how the work has changed, and is changing, that the work can continue to meaningfully represent Cecchetti's own approach. The work can be adapted and updated to bring it alive as one teaches it, and in many ways it can be (and has been) enriched in this way, but unless this is done with an understanding gained through an investigation of how it was performed, the movement principles and the style which I have suggested are so valuable are in danger of becoming obscured.

Conclusions

It would seem, therefore, that the principles underlying the Cecchetti Method are different in certain ways from those in much contemporary practice. The way the body is integrated through his use of the torso and the textural richness accessed through his approach to gravity are two areas I highlight, and suggest to be of real value in contemporary training. In addition the historical style that is embedded in Cecchetti's movement, far from being simply a historical curiosity, can be explored to great effect in a rich, style aware training with the aim of producing more artistically empowered dancers. We must, though, be careful in how we perpetuate Cecchetti's teaching for it would be easy to lose sight of what makes it special in the face of inevitable incremental change. This is no easy task but the richness of Cecchetti's legacy makes this a worthwhile pursuit.

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25 Since the writing of this paper this book has now been published (Guest and Bennett, 2007)

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