

DANCE THE MUSIC / DANCE TO THE MUSIC¹

Frits Naerebout

'To dance the music' and 'to dance to the music' are two concepts which I took from Elizabeth Sawyer's 1985 *Dance with the music* (another variant). That is to be understood as a tribute to Sawyer, whose impassioned plea for a ballet music that is more than mere 'accompaniment' is still, ten years on, one of the best books about the relationship between music and dance. It also expresses very well the subject of my lecture, which is how a supposed unity, or one had better say, compound of music and dance was lost and replaced by two activities thought of as independent or autonomous, though, as we shall see, in rather different ways. When the compound was alive and well, they were still dancing the music, when it broke up to dance to the music was about as intimate as these two could get.

Please note that I am a dance historian, not a musicologist. Had I been a musicologist, I might have approached this subject from the other side, from the perspective of the composer and/or musician, not the dancer: to play the dance / to play to the dance. But I will stick to the dance perspective, and will try to see where music fits in in the long term developments in dance which have been my subject at other occasions.

It certainly is a difficult subject: speaking about dance is difficult, as one would expect, trying to put a non-verbal activity into words. But music is as difficult a subject. Sparshott, in his recently published *A measured pace, towards a philosophical understanding of the arts of dance*, dedicates one of his chapters to the relationship between dance and music. He notes the daunting complexity of the relationship. It is unity-in-diversity. Dance, as lexically defined, is obviously not the same thing as music, as lexically defined, but the two have been pronounced inseparable, in a lot of different ways. It is a vast topic that has never been systematically explored. We could hardly expect to do so today, and can only skim the surface and suggest some relevant questions.

Incidentally, considering the title of Sparshott's book (measured!), one might have expected him to spend rather more pages on this subject, but at least he tackles the problems. Graham McFee, however, in his *Understanding dance*, 1992, another major contribution to philosophical writing on the dance, manages to discuss items

¹ Zondag 15 oktober 1995 werd in de kleine zaal van het Theater aan het Spui te Den Haag door het VDO een studiedag georganiseerd in het kader van het nevenprogramma 'Muziek voor dans' van het Holland Dance Festival. Tijdens deze studiedag werden lezingen gehouden door Stephanie Jordan ('Music and dance: dialogues and power struggles'), Hanneke Ockhuijsen ('Elektronische muziek als theaterdansmuziek in Nederland') en Frits Naerebout ('Dance the music/dance to the music'). Op het ogenblik is alleen van laatstgenoemde lezing de tekst beschikbaar.

like 'the nature of dance', 'the understanding of dance', 'the expressiveness of dance' without referring explicitly to music, which leaves me baffled, and is, I think, indicative of what is the subject of my talk, the growing rift between music and dance.

The fact that the Holland dance Festival has taken as its theme the relationship between dance and music, more specifically between choreographer and composer, and that two days, yesterday and today, have been dedicated to a problematization of that relationship, shows that the combination of dance and music no is longer the self-evidency that it once has been, that we do not even want the relationship to be self-evident and pass unnoticed. Of course not seldom it is contrast and conflict that we are looking for to stimulate creative minds. If it works, why not. But still, I side with Elizabeth Sawyer in lamenting the loss of that self-evidency which once went with the music-dance relationship. In the end, dance and music stand only to lose.

What has happened is a process of emancipation. Music has been progressively emancipated from dance, until it became accepted as a completely autonomous art. But in getting rid of the dance, music might very well have robbed itself of a partner that it cannot really live without. The emancipation of dance has not progressed as nearly as far as that: in practice, as opposed to theory, dance still is inseparable from music (there is dancing to no music at all, in theatrical practice: but, as Sparshott stresses, the music is felt as either suppressed, or inherent). Dancers still dance with reference to the beat or pulse of music (not necessarily *on* the beat: before, after, across or against the beat is also 'with reference to'). Music still assists in the articulation of the dance, in its most simple sense by providing the dance with a beginning, a section in the middle, and an end. But, and I again side with Sawyer, the emancipation of music appears to have caused dancers to approach music from the outside, not as something to dance, but as something to dance to. Which does not profit the dance.

Music can be autonomous, self-sufficient, with dance left behind feeling insecure. A broken marriage in which dance cannot get along without its partner (music can, or at least pretends to), but puts a brave face on it. Their married state, as a couple (a *compound*, as I said earlier, echoing Sparshott) is the original situation. There are languages in which music and dance are not distinguished: there is just a single word covering music and dance. One would like a full scale enquiry into the semantics of music and dance in the world's languages: it does not exist. To me it also seems relevant that the Greek word *mousikè*, from which of course our word music derives, does not originally mean music, but music, poetry and dance. The three could be distinguished, but in performance often came together: poetry was chanted or recited, with or without instrumental support, and dancing went with the song.

This, I suggest, was the original situation. We cannot know. Our knowledge of music and dance in prehistoric times is very scanty, to say the least. But we can suspect: anthropological research has at least convinced me that nonverbal communication played an essential role in the formation of human groups and human identities. The great musicologist-anthropologist John Blacking, whose untimely death I still lament, said it all in his many years of enquiry into what he

called 'the anthropology of the body'. He summed it up as follows: cultural processes and products are externalizations and extensions of the body. For nonverbal communication bodily movement is essential. A particular, and very important category of movement is rhythmized movement, such as dance, which proceeds rhythmically through time. So does music; music indeed has a 'movemental' quality, both in production and reception (one feels sound, and not only because the eardrums vibrate!).

In this context I have been wondering about the acceptability of film music: why is it possible at all to have music with a film, without being terribly distracted? Convention, is the likely answer. Still, there is more to it. Basically, I think we do not consider a tune accompanying images of somebody walking or putting the kettle on out of place, because there is movement: either somebody or something appears to be moving on the screen, or the camera moves, that is, we are. Movement is the unifying factor. Just try the same music with slides: it won't do. Movement and music go together. A fortiori, rhythmical movement and music go together.

With going together I mean: when you have the one, you always have the other. If the music strikes up, people will start dancing; if people start dancing, the music will be struck up. I have closely watched examples of this compound of music and dance in dancers and musicians from remote Greek villages: completely unselfconscious, everything completely self-evident. Both, the music and the dance, becoming infused with life in a most remarkable way. The famous French ethnomusicologist Guilcher, who was with me during some of these observations, was much excited to see this: it reminded him of his fieldwork in France long before the Second World war, amongst communities that had long since disappeared. The Greek audience also had an understanding of what to look out for, probably a better one than I have. After some villagers had performed, there was to be a folkdance by Greek youngsters from Australia. They danced competently alright, the musicians were excellent, but there was no enthusiasm from the crowd. They were dancing to *the music*, and the musicians were playing to *the dance*, everything carefully rehearsed to get it right. They were all in time, certainly, but still the music and the dance never came together.

Elizabeth Sawyer blames western dualism: to her the artificial mind-body dichotomy of European thought has opened up a chasm between music and dance. She might be right, to some extent. But I feel the breaking apart set in much earlier: in the late 5th century BC we hear of complaints about instrumental music emancipating itself, getting rid of dance and song, and setting out on a solo career of virtuoso playing. That is one thing: the music at an early stage attempting to go its own way, to further develop its own virtuosity. It took a long time to become fully emancipated: the process is not even finished yet. But since the nineteenth century it has speeded up. Undoubtedly this has resulted in a lot of interesting music, but especially the performing of music has tended to become anaemic, a bloodless affair.

Another factor has been the marginalization of dancing, and here Sawyer's dualism has been rather more important, though there is more at work than that. Christianity's failure to come to terms with the human body, again reinforced in

the 1600s by the Reformation, has played music, as a supposedly cerebral activity. into its hands. Great tradition left little tradition behind (and influenced it). Slowly but surely many first existence dances, that is dances (in the sense of the anthropologists' dance events: dance, music, occasion) that are a living part of culture were crowded out: it is not so much modernity replacing tradition, but relatively slow moving communities, mainly agricultural, being eroded away in favour of relatively fast moving communities, mainly urban. First existence dances remain, but the once enormous variety has almost disappeared. First existence dancing is disregarded, or looked down upon. Still, it is there that the self-evidency of the dance-music relationship lingers on. In other dance forms the compound has been divided into its constituent components, and whether these are at all put together in a successful manner has come to depend completely on the competence of the individual choreographer and composer and of the musicians and dancers they work with. That means that it can turn out any way: good, bad or often just interesting. The radiance that illuminates the performers in a situation where music and dance are still inseparable partners is, I fear, becoming a thing of the past. The gap between music and dance is there, and has come to stay; all we can do is try to bridge it in an intelligent way. That also means stimulating inquiry into how the gap came into existence.

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DE TOEKOMST VAN HET BALLET LIGT IN HET HEDEN

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De meeste historici zijn het er wel over eens dat de wedloop van onze eeuw niet in januari 1900 begon. Het startschot werd pas 28 juni 1914 gegeven, op de brug te Sarajevo. De kans is groot dat de marathon ook daar zal eindigen. De cultuurhistoricus Modris Ekstein meent evenwel dat het schot al een jaar eerder afging, om precies te zijn op donderdagavond 29 mei 1913, aan de Avenue Montaigne in Parijs. In het ultramoderne Théâtre des Champs Élysées waren de dansers van de Russische impresario Serge Diaghilev het kanonnevlees, in Vaslav Nyinsky's ballet op 'Le Sacre du Printemps' van Igor Strawinsky. Was het nieuwe geluid dat de componist aan de lente van 1913 gaf een week eerder nog tamelijk rustig ontvangen, veel groter was het schokeffect van het strak in het gelid gedrilde ballet waarmee Nyinsky de permafrost van de Russische steppe aanstampte. Met hoeveel stampij werd zijn viering van de wederkerende zon die de sneeuwvlakte in een modderpoel met maagdenbloed veranderde niet ontvangen!

In zijn fenomenale studie *Lenteriten* legt Modris Ekstein uit waarom juist deze dansofferande het startschot van het modernisme werd: "Het modernisme was vóór alles een cultuur van het opzienbarende gebeuren, waardoor de kunst en het leven een kwestie van energie worden en als zodanig samensmelten." Een schok is per definitie altijd anders dan men verwacht en met de koele constructivistische aanpak van dit wrede ritueel werd de zwaar geparfumeerde zaal op haar wenken bediend. Ooggetuigen zijn nogal tegenstrijdig, maar volgens de meesten kon de uitverkoren maagd haar doodstrijd tot het bittere eind voltooien, weliswaar met groot licht in de rumoerige zaal, waar toeschouwers hun parasols op elkaars hoofden kapot sloegen en dames in de loge flauw vielen. Het gesis en geschreeuw begon al tijdens de ouverture, direkt na het inzetten van de droefgeestige klarinet.

Deze hele eeuw zou Strawinsky's *Sacre* een koevoet blijven. Men denke aan het sloopwerk dat Maurice Bejart (1959) en Pina Bausch (1975) ermee verrichtten. De eerste maakte er een opgedwongen copulatie in een magische cirkeldans van en de tweede een collectieve harakiri in lompe, afzakkende onderjurken op een vloer van turfmoalm. Toch heeft niemand meer het opzien gebaard door die eerste zes *Sacre*-uitvoeringen in Parijs kunnen overtreffen. Jean Cocteau vergeleek deze met een boa constrictor. Profetische woorden zo bleek, want de eerste *Sacre* zou alles opslokken wat nog aan *Sacres* komen moest.

Tachtig jaar na dato is de publiekswaardering voor schokeffecten in de dans en theaterwereld drastisch veranderd. De boa constrictor verzwolg de meest extreme vormen van fysiek geweld of uitputting op het toneel: Artauds theater van de wreedheid, Julian Beck's *Living Theatre*, het Tanztheater Wuppertal van Pina Bausch, de Butoh-dans uit Japan, het Vlaamse verdriet van De Keersemaeker en