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Don Juan dans le ballet pantomime de Gluck et Angiolini

Part I

By Françoise Dartois-Lapeyre

Un très beau témoignage sur la première représentation de *Don Juan ou le Festin de Pierre* permet d'évaluer la force et la nature des impressions que le ballet produisit lorsqu'il fut représenté pour la première fois, le 17 octobre 1761, au Burgtheater de Vienne:

«Au spectacle. On donna «*Le Joueur*» et puis un ballet de pantomimes «*Le Festin de Pierre*». Le sujet en est extrêmement triste, lugubre et effroyable. Don Juan porte une sérénade à sa maîtresse et entre chez elle. Le commandeur le trouve sur le fait, se bat avec lui en duel, est blessé mortellement, et tombe sur le théâtre. On l'emporte, [fin de l'acte I] Don Juan entre avec des dames et danse un ballet, puis on se met à souper. Sur ses entre-faites arrive le commandeur en statue, tous les convives se sauvent, Don Juan s'en moque, et imite tous les mouvements du spectre. Il monte un cheval molasse sur le théâtre. Don Juan s'en moque encore, le spectre s'en va [fin de l'acte II] et d'un coup l'enfer paraît, les furies dansent avec des torches allumées et tourmentent Don Juan. Dans le fond on voit un beau feu d'artifice, qui représente les feux de l'enfer. On voit voler les diables. Le ballet dure très longtemps, enfin les diables emportent Don

Juan et se précipitent avec lui dans ce gouffre de feu. Tout cela était très bien exécuté, la musique fort belle»¹.

Cette annotation, portée au terme de la soirée, met en évidence la surprise ressentie devant la rudesse et le tragique du sujet, mais aussi la satisfaction éprouvée par les spectateurs face à la perfection de l'exécution et l'intensité dramatique. Un ballet suffisamment impressionnant, émotionnellement, pour qu'un grand administrateur, habitué à tenir son journal depuis des années, se donne la peine de noter non seulement le titre et la date de la représentation à laquelle il assiste, mais aussi l'argument. C'est un des rares ballets dont Carl von Zinzendorf explicite le livret, au lieu de se contenter d'en noter le titre pour mémoire comme il fait d'habitude. Aussi son récit offre-t-il des pistes de recherche afin d'élucider pourquoi ce ballet marque une date importante non seulement dans l'histoire du Burgtheater mais aussi dans l'histoire de la danse et dans l'évolution du mythe.

Pourquoi l'évocation de Don Juan, personnage bien connu depuis près d'un siècle, suscite-t-elle cette forte stupéfaction, aussi surprenante que le succès accompagné de scandale provoqué par l'étrange et inoubliable comédie de Molière le 15 février 1665? Une pièce dans laquelle Molière innovait, prenant délibérément le parti de la liberté par rapport aux règles théâtrales et à la poétique d'Aristote, la seule de ses pièces dans laquelle les personnages se battent, meurent et dont l'action se déroule en plusieurs lieux. La Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement et les adversaires de Molière, proches du prince de Conti, eurent raison du bon sens matérialiste du valet: les représentations furent interrompues au nom de la bienséance à la quinzième représentation, le 20 mars 1665. Molière, sur ses gardes, ne fit pas imprimer la pièce, laissant inutilisé le privilège obtenu par le libraire Billaine; elle ne fut publiée en France que dix ans après sa mort, mais censurée: ne circulait plus

¹ Karl von Zinzendorf, *Aus den Jugendtagebüchern. 1747, 1752 bis 1763; nach Vorarbeiten von Hans Wagner, hrsg. und kommentiert von Maria Breunlich und Marieluise Mader*, Wien, Köln, Weimar, Böhlau Verlag, 1997, p. 239 et 240.

que la version expurgée par Thomas Corneille (1677), celle qui inspira Angiolini, tout autant désireux de liberté d'expression.

Comment expliquer la force de l'émotion ressentie à l'apparition du premier Don Juan danseur séducteur, qui fit de ce ballet un événement hors du commun? La transformation du personnage littéraire en premier danseur stupéfia, alors que le mythe avait déjà connu plusieurs versions musicales, peut-être entendues par certains spectateurs du Burgtheater: *L'Empio punito, dramma musicale* de Filippo Acciaïoli, représenté au Palais Colonna (1669)² et *Le Festin de pierre* de Le Tellier (1713), comédie mêlée d'ariettes jouée dans les foires parisiennes. On y retrouvait les ingrédients du mythe littéraire: l'échange des manteaux, le catalogue des conquêtes, le valet pusillanime et famélique, le Commandeur tué sur la scène et la statue du mentor. Qu'apportait de radicalement nouveau ce choix d'Angiolini pour incarner le personnage? Et pourquoi chorégraphe son histoire? Devenu danseur, Don Juan n'incarne plus seulement un thème littéraire prestigieux; il pose la question de l'influence du genre dansé sur le mythe et c'est autour de cette interrogation que nous souhaitons construire notre réflexion. Pourquoi et comment le personnage de Don Juan a-t-il été choisi par Angiolini pour servir de «coup d'essai» à sa réforme du ballet? En quoi cet avatar présente-t-il des traits nouveaux et comment favorise-t-il l'évolution du mythe, remis en scène au XXI^e siècle? Pour répondre à ces questions, nous analyserons les réactualisations du ballet proposées en 2005 et 2006 par Thierry Malandain et Marie-Geneviève Massé, qui mettent en jeu la question des danses sociales et de la destinée du séducteur, traitent de la place et de la fonction respective de l'homme et de la femme dans l'exercice de la séduction et se confrontent aux représentations scéniques de la damnation.

² Sur une musique d'Alessandro Melani en présence de Clément IX Rospigliosi et de Christine de Suède (1669). Anna Laura Bellina, «Considérations sur les genres» dans *La "Querelle des Bouffons" dans la vie culturelle française au XVIII^e siècle*, textes réunis et présentés par Andrea Fabiano, Paris, Éd. du CNRS, 2005, p. 84.

I. *Don Juan*, un «ballet de pantomimes»

A. *Personnage tragique pour un ballet inscrit dans la tradition française*

Le ballet a bénéficié de l'implication personnelle de Gasparo Angiolini, chorégraphe désireux de créer un spectacle narratif dont il développe l'action par la danse et la pantomime, inspirée de l'usage antique, des tréteaux de la foire et surtout du théâtre français. En choisissant de danser lors de la création³, il se situe dans la mouvance de Molière, auteur qui interpréta lui-même Sganarelle, seul personnage navré de la disparition du séducteur damné, se lamentant au finale sur ses gages à jamais perdus. Dans le programme du spectacle chorégraphié par M.-G. Massé pour l'Opéra de Versailles en 2006, *Don Juan* est présenté comme étant le «premier ballet d'action» ou «ballet dramatique»⁴ de l'histoire de la danse; mais pour être exact, il convient de préciser.

1. *Don Juan* «premier ballet d'action de l'histoire de la danse»?

Don Juan n'est pas le premier ballet sans parole. Celui-ci était apparu au début du XVIII^e siècle, en Angleterre, avec *Les Amours de Mars et Vénus* de John Weaver, représenté au Théâtre de Drury Lane, à Londres, en 1717. Lui-même avait été précédé par des formes intermédiaires entre la pantomime et le ballet, comme *The Tavern Bilkers* (*Les Filous de Taverne*, 1702).

Don Juan n'est pas non plus le premier ballet tragique, contrairement à ce que l'introduction d'Angiolini tend à revendiquer, car il convient de tenir compte des premières tentatives faites dans l'entourage de la duchesse du Maine, lorsqu'en 1714 deux danseurs de l'Académie

³ Création par la demoiselle Bodin et Angiolini, la demoiselle Clerc et Dupré, la Pagni et Turchi, la Ruggiano et Viganò.

⁴ Marie-Geneviève Massé, «Notes sur la chorégraphie des *Petits-Riens* et *Don Juan*», in Alexandre et Benoît Dratwicki, *Grandes journées Mozart. 1778, le voyage à Paris*, CMBV et Château de Versailles-Spectacles, RMN, 2006, p. 99.

royale de musique, Claude Ballon et Françoise Prévot mimèrent en dansant d'une scène d'*Horace* de Corneille. Même si l'initiative, isolée resta cantonnée à un salon privé, elle fut mentionnée et louée par Francesco Algarotti comme fondatrice de la tradition française du ballet sans parole, dans laquelle s'illustra Jean-Baptiste Dehesse sur des sujets plus légers⁵.

Ce qu'il faut imputer à Angiolini, c'est la volonté consciente de composer rationnellement un ballet d'action tragique initiateur d'un genre nouveau. Il se situait dans la filiation de son professeur Franz Hilverding qui, en Autriche, commença par présenter, vers 1740, la traduction en pantomime dansée d'actes de tragédies françaises célèbres de Racine et Voltaire, et qui, à partir des années 1750, fit des ballets dans un style souvent tragi-comique (*Le Turc Généreux*, 1758). Le *Don Juan* muet proposé par le Florentin Gasparo Angiolini, qui fut danseur avant de devenir maître de ballets au Théâtre Français de Vienne, «appartient – comme il le dit lui-même – au domaine français»⁶, même si le compositeur est originaire du Haut-Palatinat, et si le livret est écrit par le Livournais Galzabigi.

En effet, l'engagement de Gluck par le comte Giacomo Durazzo, *Generalspektakeldirektor*, c'est-à-dire directeur des théâtres impériaux, en 1754, marque un tournant dans sa carrière, déjà enrichie par ses voyages à Milan, Londres, Copenhague, et par sa participation aux fêtes des mariages princiers à Dresde, dans lesquelles dansait Noverre⁷. Tout en dirigeant l'orchestre privé du prince Hildburghausen, il fut

⁵ *L'Opérateur Chinois*, ballet sans paroles composé de six scènes comiques, conçu en décembre 1748 par J.-B. de Hesse pour le Théâtre des Petits Appartements de Versailles et la Marquise de Pompadour, inscrit en janvier 1749 au répertoire de la Comédie Italienne.

⁶ A. L. Bellina, «Considérations sur les genres», *op. cit.*, p. 86.

⁷ Gluck se fit remarquer par son *Mariage d'Hercule et d'Hébé*, tandis que Noverre faisait partie du corps de ballet. Jacques-Gabriel Prod'homme, *Christoph-Willibald Gluck*, Paris, Fayard, 1985, p. 54.

amené à s'intéresser au répertoire français, en particulier à l'opéra-comique et à se détourner des conventions de l'*opera seria* pour innover: il en composa plus d'un par an entre 1758 et 1761⁸.

2. Don Juan, fruit du cénacle réformateur et francophile de la cour

La création du ballet *Don Juan* eut pour cadre une monarchie dans laquelle soufflait un vent de réformes administratives et artistiques, et non pas un théâtre public, où le souci d'économie favorisait le maintien des conventions. Le théâtre de la cour impériale, fréquenté par la haute société, était plus ouvert à la nouveauté et moins bridé par les considérations budgétaires. Gluck, qui en était le directeur, décida de mettre à l'affiche ce ballet expérimental, dont il composa la musique étonnement moderne, faisant un double pari d'originalité – dans la forme et le fond – rendu possible par sa collaboration, dans les années 1760, avec Angiolini, Durazzo et Calzabigi.

Angiolini renoua avec audace au déroulement traditionnel des ballets, qui fit dire à Algarotti: «Connaissez un ballet et vous les connaissez tous; les habits des danseurs changent, mais non le caractère du ballet»⁹; dans tous, il observait le passage d'un premier «ensemble amphigourique» aux jeux amoureux d'un couple de danseurs puis une brouille ou colère avant la réconciliation et les réjouissances communes. Chez Angiolini, le refus du commun était l'aboutissement d'un «travail assidu» destiné à régénérer le ballet en brisant la routine. Considérant «la richesse des anciens»¹⁰, il ambitionnait «avec trans-

⁸ 1758: *L'Isle de Merlin, La Fausse Esclave*; 1759: *L'Arbre enchanté, La Cythère assiégee*; 1760: *L'Ivrogne corrigé*; 1761: *Le Cadi dupé*.

⁹ Francesco Algarotti, *Essai sur l'Opéra (1755-1764), Texte original intégral. Introduction, traduction et notes par Jean-Philippe de Navarre*, Paris, Cerf, 1998, p. 123.

¹⁰ Gasparo Angiolini, *Le Festin de Pierre (Don Juan), Ballet Pantomime Composé par Mr. Angiolini*, in *Libretti: die originalen Textbücher der bis 1990 in der Gluck-Gesamtausgabe erschienenen Bühnenwerke: Textbücher verschollener Werke / Christoph Willibald Gluck; hrsg. von Klaus Hortschansky, in Sämtliche Werke. Abteilung VII, Ergänzungen 1, Kassel [etc.], Bärenreiter, 1995, p. 7.*

port» et «hardiesse» de faire revivre les Pantomimes¹¹. Cet Art étant «perdu»¹², il se référait à Pylade et Bathylle, bien connus de «ceux qui ont lû les auteurs Grecs ou Latins qui [...] sont dans les mains de tout le monde»¹³ – sous entendu instruit, comme le public choisi de la cour et les administrateurs des Lumières, dont faisait partie l'aristocrate saxon Karl von Zinzendorf, lecteur de Voltaire et Rousseau, qui, après son arrivée à Vienne en 1760, obtint la présidence de la nouvelle Chambre des Comptes et assista, subjugué, à l'entrée en scène d'Angiolini dans *Le Festin de pierre*, donné après *Le Joueur* de Jean-François Regnard (1696). Son parcours et son diaire nous renseignent sur la forte influence exercée par la littérature française dans la vie théâtrale et musicale viennoise, sous l'impulsion du comte Kaunitz, en raison de l'alliance politique conclue avec la France depuis six ans¹⁴.

Son favori Durazzo, co-directeur des théâtres avec le comte Franz Esterházy, surnommé Franz «Quinquin» [Guinguin] par Zinzendorf, avait fait appel, dès 1752, aux comédiens de la troupe Hébert pour «le Théâtre français près de la cour»¹⁵; il correspondait avec l'ambassadeur autrichien à Paris, Georg Adam Graf Starhemberg, et avec Charles-Simon Favart pour se tenir informé des nouveautés parisiennes. La dimension artistique étant ressentie comme un aspect de la rénovation politique, il réunissait autour de lui tous les esprits innovants au service de la monarchie. Ainsi, Raniero di Calzabigi, auteur d'un *Mémoire sur l'arrangement de la Chambre des Comptes*, arrivé à Vienne en février 1761, entra comme Zinzendorf dans le cercle du comte Duraz-

¹¹ Id. C. W. Gluck, Richard Engländer, *Angiolini Gasparo, Don Juan. Semiramis. Ballets pantomimes von Gasparo Angiolini*, Kassel, Bärenreiter, Sämtliche Werke, C. W. Gluck, Tanzdramen, 1966, XXVIII, 130 p., mus.

¹² G. Angiolini, *Le Festin de Pierre, Ballet Pantomime*, op. cit., p. 4.

¹³ *Le Festin de Pierre, Ballet Pantomime Composé par Mr. Angiolini/ Maître des Ballets du Theatre près de la cour à Vienne, et représenté pour la premiere fois sur ce theatre le Octobre 1761, [...] A Vienne, chez Jean Thomas Tratter, 1761, p. 2.*

¹⁴ Christine Lebeau, *Aristocrates et grands commis à la Cour de Vienne (1748-1791). Le modèle français*, Paris, CNRS éd., 1996, p. 144. Karl Graf von Zinzendorf rédigea les 55 vol. de son journal d'une écriture serrée de 1748 à 1813. Sa correspondance avec son frère Ludwig est conservée aux Archives de l'ordre Teutonique.

¹⁵ *Karl von Zinzendorf, Aus den Jugendtagebüchern*, op. cit., p. 39.

zo, qui lui fait rencontrer Gluck et Angiolini: alors seulement il s'illustre comme poète réformateur du livret d'opéra¹⁶.

3. Un ballet original et dantesque pour exprimer un mythe moderne

Alors qu'il choisit une forme ancienne, le ballet-pantomime, l'originalité d'Angiolini consiste à ne pas opter pour un sujet antique, mais à privilégier un sujet contemporain, issu d'une «Tragicomédie Espagnole qui a réuni les suffrages de toutes les Nations» et qui «a réussi sur tous les Théâtres quoiqu'elle ne soit pas dans les règles. Les unités du tems & du lieu n'y sont pas observées, mais l'invention en est sublime, la catastrophe terrible, & dans notre croïance elle est vraisemblable»¹⁷. En retenant comme seule règle certaine le vraisemblable, il renonce au canon classique pour ressusciter un genre en partie oublié, qui lui permet de traiter un sujet d'actualité dans un siècle où la liberté de pensée est revendiquée.

Il parle de «coup d'essai»¹⁸, car le sujet est doublement inattendu: par son caractère contemporain mais aussi tragique, à une époque où le ballet est conçu comme un délassement, intercalé entre deux pièces ou donné en fin de spectacle. Sa préface manifeste sa volonté d'oser se détacher de ce qui est généralement fait et apprécié pour lancer «une nouveauté téméraire»¹⁹. Il admet la tristesse de cette «Tragédie en Ballet», mais dans la mesure où «la Terreur nous fait plaisir aux Tragédies»²⁰, il revendique la liberté d'effrayer: «Nous seroit-il défendu d'épouvanter en dansant ainsi qu'en déclamant?»²¹ Son but est de faire acquérir au ballet une signification nouvelle sans se priver des plus grandes beautés de cet

¹⁶ «La Dissertazione sulle poesie drammatiche del Sig. Ab. Pietro Metastasio» in Pietro Metastasio, *Opere*, Paris, Vve Quilleau, 1755-57, vol. 1, p. 317 et 319.

¹⁷ G. Angiolini, *Le Festin de Pierre, Ballet Pantomime*, op. cit., p. 4.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5-6.

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ *Id.*

art, mais au prix d'un bouleversement des habitudes du public, qui «doit s'accoutumer à s'attendrir & à pleurer à nos Ballets»²².

Faisant figure de novateur, Angiolini devance l'exigence nouvelle, qui sera formulée en 1764 par Francesco Algarotti: «La danse doit être une imitation, au moyen de mouvements musicaux du corps [...] Elle doit parler continuellement aux yeux, elle doit peindre avec le geste. Un ballet doit posséder son exposition, son intrigue et son dénouement; il faut qu'il soit le résumé substantiel d'une action»²³. Algarotti propose en modèle «le *Ballet du joueur* de Jommelli, composé sur un très bel air dans le mode comique», mais il n'en cite aucun dans le caractère sérieux et héroïque; or c'est dans ce genre que la France excelle et se montre exemplaire: «dans les danses sérieuses ou héroïques, il nous faut confesser – écrit-il – que les Français nous dépassent, nous et toutes les autres nations»²⁴.

B. Conjugaison de l'expressivité musicale, dramatique et chorégraphique

1. De nouveaux moyens pour indiquer l'action sans la dire

Le lien qui unie intrinsèquement la musique au scénario contribue à expliquer le succès de ce ballet. La partition de *Don Juan*, dans sa version courte – sans doute originale – aussi bien que longue, est à l'antipode de la musique dénoncée dans la préface de l'*Encyclopédie*, celle qui «ne peint rien»²⁵: contrairement aux compositeurs de la première moitié du siècle, Gluck cherche moins à flatter et séduire les oreilles en virtuose, qu'à toucher le cœur ou «échauffer l'imagination de l'auditeur»²⁶. Il est un des premiers à souhaiter «réduire la musique à sa véritable fonction, celle de seconder la poésie, pour fortifier l'expression des

²² *Id.*

²³ F. Algarotti, *Essai sur l'Opéra*, op. cit., p. 125.

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 111, citation de la préface de l'*Encyclopédie* de Diderot et d'Alembert.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

sentiments et l'intérêt des situations, sans interrompre l'action et la refroidir par des ornements superflus²⁷. C'est pourquoi il adopte une organisation musicale efficace d'un point de vue tonal: «le premier acte en *ré* majeur, le deuxième en *la* majeur, le troisième en *ré* majeur et mineur», le tout étant structuré par «le retour périodique de motifs mélodiques attachés à l'un ou l'autre des personnages²⁸. L'ensemble, assez court et dépouillé d'ornements inutiles, s'accorde parfaitement avec l'argument simple, exposé en quatre paragraphes. La musique parle d'elle-même: le *ré* mineur est associé (comme ensuite dans *Don Giovanni* de Mozart) au Commandeur, faisant sentir la menace qui plane dès le lever du rideau; elle suggère au maître de ballet des gestes propres à décrire les dimensions affectives de l'action²⁹. Ce n'est plus un art illustratif – même si le chant du coucou est perceptible – mais un art expressif. En peignant l'intime et les sentiments, la musique devient le langage authentique de l'âme et atteint au plus profond du cœur humain, ce qui inspire Angiolini et satisfait pleinement ses attentes de chorégraphe.

2. Les ballets figurés cèdent la place au ballet pantomime

À quoi le ballet pantomime, né des innovations concordantes de Gluck, Angiolini et Calzabigi, ressemblait-il? L'écriture Feuillet étant alors tombée en désuétude, nous ne disposons d'aucune notation chorégraphique conservée, et faute de recherches historiques spécifiques sur ce point, alliant théorie et pratique et permettant d'envisager une reconstruction, nous ne pouvons qu'imaginer certaines poses grandiloquentes, légitimées par le contenu dramatique, et proches du style des gravures de ballets antérieurs, comme le *Turc généreux*³⁰.

²⁷ Calzabigi, préface d'*Alceste* de Gluck.

²⁸ A. et B. Dratwicky, *Grandes journées Mozart*, op. cit., p. 103.

²⁹ A. L. Bellina, «Considérations sur les genres», op. cit., p. 86: «Dès l'ouverture, la deuxième phrase en *ré* majeur est reprise en écho en *ré* mineur, souligné par les trompettes».

³⁰ F. Dartois-Lapeyre, «Racine, l'Orient et l'Opéra au XVIII^e et au début du XIX^e siècle», dans *Jean Racine et l'Orient*, Tübingen, Gunter Narr Verlag, *Biblio 17-148*, 2003, p. 183-203.

Pourtant Angiolini l'annonce: *Don Juan* est un manifeste destiné à prouver le bien fondé d'une réforme du ballet tendant à privilégier les atouts expressifs et humains de la danse par rapport à ses aspects purement décoratifs. Pressentant les difficultés de réception, il justifie son ambition par une référence à Horace, caution du sérieux de son entreprise: «*Le Festin de Pierre*, avec tous ses défauts, a été bien reçu partout en récit, pourquoi ne réussira-t-il pas de même en Danse? Le mot d'Horace que j'ai placé à la tête de ce récit, me le fait espérer³¹; pour appuyer sa démonstration et surmonter l'angoisse d'un possible rejet par le public, il cite: «Ce qui ne frappe que l'oreille fait moins d'impression sur/ Les esprits, que ce qui frappe les yeux³². Il parie sur la force de l'activation simultanée des sens auditifs et visuels, qui imposent le ressenti avec une évidence supérieure à celle procurée par la lecture, pour susciter l'empathie du spectateur, car il ne peut rester indifférent.

En faisant de la pantomime la mise en espace muette du corps durant l'ensemble de la représentation, il dépasse l'usage ponctuel qu'en avait fait les chorégraphes dans les ballets figurés de Rameau, ce qui lui permet de privilégier l'émotion et le mouvement comme forme narrative, et pose la question du statut du langage dans l'œuvre.

II. Du thème littéraire à l'expression chorégraphique du mythe

A. Resserrement de l'action autour du séducteur

1. Calzabigi concentre l'action en trois actes

Calzabigi et Angiolini épurent l'action littéraire en centrant le ballet sur l'antagonisme entre Don Juan et le Commandeur. Calzabigi ne retient pas toutes les aventures de la pièce en cinq actes de Molière – ainsi, le

³¹ G. Angiolini, *Le Festin de Pierre, Ballet Pantomime*, op. cit., p. 5.

³² *Id.* Horace, *De Arte Poetica*. Traduction du Père Tarteron.

nauffrage de la fiancée et la scène du Pauvre disparaissent – ni tous les personnages: Dom Carlos et Dom Alonse, frère d'Elvire, sont occultés ainsi que Dom Louis, père de Don Juan et M. Dimanche. L'esprit de l'acte II des paysans est condensé dans la scène de séduction des servantes Charlotte et Mathurine. L'action est simplifiée pour se donner à voir en toute évidence: à l'inverse de Molière qui suppose le Commandeur mort au lever du rideau, Angiolini le fait tuer sous les yeux du spectateur, dans une «ruë publique» où commence l'action: sa maison est d'un côté et celle de Don Juan de l'autre. L'antagonisme est matérialisé et le meurtre commis par Don Juan n'est pas évoqué mais mis en scène de façon violente et soudaine.

Le rapport au temps et à l'espace se trouve profondément modifié. Molière, trop libre pour respecter les règles de la comédie, étalait son action sur deux jours, mais le ballet nécessite au contraire de compresser et contracter le temps, car l'action physique, continue, doit tenir compte de la fatigue et de la lassitude des danseurs: «nous sommes forcés de resserrer dans un espace de quelques minutes les sujets les plus étendus» précise Angiolini. Dans son ballet, l'aventure de Donna Elvire n'appartient pas au passé: «l'action commence par la Sérénade que Don Juan donne à Elvire sa Maîtresse, fille du Commandeur. Il obtient l'entrée dans la maison, où il est surpris par le Père. Il se bat contre lui; le *Commandeur* est tué; on l'emporte»³³. La question de l'honneur, développée par la littérature, particulièrement chez Molière, est ici implicite et radicale puisqu'il ne fait aucun doute que le Commandeur est tué en voulant sauver l'honneur de sa fille.

À l'inverse, Angiolini exige que l'espace du ballet soit élargi pour englober toute l'action: «L'unité du lieu n'est donc pas compatible avec la *Saltation*»³⁴. De la rue, l'action passe à l'intérieur, où Calzabigi situe le grand repas, ici précédé d'un bal, au second acte (et non au IV^e comme dans la pièce). Le contraste est saisissant lorsque la panique

³³ G. Angiolini, *Le Festin de Pierre, Ballet Pantomime*, op. cit., p. 7.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

s'empare des invités à l'arrivée de la statue du Commandeur, qui s'annonce en frappant rudement à la porte. Les convives prennent la fuite, laissant Don Juan seul face à son destin.

2. Par la danse, Angiolini fait de Don Juan un être d'exception

Sa danse révèle les qualités physiques et la bonne éducation d'une personnalité hors du commun. Don Juan conjugue la beauté de la jeunesse avec le raffinement de l'élégance, car il a appris les codes de la belle danse, fondés sur l'apparente facilité du mouvement, rendue par le moelleux des pliés, l'équilibre et l'en-dehors. Il émane de sa performance une impression d'aisance et de facilité, qui résulte de sa formation aristocratique et de la fréquentation des meilleurs maîtres. Il a acquis *maestria* et dignité, et des mouvements de sa personne se dégagent un charme qui opère instantanément, ce qui explique la facilité avec laquelle les femmes tombent amoureuses de lui. Ce n'est pas par la ruse, comme chez Tirso de Molina, qu'il conquiert les cœurs et les corps, et il n'a pas besoin de se déguiser pour séduire, comme le fera Don Giovanni de Mozart. Ce personnage dansé, qui distille la maîtrise et l'aisance corporelle, est moins fouillé psychologiquement que celui de Molière, qui dénonçait l'hypocrisie de la société du XVII^e siècle, prompt à rejeter Tartuffe; ce n'est pas un imposteur qui fait des dettes, et il ne cache pas ses fautes sous le masque de la religion³⁵. Dans le ballet d'Angiolini, son maintien et sa danse admirables en font un séducteur irrésistible, trop sollicité pour s'attacher à quiconque, volontiers hautain et sans scrupules lorsqu'il s'agit de partir vers de nouvelles conquêtes, sans se soucier d'abandonner les précédentes.

Le danseur exprime l'orgueil du grand seigneur libertin, doté de la générosité propre aux gentilshommes de son rang; il tire gloire de ses

³⁵ Philippe Van Tieghem, avec la collaboration de Pierre Josserand, *Dictionnaire des littératures*, Paris, PUF, 1968, t. 3, art. «Tirso de Molina». Molière reprit le sujet et fit une rédaction hâtive de *Don Juan ou le Festin de Pierre*. Pierre Brunel, *Dictionnaire de Don Juan*, Paris, R. Laffont, 1999, 1088 p.

conquêtes amoureuses, se montre inconstant et cynique envers Elvire, sans scrupule, ironique et irrespectueux envers le Commandeur. C'est un héros mû par son *hybris*, liée à la démesure de son incoercible vitalité physique. Sa vigueur et sa volonté brutale de parvenir à ses fins s'expriment par une précipitation qui vient perturber l'harmonie. Grisé par les plaisirs de la table et possédé du démon de la chair, il foule aux pieds tout ce qui gêne l'assouvissement de ses instincts, et oublie sa noblesse foncière. Tel Janus, il fait deux déclarations d'amour en dansant avec Mathurine et Charlotte.

Pourtant, par son habileté et son courage, il reste profondément humain, ce qui l'empêche d'être antipathique. Même s'il n'a pas l'occasion, comme chez Molière, de se conduire en gentilhomme envers Dom Carlos, il se distingue, y compris dans les pires moments, puisqu'il est le seul à ne pas être effrayé lorsque frappe et entre le Commandeur: il ne participe pas à «l'Entrée des Trembleurs», car son assurance est telle que rien ne semble pouvoir l'intimider.

B. Le contexte psychologique, social et national révélé par les danses

1. Les relations sociales perçues lors du bal précédant le banquet

Les danses de société, comme la gavotte et le menuet jouent un rôle essentiel au second acte, occupant les numéros 7 à 22 de la partition; la noce, qui unit deux nobles, fait participer l'ensemble de la communauté villageoise aux préparatifs et la société y apparaît unie dans le bonheur de la fête.

La hiérarchie sociale s'exprime musicalement par la noblesse du menuet dansé «grazioso» par les aristocrates, tandis que la contredanse interprétée «allegro» s'ouvre plus largement. Mais badiner et danser vont de pair et le bal offert par Don Juan à ses amis et maîtresses est l'occasion de nouvelles conquêtes. C'est le jeu de la galanterie qui compromet l'ordre et la conduite irrespectueuse de Don Juan qui conduit à la scène du duel.

Cette idée de la fête aristocratique fut reprise par Mozart dans *Don Giovanni*³⁶: les danses à la mode, menuets, folies d'Espagne et allemandes y sont jouées «sans ordre»; elles sont détournées de leur fonction sociale pour servir utilement au stratagème du héros pour séduire: tandis que Leporello retient Masetto pour danser une prétendue allemande, la contredanse est fatale à Zerlina, qui «ne peut résister»³⁷.

L'opposition entre danses aristocratiques et danses paysannes reflète la hiérarchie des rapports maître et «laquais». Ce terme est préféré par Calzabigi à celui de «valet», même si son personnage est hérité du Sganarelle bouffon de Molière et aussi du Catalinon de Tirso et de l'Arlecchino italien. Son nom n'apparaît pas dans le programme d'Angiolini, qui le rend anonyme et le résume à sa fonction, ni dans le récit de Zinzendorf. Il est mentionné tardivement dans le *Répertoire de tous les Spectacles qui ont été donné [sic] au Théâtre de la Ville* rédigé par Philipp Gumpenhuber, assistant chorégraphe et metteur en scène, qui le dédie au Comte Durazzo. Subalterne, soumis aux ordres de son maître – comme Leporello à Don Giovanni – le laquais danse rarement en même temps que lui. Selon Sibylle Dhams, ce n'est que le 5 avril 1763, après l'introduction de danseurs de caractère dans la distribution, que le domestique fut enfin remarqué et mentionné par P. Gumpenhuber³⁸: il fallait un interprète capable de danser le comique de la farce et la bouffonnerie dans un style étranger au registre noble, car le tempérament du personnage contraste avec celui de son maître: naïf et poltron, il manifeste sa couardise devant le Commandeur. Au contraire, Don Juan exprime sa propre pensée, comme chez Molière, mais par le geste.

³⁶ Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Don Giovanni*, I, 20. Michel Noiray, *Don Giovanni, Mozart, L'Avant-scène Opéra*, n° 172, juillet-août 1996, 2^e éd. 2002, p. 64.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 15, n° 11 et I, 20, n° 13. M. Noiray, *Don Giovanni, op. cit.*, p. 54 et 68.

³⁸ S. Dahms, "Some Questions on the Original Version of Gluck and Angiolini's *Don Juan*", *Dance Chronicle*, vol. 30, n° 3, September 2007, p. 431. Dès février, Angiolini avait remplacé, dans le rôle de Don Juan, le danseur noble Pierre Bodin par un danseur de caractère, Turchi cadet (probablement Vincenzo Turchi).

2. Les danses de caractère, teintées de nationalisme

Chaque personnage est caractérisé par sa danse. Le recours aux danses nationales, aussi bien espagnoles et italiennes que françaises souligne le comportement méditerranéen de l'arrogant Don Juan, qui met en jeu le sens de l'honneur, particulièrement vif en Italie du Sud alors sous domination espagnole.

Le fandango de rythme ternaire (3/4) est de tempo «moderato», plus vif que dans la danse populaire espagnole souvent lente, en 6/8. Cette danse convient particulièrement au jeu de la séduction puisque, traditionnellement, le couple de danseurs évolue sans se toucher, mais en jouant des castagnettes et en mimant les différentes phases du rituel amoureux: l'hommage à la dame, l'essai de séduction, la fuite de la jeune femme, la colère du danseur, puis sa seconde déclaration d'amour et enfin l'acceptation de sa partenaire.

C'est au nationalisme italien que renvoie le rythme binaire de la sicilienne, danse traditionnelle (mentionnée dès 1389), jouée avec un tempo légèrement ralenti³⁹, et la forlane, originaire du Frioul, dont Casanova appréciait le rythme endiablé (à 6/4 ou 6/8) et le caractère licencieux; Gluck la fait jouer «allegretto», et son rythme très animé inspire des gestes vifs, voire heurtés⁴⁰.

Certains airs, plutôt cocasses, font écho au comique de la *commedia dell'arte*, évoquant les origines mixtes – italiennes et espagnoles – de Don Juan et son valet. Façonnées à l'époque de la contre-réforme par le jésuite Zehentner, qui fixa sur le papier une ancienne légende italienne qui relatait les aventures du mécréant Leonzio invitant à dîner une tête de mort, ces origines furent réactivées par la publication de la tragi-comédie *El Burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra* de Tirso de Molina, en 1650. L'histoire voyagea de Barcelone au vice-royaume de Naples, alors sous domination espagnole et c'est sous la forme de

³⁹ C. W. Gluck, Richard Engländer, *Angiolini G., Don Juan, op. cit.*, n° 2 «andante» avec solo de flûte.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, n° 22 «allegretto».

canevas de *commedia dell'arte*, que la troupe Locatelli introduisit en France le *Convitato di pietra*, qui inspira les tragi-comédies de Villiers et de Dorimond (1658 et 1659).

3. Des gestes qui deviennent des signes

Comme toute l'action doit être comprise sans parole, certains gestes deviennent hautement symboliques. Ainsi, le sens de l'honneur, poussé à l'extrême chez le Commandeur, explique qu'il jette son gant à Don Juan et sorte sa dague. Sans doute un rôle important fut-il aussi accordé à l'éventail; cet accessoire, habilement agité par la femme pour intriguer et attirer, est traditionnellement l'instrument de séduction, dont cherche à s'emparer le séducteur en gage de soumission de sa conquête. Dans le face à face de Don Juan avec le Commandeur, les gestes rarissimes et inattendus, n'en sont que plus remarquables pour convoquer les enfers et les furies.

Mais comment expliquer la force de cette confrontation, envoûtante au point de susciter l'émotion du public? Ce n'est pas simplement en raison du sujet, car il ne suffisait pas de représenter les enfers pour faire un beau spectacle: Zinzendorf avait été très critique quelques mois plus tôt à propos *L'Ivrogne corrigé*, opéra-comique dans lequel Gluck «représentait Pluton et l'enfer»⁴¹. S'il s'enthousiasma pour *Don Juan*, c'est en raison du soin apporté à la mise en scène, au décor du troisième acte, «un endroit destiné à la sépulture de personnes de distinction», près du mausolée du Commandeur, et aussi pour la musique – première manifestation du «*Sturm und Drang*» selon Jean et Béatrice Massin – qui conduit inexorablement vers la scène finale d'une ampleur impressionnante⁴². Le Commandeur, debout devant son tombeau, s'oppose par son statisme au bouillant Don Juan qui tourbillonne en bravant la morale familiale et la religion, ayant forgé le projet

⁴¹ Karl von Zinzendorf, *Aus den Jugendtagebüchern, op. cit.*, p. 204, le 30 mai.

⁴² J. et B. Massin, *Histoire de la musique occidentale*, Paris, Fayard, 1985, p. 580.

monstrueux de confondre les morts avec les vivants. Prêt à rendre la justice divine, la statue saisit Don Juan «par le bras»⁴³ dans un geste symbolique qui l'exhorte à changer de vie et scelle le sort du libertin.

L'expression du danseur devait rendre compte de l'étonnement de Don Juan, mais aussi de sa superbe: fidèle à lui-même, il rusa en affectant «un air assuré» pour s'approcher du Commandeur, tout en laissant entrevoir l'inquiétude affectant l'athée en proie, pour la première fois, à l'angoisse métaphysique. «Obstiné malgré les menaces du Commandeur & les prodiges dont il est témoin», l'impie, en proie à un affreux désespoir, persiste – comme le héros de Molière⁴⁴ – dans son impénitence et se trouve bientôt «englouti avec tous les monstres; & un tremblement de terre couvre le lieu d'un monceau de ruines»⁴⁵.

Angiolini rend hommage aux talents du décorateur Giovanni Maria Quaglio, qui «a saisi parfaitement le terrible de l'Action», en particulier les passions et l'épouvante qui règne dans la catastrophe lorsque «le centre de la terre s'entrouvre vomissant des flammes» et qu'il «sort de ce Volcan beaucoup de spectres, & de Furies qui tourmentent Don Juan»⁴⁶. La scène spectaculaire accentue l'intensité dramatique des n° 30 et 31 de la partition de Gluck, chacune majestueuse qui suggère les enfers et pose la question du salut, de la faute, de la mort et de l'âme en emportant dans un tourbillon musical. Angiolini fait disparaître Don Juan, comme le fera Mozart à Vienne, en 1798, puisque le rideau du Kärntnerortheater tombe sur le cri infernal de Don Giovanni, englouti par une trappe qui s'ouvre au milieu des flammes. Ici, le ballet s'achève sur le vide: il ne reste rien, pas même le bouffon. La chaconne finale

⁴³ G. Angiolini, *Le Festin de Pierre, Ballet pantomime*, op. cit., p. 177.

⁴⁴ Contrairement au héros de Tirso de Molina, pseud. de Fray Gabriel Tellez (1584-1648), Don Juan n'espère pas un pardon miraculeux. P. Van Tieghem, *Dictionnaire des littératures*, op. cit., art. «Don Juan», t. 1, p. 1151-1155.

⁴⁵ G. Angiolini, *Le Festin de Pierre, Ballet pantomime*, op. cit., p. 177.

⁴⁶ *Id.*

laisse le spectateur en plein désarroi, au plus fort de son émotion face à la dernière image, celle du néant: vision beaucoup plus troublante et plus fantastique que celle de Sganarelle réclamant ses gages.

Multi-talented Men

Part II

By Kathrine Sorley Walker

William Chappell, 1908 – 1994

In the last issue Kathrine Sorley Walker discussed the career of Hedley Briggs. Here she considers the career of one of his contemporaries, William Chappell

William Chappell and Hedley Briggs were close contemporaries in age - Chappell was born on 27 September 1908, Briggs on 29 March 1907. Both, from their early teens, were to make multi-faceted careers in the performing arts, but there the similarities ended. Although Chappell's birthplace was Wolverhampton, he was essentially a Londoner. He came of a theatrical family – his father was Archibald Chappell and his mother had been Edith Blair-Staples - and, in his own words, 'I was born in theatrical digs – my mother and father were on tour. The theatre was in my blood'. His grandfather, although a soldier, was so passionate about the theatre that when he retired from the Army he took a job as house manager of the Royal Court Theatre in Liverpool. Music also was part of his heritage - an earlier William Chappell (1809-1888) (possibly a forbear) was a leading historian of popular music of his day, co-founding the Musical Antiquarian Society in 1840.

Chappell, therefore, had the inestimable advantage of growing up in the London milieu which could best promote his inborn passion for

dancing, drawing and the theatre generally. His father walked out when he was very young, and he, his mother and younger sister, Honor had very little money. In 1921, when he was only thirteen and a half (his mother lied about his age to ensure his enrolment), he became a student at the Chelsea School of Art, and instantly made a friendship that would be life-long with the sixteen year-old painter Edward Burra. They set up a quartet with Barbara Ker-Seymer and Clover Pritchard. Burra came of a rich family but was an extremely delicate child so that his schooling ended early. Nevertheless the four friends were immensely active, going to theatres, art exhibitions and annual Society events like the Chelsea Arts Ball on New Year's Eve. They saw the Diaghilev Ballet, and for Chappell a closer connection with ballet came in 1927, when a friend of his mother arranged for him to be introduced to Marie Rambert. He began to go to her ballet classes, and made a stage debut with her students at the Rudolf Steiner Hall on June 23, when Purcell's masque/opera, *The Fairy Queen*, was produced by Dennis Arundell for the Purcell Opera Society and the Cambridge Amateur Dramatic Society. Ashton, right at the beginning of his career (he had staged *The Tragedy of Fashion* for Rambert in 1926), supplied the choreography and Chappell was cast with Kathleen O'Connor and Joyce Peters in a *pas de trois* as Monkeys. He told Julie Kavanagh (*Secret Muses*) that before that he 'had never lifted a foot' except to do the charleston'.

He was, therefore, in at the very start of the modern era of ballet in Britain, along with Frederick Ashton, Maude Lloyd and Andrée Howard. There was an immediate rapport with Ashton, who was four years older but in very comparable home circumstances. Ashton's family was also poor – his father had committed suicide, leaving his widow with a son and daughter (Edith) to bring up. Ashton had been found a job in the City, but he became a pupil of Leonide Massine who handed him on to Rambert in 1925. As a dancer he was well ahead of Chappell, but in May 1928 Rambert's young men were employed as dancers in opera productions at Covent Garden. The repertoire included *Armide*, *Samson et Dalila*, *Louise*, *Carmen* and *Aida*. In July Rambert took advantage of Chappell's art school qualifications to launch him as a designer for a new Ashton ballet, *Leda*, later revised as *Leda and the Swan*. Ashton, however, had already been accepted in Paris for the Ida

Rubinstein Ballet that was about to be launched. Rehearsals began in August, and Chappell joined slightly later. He and Ashton lived in an apartment in the Rue des Ruisseaux belonging to the composer Lennox Berkeley. Berkeley, who graduated from Oxford in 1926, was studying with Nadine Boulanger and, incidentally, making friends with composers like Stravinsky, Milhaud and Poulenc.

Chappell describes his own audition in his book *Fonteyn: Impressions of a Ballerina*: 'Wearing practice clothes I presented myself to the scrutiny of Bronislava Nijinska, who was chief choreographer and *maitresse de ballet*...Paralysed by nerves, woefully aware of my lack of training, I gave a lamentable exhibition, and to my dismay I was accepted. I made an attempt to avoid signing the contract, but Fred [Ashton] was adamant.' At least he was no stranger to continental travel as he and Burra had already been twice on holiday in the south of France. Nijinska's presence with the company compensated for Rubinstein's own minimal dancing ability and Chappell and Ashton met a group of young male dancers who would all become famous internationally: David Lichtenstein (Lichine), Roman Jasinsky, Yurek Shabelevsky and Birger Bartholin. The company opened in Paris in November, and then fulfilled an extensive European tour that took them to Monte Carlo, Venice, Milan, Naples, Rome, Vienna and Brussels, ending in Paris in May 1929.

Rambert meanwhile had a new jack-of-all-trades in an eager and hardworking young man called William Cook who had approached her as a possible student towards the end of 1928. In exchange for ballet classes, he was acting as bookkeeper, pianist, secretary and stage manager. In London in 1929 there was a production by Ashley Dukes (Rambert's husband) of the play *Jew Süß*, for which Ashton choreographed a ballet, *Mars and Venus*. Sometime in 1930 Chappell illustrated a book, *The Pleasure of Your Company: a Guide to Entertaining*, compiled by Doris Langley Moore and her sister June, and in February he got his first important design assignment, for Ashton's *Capriol Suite*. There was little money available, but he took Rambert to look at some left-over World War I stock in the basement of Barker's Kensington store. There was natural coloured linen for sixpence a yard (difficult to express in 2009 currency and measurements!) and they used

this as a basis for the costumes, trimming them imaginatively with black tape. *Capriol Suite* is a ballet that still works well, set to themes arranged by Peter Warlock (Peter Heseltine) from Arbeau's *Orchésographie*. Chappell's costumes are an excellent union of Elizabethan fashions and the demands of the choreography, and he also took part in the Basse Danse (and later the Pavane). *Capriol Suite* was in the Camargo Society programme at the Apollo Theatre in January 1931, and the same evening saw the premiere of de Valois' ballet *Cephalus and Procris*, also designed by Chappell. H. B. Sibthorp (in his memoirs (cited in Part I of this study) claimed that the work 'revealed Chappell's mastery of the art of making bricks without straw'.

In February 1931 Ashton choreographed and Chappell designed *La Péri* for Rambert. Alicia Markova (*Markova Remembers*) recalled how she and Ashton and Chappell went to Burlington House, where 'there was a great exhibition of Persian Art' which gave them ideas about make-up and poses. Production costs had to be minimal, but 'Billy Chappell had ingenuity as well as talent – he was able to make and design costumes as well as dance – and he created a beautiful tunic for Fred...from a discarded brocade evening dress belonging to Mim [Rambert] – she hated parting with it!'. During March Ashton got a bread-and-butter engagement arranging dances for stage shows that were interspersed with the films at the Regal Cinema at Marble Arch. Markova and Chappell led thirty-two girl dancers three times a day, and he designed their costumes. Like Hedley Briggs, Chappell was associated with the Camargo Society in different capacities as dancer and designer, and when Ashton's *Facade* was premiered at the Cambridge Theatre in London in April 1931 he created Popular Song with Walter Gore, the dance that brilliantly reflects the dead-pan soft-shoe double act vaudeville style and still marks one of the high spots of that durable comedy. He was also one of the three Mountaineers who dally with the Milkmaid in the Yodelling Song. For Rambert, Woizikovsky staged Nijinsky's *L'Après-midi d'un faune*, and Chappell had the lead. *The Dancing Times* (May) wrote 'he is another member of the Ballet Club of whom considerable things may be expected in future', but decided that in *Faune* he 'failed to catch the atmosphere of this very peculiar ballet'. *The Stage* (June 18), however, described him as 'a

dancer of warm imagination'. In July he was briefly associated with Hedley Briggs (although they may barely have noticed each other!) as he was cast as a Son and a Comforter in *Job*.

De Valois' Vic-Wells Ballet had started at Sadler's Wells, and in May 1931 Chappell designed her ballet *The Jackdaw and the Pigeons*. Sibthorp wrote: 'Chappell decorated it in tones of black, silver grey, pink and lemon yellow that moved against a giant watering can and giant sprawling flowers'. Work still went on for Rambert – the dancers had a season at the Lyric Theatre Hammersmith in June with the great Tamara Karsavina as guest artist. Ashton created *Mercury* for her, and Chappell designed some rather controversial costumes – C.W. Beaumont (*Dancers under my Lens*) wrote: 'Why on earth should Mercury wear a white jacket and tight-fitting trousers which suggested an attendant at a cocktail-bar or a *comique* out of a Montmartre revue?' In September, for the Vic-Wells Ballet at the Old Vic, Ashton composed a frivolous and stylish 'nautical comedy', *Regatta*, with designs by Chappell, who also danced as one of Two Young Men. During the 1930s, Rambert had name-changed William Cook to Antony Tudor, and in November 1931 she launched him into choreography with *Cross-Garter'd*, a piece about the gulling of Malvolio in which Chappell danced Fabian. The same month he designed, very charmingly, Ashton's *The Lady of Shalott* (the costumes were used again in 1941 for Walter Gore's ballet *Bartlemas Dances*); and for the Camargo Society at the Savoy Theatre Ashton staged a ballet to Constant Lambert music, *A Day in a Southern Port* (later called *Rio Grande*). Burra did the designs, and for Chappell there was an attractive creation of A Creole Boy. When the ballet was taken into the Vic-Wells repertoire in 1935, he repeated the performance, partnering the young Margot Fonteyn – the first time they danced together. In his book about her (*Fonteyn: Impressions of a Ballerina*) he wrote about their roles, saying 'They did not demand a lot of technique... but they certainly needed artistry, life and characterisation'. These were the kind of qualities that made dancers of that period (including Chappell) so memorable. Fonteyn also looked back, in her autobiography (*Margot Fonteyn*), remembering that at the age of fifteen and a half 'it was not long until I developed a crush on William Chappell, who was so much the kind-

est of the awe-inspiring adults around me and who had such blue eyes. He was gentle, he never shouted...I don't expect he was aware of my feeling for him, I would have thought it shameful to let him see'. Rehearsals for *Rio Grande* provided her 'most opportunely with an excuse to regard him affectionately while acting my role'.

1931 ended with a Midnight Ballet at the Carlton Theatre in December, when Ashton staged *The Lord of Burleigh* and Chappell created the leading role. He also designed costumes (after Aubrey Beardsley illustrations for Wilde's *Salome*) for a short work choreographed and danced by de Valois, *The Dancer's Reward*. In January 1932 he was in the cast of the musical *Helen!*, and designed de Valois' *Narcissus and Echo*, created at Sadler's Wells for Markova and Stanley Judson. Markova recalled very 'modern' costumes in white and black and a set with different levels to separate Echo from Narcissus – a series of levels had also been a feature of *The Lady of Shalott*. In March, for Rambert, there was a new collaboration, creating designs for Tudor's *Lysistrata* – a background of white walls was painted with sprays of vines and bunches of grapes, and Lysistrata wore dark tights under an ankle-length split skirt. Ashton by now had met C. B. Cochran and contributed to a musical comedy called *The Cat and the Fiddle*, and in March he arranged dances for a Cochran cabaret, *Magic Nights*, at the Trocadero. Chappell designed a couple of numbers, one of which, under the title *Récamier*, was taken into the Rambert repertoire in 1933. The Camargo Society's performance in June 1932 included a new de Valois ballet, large-scale, very classically choreographed, titled *The Origin of Design*. It was generally felt to be overlong and laborious; it used Handel music arranged by Sir Thomas Beecham and had designs by Chappell after Inigo Jones.

Chappell, in fact, had every opportunity to become part of the London theatre world in a way that was not possible for Hedley Briggs, whose his early career was sited in Birmingham and Cambridge. Although Briggs had a good relationship with de Valois he never became part of the Vic-Wells Ballet organisation; and he did not, of course, have any connection with Rambert. Apart from Penelope Spencer and Lopokova, his contacts were in drama theatre through Peter Godfrey and Norman Marshall, and he moved steadily away from

dance. For Chappell (who was never an actor) everything opened out from the time he met Rambert and became part of Ashton's circle of friends and acquaintances in London society. It is always fascinating to trace how and why careers are helped or hindered in a wide variety of different ways. Chappell's helpful circumstances were reinforced by his great likeability; at no time in his long and busy life did anyone appear to have any animosity for him. He was considered talented, charming, outgoing, cooperative and very pleasant to know. Briggs was equally admired, liked, and constantly chosen by directors to act, dance or design in their productions; what he lacked was the tremendous support Chappell got from his Rambert and Vic-Wells connections.

It was undoubtedly through Ashton that Chappell's career moved on. Their talents were complementary. Chappell was not a rival in the sphere of choreography that Ashton steadily made his own. In the Cochran shows Ashton met Buddy Bradley, the American jazz choreographer, and in June 1932 they collaborated over a ballet, *High Yellow*, for the Camargo Society. This was a comedy set on a tropical island – we have already seen that Hedley Briggs had the role of Pappy. The decor was designed by Vanessa Bell, but Chappell did clever, bright, Caribbean-style costumes, with long flounced skirts and turbans for the women, and danced the part of Joey. In October, for Rambert, Ashton created the Degas-inspired ballet *Foyer de danse*; again, the costumes were by Chappell. The danseuses, naturally, were dressed as they were in the paintings but Ashton, as ballet master, wore a yellow waistcoat, blue tailcoat and trousers and Markova, as *première danseuse*, wore an orange-crimson dress, diamond bracelets and a hat with enormous ostrich feathers. 'The dearest little pastiche imaginable' was the way H. H. described it all in *The Observer*. In November Chappell danced, and Ashton choreographed, the 'comedy with music' *A Kiss in Spring*, for which Briggs did the designs. Another collaboration with Tudor came in May 1933, with *Atalanta of the East*. This was about the famous race between the athletic Atalanta and her suitors, but Tudor re-sited it in India. Chappell's designs were much admired. The costumes were in black and silver, yellow and gold. The dancers wore bracelets with bells, and had long gilded fingernails, as well as excit-

ingly oriental headdresses. In September he designed de Valois' ballet *The Wise and Foolish Virgins* in boldly medieval style, with the wise virgins in tall pointed headdresses and the foolish ones in short-veiled coiffes; and also designed costumes for a divertissement performance of the *Bluebird pas de deux*.

In December 1933 Ashton staged *Les Rendezvous* at Sadler's Wells. As delicious now as then, the work, set to an arrangement by Lambert of Auber music, was frothy and frivolous, and showed off Markova, in a flirtatious leading role, wearing a Chappell-designed costume of light grey decorated with roses and lilies of the valley. Of all the ballets with which he was connected, this one had the most complex history. Some revisions were made in October 1934. He produced a new set of designs in November 1937, a setting of white park gates, and pink and white or blue and white costumes for the dancers – all was young, fresh and entirely charming. In May 1959, when the company had become the Royal Ballet, he produced revised costume designs but a new setting was used by Sophie Fedorovitch. In October 1962, however, a sensible decision was taken to revert to his 1937 designs. Alas, these have now been discarded in favour of new designs by another hand that entirely ruin the original conception of the work. Chappell had also re-designed the ballet in December 1947 for Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet, but these were destroyed by fire at the Theatre Royal Hanley in June 1949. In 1961, however, that company (by then the Royal Ballet touring company) used new designs by Chappell.

Chappell danced with Diana Gould in December 1933 in *An Elopement in Elsinore*, a ballet choreographed by Andrée Howard for a play, *Beau Brummell*, produced by Sir Nigel Playfair at the Saville Theatre. Then in May 1934 de Valois staged *Bar aux Folies-bergère* for Rambert at the Mercury Theatre, and Chappell was the designer, achieving a marvellous transference of Manet to the stage, as well as dancing the role of Adolphe. That year he joined the Vic-Wells Ballet as a dancer and in April made considerable impact as the Stranger Player in *The Haunted Ballroom*, the ballet in which de Valois gave Robert Helpmann his first leading creation with the company. This was a highly atmospheric, dramatic work, and Chappell's sensitive contribution as the supernatural master of ceremonies was a vital part of its success. In

October he was responsible for the designs of de Valois' ballet *The Jar*. This comedy set in Sicily was about a wealthy farmer whose prized oil jar was broken. A hump-backed tinker was employed to mend it, but managed to trap himself inside the jar, which had to be broken again to rescue him. Chappell's clean-lined and brightly coloured impression of bits of houses, a glimpse of a garden with an orange tree and the enormous jar, and clever peasant costumes, were well-liked. Beaumont described them (*The Vic-Wells Ballet*) as 'charming alike in colour and design' and P.W.Manchester found them (*Vic-Wells: a Ballet Progress*) 'as pretty as a picture'. Sibthorp wrote that they were 'one of his best decors, cool tones contrasted with bright sunny farmyard'.

Chappell retained his links with Rambert. In October he created, with Pearl Argyle, the Mortal Lovers under Venus in Tudor's ballet *The Planets*; and he had a role as Sylvestre in Ashton's *Valentine's Eve* when Ballet Rambert appeared at the Duke of York's Theatre in London in February 1935. His early work as a designer for Ballet Rambert was thoughtfully analysed in 1945 by Lionel Bradley (*Sixteen Years of Ballet Rambert*): 'He has been particularly successful with mythological subjects and divertissements. His simplicity of design and the use of only a few clear colours is ideal for the costumes of classical times and he is clever in devising slight variations of design or colour arrangement to differentiate between several groups of dancers. Unlike the easel painter who turns to theatrical work, Chappell never forgets that a ballet costume is to be used in motion. His cleanness of design does not preclude richness of effect.'

In May 1935 Chappell created the Friend, and the Card-Player in the mad scene, in de Valois' magnificent dance-drama, *The Rake's Progress*. Gordon Anthony (*A Camera at the Ballet*) wrote that this was 'an ideal conception of an irresponsible 18th century macaroni...with a comical sort of preening, bibulous elegance...[he gave] the dance with the pack of cards...a horrible sort of vacuity indigenous to certain types of mental cases – comic, mad and horrific at the same time'. Chappell also produced new designs for the Vic-Wells Ballet *Giselle* that were to last until the company re-staged it at Covent Garden in 1946. He was ideally cast, with Pearl Argyle, as the Shepherd and Shepherdess – masquerading gods – of de Valois'

delightful *The Gods Go A-Begging* in January 1936 – and this was televised by the BBC in June 1938. Other television appearances were in Popular Song in *Facade* (1936), Florestan in *Carnaval* and Benno in *Swan Lake Act II* (both in 1937). In *The Dancing Times* (January 1936), G.E.G. wrote about him in his Notes on Decor:

‘William Chappell has been a bulwark of British ballet. Time and time again he has given it a setting that has allowed it to keep alive in its tiny and not too richly furnished retreats. This has been no mean achievement...but in its attainment the artist himself has suffered and his work still bears the signs of the limitations imposed on him by the cramped confinement of his earlier decorative circumstances’

The Markova-Dolin Ballet was created in 1935, and Chappell did the designs for their production of *Casse-Noisette Act II*. This time G.E.G. (*The Dancing Times*, February 1936) waxed enthusiastic. He wrote:

‘A sheer delight! A true fairyland where the trees are snowy white and where the blues are all icy without ever becoming steely, and where the pinks are such as are only found in the nicest of sweets, and the yellows were touched with the gold of sugar candy at its best. Costume after costume is a minor triumph of artistically restrained gaiety... never a note of cheapness...never silly in its childish loveliness. Only the wistful Clara wore a touch of sombre grey in her blue drapings, which was just as it should be.’

In October 1936 Chappell created the role of The Friend in de Valois’ new ballet, *Prometheus*, and in December he re-designed an early deValois work, *Nursery Suite*, which was revived for a group of Vic-Wells Ballet School’s Scholarship students that included the very young Julia Farron. His next designs for the Wells, in February 1937, were to become the ones most solidly linked to him for ever after – he did the delightful costumes and setting for Ashton’s much-loved *Les*

Patineurs. Only a couple of other-company productions have commissioned designs from other artists – notably perhaps those created by Cecil Beaton for American Ballet Theatre in 1946. The unity of Chappell’s designs with the choreography and Lambert’s arrangement of Meyerbeer music is outstanding. Along with the sense of outdoor winter in the fur-trimmed costumes and muffs, the scene is pleurably lit by Chinese lanterns. The colours are predominantly blue and brown, apart from the pristine white of the lovers’ *pas de deux* and the dark ruby and white dresses for the pair of graceful *patineuses*. Styles suggest mid-19th century fashions, but are perfect for the clever and sometimes virtuoso movements of the dances.

Often, if he did not actually create designs himself, Chappell supervised the execution of designs by other artists which needed adaptation. This happened over Ashton’s *A Wedding Bouquet* in 1937, when designs by Lord Berners had to be adjusted to suit dance action. An exhibition of Chappell’s paintings, drawings and designs was held at Sadler’s Wells in April 1938, and the prices are interesting. The decor for *Les Rendezvous* was marked at 10 guineas, costumes 5 guineas, and a projected decor for *Les Patineurs* was 10 guineas; miscellaneous costumes were 5 guineas each and portrait heads in oils were priced ‘Helpmann, 14 guineas; Argyle, 12 guineas; Chappell, 12 guineas’; drawings of Fonteyn, Ashton, de Valois, Helpmann and Turner were sold for 10 guineas each. His next designs for the Vic-Wells Ballet were for a *pièce d’occasion*, *The Judgment of Paris*, created by Ashton for a fund-raising gala in May 1938. A flight of steps behind three pillars was set against a backcloth showing a distant view of sea and sky, with a ruined temple at the top of a hill; costumes were Greek tunics and short cloaks for the men and draped dresses for the women. Colours ranged from white and gold to purple and blue.

World War II began on 3 September 1939. Chappell was with the Vic-Wells Ballet, which was briefly suspended but reassembled in Cardiff and continued with a provincial tour, accompanied by two pianists (Hilda Gaunt and Lambert) instead of an orchestra. In January 1940 he designed for the new London Ballet, Frank Staff’s *The Seasons*, in which ‘the costumes were excellent in suggesting the different elements and very well suited to the choreography...the use of a

panoramic backcloth, raised as the scene changed, enabled each season to follow on without break.' In April he designed the Vic-Wells Ballet's new production of *Coppélia*, given for the first time with the third act, and created a remarkably pleasing village setting with imaginative colour values of green and blue, red and purple for the costumes. For Mona Inglesby's International Ballet, he designed *Le Lac des cygnes Act II, Amoras* and *Everyman*, before he was called up in 1940. He served in the Royal Artillery. His military status is made clear in the way his friend Edward Burra directed letters: Gunner Chappell W.E., 979498. This changed to Cadet in July 1942; 2nd Lieutenant 258507 in May 1943; Lieutenant in January 1944, and Captain in March 1944. In 1945 he was in Naples, according to *Well, Dearie!*, 'chafing bitterly against the delay of his demobilisation', but by Christmas he was out of the Army and about to start a theatrical dressmakers and designing business in Bruton Place, London.

Quite quickly, however, he became busily engaged with the theatre. In October 1946 he re-designed *Coppélia* when Sadler's Wells Ballet first gave it at Covent Garden. Beaumont described this in detail in *Ballet* (December 1946). He was not favourably impressed. The setting for Act I had an elaborate archway of pink stone hung with red bunting and flanked by brightly coloured houses. Act II, with its elaborately dressed dolls in alcoves, resembled 'a modern trade exhibition'. In Act III the traditional presentation bell was replaced by a clock, 'its works alike exposed to wind and weather'. Costumes on the whole were 'colourful but rather inclined to be garish'. The designs were far less attractive than the 1940 ones and were replaced in 1954. Beaumont was as unenthusiastic about Chappell's designs for International Ballet's *Swan Lake* in March 1947. Again, it was principally colour mixes about which he was worried. There was bright blue and mustard yellow for the men in Act I, Wedgwood blue and white for the peasant girls, while the Prince was 'shabbily treated' in a costume of dark brown and blue. Spreading feather headdresses for the swans were criticised, but the national dances in Act III were praised for showing 'a sense of period'. At the time Odile was not generally in the UK described as 'the Black Swan' – Hugh Stevenson's Vic-Wells Ballet designs for *Le Lac des cygnes* had dressed Odile in a warm ruby-

coloured tutu – and for the 1947 International Ballet production Chappell dressed her in dark green with paler green sequins which gave her 'a sinister snake-like appearance'. When this production was given at the Coliseum in May 1950 *The Times* (May 5) also mentioned this: '[Chappell] neglects the recently established clothing of Odile in black, and favours a mixture of lavender and apple green which becomes her not at all.' All these comments reflect a complete change in Chappell's design ideas from his pre-war work. Everything that Bradley praised about his early sets and costumes for Rambert was still applicable in 1940, when he first designed *Coppélia*; but his simplicity and his ability to use 'only a few clear colours' seem to have vanished entirely after his return from war service. After this Chappell's career was primarily outside ballet. He was no longer linked with Ballet Rambert, and although Ashton had returned in power to Sadler's Wells Ballet (which became the Royal Ballet in 1956) he was using a variety of new designers. Chappell found his postwar niche in non-dance theatre, including opera. In 1948 he designed Elizabeth Bowen's play *Castle Anna* for the Company of Four, and in January 1949 directed Vaughan Williams' *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains* for Sadler's Wells Opera. About this *The Times* wrote (January 21) 'William Chappell's production takes its character from the elusive ethereality of the music...[he] aims visibly and successfully at under-emphasis, never allowing stage movement to intrude on the steady course of the music.' New designs for Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet's production of *Les Rendezvous*, in late January were not particularly happy. *The Times* (February 1, called the new decor 'a chocolate-boxy striped affair that somehow attempts to inflate the ballet's charming good humour with unnecessary pretensions...it is out of taste, strangely so for Mr Chappell'. He followed this in February 1950 (*The Times* February 21) with 'a wholly charming' decor for Sadler's Wells Opera's *La Traviata* 'that is at all times a help to her [Joan Cross was the director] scheme'. Eric Blom (*The Observer*, February 26) found that the designs 'but for the unpleasing second ballroom scene, show charm and imagination in conception although no great skill in execution'. Chappell designed Elizabethan-style costumes for a small British Council venture, the Norman Marshall Dramatic Recital Company that presented scenes

from Shakespeare on tour in France, and later in India and Pakistan, during 1950. For this the plays were presented on a bare platform without scenery or stage lighting; all-purpose costumes were varied for each scene simply by changes of cloak, doublet or headdress.

In 1951 he acted as a monkey in a very successful comedy, *The Little Hut*, arranged dances for *The Winter's Tale* starring John Gielgud and Diana Wynyard, and had his first directorial success with *The Little Revue*. *The Times* critic (May 25) was not completely won-over, although he allowed that it 'is a gay evening' (the adjective was not yet demoted). He found it 'almost too amusing. But then, what is Mr William Chappell to do, with a gifted company champing at the bit, as it were, and a principal author [Arthur Macrae] who sees the funny side of some most unexpected things.' From then on Chappell was much in demand as a designer and a director of revues, straight plays, operas and musicals, working with many leading actors and actresses, singers and dancers. He felt that his experience as a dancer and a designer proved extremely helpful in his work as a director – he liked to plan new productions almost choreographically. Curiously, in fact, with the new postwar theatre generation in the ascendant, he was quite unintentionally usurping the directing/designing role that Hedley Briggs had so ably filled before they were both called up for war service. It seems, with hindsight, to be a classic example of one star being in the ascendant, the other suffering eclipse.

A parallel career also emerged for Chappell as a writer, something that had at no point been a possibility for Briggs. Chappell had already written articles for journals such as *Penguin New Writing* and in 1949 he contributed one to Peter Noble's edited *British Ballet*, in which he discussed other ballet designers. In this he divided designers into three groups: the famous Russians, like Alexandre Benois, who had worked with Diaghilev; those who derived from 'the new school of painting in Paris', including Christian Bérard and Pavel Tchelitchev; and those who were encouraged in Britain by Rambert and de Valois. In the latter were included Edward Burra, Oliver Messel, Rex Whistler, Sophie Fedorovitch, and Leslie Hurry. He then set out points governing ballet design: the necessity for the creation of space and for costumes that revealed dancers' bodies. He emphasised the need for a designer to be

able to understand and enhance the choreography. Examples quoted were Oliver Smith's evocation of New York for Jerome Robbins' *Fancy Free*; Christian Bérard's collaboration with Roland Petit in *Les Forains*; Rex Whistler's understanding of Hogarth's London and de Valois' choreography in *The Rake's Progress*. He gave enormous praise to Sophie Fedorovitch for Ashton's *Symphonic Variations* - 'She creates boundless space and controls it gently by the few dark graph lines on the backcloth. She expresses the clear ecstasy of the movement by her use of a light green, which is thin, delicate and brilliant, washed on the cloth and the plain flats...the shapes of the costumes are made sufficiently theatrical by a few intricacies of cut, and some palely-shimmering decorations on the heads.' Burra's designs for *Miracle in the Gorbals* had 'a dramatic shape, a solidity and perspective without straining too near realism' and represented 'strong and effective native designing'. Of Leslie Hurry he wrote 'although his backgrounds tend to dominate the ballet...they are saved from being overwhelming by the fact that they invariably point and emphasise most effectively the atmosphere of the work they are decorating. This is particularly applicable to his striking scenery and clothes for Helpmann's ballet *Hamlet*'.

Chappell's first book was *Studies in Ballet* in 1948. This was valuable as an expression of personal feelings and conclusions by an active member of the ballet profession about a dancer's work and about critics and audiences. Although he tended to think (mistakenly) that audiences were largely characterised by ignorance and hysteria, he wrote good sense on most other matters; and the text was remarkably well complemented by strongly fantastic drawings. This book was following by a detailed appreciation of Fonteyn's development and artistry in *Fonteyn: Impressions of a Ballerina*, published by Spring Books in 1951. Like *Studies in Ballet*, this included a series of his frequently surrealistic line drawings, this time of cats. 'Fonteyn', he wrote, 'is devoted to cats in their real and their simulated forms. Perhaps it is a fellow-feeling and cats are like Fonteyn, not Fonteyn like cats. Whichever it may be, the feline in her appearance has become emphasised as she has grown up...it is strange that until Petit made *Les Demoiselles de la nuit* for Fonteyn, no choreographer had thought of her as a cat.' He went

farther – ‘Fonteyn’s character is cat-like as well as her appearance. She has their reserve and repose...also a cat’s sudden outbursts of gaiety and irresponsible behaviour. She moves with their smooth, easy and effortless speed.’ This book, out of print and forgotten, is a remarkable detailed analysis of Fonteyn’s development and style. A review by J.H.M[onahan] in the *Manchester Guardian* (June 12) found that Chappell was ‘singularly well equipped to give a critical appreciation of her [Fonteyn’s] talents’ and praised the ‘almost casually vivid passages of description which may help later generations to understand the distinctive but elusive quality of the finest West European dancer of this decade’. In 1955 Chappell contributed a ‘pictorial diary’ of the early Vic-Wells Ballet days to a book, *Gala Performance*, in which he mentioned that he had designed the costume for one of Ninette de Valois’ most memorable solos, *Pride* - it was in fact a second-time round commission, as it had been initially designed by Vivienne Bennett. In 1982 he co-authored *Edward Burra: a painter remembered by his friends* and brilliantly edited Burra’s letters in *Well, Dearie!: the letters of Edward Burra*, published by Gordon Fraser in 1985. After *The Little Revue* in 1951 he was associated with other similar shows as director and often dance-arranger, including *The Globe Revue*, *At the Lyric*, *High Spirits*, and *An Evening with Beatrice Lillie*. In 1952 he designed costumes for Tennessee Williams’ *Summer and Smoke* as well as Coward’s *The Vortex*. In 1954 he directed his first play, Anouilh’s *Time Remembered* starring Paul Scofield, Margaret Rutherford and Mary Ure.

From 1954 Chappell became increasingly involved with opera - that year he was at the Aldeburgh Festival in June, living in a borrowed cottage in Romney Marsh and directing a new comic opera by Lennox Berkeley, *A Dinner Engagement*. This was a one-act work with a witty libretto by Paul Dehn, in which, according to *The Times*, Chappell ‘made good use of the doors, windows, cupboards and the oven which Peter Snow [the designer] had provided’; and in 1955 for another festival, in Bath, he staged dances for Grétry’s *Zémire et Azov*. Also in 1955 he was associate director for Orson Welles’ production of *Moby Dick* at the St James’s Theatre – this led to an association in 1962 when he appeared in Welles’ film, *The Trial*. Regular directorial engage-

ments came in 1956 (Coward’s *South Sea Bubble* and a farce, *Man Alive*, by John Dighton); 1957 (Anouilh’s *Restless Heart*); 1958 (*Where’s Charley?*, a musical version of *Charley’s Aunt* starring Norman Wisdom; and the musical, *Expresso Bongo*, starring Scofield and Millicent Martin). There were shows that did well and others that flopped – one of the latter was a musical version of Terence Rattigan’s *French Without Tears* called *Joie de vivre* staged in 1959. In 1963 Harold Fielding took over Prince Charles Theatre to present *Fielding’s Music-hall*, and Chappell had the task of creating a Victorian-style programme that included a series of solos, two-handed acts and production numbers.

June 1964 saw him again at Aldeburgh, on the advice of Lennox Berkeley and Robert Helpmann (a long-time colleague and friend), collaborating successfully as director with Malcolm Williamson and the librettist Geoffrey Dunn on an extraordinary opera based on Edith Sitwell’s *English Eccentrics*. The opening of the little Jeannetta Cochrane Theatre of the Central School of Art in November 1964 was marked by *One Man Show* with music by Nicholas Maw, based on a Saki story and directed by Chappell. In December 1965, at the same theatre, there was a fascinating experiment by Malcolm Williamson, *Julius Caesar Jones*. This opera was written for the Finchley Children’s Music Group, and was based on the gap that often existed between parents and their children, the parents being in ignorance of the children’s intense preoccupation with complex imagined worlds. Chappell was in Dublin for the Theatre Festival in October 1966, directing a revival of George Farquhar’s first play, *Love and a Bottle*, at Dublin’s Gate Theatre. *The Times* (October 8) decided that his production ‘assists understanding by lining up the cast for an introduction in character’. He continued to be closely linked with opera, teaching (but what, one wonders?) at the London Opera Centre in Covent Garden. He wrote the libretto for another Malcolm Williamson opera, *The Violins of St Jacques*, based on the book by Patrick Leigh Fermor, and directed its production at Sadler’s Wells in November 1966. Williamson wrote, in an obituary of Chappell in *The Guardian*, ‘The depths of his musical understanding and his love of the singing voice, with [Peter] Rice’s amazing sets, realised a composer’s dream with the lyricism of young

love, extravagant spectacle and ultimate tragedy.' The story of *The Violins* dealt with the early 20th century disaster when the Island of St Jacques in the Caribbean was destroyed, with all its inhabitants, by a volcanic eruption. It was an eclectic score, with many mood changes; Act I was characterised by a sense of suppressed tropical passions but Act II had wit and charm. Leading singers were April Cantelo as Berthe, Jennifer Vyvyan as the Comtesse de Serindan and Owen Branigan as the Comte. In *The Guardian*, November 30), Edward Greenfield wrote that Williamson, 'with the help of his librettist William Chappell, has turned a highly unlikely source...into a richly emotional drama in which the relationships between characters come to life in big, bold arias'. When the production transferred to the Coliseum, Hugo Coles (*The Guardian*, November 28, 1968) wrote of 'a wonderful feeling of the exotic context, the meeting of European and native cultures'.

A production of *The Beaux' Stratagem* at Chichester Festival Theatre came in June 1967 and disappointed the critic of *The Times* (June 6), who had recently seen at the Old Vic a production he admired of *The Recruiting Sergeant* and found that Chappell 'had attempted to thrust Farquhar back into the old Restoration shell and to present the standard panorama of laughable bumpkins and hothouse gallants'. More opera came in 1970 with *Samson* for the Handel Opera Society at the Wells which Stanley Sadie in *The Times* (October 15) thought 'a bold attempt to bring fresh life to old methods'. He qualified this, however, by strong words about how badly Chappell had dealt with his non-professional performers: 'It really will not do...to ask a chorus to gesture together to the music, to raise their fists as they sing emphatically, to form into disciplined ranks and have others filing between in would-be parallel to Handel's counterpoint'. In 1972 there was at long last another collaboration with Ashton for the Royal Ballet at Covent Garden. This was an idyllic short ballet for Merle Park, David Wall and Derek Rencher, *A Walk to the Paradise Garden*, set to Delius music. In March 1973, for Opera Rara at the Collegiate Theatre, he directed Offenbach's *Robinson Crusoe*, which *The Times* (March 8) called 'appropriately light-hearted, but once or twice called for tighter discipline'; and there was a not-very-successful show, *Cockie!* (memoirs of C.B.Cochran). About this Michael Billington (*The Guardian*, Decem-

ber 12) wrote of 'an affectionate, relatively small scale show about a spendthrift, larger-than-life personality; William Chappell's direction has speed without any visible destination'. That year he also wrote the text for the splendid *Tribute to Ashton*, staged by the Royal Ballet at Covent Garden. In 1974 there was another flop – a production of Gershwin's *Oh, Kay!* at Westminster Theatre. *The Times* (March 8) allowed that he 'had gone for comedy casting and on those terms he has done well', but added that he 'achieves the almost impossible feat of reducing the music and lighting to the surrounding level of the show'. There were designs for Sadler's Wells Opera for *The Marriage of Figaro*, about which *The Times* (May 20) commented leena.rouhiainen@teak.fi 'Mr Chappell's economical sets, relying on suggestively painted surfaces, looked well'. Philip Hope-Wallace (*The Guardian*, July 28) wrote: 'The designer as well as the producer is William Chappell, and his job is marked by an expert's hand, not too elaborately conceived but practical and swift without seeming to skimp the values of the piece.'

In *The Times* (November 1, 1975) Clive Barnes reported on a production of Tom Stoppard's *Travesties* at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre in New York, mentioning that Chappell had arranged 'tongue-in-cheek dance movement'. Also in 1975 he produced, choreographed and designed costumes for Lully's rarely staged *Alceste* for London Opera Centre, with which dancers from Ballet Rambert were involved. Stanley Sadie, writing in *The Times* (December 19) felt that '[Chappell] perhaps ill-advisedly left too much of the very varied and tuneful ballet music undanced (while allowing dancing in some of the recitatives), but he kept things moving in a score that often threatens to become static, using the various slopes, the steps and the raised wings of the stage to excellent advantage; and some attractive lighting effects and projections served well...there was a good stylised battle and an effective Hades scene.' A production of *The Marriage of Figaro* for Sadler's Wells Opera in July 1977 was fiercely treated by Sadie in *The Times* (July 28) in a notice that detailed how subtleties had been ignored, motivations were unclear, and the action was full of 'stock comical gestures'. In 1979 he worked on the film *Nijinsky*. On August 4, 1980, he produced designs for Ashton's *Rhapsody* at Covent Garden, a trib-

ute to the 80th birthday of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother. According to Julia Kavanagh (*Secret Muses*), Ashton devised the architectural set of arches and Chappell did romantically pretty costumes in pink and gold. 'Always sensitive to criticism – a criticism from his oldest friend in particular – Chappell was hurt by Ashton's attempts to effect any changes.' They ended by passing notes to each other. Ashton begrudged the fact that he never felt free to speak his mind with Chappell but was expected to tolerate criticism in return. Ashton voiced his exasperation to others but [he and Chappell] remained devoted to each other and spoke on the phone each evening. In 1985 Chappell designed the costume for Ashton's charming solo for Merle Park, *La Chatte métamorphosée en femme*. Possibly his last directorial work was for *A Little Bit on the Side*, a revue launched at the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre in Guildford in August 1983, which may never have reached London. Ill health in his later years – the onset of emphysema – ended his active work for the stage although he continued to write. He worked on memoirs that do not seem to have survived, living at Rosenau Road, Battersea (where I remember visiting him); but when he died on January 1, 1994, he was at Rope Walk, Rye. At a thanksgiving service at St Paul's Church, Covent Garden on April 12 Leslie Edwards and John Standing paid tributes and Michael Somes and Penelope Wilton gave readings. Malcolm Williamson, in his *Guardian* obituary, summed up this extraordinary artist: 'Rarely does such a gifted and genial spirit come amongst us'.

William Chappell Chronology

(cr = created; des = designed; costs = costumes; sc – scenery; chor = choreographed; arr = arranged; dir = directed; VWB – Vic-Wells Ballet; SW = Sadler's Wells Theatre; OV = Old Vic; Th = Theatre; Ldn = London; H'smith = Hammersmith; Note: entries unspecified are all for Rambert)

- 1908 – Sep 27: born Wolverhampton, son of Archibald Chappell and wife Edith Eva Clara Blair-Staples.
- 1921 – Chelsea School of Art
- 1927 – June 23: as Rambert pupil, Dance of the Monkeys (cr), *Dances from The Fairy Queen*, Rudolf Steiner Hall
- 1928 – Mar 9: Passepied/courante (cr) *Nymphs & Shepherds*, Arts Th Ldn
 May 1-June 15: Dancer in operas at Covent Garden. Repertoire included *Armide* (May 1); *Samson et Dalila* (May 22); *Louise* (May 22); *Carmen* (May 29); *Aida* (June 15)
 July 10: Ganymede (cr), *Leda*, also des costs, Sunshine Matinee, Apollo Th (first given in Rambert Studio in June)
 Oct: joined Ida Rubinstein Ballet in Paris
 Dec 31: New Year's Eve Chelsea Arts Ball
- 1930 – Feb 25: Basse Danse/Mattachins/Pieds en l'air/Bransles (cr), *Capriol Suite*, also des costs. Mars, *Mars & Venus*, also des costs. A Zephyr (cr), *Leda and the Swan* (revised version of *Leda*), des costs (except for the swan). Entrée de Cupidon, *Four Dances from Les Petits Riens* (Ashton), Lyric H'smith. WC later danced Pavane, *Capriol Suite*
 June 23: *Le Rugby*, Lyric H'smith. WC later danced The Player. *Les Sylphides* given company premiere, WC later danced male lead. *Saudade du Brésil*, des cost.
 30: *Le Spectre de la rose* company premiere, WC later danced Spirit of the Rose.
 Dec 10: *Beauty, Truth and Rarity: a Masque of Poetry, Music and Dancing - Follow Your Saint (The Passionate Pavan)*, des costs, WC later danced lead. *Dances on a Scotch Theme*, sometimes called *The Tartans*, December 31, 1931 des costs
 20: Batsman (cr), *Le Cricket*, Lyric H'smith. *Carnaval* also given company premiere, WC later danced Pantalon.
 date unknown: illustrated book *The Pleasure of your Company*, a guide to entertaining, by Doris Langley Moore and her sister June.
- 1931 – Jan 25: an Attendant on Cephalus, *Cephalus and Procris*, also des costs. Apollo Th Ldn, Camargo Society
 Feb 16: The American Champion (cr), *Le Boxing*, also des sc. Also *La Péri*, des. Also poss danced a Cavalier, *Aurora's Wedding*.
 Mar 14: dancer, *The Dance of the Hours*, also des costs, The Regal (Cinema) Ballet

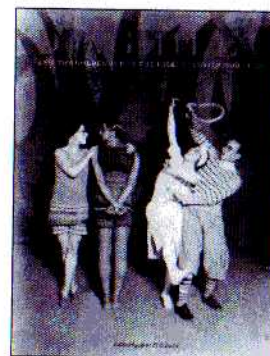
- Apr 20: The Faun, *L'Après-midi d'un faune* (revival by Woizikovsky)
 26: Jodelling Song/Popular Song (cr), *Facade*, Cambridge Th Ldn, Camargo Society
 May 5: *The Jackdaw & the Pigeons*, des, VWB, OV
 June 22: Apollo (cr), *Mercury*, also des, Lyric Th H'smith.
 July 5: an Attendant on Vertumnus, *Pomona*. also A Son/A Comforter (cr), *Job*, Cambridge Th Ldn, Camargo Society
 Sep 22: A Young Man (cr), *Regatta*, des, VWB, OV
 Nov 12: A Reaper (c), *The Lady of Shalott*, des (costs used for *Bartlemas Fair*, May 13, 1941).
 29: A Creole Boy (cr), *A Day in a Southern Port (Rio Grande)*, Savoy Th, Camargo Society
 Dec 15: Lord of Burleigh (cr), *The Lord of Burleigh*. also *A Dancer's Reward*, des costs, Camargo Society, Midnight Ballet, Carlton Th.
 date unknown: *Bluebird pas de deux*, des costs, VWB, SW
- 1932 – Jan 30: dancer, *Helen!* (opera bouffe by A P Herbert), Adelphi Th. Also *Narcissus & Echo*, des, VWB, SW
 Mar 20: *Lysistrata*, des.
 Apr 4?: Pas de quatre (cr), *An 1805 Impression in Magic Nights*, C B Cochran cabaret, Trocadero (Later known as *La Valse chez Madame Récamier* or *Récamier*), des.
 June 1 /6?: Joey, a Stranger (cr), *High Yellow*, des costs, Camargo Society, Savoy Th
 11: *The Origin of Design*, des. Savoy Th, Camargo Society
 Oct 9: *Foyer de danse*, des costs
 Dec 22: *Ballyhoo* (revue), des costs, Comedy Th
- 1933 – Mar 5: *Les Masques* premiered, WC later danced A Personage.
 28: dancer, *He Wanted Adventure* (musical fantasy), Savoy Th
 May 7: principal dancer (cr), *Pavane pour une Infante Defunte* (Ashton). also *Atalanta of the East*, des.
 Sep 26: *The Wise and Foolish Virgins (The Foolish Virgins)*, des, VWB, SW also costs for the *Bluebird pas de deux*
 Dec 5: *Les Rendezvous*, des, VWB, SW, revised October 2, 1934, re-des November 16, 1937. Des new costs May 7, 1959. Reverted (Royal Ballet) to 1937 des, October 10, 1962. New des for S W Th Ballet, December 26, 1947, costs revised after SW Th Ballet's sc/costs lost in fire, Hanley, June 2, 1949. Company (as Royal Ballet Touring Company) had new des in 1961, costs on August 29, sc on September 28.
 Dec 22: The Stranger, *Beau Brummell*, Saville Th, dancer in ballet in Act I with Diana Gould.
- 1934 – Jan 30: Danse Chinoise, *Casse-Noisette*, VWB, SW
 Mar 4: The Prince (cr), *Mermaid*. Joined VWB.
 c 12: The Man, *La Création du monde*, VWB, SW

- Apr 3: The Stranger Player (cr), *The Haunted Ballroom*, VWB, SW
 22: *Paramour*, des, (1st given in play *Dr Faustus*, OUDS, Feb 20)
 May 15: Adolphe, un habitué du bar (cr), *Bar aux Folies-Bergère*, des
 Oct 2: Entrée. *Les Rendezvous*, VWB, SW
 9: Young Man with a Guitar (cr), *The Jar*, des, VWB, SW
 28: Mortal under Venus (cr), *The Planets*
 Nov 20: Benno/a Mazurka dancer, *Le Lac des cygnes* (entirety), VWB, SW
 date unknown: Elihu, *Job*, VWB, SW
- 1935 – Feb 4: Sylvestre (cr), *Valentine's Eve*
 Mar 26: A Creole Boy, *Rio Grande*, VWB, SW
 May 20: The Friend (cr), *The Rake's Progress*. VWB, SW
 27: *Giselle*, des, VWB, SW
 Nov 12: *Casse-Noisette Act III*, des, Markova-Dolin Ballet
 Dec 14: *Nursery Suite* (students), des, VWB, SWT
- 1936 – Jan 10: The Shepherd (cr), *The Gods Go A-Begging*, VWB, SW
 Oct 11: *Passionate Pavane/Trio (Lacrymae)*, des.
 13: The Friend (cr), *Prometheus*, VWB, SW
 Nov 11: Elihu, BBCTV, extracts from *Job*. VWB
 Dec 8: Popular Song, *Facade*, BBCTV; also 1938, June 10 & 11.
 date unknown: *Aurora pas de deux*, des costs, VWB, SW
 date unknown: The Bluebird, *Bluebird pas de deux*, VWB, SW
- 1937 – Jan 11: *Perpetuum Mobile pas de deux*, des costs, VWB, SW
 Feb 16: *Les Patineurs*, des, VWB, SW
 date unknown: *Bluebird pas de deux*, (des costs), Markova-Dolin Ballet,
 date unknown: Prince Siegfried, *Le Lac des cygnes, Act II*, VWB, SW
 Apr 27: John (cr), *A Wedding Bouquet*, VWB, SW
 June 15: 2nd Red Knight (cr), *Checkmate*, VWB, Paris Th des Champs-Elysées
 Oct 11: Florestan, *Carnaval*, BBCTV, VWB .
 Dec 13: Benno, *Le Lac des cygnes Act II*, BBCTV, VWB.
 c 23: The Poet, *Apparitions*, VWB, SW
- 1938 – Jan c 4: Pas de deux, *Les Patineurs*, VWB, SW
 16: *The Tartans* (new version, Frank Staff), des, prob as for Ashton version
 Apr 7: A Tailor (cr), *Le Roi nu*, VWB, SW
 25: John, *A Wedding Bouquet*, BBCTV, VWB
 May 10: Mercury (cr), *The Judgment of Paris*, des, VWB, SW
 June 8: The Shepherd, *The Gods Go A'Begging*, BBCTV, VWB
- 1939 – Feb 2: Cavalier to Violet Fairy/3rd Prince, *The Sleeping Princess*, VWB, SW.
 Mar 25: possibly appeared in *The Sleeping Princess*, BBCTV (Acts I and II), VWB
 repeated Mar 29
 Apr 8: ? The Friend, *The Rake's Progress*, BBCTV, VWB

- 27: One of the Townspeople (cr), *Cupid & Psyche*, VWB, SW
 May 22: possibly appeared in *The Sleeping Princess* (Act III), BBCTV, VWB
- 1940 – Jan 3: *The Seasons*, des, London Ballet, Arts Th Ldn
 Apr 7-23: SW, Exhibition of Paintings, Drawings & Designs for the Ballet: *Les Rendezvous*, decor 10 gns, costs 5 gns; *Les Patineurs*, project for decor 10 gns, costs 5 gns
Giselle, Queen of the Wilis and a wili; Miscellaneous, all 5 gns, Flora, Cavalier, Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter, Butterfly, Bird; Portrait Heads in oils, Helpmann 14 gns, Argyle 12 gns, Chappell 12 gns. Drawings all 10 gns, Fonteyn, Ashton, de Valois, Helpmann, Turner in the dressing room;
 Dancer, painting.
 May 22: *Swinging the Gate* (revue) arr dance ensembles, some deas, Ambassadors Th
 Nov 11: *Up and Doing* (revue), des costs, Glasgow Alhambra
 Called up to Royal Artillery, gunner, 979498
- 1941 – May 9: *Bartlemas Dances*, Oxford Ballet Club, apparently used costs des by him for *The Lady of Shalott*; staged by Ballet Rambert, May 13.
 Aug 26: *Amoras* and *Le Lac des cygnes, Act II*, des, International Ballet. date unknown: *Pavane pour une Infante Defunte*, des, London Ballet
- 1942 – July: Cadet 1943 - May: 2nd lieutenant, 258507.
 July 19: *Everyman*, des costs, International Ballet
- 1944 – Jan: lieutenant Mar: captain
- 1945 – in Naples, but out of army by Christmas.
 Mar 4: *The Merry Widow* (operetta), des costs, His Majesty's Th
- 1946 – Sep 26: *The Shephard Show* (revue), des, Princes Th.
 Oct 25: *Coppelia*, new des, SWB, Royal Opera House, Covent Garden
 Dec 15: ?in *Peter and the Wolf* (Staff) (and July 16, 1947), BBCTV
- 1947 – Mar 22: *Le Lac des cygnes (entirety)*, des, International Ballet, Adelphi Th
- 1948 – date unknown: *Castle Anna* (play), des, Lyric H'smith. Company of Four
 Mar 11: *Four, Five, Six* (revue), des, Duke of York's Th.
 June 17: *A La Carte* (revue), des, Savoy Th.
 Author of *Studies in Ballet*, and illustrations.
 Sep 3: *Sugar and Spice* (revue), des, St Martins Th
- 1949 – Jan 20: *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains* (opera), SWOpera, SW, dir 1950
 Aug 23: *The Second Stranger, The Little Hut* (play), Lyric Th.
 Nov 1: *Point of Departure* (play), des costs, Lyric H'smith (transferred to D of Y Th, Dec 26).
- 1950 – Feb 21: *La Traviata* (opera), des, SWOpera, SW
 24: des costs for British Council tour in France of Shakespearean plays (dir Norman Marshall)

- May 4: *Swan Lake*, ?new des, International Ballet, Coliseum
- 1951 – May 24: *The Lyric Revue*, dir/des, Lyric H'smith (transferred to Globe Th, Sep 26).
 June 27: *A Winter's Tale* (play), arr dances, Phoenix Th.
 Nov 22: *Summer and Smoke* (play), des costs, Lyric H'smith (transferred to Duchess Th Jan ? 1952)
 Author of *Fonteyn: Impressions of a Ballerina*, and illustrations.
- 1952 – Mar 4: *The Vortex* (play), des costs, Lyric H'smith (transferred to Criterion Th Apr 9).
 May: *Swing Back the Gate* (revue), arr dances, Irving Th.
 July 10: *The Globe Revue*, dir/des/chor, Globe Th.
- 1953 – Jan: *The Princess and the Swineherd* (play). dir, Mercury Th.
 May 12: *High Spirits* (revue), dir/chor, London Hippodrome.
 May: *The Immortal Hour*, dir, SW.
 Dec 20: *At the Lyric* (revue), dir/des/chor, Lyric H'smith (a revised version, titled *Going To Town*, given at St Martin's Th, May 1954)
- 1954 – June 17: *A Dinner Engagement* (opera), dir, Aldeburgh Festival
 Nov: *An Evening with Beatrice Lillie* (revue), assistant dir, Globe Th.
 Dec 2: *Time Remembered* (play), Lyric H'smith, dir, 1st time for a play, transferred to the New Th Apr 9, 1955.
- 1955 – May 11: *Zémire et Azov* (opera) arr dances, Bath Festival
 June: *Moby Dick* (play), asst dir to Orson Welles, D of Y Th
 Sep 8: *The Buccaneer* (musical play), dir, Lyric H'smith (transferred to Apollo Th Feb 22, 1956).
 Dec 22: *Charley's Aunt* (play). dir, Globe Th.
- 1956 – Feb 23: *The Rivals* (play), dir, Saville Th, dir
 Apr 25: *South Sea Bubble* (play), dir, Lyric Th
 June 14: *Man Alive* (farce), dir, Aldwych Th
- 1957 – May 8: *Restless Heart* (play), dir, St James's Th
 July 15: *Hotel Paradiso*, dir, Streatam Hill Th
- 1958 – Feb 20: *Where's Charley?* (musical), dir, Palace Th
 Apr 23: *Expresso Bongo* (musical). dir/arr dances, Saville Th
 May 15: *Living for Pleasure* (revue), dir, OH Manchester. transferred to Garrick Th, July 10
- 1959 – c June: *Farewell, Farewell, Eugene* (play), dir
 Dec 30: *Joie de vivre* (musical), dir. Queen's Th
- 1961 – June 21: 'a new revue' but name was left out, possibly *On the Avenue*, dir.
 Nov 2: *Poème tragique solo*, des cost, Royal Academy of Dancing Gala Matinee, Drury Lane
- 1962 – date unknown, asst dir & appeared in Orson Welles' film *The Trial*
- 1963 – date unknown: *So Much to Remember* (play). dir/devised.
 Sep 26: *Six of One* (musical), dir, Adelphi Th.
- 1964 – Feb 27: *Fielding's Music-hall* (revue), dir/devised, Prince Charles Th

- June 11: *English Eccentrics* (opera), English Opera Group, dir, Aldeburgh Festival. Given at City Temple Th, July 14, later at Coliseum with *The Telephone*, also dir WC
- Nov 12: *One Man Show* (play with music), dir, Jeannetta Cochrane Th (opening) (Central Sch of Arts & Crafts)
- 1965 – date unknown.: *Travelling Light*, dir, Prince of Wales Th, run ended Aug 14 Aug 3 (or 24): *Passion Flower Hotel* (musical), dir/des costs, P of W Th Dec 5: *Julius Caesar Jones* (children's opera), dir, Jeannetta Cochrane Th, (Finchley Children's Music Group)
- 1966 – Oct 8: *Times* report on first week of Dublin Th Festival. *Love and a Bottle* (play by Farquhar), dir, Gate Theatre Dublin. Canonbury Th Ldn, Oct 11, 1968 and Nottingham Playhouse May 7, 1969.
Nov 29: *The Violins of St Jacques* (opera). librettist/dir, SW, later at Coliseum, November 27, 1968
- 1967 – June 5: *The Beaux' Stratagem* (play), dir, Chichester Festival Th
- 1969 – teaching once a week at the London Opera Centre in Covent Garden
- 1970 – July 24: *A Tribute to Frederick Ashton*, WC wrote narrative, Royal Ballet, ROHCG
Oct 14: *Samson* (opera), dir, SW, Handel Opera Society
- 1971 – Apr 26: *The Chalk Garden* (play), dir, Haymarket Th
- 1972 – Nov 15: *The Walk to the Paradise Garden*, designs, Royal Ballet, ROHCG
- 1973 – Mar 7: *Robinson Crusoe* (opera), dir, Collegiate Th, Opera Rara
Dec 12: *Cockie!* (musical), dir, Vaudeville Th.
- 1974 – Mar 7: *Oh Kay!* (musical), dir, Westminster Th
May 19: *The Marriage of Figaro* (opera), des, SW Opera, SW, also July 27, 1977
July 17: *In Praise of Love* (play), Rosehill Th, dir
- 1975 – Oct 30: *Travesties* (play), movements/dances, Ethel Barrymore Th New York
Dec 17: *Alceste* (opera), dir/chor/des costs, Ldn Opera Group, 490 Commercial Road Stepney (Ballet Rambert) (Given at SW, Mar 19, 1977)
date unknown: *Arsenic and Old Lace* (play), dir
date unknown: *The Fairy Queen* (masque), dir, Ldn Opera Group
- 1978 – date unknown: *Memoir* (play about Sarah Bernhardt), dir
- 1979 – 'worked on' film *Nijinsky* – chor film *Moulin Rouge*
May 23: *Salut d'amour à Margot Fonteyn*, R Blt, ROHCG, des cost
- 1980 – Aug 4: *Rhapsody*, des costs, Royal Ballet, ROHCG
- 1982 – co author & editor of *Edward Burra: a painter remembered by his friends*
- 1983 – Aug 27: *A Little Bit on the Side* (revue), chor, Yvonne Arnaud Th
- 1985 – Oct 23: *La Chatte métamorphosée en femme*, des cost, Royal Ballet, ROHCG
editor, *Well, Dearie! The Letters of Edward Burra*
- 1994 – Jan 1: died at 23 Rope Walk, Rye, Sussex
Apr 12: thanksgiving service at St Paul's Covent Garden. Readings by Michael Somes and Penelope Wilton. Addresses by Leslie Edwards and John Standing



Diaghilev and the Golden Age of the Ballets Russes 1909-1929

Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 25 September 2010 - 9 January 2011

Diaghilev and the Golden Age of the Ballets Russes 1909-1929

Edited by Jane Pritchard. V&A Publishing, London, 2010. HB ISBN-13: 978-1851776139, ISBN-10: 9781851776139, 240pp, £35.00.

By Giannandrea Poesio

The first to organize an exhibition celebrating the splendour as well as the historical and cultural significance of the Ballets Russes, was Richard Buckle in 1954.

His achievement became almost legendary and prompted a long series of similarly themed events. What Buckle strove to achieve - and achieved - was an exhibition that could evoke the theatre magic that had informed the Ballets Russes era. In line with Diaghilev's famous request, "surprise me", each of the events organized by Buckle stood out for the breathtaking theatrical vibrancy of the display, as well as for the richness of the content.

Buckle's legacy was certainly detectable in *Diaghilev and the Golden Age of the Ballets Russes 1909 -1929* at the Victoria and Albert Museum, curated by Jane Pritchard and Geoffrey Marsh. The exhibition, regarded by many as London's number one cultural event for 2010, captivated viewers with an overall engaging experience, in which the unavoidable rigidity of the diachronic progression was gently and ingeniously tempered with thematically arranged clusters of exhibits and mediatic solutions.

More significantly, contextualisation played a significant role, allowing viewers to locate chronologically, socially, culturally, and politically various moments in the parallel histories of Diaghilev and

his Ballets Russes. Hence a visually striking introduction in which visitors were confronted first by a brief but well-chosen reminder of the miseries and splendours of Imperial Russia and then of the state of theatre dance in Western Europe before Diaghilev's first Russian season in Paris.

Both the exoticism and the modernism Diaghilev and his collaborators advocated so vividly, were highlighted by a colourful juxtaposition between some of the Ballets Russes' costumes and a number of exhibits - bill-posters, paintings and rare films - showing what ballet was both in the West and in Russia prior to the first Saison Russe.

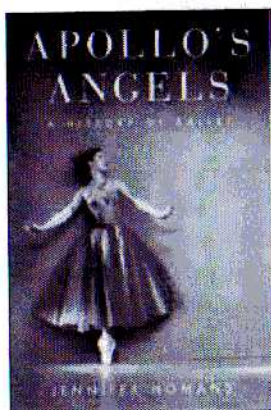
Inevitably, Vaslav Nijinsky was given a special section, aptly presented in a purpose built alcove gathering costumes and items from both his theatre career and his life. A photograph of his marriage to Romola de Pulszky placed near to one of the obsessively geometrical images he drew during his mental illness invited viewers to choose between the different narratives about his demise: the one that credits the end of his career with Diaghilev's jealous retaliation to the marriage and the more recent one that sees Romola and Nijinsky himself as, more or less unwittingly, the perpetrators of the male dancer's fate.

Strategic placing of the various exhibits was paramount to the exhibition's success. Natalia Gontcharova's 1926 backcloth for *The Firebird* and the drop curtain realised in 1924 by Alexander Schervashidze after Pablo Picasso for *Le Train Bleu* could be easily regarded as centrepieces of the whole event. Their visual impact proves that, contrary to what some historians have claimed, is still possible to grasp the effect those performances had on their original audiences. They also provide valuable information on the dimensions of the scenic space they were conceived for, and prompt speculation on which lighting process might have been used at the time to highlight their features in the most effective, spectacular way.

Such a thought-provoking dimension was not exclusive to those two scene-stealing exhibits, though. Costumes, scenery, front drops, props, sketches, paintings, musical and choreographic scores were never presented as the mere remains of that magic bygone 'golden' era the title of the exhibition refers to. Thanks to constant references to the present,

each exhibit is also shown as a potentially vital clue in the process of both reconstructing and keeping the Ballets Russes repertoire theatrically alive. The documentary value of the exhibited materials and the significance of the interaction between past and present were subtly highlighted at different moments and in different ways. The link between past and present is also addressed by a number of filmed images, providing glimpses of how the Ballets Russes' legacy resonates in modern day performance making; Hodson's reconstruction of *Rite of Spring* is thus contrasted with the postmodern 1975 version of the same work by Pina Bausch. A cursory look at both the ballet's original costumes and Valentine Gross' drawings reveals that Bausch did not actually move that radically away from the essence of the original work. Hers is not the sole modern day reinterpretation of works from the Ballets Russes repertoire displayed in the exhibition; there are filmed extracts from works of Jerome Robbins, Richard Alston, and Peter Darrell. The choice of filmed extracts might have come across as arbitrary at times, for it seemed to overlook a plurality of significant names and titles from recent and not so recent dance history. Yet, an exhaustive retrospective of how the Ballets Russes's performing legacy in today's cultura would have required an entire exhibition of its own.

Indeed, the posthumous influences of the legendary company are accurately described and critiqued in the exhibition's catalogue, which goes far beyond being a mere pictorial record of the event. Packed with essays that cover a multitude of Diaghilev and Ballets Russes related topics, the publication is, arguably, the latest in a long series of excellent scholarly, though accessible, studies on the subject. As such it mirrors the multifaceted, interdisciplinary approach to dance history its editor, Jane Pritchard, is internationally known for. And it is thanks to such interdisciplinarity that the book manages to cast new light on one of the greatest and most studied monoliths in the history of performing arts. A great achievement indeed.



Apollo's Angels - a history of ballet by Jennifer Homans. Granta Publications, London, 2010. HB ISBN-13: 978 1 86207 950 2, ISBN-10: 18620795. 643pp. £30.00.

By Giannandrea Poesio

Since its publication, Jennifer Homans' book has been the object of much controversy, as its conclusive pages purport that ballet is a dying art. Cheap journalism and the obtuse views of those who want to see only what they want to see, have accused such claim to

be a mere sensationalist stunt. Yet, such controversial ending is but the cogently formulated conclusion of a sound and exhaustive historical/critical discourse on ballet. Homans, a former dancer, challenges the views of those "hyperspecialists", "balletomanes" and "insiders" who, she accuses, speak an "impenetrable theory laden prose" and have reduced dance to a "recondite world". Indeed, the worrying demise of classical theatre dance depends greatly on the theory-induced and theory-related blinkeredness of some scholars as well as on the art-less vision of those in the profession - mostly teachers and directors - who keep ignoring that there is more to ballet than hyper-extended muscles. Homans' provocative attack, however, is not as categorical as some made it sound, as she is the first to admit that ballet might not be dying "but falling instead into a deep sleep, to be reawakened - like *The Sleeping Beauty* - by a new generation".

It would be erroneous, however, to believe that Homans' new work is significant only because of its conclusions. This new history of ballet also stands out for a refreshingly new and in-depth approach to tracing the art's developments since its inception. Unlike many previous historical discourses on the same subject, Homans' discussion is informed by a vibrant contextualisation and, more significantly, by a captivating critical perspective. The work's narrative, thus develops fluidly through a series of well-formulated and well-proposed argu-

ments that transcend the long established limits of ballet archaeology and capture the readers' attention with the depth and the breadth of scholarly, though never impenetrable, considerations. Immediacy, directness and accessibility are, in fact, the distinctive qualities of Homans' prose. Qualities that turn this must-have book in to ideal ballet history for the twenty-first century.



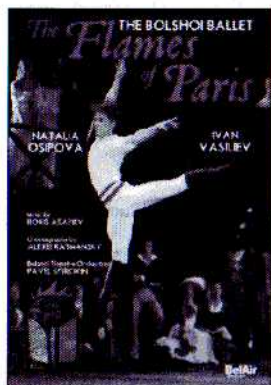
Diaghilev a Life by Sjeng Scheijen. Profile Books, London, 2009. HB ISBN-13: 978-1846681417 ISBN-10: 978-846681417, 560pp, £ 25.00; PB 2010 ISBN-13: 978 1 84668164 6, 560pp, £14.99.

By Giannandrea Poesio

A distinctive trend of modern day historiography is the need to demystify well-established historical tenets in the light of often gratuitously radical critiques of facts and sources. Still, not every chapter of dance and

ballet history lends itself to such treatment. Take, for instance, the Ballets Russes, possibly one of the most studied phenomena in the history of the theatre arts. Although the recent centenary celebrations have prompted a considerable number of new historical readings on both the legendary company and its equally legendary members, no radical critique has emerged. Both Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes remain thus shrouded in mythical and mystical aura. Sjeng Scheijen's book *Diaghilev, a life*, the latest of a long series of studies on the great impresario is no exception, even though the author steers admirably away from the treacherous trappings of that celebrative mode chosen by many of his predecessors. His directness might not be everyone's cup of tea, but is captivatingly effective. Interestingly, this is a biography written by a researcher who is not a dance scholar. Dance, therefore, is present but never in a prominent way - to the extent that the creation of celebrated masterworks is often dealt with just a few lines.

Scheijen's primary interest and focus is on Diaghilev the man, namely one of the most complex figures ever existed. Thanks to new research, new significant light is cast on such a living bundle of contradictions. His much debated sexuality - and the way he pleased his urges - is analysed in depth, though always in a scholarly and never sensationalistic way. So is his multifaceted psychological make-up. Yet, in the end, the new and often unflattering considerations do not detract from the myth. Quite the contrary, for the cogent and thoroughly researched investigation of Diaghilev's persona adds greatly to the legend that surrounds the man, perpetuating it. This book might not be the definitive biography of Diaghilev, but it does provide a unique, thought-provoking addition to what is already available.



The Flames of Paris. Choreography by Alexei Ratmansky after Vasili Vainonen. Balaire Classiques DVD BAC062, rrp £21.75; Blue-ray, rrp £29.75. Approximate running time 124 minutes.

By Patricia Daly

Alexei Ratmansky has in recent years revisited several of the iconic works from Soviet times, successfully recreating such works as *The Bright Stream*, *Bolt* and *The Bronze Horseman*. *The Flames of Paris* (original Russian title *Plamya Parizha*), premiered in Leningrad in 1932 was possibly more of a challenge. The original libretto by Nikolai Volkov and Vladimir Dmitriev (adapted for the current, revised version by Ratmansky and Alexandr Belinsky) was inspired by the epic three volume historical romance by the republican poet Félix Gras, *Les Rouges du Midi*, set during the French Revolution. The score by Boris Asafiev was based on popular French music from that period, Vasily Vainonen's choreography encompassed classic ballet and demi-caractère, but folk dances for the corps de ballet formed a major part of the work. Inevitably as the cre-

ation came less than two decades after the Russian's own Revolution, the events of the French uprising shown in the ballet were inevitably influenced by current Soviet ideology. *The Flames of Paris* can thus be considered one of the first - if not the first - Soviet socialist-realism ballets. Said to be a favourite of the dictator, Joseph Stalin, the work retained its popularity during the next repressive decades and was performed on many important state occasions

In the interview included on the DVD, Ratmansky states that originally he considered a straight revival of the work but quickly realised that this would not be acceptable to audiences of today. He therefore revised the libretto, concentrating on the affect the Revolution had on the lives of several individuals, whilst retaining the large scenes full of energy, such as the storming of the Tuilleries. He retained much of Vainonen's choreography including the *Danse basque*, *Farandole* and the *Camagnole*, as well as the classical *pas de deux* in the court scene and the well-known second act *pas de deux* (once frequently seen at galas). Whilst it was obviously necessary to contrast scenes of the main protagonists and the revolutionaries with court life to show some of the causes of the uprising, the work does rather sag during the prolonged court scenes. The ballet does, however come to life in other scenes and Ratmansky has created strong roles for Phillippe, a Marseillais (danced by Ivan Vasiliev), Jeanne, his peasant girl-friend (Natalia Osipova) and Jérôme, her brother (Denis Savin) and is rewarded with strong acting and dancing performances from all three, with Osipova and Vasiliev being spectacular in their *pas de deux*. Whilst I suspect this production will not have the popular appeal of *The Bright Stream*, and is probably very reliant on strong interpretations in the principal roles, this is an opportunity to see a ballet long talked about, but little known, in the West.

LONDON, UK

Not Just Fred and Ginger: Cameraderie and Collusions Between Dance And Film. The Annual Conference of the European Association of Dance Historians in collaboration with Film Studies at London Metropolitan University October, 14-16, 2011 London, United Kingdom. The relationship between dance and film has produced some of the most respected and popular stars, directors, films and genres in screen history. At the same time, these well-established links have frequently revealed essential tensions between two distinct art forms and their often contrasting approaches and perspectives. The aim of the conference is to investigate the histories, processes, techniques, values and discourses inherent in the complex interactions between dance and film and to cast a renewed historical, critical and analytical light on the same. Proposals for both individual twenty-minute papers and panels of three speakers are invited on any topic related to dance and film, including but not limited to the following:

- Choreography and film
- Film and dance history
- Dance as cinematic narrative
- Cinema as choreographic narrative
- Transnational exchanges between dance and cinema
- Music, dance and film
- Genre boundaries and transgressions
- The dancing body on film
- Dance stars on and of the screen
- Representations of national identity
- Images of gender and sexuality
- Ethnic and racial interventions
- Directors of the film musical

Deadline for the submissions of proposals: Friday, 29 April 2011.

Presenters will be notified of acceptance by Monday, 16 May 2011.

Please e-mail a proposal of no more than 300 words in either MsWord or PDF format to the conference organisers Dr Giannandrea Poesio, Principal Lecturer and Media/Performance Coordinator, London Metropolitan University, and Dr Karen McNally, Senior Lectur-

er and Course Leader, Film Studies, London Metropolitan University at eadhconference@gmail.com

Contact/affiliation details for each presenter must be provided on a separate sheet, to ensure blind reading.

OXFORD, UK

Dance and the Novel in the Long Eighteenth Century. The 13th Oxford Dance Symposium looks at the place and significance of dance in the novel and other works of fiction, from Daniel Defoe to Jane Austin. References to, and descriptions of, dancing conjure up a vivid social world which would have been instantly recognisable to readers at the time and also gives the modern reader insights to that world. The dance elements in a novel sometimes help to explain the personalities of the characters concerned, and sometimes their involvement in dance directly influences the course of the plot. New College and the Holywell Music Room, Oxford, Saturday 7 May 2011.

LEITRING BEI LEIBNITZ, AUSTRIA

Performing Arts Training Today is the professional conference open to performers, performing arts educators and teachers from all over the world interested in the research of topical questions and processes in contemporary performing arts education and training. May 20-24, 2011 at Leitring bei Leibnitz, Austria. The conference is open to different art genres, techniques and forms - theatre, dance, music, circus, visual and multimedia art. www.iugtecom/projects/conference.php

TORONTO, CANADA

Dance Dramaturgy: Catalyst, Perspective and Memory Society of Dance History Scholars Annual Conference. York University's Masters of Fine Arts Graduate Program in Dance, the Graduate Centre for Study of Drama and UC Drama at the University of Toronto as well as the Toronto-based companies Dancemakers, Series 8:08 and Nightswimming June 2-26, 2011 For the first time in North America, this conference brings together an international body of scholars and artists to discuss the growing impact of the discipline, history and

potential of dance dramaturgy. We invite proposals for papers, panels, workshops and presentations from a broad spectrum of dance scholarship and practiced-based research on dance dramaturgy, or any other topic in dance. www.sdhs.org

PHILADELPHIA, PA., USA

Congress on Research in Dance. The Society for Ethnomusicology. Moving Music/Sounding Dance: Intersections, Disconnections, and Alignments between Dance and Music. November 17-20, 2011. The Sheraton City Center Hotel Philadelphia, PA. CORD's proposals for the Joint Annual Meeting are invited in six categories.

www.cordance.org/conferences

The Photographs of Roger Pic 1959-1970

The first virtual exhibition produced jointly by the Paris Opera and the Bibliothèque nationale de France invites you to relive the years 1959 and 1970, as seen by Roger Pic, a major figure in photography in the twentieth century, in four thematic galleries. His work reflects an period which saw the cream of the opera and ballet artists.

Virtual exhibition at www.operadeparis.fr

Bassano In Focus

Room 33, National Portrait Gallery, London

December 14, 2011 – July 24, 2011

The richness and variety of dance on the British stage in the early decades of the twentieth century is often forgotten and overshadowed by Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, which made its first appearance in London in the summer of 1911. However, spectacular ballets and dance diversissements, featuring classical and stage dancing, attracted large and enthusiastic audiences at the Alhambra and Empire theatres in Leicester Square in the years before World War I. One of the most celebrated ballerinas of the day was the Empire's principal dancer, Adeline Genée. As well as Genée, the photographs included her successors at the Empire Theatre, Lydia Kyasht and Phyllis Bedells; her rival, the great Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova; Canadian modern dancer Maud Allan, who achieved notoriety in the Vision of Salome; and, from 1918, stars of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes.

www.npg.org.uk

Hoppé Portraits: Society, Studio and Street

Wolfson Gallery. National Portrait Gallery, London

February 17 – May 30, 2011

E.O. Hoppé (1878-1972) was one of the most important photographers of the first half of the twentieth century and much of his work has only recently been reassembled. This exhibition features portraits of celebrities taken in this period, including Margot Fonteyn, George Bernard Shaw, H.M King George V, Vaslav Nijinsky, Ezra Pound,

David Lloyd George, and Benito Mussolini. and his fascinating photo-journalist studies, which capture the realities of day-to-day life in Britain between the wars.

www.npg.org.uk

Laurie Anderson, Trisha Brown, Gordon Matta-Clark: Pioneers of the Downtown Scene, New York 1970s

Barican Art Gallery, London

March 3 – May 22 2011

Performance artist and musician Laurie Anderson, choreographer Trisha Brown and artist Gordon Matta-Clark were friends and active participants in the New York art community, working fluidly between visual art and performance. Featuring sculptures, drawings, photographs, documentation of performances and mixed media works, the exhibition focuses on the intersections between their practices and explores their shared concerns – performance, the body, the urban environment and found spaces.

www.barbican.org.uk

A Flash of Light: The Dance Photography of Chris Nash

Theatre and Performance Gallery, room 104, V&A Museum, London

March 19 – August 29 2011

Showcasing Nash's fascination with movement, light, colour and composition, this dazzling display will feature three decades of the dance photographer's most significant work. This exhibition explores Nash's collaboration with the foremost figures in contemporary dance, including Rambert Dance Company and Javier de Frutos. By including over 60 prints, the display will document 30 years of Contemporary British Dance and the vision behind Nash's process, combined with a specially commissioned behind-the-scenes film of his work.

www.v&a.org.uk

Art Cannot Be Killed Off – Although Pol Pot Tried: A story in pictures about Cambodian dance by Anders Jirås
Dansmuseet, Stockholm

March 25 – May 8, 2011

The Khmer civilisation flourished in South-East Asia a thousand years ago and its legacy still shapes the region's art and culture to this day. Aside from the architecture, Cambodian dance is now what visitors find most captivating, as the disciplines of dance, drama, shadow puppetry, folk dance and music merge into each other. The civil war, Pol Pot and other calamities almost eradicated this dance. However, Cambodian culture is strong, with dance and music an expression of a cohesive power. With so little written down, passing on and preserving the dance as part of an oral tradition was problematic. With nine out of ten dancers from the Royal Palace killed during Pol Pot's reign of terror in the 1970s, parts of the tradition were lost. But not everything. Some dancers managed to survive and they had carefully concealed their knowledge, allowing the dance to be restored once more. Now, thirty years later, the few survivors are passing their knowledge on to a new generation of dancers. It is this transfer of tradition that Swedish photographer Anders Jirås, who lives in Phnom Penh, has captured in his study of a form of dance that managed to survive against all the odds. It seems that art cannot be killed off after all.

www.dansmuseet.se

www.dansmuseet.se/english

Frederick Ashton - The Ballet and Suffolk.

Ipswich Town Hall Galleries and Christchurch Manor,

May 19 – October 9, 2011.

Sir Frederick Ashton, Founder Choreographer of The Royal Ballet, was proud of his roots in Yaxley, Suffolk. This Royal Opera House exhibition celebrates his Suffolk links, his career with The Royal Ballet and the influence of his native countryside on his ballets. An accompanying Ashton Trail leaflet highlights places associated with Ashton's life and work.

www.ipswich.gov.uk

Mats Ek: as seen by photographer Lesley Leslie Spinks

Dansmuseet, Stockholm

May 27– September 25, 2011

Mats Ek is currently one of the world's most successful choreographers. Since his debut in 1976 with *The Officer's Servant* and *Saint George and the Dragon* for the Cullberg Ballet, his ballets have captivated international dance audiences and his reworking of classics such as *Giselle*, *Swan Lake* and *The Sleeping Beauty* have themselves become classics. Photographer Lesley Leslie Spinks has had the privilege of documenting Mats Ek's success as a choreographer and director from his debut to *The Cherry Orchard* at the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm in 2010. With special insight and sensitivity, she has managed to enter his peculiar and elusive world. She has perhaps succeeded due to her both experiencing and being part of "Mats Ek's dynamic, deeply human commitment, wanting to talk about important issues, life and death." It is probably among like-minded people, where total commitment rules, that Lesley Leslie Spinks is most content: "Mats Ek's dedication, like that of Robert Wilson and Suzanne Osten, is a kind of obsession and I love obsession."

www.dansmuseet.se

www.dansmuseet.se/english

Degas Dancers: Eye and Camera

Royal Academy of Arts, London

September 17 – December 11, 2011

The Royal Academy of Arts will stage an exhibition focusing on Edgar Degas's preoccupation with movement as an artist of the dance. The exhibition will trace the development of the artist's ballet imagery throughout his career, from the documentary mode of the early 1870s to the sensuous expressiveness of his final years. This will be the first exhibition to present Degas's progressive engagement with the figure in movement, acted out against parallel advances in photography and early film that he was aware of or directly involved in. *Degas Dancers* will incorporate drawings, pastels, paintings, prints and sculpture by Degas, as well as photography by the artist and his contemporaries and

samples of film from the period. It will bring together selected material from public institutions and private collections, including both celebrated and little-known works by Degas.

www.royalacademy.org.uk

Danser sa vie: domaines installation, art contemporain périodes XXe siècle, XXIe siècle

Centre Pompidou, Paris, France

November 23, 2011 – May 25, 2012

Dance life is a major multidisciplinary exhibition devoted to rapport that the dance has with the visual arts since the early twentieth century until today. It explores the resonances between developed dance and visual arts, a dialogue of the masterpieces of modern art and contemporary dance practices. Archival records, films, video installations and live performances punctuate the route. The exhibition is organized around three main themes:

- The Dance of the Senses by Auguste Rodin to Matthew Barney
- Abstraction Corps Sonia Delaunay Merce Cunningham
- The Corps Event Tino Sehgal Dada

www.centrepompidou.fr

CHOREOLOGICA

The refereed journal of the European Association of Dance Historians aims to provide a forum for historical and theoretical explorations of dance histories and practices. These may include analyses of individual works or investigations, whether they be monographic, contextual or interdisciplinary. Submissions may address topics ranging from past dance practices to contemporary themes. More in particular, the editorial board welcomes essays rethinking current approaches and theoretical understanding of dance practice, history or crossovers into other disciplines.

For guidelines of submission please see the publications section on www.eadh.com

Editorial Board Choreologica

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On cover: Front cover of the 1921 programme
for Diaghilev's production of *The Sleeping Princess*
in London. Giannandrea Poesio's collection

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