

DANCE OPPOSITE ITS MODELS

THE MUSICAL MODEL

by Naftali Ironi

Music, far from being a mere helpmate of poetry, is surely an independent art form, indeed the most powerful one, and as such fulfills its aims without recourse to means other than its own, has no inherent need of words for song or plots of operas. (Schopenhauer)

Musical involvement in nearly any dance event is inevitable. This statement requires an explanation, as the phenomenon isn't accidental. Indeed even when music is absent in a dance performance, its absence is strongly felt. Silence invades the space of the performance and emphasises its presence as a replacement of music. When percussion-instruments alone are used to fulfill the role of music, they replace it, filling its allocated space. When other acoustic means, such as human or other concrete sounds accompany dance, this does not represent a different solution.

All such methods include a kind of musical harmony and musical feeling which provide a background to the performance. The musical underpinning provides a natural stage-set for the show. But often such a back-drop does not contribute to the performance. Its mere presence functions just as an old-fashioned, painted back-drop would.

It seems that the role of music in dance is rarely understood and its wonderful power often remains underexploited. This is the phenomenon we endeavour to discuss further on. But before we proceed, let us first describe the situation in which dance takes place as a manifestation of stage art.

Perhaps the real situation is unclear, smudging the boundaries of the art of dance and obfuscating its true substance and content. Its chief component — movement — isn't always the chief concern of its creators and regarded as the outcome and result of the dramatic situation it comprises.

Such an attitude is obvious, because as it is confined to a stage, dance has to obey the rules of staging. One may,

of course, pose the question, whether a theatrical situation or any other form of "situation" on-stage comprises the movement potential necessary for the development of dance?

In order to discuss this question, one has to feel and understand the dimensions of time and space in which the stage action takes place.

The differences between theatrical action and dance action are fundamental. These are two separate phenomena, lacking a common denominator in time as well as in the spatial dimensions. The simplest definition of movement is, (according to Constantin Brunner) — a change in place. This definition is true in all aspects of reality as well as in abstract thought and has no substitute. Dance is connected to movement both as form of expression and through its development. The challenge is self-evident: perpetual movement as an expression of wholeness, in principle as well as in reality. The dimension of time in dance is a consequence of the movement situation. Dance knows only the present tense, always taking place in the present.

When dance adopts the theatrical situation mode, it undergoes a conversion, and it descends into space and time, taking on qualities alien to its nature. Theatrical stage and time function in a totally different mode from those of dance. The theatrical situation isn't reality presented directly, but rather a composite process comprised of coinciding thought and observation. The unseen, imaginary parts of the theatrical picture are able to invade a hypothetical past; what Stanislavsky called: "The pre-history of the play."

At the same time, the spectator may try to foresee the future development of the plot. The actual movement of the characters on stage is but a minimal expression of the overall movement of the plot or story-line.

Even in Expressionistic theatre, which emphasizes visual

expression, movement exists only as an extension of the imaginary complementary plot. The role of movement is enlarged, but nevertheless subordinated to other aspects of theatre.

Dance-theatre, though it may be associated with Expressionism because of the emphasis placed on expression and movement, doesn't allow the spectator to "complete" the picture. He often feels there isn't enough movement; and should the movement be sufficient, he is unable to fathom the reasons behind it.

A feeling of strangeness, of *Verfremdung* (to use a Brechtian term) prevails, the happenings on stage appear arbitrary. The reason for this unease is the discrepancy between the time and space dimensions of theatre and dance. In theatre, anticipation and inaction are active components contributing to the advancement of the plot. In dance a protracted pause is acceptable only in rare circumstances.

While reason and imagination are practical means of advancing a plot, they are but a hint or pointer as far as dance is concerned. The estrangement of the spectator in dance theatre is a result of the movement taking place in a space built for other purposes. The movement doesn't find a foothold, as no such footholds are provided for it in the dramatic framework.

The flow of time also seems "unnatural", as the time sequence in dance is "real" and "objective", while theatrical time is totally fictitious. The dance spectator, if he applies the rules of theatre to dance feels confronted with incongruencies and discrepancies. Before his eyes unfolds a series of strange happenings, seemingly devoid of rhyme and reason, lacking continuous development.

He tries to look behind the movement for reasons, in the best theatrical manner, to fathom the motives, to await the outcome — but in dance all this is totally different: the movement is nearly continuous; the time always the present. Everything is obvious, concentrated, "there", in the emotions expressed by the movement. Then 'black holes' begin to appear: pauses, empty spaces, situations in which one doesn't know what is to follow, as there is no apparent reason for anything to happen. Then the dancer expresses his personality, without any reason connected to what preceded.

Once the message is over, one wishes to reconnect oneself and continue. The result may become rather spotty and disjointed, as disconnected moments of

personal expression become a chain of events, lacking any relevance to any overall purpose.

Classical ballet often is based on such expressions of personality within the boundaries of a formal, well-known plot. Diaghilev endeavoured to loosen the hidebound structure of theatricality. The, "epic" element became an important influence and inspiration for him. According to ancient aesthetics (such as those of Plato), the epic *genre* combines drama with poetry and singing. At any rate, such a form is less strictly subordinated to the rules of theatre.

The role music plays in it is more prominent and singing and poetry open new horizons. The show may be structured less according to the laws of drama, but more closely observes the laws of staging. The style of "imitation" (of nature) continues. An important part of the spectator's imagination is engaged in the identification of events, in seeking similarity between actions and moves on-stage and in real life. The poetic element succeeds in liberating dance from its dependence on realistic details of the dramatic plot.

THE MUSICAL MODEL

Music is altogether a different art form, which exists in the immediate present, its place in space totally different from any "real" space. This difference is comparable to that between space in Euclidian and Neo-Euclidian geometry. The expression of emotion in music doesn't require the protracted, step by step development of a dramatic plot which must progress through all the stages in time and space.

Musical space — unseen but keenly felt — is a huge receptacle of powerful feelings, well organized in maximum concentration. Music possesses the quantitative rhythmic element as well as the qualitative one of harmony. (In musical structure the first one is vertical, the latter horizontal.) Of course, the decoding of the content of the music isn't "true", if it concerns itself with the reading of the outward shape of the notation alone. The inner organization of the emotional content can not be notated. Sometimes this inner content is so concentrated and the changes occurring in it so intensive and rapid, that it can only be partially deciphered — both for the purpose of execution and of absorption.

An important Chinese pianist once stated, that he is unable to play Mozart's music because of the huge

number of shifts in emotion it contains. But it is common knowledge that Mozart's musical forms are not the most complicated ones and reading the notation does not pose any technical difficulty.

Musical notation is incapable of reflecting the flow of emotion and of denoting its intensity. The horizontal line of harmony is like a glossy envelope which allows us only to guess what its contents are. A pliant and soft envelope, such as that of Romantic music, makes it easier for us to guess the shape of what it holds. A stiff, orderly and geometric cover, such as that of Baroque music conceals what it covers. The performing artist has to pave the paths of emotion in the work, to determine their duration and fix their pace.

The choreographer, on the other hand, has to design the inner content of the movement as well as determine its corporeal expression. Thus a melodic motif, defined by rhythm and harmony, becomes a progression of emotion. This expression is concrete, like a drawing or a map, tracing the shape of emotion in the dancer's body and in space.

The dancer becomes the musical instrument in the language of dance movement, which is an equivalent to the musical language of sounds in the musical space.

The poet Paul Valery stated correctly that dance is an energetic process in which energetic tension is defused. Music is the best suited, most powerful energetic explosive device to detonate in dance. The use of music even as mere accompaniment or background to dance requires injection of kinetic energy into the stage space, to provide a real, not only a quasi reason for movement.

The choreographer feels obliged to soften and lower the voice of the dramatic story line and to amplify the sound of music. His main problems are, where in the music the little devil, that is to supply the trigger for the detonation of this explosive device is hiding, and how to harness the resulting energy to move his dance forward. He is willing to follow the strict dosis of medical prescription — namely rhythm — and even to preserve the packaging intact (the dynamics of the music).

It is churlish to demand from the choreographer what many musicians are unable to do: to determine the dosage and structure of their performance according to their natural reaction and need.

Many musicians faithfully follow the notation and melodic shape, believing that once the form of the

musical piece is perfect, its inner message must reveal itself. This attitude expresses the idea that melody is an outcome of the underlying emotional basis, and that one should refrain from analysing it too closely.

The musician accompanying dance, as conductor or instrumentalist, often tends to follow closely only the one parameter dictated by the choreography: rhythm, dynamics, level of tone, connection between phrases or their interaction with other devices. Such an approach is basically "decorative", descriptive, as the music, movement and stage design all become components of a dramatic, story-telling performance, an old fashioned *tableau vivant*.

If one wishes to detonate the energetic explosive device contained in the music, one must take a radically different approach.

First of all, one must hone one's perception of the deep emotional content of the music. There is no contradiction between the formal structure of musical notation and the expression of emotional content. Emotional expression isn't opposed to musical form — it exists on a different plane.

Great performers exhibit a perfect balance between the two. On one hand pedantic faithfulness to the form and all the notated details, combined with freedom of emotional expression result in a performance in which one hardly recognizes the work being performed. Violinists like Enesco or Szigeti, pianists such as Rachmaninoff or Horowitz offer the listener a totally new emotional map, as it exists in the work they perform and its melodic design, causing the listener to feel he is confronted by a new, unknown work.

New musical interpretation is designed to make the detonation of the musical energy possible. When applied to choreography, these implications are even more far-reaching and profound. Huge powers arrive from an unknown, multi-dimensional, real space, in which the dance moves.

The rational, story-telling logic of dramatic imagination ceases to exist. But there exists a potential opportunity to reconcile the two arts of music and dance, since they both exist in the sphere of immediate communication of emotion and live only in the present tense. A huge movement potential belonging to another invisible space demands practical kinetic expression in the finite space of the stage by means of human movement.

In this encounter, the proper proportions destined to reconcile and create a true fusion between the two arts of music and dance is often missing. What is needed is a new idea and form of dance.

DESIGNING THE NEW DANCE IDEA

Designing a new dance idea is an intuitive process, but also a conscious process of choice and combination. The choice is an endeavour to find elements existing on two separate levels: one being the invisible musical space, the other being the one closer to reality, that of movement, that are to become one in the process.

This process of combination is experimental by its nature, as its aim isn't to discover the degree of compatibility of the components.

It may perhaps be compared to diving into deep waters, knowing full well that after surfacing one shall be able to breathe the air again. Dance movement is comparable to diving, as it takes place in a dark environment, full of huge energetic currents, of high emotional intensity, which one is unable to decipher, bordering on the simple, visual, straight forward world of the dance stage.

The cognitive element, the imagination, which is part and parcel of a dramatic performance does not yield its full powers in such a situation — as there is no way to explain or justify such an explosion of movement energy by rational means.

The movement is a goal in itself; an expression as immediate, present and existing only in the present as music is. But there exists yet another aspect of movement, its visual nature. The process takes place before our very eyes. Therefore, it requires an additional means, one capable of creating the transition to the world of the stage and the spectators.

The poetic element is a potential “matchmaker” making it possible. The tools of poetry — image, simile, metaphors, etc. — are all there to create an instant, spontaneous emotional impression in the present tense. The resulting emotional power forms a dynamic emotional viewpoint similar to movement, which flows towards an unknown destination. This, too, is a common denominator of dance and music. Designing a dance idea isn't the designing of a concrete object. After all, it is the determinant of the shape of the flow of movement.

By their very nature, the emotional components are

ephemeral, temporary, their instability is the characteristic which makes perpetual motion possible. There is no need to define the components comprising the dance work and they need no rational explanations. Nevertheless, one may describe its general characteristics and allot to each its relative importance in a given work of art.

TIME SENSE

The central problem of fusing diverse art forms lies in the dimension of time. Our perception of time is different in each art form, because it is perceived by different sense organs according to what art category it belongs to. Hence it doesn't make sense to adhere to strict musical time when the dance movement progresses according to its own specific rules.

Adhering to the strict musical time signature when dealing with dance means one is trespassing, “out of bounds”, so to speak. This is true of all the parameters of musical notation. In order to employ the potential emotional material in the creation of dance, one has to look for the emotional foci, to “read the emotional map” of the music in question in detail. The tracks connecting the emotional occurrences in the music in fact measure the real time in which the movement exists.

But “reading the map” correctly does not in itself assure finding a correct movement solution, as not all music lends itself to movement interpretation. One has to choose the right music as well as imagine its realization in movement.

EMOTIONAL DENSITY

The very fact that musical space is fundamentally different from physical (real) space, being to a great degree fictitious (abstract), explains why it is so highly charged with emotion. It is obvious, that using music implies utilization of a “whole”, which is indivisible and unmodifiable — hence the necessity of choosing and discarding. One has to choose those musical works which have built-in emotional progressions that coincide reasonably well with a possible movement/time progression.

INTERPRETATION BY PERFORMANCE

Performing music may provide an emotional map of the

work or become only an articulation of the notation, though perhaps on a very high technical level of virtuosity. Such a reconstruction of the score indeed touches on the emotional load of the music, but is unable to detonate or defuse it. It is like an exhibition of emotions in a shop window. The distinction between these two kinds of performance interpretation is crucial for the dance idea one is seeking, as the latter one does not enable one to enter the locked, blocked emotional sphere of the music in question.

POETRY

The poetical motif constitutes a loosely defined framework, being just a hint which one may develop into diverse directions of movement progression.

It provides terms of reference totally free of causality. There is no need to build a grid of stage means to "justify" or convince anyone, because the kinetic energy of dance encourages free observation and reaction.

Nevertheless, the poetic motif plays an important part in the early stages of creating a dance idea. At this point it is possible to introduce components according to choice and surprising encounters may occur.

Later, the role of the poetic motif is diminished. Surprising encounters may happen between different art forms, such as between music, poetry, painting, etc. Poetry is elastic and free-wheeling enough to make fusion of art forms possible without becoming a restraining "Procrustean Stretcher", since in poetry real time and real space are obliterated.

The dancer personifies the movement, which spreads into space in all directions. As in music, dance is able to create a world existing in a special space, built so that it is perceived by the senses allocated to its perception. This is the natural way of "authenticity", by which each art form frees itself from influences foreign to itself. In this aspect music constitutes a special, unprecedented model, as it is capable of concentrated expression which addresses one sense organ only.

The model is a guide for behaviour and expression of the dance creator. Like music, dance must accustom itself to creating movement without recourse to external impulses and "reasons". The movement must be visual, but based on emotion. The force of emotion becomes directly a kinetic process of motion. Seeing in music a model and source of inspiration for dance requires proof

— a convincing dance. Yaron Margolin, the dancer and choreographer who works in Jerusalem, accepted this way of thinking and began creating works possessing a special "dance-ness".

At first I suggested that he explore the natural force of music. For this purpose, musical pieces possessing a potential for movement development were chosen, according to the "emotional map" these compositions showed: "Nuits d'ete" by Berlioz; "No Sun" by Moussorgsky; "Wesendonk Songs" by Wagner.

The role played by the singing human voice in each of these works is quite different. It is dramatic in the Wagner and Moussorgsky songs, lyrical in the Berlioz opus.

In the Berlioz work, in the steady flow of the movement changing emotions of many kinds are incorporated. This constitutes a sort of analogue or replica to classical ballet, as the dance movement's reaction to the music does not require the backing of a story line. It just creates an atmosphere.

Moussorgsky, on the other hand, provides the dancer with a rare opportunity to seek a form of dance expression to songs that are "spoken" more than sung, in that composer's typical style. The dance movement takes place nearly beyond the sphere of musical rhythm and becomes a sort of stepping or marching, as the musical rhythm is replaced by an emotional one.

In the "Wesendonk Songs" there is a dramatic dialogue between the singing voice and the accompanying piano. This makes the creation of a duet possible, translating so to speak the situation into convincing dance without recourse to any dramatic "explanation" or justification.

In the above mentioned works performed by the Yaron Margolin Dance Company, there were no "black holes". The dance was rich in devices and moved along by the musical image motivation alone.

Later I endeavoured to design a dance idea connected more closely to poetry. That required a correct balance between the music and the poetry. In "Cursed Women", the personalities of the poet Baudelaire and of the composer Cesar Franck were emphasised. The poet supplies the inner world of his poems, while the composer, by his "cyclical" music creates a closed circle of drives ("vices") in which the dancers are whirled about.

The movement develops in a confined world, in which the poetry only provides hints, while the music drives relentlessly on.

In "The Dance of Death", to another poem by Baudelaire, and the "Requiem" by Faure, a similar combination was attempted. In both cases and without any dramatic plot or outline and without the use of abstract symbols, a rich and liberated dance was created.

It has to be pointed out that these are only the first steps in the search for an efficient dance language. Only those musical horizons bordering on the Romantic and Post-Romantic mentality have been explored.

It goes without saying, that different musical components would provide other, new horizons. Each encounter with another musical aspect enriches the dance. ■

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