

Reconstruction of Nijinsky's choreography: Reconsider Music in *The Rite of Spring*

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ABSTRACT

Since Millicent Hodson and Kenneth Archer had reconstructed Nijinsky's choreography of *The Rite of Spring* (*Le Sacre du Printemps*, 1913), the possible image of the premiere of this ballet is visually accessed. With this kind of invention, musicologists or dance theorists have still not exposed its effect on research. Therefore, through a detailed analysis of reconstructed *The Rite of Spring*, this paper proposes that dance may play a role on reconciling rhythmic patterns or reshaping cellular groupings in music. In this finding, the rhythmic theme in "Augurs of Spring" (Boulez, 1966), seems congruent with the complementary of postures and movements of the dance performance, even though music analysis or rhythmic complexity may indicate that such segmentation would be problematic (van den Toorn, 1987). In addition, regularity and symmetry are also perceivable by means of dance movement, though asymmetry, irregularity and hierarchical rhythms do exist in listening to this work.

Keywords

The Rite of Spring, Nijinsky's choreography, music and dance, grouping, perception

1. INTRODUCTION

Since Millicent Hodson and Kenneth Archer had reconstructed Nijinsky's choreography of *The Rite of Spring* (*Le Sacre du Printemps*, 1913), the possible image of the premiere of this ballet is visually accessed. Though there has been a plenty of sources of analyzing *The Rite of Spring*, seldom can we "see the voice" of its earliest choreographer Nijinsky. Even we access Nijinsky's contribution of *The Rite* according to others' voice, we may receive some negative descriptions about him, including the composer Igor Stravinsky's point of view [12][13]. Fortunately, such defect would be generally filled up since the original dance now "speaks" when it is performed.

With this kind of invention, musicologists including Pieter C. van den Toorn insist on "music itself" and exclude interdisciplinary conception of *The Rite*. Conversely, dance theory takes for granted that choreographic designs reflect music principles, and the related analyses are highly focus on

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SysMus12, Montreal, Canada, May 24-26, 2012

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consistency of dance and music without further consideration of other possible relations.

However, does "dance" really have no function in this "ballet"? Can other parameters such as dance movements or postures make audiences have different perceptions from listening to "music itself"?

In this study, I take the reconstruction of Nijinsky's choreography as subject. Instead of revealing music and dance consistent parts of interaction, I aim to investigate whether dance affects rhythmic and thematic perceptions in the music of *The Rite of Spring*.

2. CHOREOMUSICAL ANALYSIS

Through my choreomusical analysis of "Augurs of Spring," I found that dance plays an important role on recognizing rhythmic patterns or cohering different materials in this work. In other words, a certain cellular grouping may be perceived by audiences even though hierarchical patterns actually coexist in music. In addition, irregular or complicated rhythms of music are gradually reconciled in virtue of dual movements or symmetric gestures.

The first type of quality would be proved by music in no.13. In this section of music, continuous repetitions of "Augurs chord" varied with sudden accents. Five young people grouped in circle start to "bobbing" on the first beat of each measure, and after two measures of bobbing, they individually place their hands in symmetrical position with respective accent [8][19]. As a result, this passage of music seems to have four beats per measure by the emphasis of first-beat bobbing. And the first two measures without hand movement could be identified as a kind of "preparation." The symmetrical postures of five young people repeat three times and correspond to the accents respectively on the second beat and the forth beat of no.13₊₂¹, the second beat of no.13₊₄ and the first beat of no.13₊₅, and finally the first beat of no.13₊₆ and the second beat of no.13₊₇. If we take a pair of symmetrical gestures as a group, and then there would be exact three groups nominated as group A, B and C.

Going further, smaller cells could be analyzed by the relationship of bobbing and hand movements, such as both two types of hand movement follow after bobbing inside a measure (no.13₊₂), or specific hand movement emerges one beat after bobbing (no.13₊₄, no.13₊₇), or specific hand movement

¹ In this paper, the measure next to no.13 is identified as no.13₊₁, the one before it is no.13₋₁, the measure at which no.13 starts is indicated as no.13₀.

coincides to bobbing on the first beat of measure (no.13₊₅, no.13₊₆). Consequently, we may acquire six cells included in group A, B and C, and I name them as “a₁,” “a₂,” “b₁,” “b₂,” “c₁” and “c₂” respectively (See figure 1).

When Compared with previous rhythmic analyses for this section, Pierre Boulez preserves original bars to make segmentations, and chooses to use accents as characteristic of the organization of the cells. Hence he concludes cell A, B, B₁ and their derivatives as main rhythmic themes in the whole section [2][3]. On the other hand, Pieter C. van den Toorn segments this passage of music by accents, and establishes irregular rhythmic patterns to illustrate Stravinsky's manipulation of re-barring. With different results of analyses, van den Toorn claims his analytical result is more radical and indicates Boulez's ignorance of disruptive effect on invention [14].

As figure 1 shows, rhythmic groupings in dance are more similar to Pierre Boulez's cellular-groupings. Even though we should admit the interference of sudden accents with original measures, which is just as van den Toorn mentioned. A regular meter of four beats per bar could still be realized by means of vision. The most difference between groupings in dance and rhythmic patterns of Pierre Boulez's analysis is in No.13₊₄₋₇. Listeners may recognize the beat of appearance of accents inside a group, and classify these properties into cell b₁ or b₂, and combines them into group B or its inversion, group B₁. In the other side, the image of dance makes more possibilities of permutation, that is, audiences can further distinguish hand movements of cell b₁ and c₂, or cell b₂ and c₁. As a result, the final two groups are not inverted relationship but totally different types of groupings. Hence I differentiate these two groups in the name of B and C rather than B and B₁.

The groupings of dance in no.13 are basically consistent with bar. However, music between no.28 and no.30 shows another type of quality: Dance has its own principle of progression, i.e. sometimes dance accords with bar and sometimes it transcends the restriction of bar. But in general, dance movements sustain in a period of symmetry and regularity.

In the beginning of this section, a group of seven maidens move left and right in turn [8][19]. And the rhythm of steps could be counted in three beats for fourth and conflicts to Stravinsky's original time signature of two-four time in no.28₀₋₊₇. If we take

the audible melody of flute into consideration, interestingly, we can find that every third beat of dance responds to the recurrence of interval “B^b-E^b.” In no.28₊₄₋₇, a sudden melody of trumpet appears and succeeds with the accompaniment of melodic cells of flute. At this moment, dance continues its three-beat meter and divides trumpet's melody into two parts: “B^b-B^b-C-D^b” and “E^b-D^b-C.” In no.28₊₈₋₉, however, a melodic variation of trumpet occurs, and the rhythm of dance alters to be consistent with bar and could be counted in two beats. From no.28₊₅ to No.29₊₇, dance becomes to alternate in the structure of three beats for twice and two beats for twice. Also, theme melody in the voice of trumpet is totally enveloped in each pair of symmetrical movements (See figure 2). Namely, the relationship of dance and music gradually achieves a way of regularity by the repetition of certain rhythmic pattern. And this kind of phenomenon makes audiences perceive music and dance in a sense of coordination in the end of this section.

To sum up, the contrast of irregular pulse and interrupted meter would be regularized and familiarized during subsequent repetition of later measures. And a specific sense of rhythmic pattern is constructed in visually through dance, which allows listeners have ability to make music and dance as a whole.

3. CONCLUSION

Through analyses of rhythmic/metric patterns or cellular groupings in music and dance, the findings explain how specific perception is received reasonably. Furthermore, dance plays a decisive role in constructing structure of multimedia, and it could even alter the rhythmic or cellular reception of music.

Nijinsky's choreography facilitates the realization of symmetry and regularity in *The Rite of Spring*. His choreographed reconstruction is indeed a valuable gift for audiences to retrieve its importance of being a ballet.

Based on the results of analysis, it is suggested that cellular groupings or rhythmic patterns in music could be reconsidered with combination of dance. For this reason, the paradigm for choreomusical analysis should be enlarged in the meanwhile.

4. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their generous feedbacks and suggestions in the early abstract.

13 Tempo giusto $\text{♩} = 50$
 I, II, III, IV (I, II senza aord.)

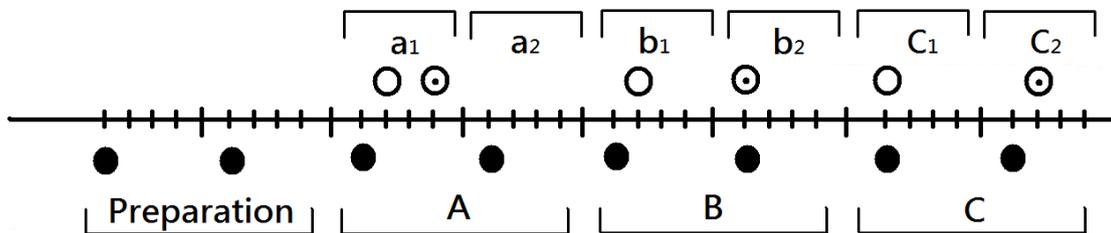
Cor. V, VI, VII, VIII *sf sempre*

V-ni II arco (non div.) *sempre simile*
 tutti (non div.) *sempre stacc.*

V-le arco (non div.) *sempre simile*
 tutti *sempre stacc.*

V-c. arco (non div.) *sempre simile*
 tutti *sempre stacc.*

C-b. arco (non div.) *sempre simile*
 tutti *sempre stacc.*



● : Bobbing ○ : Hand movement 1 ⊙ : Hand movement 2
 * ○ and ⊙ are symmetrical gestures

Rhythmic pattern and grouping of dance movements

13

Pierre Boulez's cellular groupings

13

Pieter C. van den Toorn's rhythmic pattern

Figure 1. Rhythmic pattern and groupings in no.13

28

Fl. I
Fl. c-a. (G)
Tr-be (C)

Dance Movements:
(Group of seven maidens)

All Bend Towards Right Wing Head Right Step Left Head Right Step Right

Beat: ① ② ③ | ①

29

Picc.
Fl. I
Fl. c-a. (G)
Tr-be (C)

mp cantabile

Head Right Step Left Head Left Step Left Head Right Step Right Head Left Step Left Head Right Step Right

(Three small maidens rise)

30

Picc.
Fl. I
Fl. c-a. (G)
Tr-be (C)

Head Right Step Left Head Down Left Step Right Head Right Step Left Head Down Left Step Right

(Three small maidens joint to the group of seven maidens)

Figure 2. Rhythm and groupings of dance between no.28 and no.30

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