Abstract

A long-time performer with the Mark Morris Dance Group, I have received praise for the musicality inherent in my dancing. This refined musicality developed over decades of working with Morris—an artist known for his choreomusicality. Drawing from the pedagogic techniques Morris uses to train his dancers, I also employ a musical approach when teaching dance technique classes and have distilled these principles of musicality in a journal article written for dance educators. In this MFA thesis project, I now apply the musical principles utilized in my performance and pedagogic techniques toward a choreographic endeavor.

The dance and musical form, sarabande, serves as a vehicle for this choreographic process. In one regard, I tend to the concepts of beat, tempo, meter, accent, duration, articulation, rhythm, and phrasing during movement invention to supply my dance with intrinsic drama. Intermixed with this rhythmically rooted methodology is an influence from knowledge developed through academic research about the sarabande’s origins, migration, and transformation through time and locale. The final choreographic product invites a conversation among historical, musicological, and compositional elements and aims to shed light on this multilayered musical form while providing meaning and delight beyond the pure facts of music and movement.
MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

Constructing Meaning in Movement Through its Relationship to Music:

A Choreomusical Response to the Sarabande

by

Lauren Grant

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Introduction

A long-time performer with the Mark Morris Dance Group, I have been celebrated for the musicality I employ within my embodiment of the work of a choreographer noted for his choreomusical approach. Mark Morris trains his dancers by teaching a daily ballet class before rehearsals and performances. Through these classes, in addition to rehearsing and performing with Morris and his company for twenty-one years, I have honed my musical sensitivity as a performer. Morris’ pedagogic and choreographic methods have enabled me to develop this temporal and qualitative nuance. As a teacher of ballet and modern technique, I strive to relay these tenets to my students. To do so, I incorporate a detailed musical approach in my classes. In this MFA thesis project, I now turn to apply the musical principles utilized in my performance and pedagogic techniques toward a choreographic endeavor.

To engage in this process, I have chosen to utilize only one musical form—the sarabande—as a vehicle through which to employ my methodology. Although my established approach involved the application of musical principles to the activity of movement invention, I found additional fertilizer for my creative process in discovering the story of the sarabande’s origin, migration, and transformation through time and locale. Utilizing several musical principles in the way in which they relate to dance, along with knowledge developed from research conducted on the history of the sarabande, this choreographic thesis project aims to produce a dance work inspired by, in relation to, in conversation with, and highlighting the specific musical form sarabande. My goal is that the choreomusicality in the performance product proves captivating to an audience and,
along with layers in the work inspired by the sarabande’s history, provides meaning beyond the pure facts of the movement and music.

Research

The genesis of my interest in the sarabande can be traced back to my first in-depth encounter with the form while dancing Mark Morris’ 1995 work *Falling Down Stairs* (choreographed to Johann Sebastian Bach’s *Unaccompanied Cello Suite no. 3 in C major*). Up until that point, I had danced to a wide-ranging assortment of rhythms in triple meter, but never one so slow and heavy, with such little momentum. At first, I had some difficulty working out the relationship of my movements to the music—this triple meter lacked the buoyancy and suspension of the waltz form with which I was so much more accustomed. Over the years, during subsequent reprisals of Morris’ dance, I gained a clearer understanding of how to hear the underlying three pulses per measure. But as further opportunities to physicalize the sarabande’s characteristics had not arisen within ballet class training or my performance career beyond this encounter of dancing Morris’ work to Bach, I was left hungry to know more. To my surprise, in researching the sarabande, I discovered it embodied multiple and even divergent incarnations across its extensive migratory path; the sarabande was not solely a sedate musical composition and dignified dance.

To learn more about the sarabande’s lineage I reviewed literature on its history, including its debatable origins, migratory path, numerous personalities, and structural mutations. To understand more about the five musical selections comprising the score for the choreographic component of this thesis project, *Sarabande Suite*, I learned the
cultural background of each composer along with details about each piece. For this creative venture, I devised a methodology in which the principles of musicality in dance—as fleshed out in an article I wrote for dance educators—guided my approach.

*History of the Sarabande*

**Definition**

The sarabande, as we know it today, is a musical form in triple meter with a typically emphasized second beat. But the sarabande has embodied multifarious formats over the centuries. Once a sung dance—replete with instruments and text, it has also prevailed as a Baroque dance with no text and later, as a purely instrumental expression—oftentimes as part of Baroque suites. The sarabande, as it is spelled in France (*sarabanda* in Italy, *zarabanda* in Spain, and *saraband* in many other countries), developed and changed over the centuries as different cultures adopted the form (Hudson and Ellis).

**Debatable Origins**

Conflicting theories exist regarding the sarabande’s origins. With no documented mention of the sarabande before 1579 (Stevenson 29), and with varied hypotheses based on numerous diverse etymologic explanations, no one claim can be taken as fact. Some researchers place the sarabande’s origins among various Muslim populations in the Middle-East: “The debatable point is whether the Sarabande was a truly Arabian or other Oriental form brought to Mauretania by the Saracens and modified in Spain, or whether it was a Spanish form influenced by the Moors” (Pulver 17). But perhaps the most compelling argument locating the sarabande’s origins is offered by Robert Stevenson in his article, “The First Dated Mention of the Sarabande.” Stevenson suggests that the
discovery of a 1579 description of a zarabanda from a Mexican author lends credence to the assertion that the form—one most commonly attributed as a European product—in fact, may have had its beginnings in America (29). Curt Sachs, in his book *World History of the Dance*, also points to the form’s germination within the Americas: “The *sarabande*...originated in the melting-pot of Central America” (350). J. Peter Burkholder concurs in his article “Music of the Americas and Historical Narratives”:

By the end of the sixteenth century, the New World was already exporting music back to the old country...the sarabande apparently originated in Latin America...[showing] a popular, unwritten tradition from Latin America being taken up in Spain, brought into the written tradition, and transformed as it moved across borders to Italy and France. (411)

**Migration and Transformation**

Assuming the sarabande’s roots emanate from Mesoamerica, it was then the Spanish colonists who likely encountered the dance of Native Americans in that region and infused their dancing with elements of that which they witnessed. Sachs continues that the sarabande was “brought home to Andalusia by the colonists” (350). Around the end of the 16th century, the dance and music of the sarabande infiltrated the cultural practices of Spain. Sachs offers an account of Thomas Platter the younger who saw the *sarabande* danced in Barcelona in 1599: “There were always several couples together—once, in the street, some fifty—men and women opposite each other playing the castanets, mostly in backward motion with absurd twists of the body, hands, and feet” (368).
But around the time of the sarabande’s intense popularity in Spain, the Spanish church—deeming the full-bodied dance component lascivious and the text of the accompanying song obscene—banned it for a period. Ingrid Brainard, in reviewing Rainer Gstrein’s book, *The Sarabande in Dance and Music*, describes this phenomenon from this portion of the sarabande’s history:

*Spanish zarabandas, according to the existing evidence, could be recited or sung, or they could be danced, or both together; they were frequently, if not always, danced with castanets; they could be group dances, passionate and erotic in nature, characterized by the supple motions of arms and hands, intricate footwork, a flexible torso, and mobile hips. Small wonder that the Inquisition punished the singing and dancing of zarabandas with two hundred lashes of the whip, with expulsion from the kingdom for women, and six years of servitude on galleys for men. That the zarabanda, modified for the purpose, also played in religious processions is just one of the many intriguing facets of its history. (193-194)*

Following the Spanish sarabande craze of the 16th century, the novelty, popularity, and illicit status in Spain became exhausted, and the form began a new life as it was introduced into other European countries.

Throughout the 17th century, Germany, England, Italy, and France developed their own distinctions for the sarabande. In the 1620’s, the sarabande crossed over into France, beginning a metamorphosis so profound that the resulting transmogrification almost directly opposed its previous Spanish nature. The French Baroque modifications to the sarabande opened up a new and divergent path on which the form could grow with strikingly opposing distinctions.
Variation and Mutation of Structure and Format

The structure and format of the sarabande has fluctuated across its many incarnations. At first, it was the harmonic scheme that characterized the sarabande; later, rhythm and tempo became the identifying attributes (Hudson and Ellis). J. Peter Burkholder, in his article, “Music of the Americas and Historical Narratives,” explains:

The zarabanda changed a great deal as it spread. Early notated examples from guitar tablatures published in Italy show a constantly repeating I-IV-I-V harmonic basis, with various rhythms. From this it gradually evolved in several directions, culminating in three major types: a rapid sung dance with an ostinato framework, common in Spain and Italy; a less rapid instrumental form that became the principal type in Italy…; and the even slower and more dignified French sarabande. In the latter two cases, the zarabanda lost its text, its association with a particular harmonic progression, and its reputation as lascivious. The best known of the three is the purely instrumental slow French sarabande, which became among the most common dances of the baroque period and among the most immediately recognizable to modern listeners. (412)

Harmonic structure, phrasing, tempo, and emotional tone, along with format—text-based, purely instrumental, or dance form—morphed as various cultures, artists, and participants enjoyed utilizing the form for their purposes. “When it came over the Atlantic to Spain in the late sixteenth century, the zarabanda was a type of song sung for dancing, accompanied by the guitar, usually with castanets and perhaps with other percussion” (Burkholder 412). In the 1640s, the balanced phrasing switched to that of the “unbalanced line…preferred by French poets” (Ranum 23). The sarabande ranged in
tempo from fast (Spanish and some Italian) to slow (later French and German). Within its triple time, its meter varied. Jeffrey Pulver, in his article “The Ancient Dance-Forms,” elaborates on its development in France and beyond:

Its measure was generally 3/2 or 3/4, its key either major or minor, and it consisted of two eight-bar divisions each of which was repeated. Some noticeable features of the Sarabande's rhythm were its long notes with many embellishments, the possession of as few running notes as possible, and the second crotchet of each bar generally lengthened by a dot. It usually commenced with the downbeat…. (19)

In early 17th century France and Italy, it was a component of ballet de cour, or court ballet, often taking its place toward the end of the productions (Buch 102) (Brainard 194). But eventually, the element of dance was excised from the sarabande as it evolved into a purely musical expression. Mid-17th century, it became a movement within the suite— “[a] series of disparate instrumental movements with some element of unity” (“Suite”). In the Baroque period, suites contained music originally written as support for dance forms; the sarabande was typically placed between the Courante and Gigue (Pulver 19). Pulver adds:

In the hands of the Germans the sarabande was rapidly converted from a simple dance-form into a purely instrumental piece, and in the process they so widened its bounds, and so elaborated its hitherto simple structure, that it ceased to be the name of a dance, and became exclusively the designation for a movement in the Suite. Nearly every composer made use of the form, utilising [sic] it as the vehicle for the display of his skill in polyphonic writing. (21)
From its existence along the wide spectrum as a form once American, then European; first a sung dance with donned percussion, then eventually a purely musical form; initially up-tempo, but later, slow; and formerly lewd, but ultimately noble, the sarabande has borne myriad personalities across its life span. Following its eventually established guise as an integral instrumental component of a musical suite, what happened to the form and its further development?

**Continuum**

Although the popularity of the sarabande waned at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century, the sarabande eventually gained the favor of more contemporary composers and continued to promote creative responses across countries and continents. Louis Horst, in his book *Pre-Classic Dance Forms: The Pavan, Minuet, Galliard, Allemand, and 10 Other Early Dance Forms*, states:

> After Gluck (1714-1787) we find no composers of Sarabandes until Satie, in 1887, wrote a set of three; strange, mystical pieces, suggestive of intense, religious austerity. Since then there have been many beautiful recreations of this important form by modern composers. (Horst 50)

A partial list of sarabandes made in the 19th and 20th centuries includes such notable composers as:

- **Erik Satie**—whose 1887 composition *Three Sarabandes* furthered music’s evolution in terms of harmonic technique, and may have paved the way for future developments regarding atonality (Johnston);

- **Claude Debussy**—whose 1901 *Pour le piano* “evokes the stately nobility of the traditional sarabande through a dreamy, impressionistic haze” (Judd);
• Conlon Nancarrow—in 1930, during his pre-player piano youth (Gann 51-52);
• Benjamin Britten—in his 1934 *Simple Symphony* (Judd); and
• Henry Cowell—commissioned by choreographer Martha Graham, resulting in a
  1937 dance work “Immediate Tragedy” (Horst 51) (J. Sachs 337-338).

The sarabande remains a source of inspiration into the 21st century. Current musical
artists continue to make modern adaptations of the sarabande, with successful efforts in
wringing out new and surprising creative responses. American composer, Caroline Shaw,
won a 2013 Pulitzer Prize for her work *Partita for 8 Voices* (made for her vocal group,
*Roomful of Teeth*), in which an a capella sarabande is featured as the second of four
movements reinventing the Baroque suite (“Partita”).

Choreographers equally have been inspired by the musical form, pairing their
work both with established musical examples of the sarabande as well as new
commissions from modern composers. Horst writes:

Martha Graham’s *Sarabande* (music by Lehman Engel) is one of her
masterpieces…Jose Limon produced two group dances, *Sarabande for the Dead*
and *Sarabande for the Living*, to Henry Clark’s music. Hanya Holm has done a
Sarabande…. (51)

Later in the 20th century, Mark Morris collaborated with famed cellist Yo-Yo Ma in a
film (and later, stage) production *Falling Down Stairs*, utilizing Bach’s *Unaccompanied
Cello Suite no. 3 in C major* which includes a “Sarabande” movement. In the same
decade, Jiří Kylián made *Sarabande*. Lewis Segal describes a Nederlands Dans Theater
production of Kylián’s work in his review:
The breaking point came in “Sarabande” (1990), with Bach shattering into electronic fragments and the motions of the six-man cast amplified into a thunderous score. But if the old cultural forms no longer survived modern rhythms and actions, they persisted in social values--for instance, in the macho behavior that Kylian parodied here. (Segal)

In the 21st century, Benjamin Millipied made his own Sarabande to sections of Bach suites, including a sarabande movement (Sulcas). Roslyn Sulcas reviewed a New York performance: “Unusually in ballet, it shows men dancing expressively, and interacting in a variety of ways that do not demand narrative analysis or fall into conventional emotional contexts” (Sulcas). Although the choreographic and physical components of the sarabande were excised by the mid-17th century, today, artists are reimagining the sarabande as a dance and music form, remarrying the holistic connection between the aural and visual. In 1937, Horst wrote, “All students of dance composition should likewise find this form a grateful vehicle for choreographic ideas of serious, and also of social import” (51). The musical aspect of the sarabande, while entirely fascinating in its own right, can further absorb an audience when in relationship to dance. And it can supply a well of inspiration for the dancemaking venture.

Methodology

Background on Methodology

The principles of musicality I utilize in the creative process for Sarabande Suite—beat, tempo, meter, accent, duration, articulation, rhythm, and phrasing—are tenets within my approach to performing and teaching which I have recently distilled in an
article for dance educators titled “Enhancing Musicality in Ballet Technique Classes” (Grant). Over my twenty-one years training, rehearsing, and performing with the Mark Morris Dance Group as well as setting Morris’ work and teaching for his company and school, I have had to develop a honed awareness of these principles. Morris’ artistic vision—one that has intrigued and delighted audiences around the world over the thirty-eight years of his company—derives from his research and understanding about a musical selection and his intelligent and surprising choreographic response. These uniquely faceted and illuminating artistic works come to fruition only when the colors on his palate—his dancers—possess a musicality keen enough to enable them to embody material requiring specifics of these principles of musicality. To bring Morris’ creative vision to life, his dancers must be able to follow a beat and changes in tempo; understand meter; clearly demonstrate accent; perform movements over varying durations and with myriad articulations; embody phrases consisting of multifarious and intricate rhythms; and execute those phrases with intentionally aligned or offset relationships with the accompanying musical phrases. I have witnessed audiences become roused and moved by Morris’ choreomusical creations. In this thesis project, I attempt to gather my knowledge of and experience with these concepts as a performer and teacher and redirect my engagement with them toward the creation of a new work.

Introduction to Methodology

After conducting research on the sarabande, I assembled and arranged five musical selections of the form. Each musical work differs in tempo, articulation, cultural character, and emotional tone. This suite of sarabandes serves as a vehicle through which I aim to create a choreographic response utilizing principles of musicality. As all the
musical selections comprising Sarabande Suite are in triple meter, the concept of meter is addressed through my process of engaging with every selection within this entire project. Each of the other principles (beat, tempo, accent, duration, articulation, rhythm, and phrasing) is investigated within one or more of the five sections of Sarabande Suite.

Gathering information on the lineage of the sarabande as a music and dance form, I integrate motifs and elements inspired by my understanding of the form’s colorful history. Within my choreographic response, I make varied and intentional musical choices in addition to abstract references to some of the cultural layers accumulated by the sarabande along its evolution. I intend this work—Sarabande Suite—to be more than mere movement to music; the coupling of a choreomusical approach with the incorporation of allusions to layers of time and place may stock this work with ingredients that allow it to carry meaning to those simultaneously listening and watching.

**Application of Musical Principles**

As I set out to craft choreographic material, I allowed the rhythms and structures of the music to inspire and inform my movement invention. In supplying my physical phrases with rhythmic detail, I avoid merely mirroring the structure of the music; sometimes, I intentionally break free from it and other times, I work in counterpoint with it. These conversational moments with the score serve as recuperations from periods where I stay quite aligned with the structure. This choreographic tactic of including *recuperative* periods is a concept I encountered during a Creative Practices course taught by Claire Porter during my first semester in graduate school at Montclair State University. In Sarabande Suite, I utilize this device by altering a phrase’s properties during direct musical repeats, or by making distinctions between choreographic and
musical phrasing—where the music has one phrasing and the dance scans oddly on top of the music.

The elements of rhythm and structure are some of the fundamental components of music’s substance and appeal. Other temporal art forms utilize these means for effect. Patricia Ranum, in her article, “Audible Rhetoric and Mute Rhetoric: The 17th-Century French Sarabande,” describes how French Baroque poets employed detail of rhythm to endow their writing with emotional appeal:

[W]ithin the relatively inflexible structure of poetry and the very inflexible musical metre to which that poetry is set…French Baroque poets varied speech rhythms from line to line, according to the emotions they wished to stir. These passionate rhythms combine with the figures of rhetoric to create the 'character', the 'movement', the mood of a speech, a song or a dance. These rhythms are determined by three factors: the length of the individual syllables, the number of syllables in a group, and the melodies of emotional speech…. (26)

In making intentional choices about the temporal and therefore qualitative characteristics of my movement, I aspire to infuse the dance with properties rendering it affecting and engrossing for the audience. Ranum describes tactics used by orators to persuade through speech and impress upon the listener:

He must convince them by his artful deployment of exclamations, questions, dramatic pauses, repetitions, strongly contrasted statements, exaggerations, and so on…. Thus, figures of speech express the passions that the orator is acting out and hopes to stir in the hearts of his listeners. In other words, figures of speech not only persuade, they also move the audience. (25)
Through rhythm, phrasing, emphasis, and structure alone, content may be infused with a resulting drama. Ranum supports this assertion and connects it to the way these structural characteristics within the early sung sarabande allowed the form to capture the attention of its audience:

[B]alanced phrases go hand-in-hand with assertive, exclamatory statements, while unbalanced phrases usually express tender, plaintive thoughts—or imply hemiolas. Since the ear easily picks out these contrasting phrasings and the emotions with which they are associated, the position of the double slashes within each four-measure phrase is of prime importance to the rhetoric of the sung sarabande. (26)

Music, through its detail of rhythm, melody, harmony, and phrasing, can possess inherently dramatic characteristics. I sowed the equivalent of this detail within the base temporal structure of my movement in the hope to cultivate material intrinsically, yet abstractly, emotional.

Analysis of Sarabande Suite

Movement 1: Bach

The first section of Sarabande Suite is Johann Sebastian Bach’s “Sarabande” from his French Suite no. 2 in C minor, BWV 813, written between 1722-1725. Although tagged a French suite by Bach’s biographer Johann Nikolaus Forkel, Bach did not designate this label, nor does it accurately describe the style of work (“French Suite”). This suite represents Bach’s German heritage and the “Sarabande” movement exemplifies the sarabande’s development in Germany: “Like each of its five brothers, J.S.
Bach's French Suite No. 2 in C minor, BWV 813 is not French at all, but actually a true German-style, multi-movement keyboard suite” (Johnston).

In this purely musical sarabande for keyboard, Bach “…explores a languorous and elegantly adorned 3/4 meter…” (Johnston). In my creative response, I intentionally ignore the musical structure of AABCBC to instead play with duration, tempo, accent, articulation, and phrasing in a conversation with this languorous quality. To underscore the importance of music to this project and to awaken the audience’s aural sense, I begin the event with no dancing. During the first iteration of the A theme, only music sounds as I wait in the darkness. For the repeat of A, I perform my singular phrase at its slowest incarnation, highlighting the music’s languid quality. My movement phrase, although simple and slow, does have some accented moments; while basic, these moments are meant to stand out because of the way they are sandwiched between simple torso movements and arm gestures which steadily move in one direction over the course of two slow bars of 3/4 time. During the B and C phrases, I repeat the original movement phrase at faster speeds, altering the tempo of the phrase’s physical components, the duration of each movement, and the way the phrasing of the movement lines up with the musical phrase. Additionally, I change some of the accents built into my control phrase; instead of keeping the same accents but performing them at increasing speeds, I add some slight variation and complication. My goal is to add interest: when the eye grows accustomed to a certain phrasing, a subversion of that expectation can offer a captivating surprise.

Meredith Little and Natalie Jenne, in their book *Dance and the Music of J.S. Bach*, support this theory behind the interplay between the inherent and created rhythms of dance movements with those of their musical accompaniment. Referring to French
Baroque Court dancing, the authors state, “In all choreographies, the rhythms of music and dance form counter-rhythms at least some of the time. Counter-rhythms create further interest, heighten tension, and may take place on any level of rhythmic activity” (24-25). Conversely, in my final iteration of this singular phrase, I closely acknowledge a musical fillip by adding a qualitative element to a downward movement of the arms. I mirror this musical ornamentation by adding a slight shudder, or vibration to this already-seen downward arm movement, intending it potentially to carry new pathos.

My placement of this section within the confines of one spot on the stage along with my choice to use a gravity-bound theme reflects the story of the sarabande’s early history. Most likely, the sarabande began with a Native American population, and therefore within a society engaged in a spiritual relationship with the Earth—its cycles, riches, and challenges. The sarabande also served as a vehicle for total freedom of expression until those liberties and abandon were squashed by religious and political constructs. In this section, I slowly toil to rise up, to be born, to hope, to imagine; ultimately, I fall back down, unable to realize my full potential.

**Movement 2: Lully**

The second section of *Sarabande Suite* is set to a movement from Jean-Baptiste Lully’s last comédie-ballet collaboration with the French playwright Molière. “Premiere air des Espagnols” is the title of this sarabande from *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, a comédie-ballet that received its first performance in 1670 (Welch). Lully was Italian born, but established himself in France, alongside King Louis XIV as his court composer and friend. Lully enjoyed “pre-eminence among French composers” (Anthony et al. 53); his work influenced the development of music across countries throughout Europe, most
notably in the Netherlands and Germany (“Lully”): “The geographical distribution of Lully’s music outside France was remarkable” (Anthony et al. 55).

Looking at the written score for this Lully piece, the notation seems to deliver only some basic phrases with simple repeats. The pianist for my performance of *Sarabande Suite*, George Shevtsov, explained that there was room to embellish. In an email correspondence, Shevtsov stated:

I do earnestly believe that to remain true to the spirit of this music one must depart from being true to the letter, i.e. the printed score. This piece, as countless others, was not written ‘for posterity,’ which is a much more recent phenomenon in notation, concerned with controlling and ‘objectively’ preserving every possible aspect of music making. It is written by the composer who is also a part of the band and the main rehearsal director. So, much like in dance, lots of elements that are intrinsic to the style cannot possibly be written down, but can rather be explored with a sympathetic ear and inquisitive mind. It’s an act of reimagining. And of course every time we reimagine something we interpret it in a way that’s unique to ourselves. But I think to only execute what we see on the page is to do this music the greatest disservice, because we fail to look beyond the notes. (Shevtsov)

Ashley Oakley, in “The Sarabandes of J.S. Bach: Freedom of Ornamentation and Improvisation,” supports this premise:

The current standards of Baroque performance practice contrast starkly with the original intentions of Baroque composers. The concepts of originality and freedom in Baroque performance have been lost and replaced with technical
rigidity and strict adherence to the score. By its very nature, musical notation is inexact; the notes on a score lack the ability to fully portray the composer’s intentions. (10)

Taking inspiration from the creative freedom originally immanent in the work of that period, I make artistic decisions regarding instrumentation for this section, the number of repeats of the musical stanza, and along with my pianist, the election to play the music with rhythmic freedom. Segueing from the solo piano voice in the first movement of *Sarabande Suite*, this second movement brings together sounds of piano, violin, cajón (a Peruvian wooden drum), and ankle bells. This array of instruments increases the potential for layers of melody and rhythm. I wear ankle bells to highlight the assorted rhythms of my movement phrases. This practice has been utilized across time and cultures for similar purposes. In comparing the inherent body rhythms of ballet, modern, and global styles of dance, Irmgard Bartenieff explains how, in non-Western cultures, a “more total activation of all parts has been done in different ways throughout history. Dancers often connected sound-producing props such as bells around ankles, finger cymbals, tambourines, hand drums, castanets to reinforce their body rhythms” (79). Considering how the sarabande roamed across continents and through cultures—like a glacier trudging through one terrain to another, picking up new sediment and particles along its journey—I feel emboldened to add colorful sounds from areas across the world. While ankle bells are an adornment more associated with Indian, African, and Native-American cultures, Horst, however, does give an example of their use in France during a danced sarabande: “History also relates of Cardinal Richelieu that, to gain the favor of Anne of Austria, he danced a Sarabande before her, with bells on his feet, and
castanets in his hands” (Horst 46-48). Later in *Sarabande Suite*, I bring in other percussive sounds as I play castanets. My use of bells and castanets adds rhythmic emphasis and recalls the cultural layers within the sarabande’s history.

Little and Jenne write of the early 18th century sarabande possessing an “extreme simplicity of phrase structure [and containing] anticipated rhymes (question and answer, or statement and counterstatement)…” (96). In this Lully section, I begin by listening to the “question” posed by the musicians and answer each phrase with a danced “response.” Later in the section, once these questions and answers have been fully presented, the musicians and I engage in a wholly simultaneous *song and dance*.

Regarding my movement invention for this section, I primarily focus on beat, accent, rhythm, and articulation. I made four base phrases, some of which plainly repeat, and others of which repeat with variation. The simply repeated phrases allow me to restate a phrase with two qualitatively juxtaposing halves while the variations of phrases enable me to further develop some of my explorations of accent and rhythm.

Within each phrase, I vary which beats take the emphasized accent. Even within a duplicated movement phrase in which I perform the same steps, I change the accent of those steps from up, or airborne, to down, or on my landing. In this mere act of specifying and altering accent, an identical physical statement takes on a fresh effect. Furthermore, in this subtle yet detailed relationship between the movement and music, a simply repeated musical phrase may be heard afresh through this relational shift.

Each of my choreographic phrases acknowledges and works within the framework of the 3/4 meter and phrase units of four bars, but rather than mirroring the internal rhythm of each bar of music, I layer in my own compatible, yet contrapuntal
rhythms. My danced phrases emphasize the triple meter of the music, but also stress the hemiola rhythm (hemiola is a proportion of 3:2) I hear and feel from the music. Through these varying rhythms, my movement alternates between highlighting the underlying triple meter and punctuating a perceived duple pulse tucked into the phrase of six beats. The ankle bells help me bring out the accented beats and differing rhythms contained within my movement phrases. These juxtaposing rhythms also contain movements that inherently differ in articulation. The steps operating in triple meter are sweeping, swingy, and suspended while the steps performed in duple time are sharper and more abrupt.

Acknowledging contributions of Lully and Louis XIV to the development of the genre of ballet, I incorporate a more balletic vocabulary than used in the first movement. To further allude to the sarabande’s history, I include gliding movements, which were among the original steps performed within a Baroque danced sarabande. Drawing from Father François Pomey’s 1671 description, Ranum describes this dance: “He glides rather than steps” (29). Pomey’s description of this Baroque sarabande dance further inspired my vocabulary invention and timing decisions:

Sometimes he would glide imperceptibly, with no apparent movement of his feet and legs, and seemed to *slide rather than step*. Sometimes, with the most beautiful timing in the world, he would remain *suspended, immobile*, and half leaning to the side with one foot in the air; and then, *compensating for the rhythmic unit that had gone by*, with another *more precipitous unit* he would almost fly, so rapid was his motion…. Sometimes he would advance with *little skips*, sometimes he would drop back with *long steps* that, although carefully planned, seemed to be done spontaneously, so well had he cloaked his art in skilful [sic] nonchalance…. Now
and then he would *let a whole rhythmic unit go by*, moving no more than a statue
and then, *setting off like an arrow*, he would be at the other end of the room
before anyone had time to realize that he had departed. (qtd. in Ranum 35)

This example describes a dance that contains opposing movements and rhythms. It seems
these rapid and frequent shifts in speed, quality, locomotion, and physicality contributed
to a most captivating performance. Referring to this approach and, once again, integrating
the technique of recuperation, I pepper in unexpected contrasting movements by
alternating my balletic glides with suggestions of steps and physicalities from other
genres of dance. Noting how, at this period in the sarabande’s continuum, it was a lively
dance within the entertainment of the court ballets, I accordingly engage in a spritely,
locomoting, enthusiastic dance in which I employ detailed and faceted shifts in rhythm
and motion to supply interest.

**Movement 3: Grieg**

The third movement of *Sarabande Suite* is set to Edvard Grieg’s “Sarabande”
from his 1884 *Holberg Suite*. Grieg, a Norwegian composer, was commissioned to write
a work commemorating the bicentennial of the birth of Norwegian writer Ludvig Baron
Holberg. Joan Olsson, in her program notes for the Wilmington Symphony Orchestra’s
performance of the *Holberg Suite*, writes:

> Since Holberg was a contemporary of Bach and Handel, Grieg chose to compose
> his tribute in the form of a French Baroque period suite. He cast six movements in
> the musical forms of the l8th century, and filled them with the spirit of his own
> time and style.... The *Sarabande*, originally from the Americas, contrasts [with
> the lively opening movement] nicely with its peaceful, meditative mood. (Olsson)
This work was originally composed for piano, but later rearranged for orchestra. In this third movement of *Sarabande Suite*, I utilize the solo piano arrangement of the “Sarabande” section from Grieg’s beloved *Holberg Suite*.

For this section, I most simply attend to rhythm and phrasing. During Grieg’s A and B phrases, I match his established rhythm and phrasing, highlighting his composition. During the C phrase, I intentionally misalign my movement phrase with that of the music. This serves as another recuperative moment within a structurally paralleled set-up. During repeats of the musical lines, I too, restate my movement phrases, but at one point, alter their facings and trajectories. Once acclimated to a presented pattern, a subversion of audience expectations on this micro level can contribute toward active and vital viewer engagement.

In this movement, I employ increasingly overt ballet vocabulary; in adopting more restrained and contained movement, I allude to the sarabande’s reformation from a full-bodied dance to one instead displaying a “graceful nobility” (Pulver 20). In the story of the sarabande’s evolution, I noticed how the values of each period caused a metamorphosis of the form, a shift in which dancers, singers, musicians, and poets who fully and freely expressed raw emotions later were confined to a decorous approach or even entirely excised, as in the case of singer, poets, and dancers. Trying to pinpoint this phenomenon in which socially constructed conventions result in the stifling of human expression and enjoyment, I integrate a prop—one flower held in each hand—to infuse my steps with a subtext of desired, but unreciprocated, romance. The addition of the flowers to my simple but direct movements of the arms and gaze adds my overlaid meaning to the abstract movement.
Movement 4: Handel

This penultimate movement of Sarabande Suite is set to the “Sarabande” from the Suite in D minor, HWV 437, by the German-born Georg Friedrich Handel. Written between 1703 and 1706, “Handel's Sarabande is based on a variant of a musical pattern called ‘later Folia’, a popular chord sequence during the baroque period (the 16-bar blues of its day)” (Paterson). This sarabande exemplifies the solemn characteristics typical of the Germanic revision of the form.

In this movement, I examine beat, accent, duration, and phrasing. On a micro scale, I play with phrasing in the way my steps initiate on the second beat of each measure, allowing the eye of the viewer to trick the ear into perceiving the down beat of each bar on the second, rather than first, beat. One of the primary characteristics of the sarabande is its emphasis of the second, rather than first, beat within a measure. By accentuating the second beat, I acknowledge this identifying structure of the sarabande.

Narratively, the choreography of this section is a response to the scenario of the previous movement to Grieg. There, I gracefully pine with hope and longing for a romance perhaps unattainable; here, no longer able to maintain my stoicism, I devolve from my vertical state. Throughout this section, my physicality crescendos from a muted dejection to an almost full-blown madness. From this ultimate frenetic status, I conclude by adopting the stable and dignified upright motif from the previous Grieg section, but now, with an added arm gesture from the movement vocabulary used in this Handel movement. This gesture, inserted here, adds an intimation of my overall theme within Sarabande Suite—the battle between restriction and freedom, the condition of operating in figurative shackles versus living fully and unabashedly.
**Movement 5: Granados**

In the closing movement of *Sarabande Suite*—set to the third movement of *Danzas Españolas Para Piano* by the late 19th to early 20th century Spanish composer Enrique Granados (Clark)—the relationship between the rhythms of the movement and the musical composition is more closely aligned than in any other section of this work. Granados accents the second beat of many of the measures throughout this “Zarabanda” and, along with some help from my castanets, so do I. When he throws in a rare accented downbeat, I replicate the emphasis through my actions. Following the first four sections of *Sarabande Suite*, in which I heartily offer numerous examples of contrapuntal play, I now allow an easy match of physical and musical rhythms to serve as a satisfying conclusion. I intend for the finale to carry its potency through my more fully robust locomoting steps, the addition of the castanets, the vibrancy and Spanish inflection of the music after two slow and poignant selections, and the content of my physical choices. In more pointedly mirroring the music, I naturally adopt Granados’ mixture of articulations and variations in phrasing, echo his rhythms and accents, align with his meter, attend to the beat, involve steps with differing durations, and keep pace with his tempo.

*Sarabande Suite* carries an overall theme inspired by the story of the sarabande as it traveled across cultures and through time and locale. A conglomeration of dance, music, song, and text, the sarabande once employed a synthesis of art forms as it enabled its practitioners to express deep passion. But as ascetic religious and political values intervened, the animation and fervor exhibited through the sarabande was curtailed. When the sarabande encountered the strict moral codes of European society, its nature transformed as a result; eventually, the bodily elements—vocalizations and
physicalizations—were excised. Throughout Sarabande Suite, I weigh extreme propriety and rectitude against emancipation of body and spirit. This juxtaposition is displayed in the way my urge to rise, move, love, live, and be free is prevented by internal and external forces at play. In Sarabande Suite’s concluding section, I pose an answer to my question comparing two states of being as I finally achieve this freedom of expression.

Results and Implications for the Future

Although I am not a trained musician (except for some brief time spent learning piano as a young child and some subsequent voice lessons), my decades of experience both training and performing in a deeply musical fashion has endowed me with a certain level of knowledge and understanding. Working with live musicians each day in my roles both as dancer and teacher and engaging in the choreographic process as a body within the cast of Morris’ works, I have listened to, analyzed, and physically embodied the components of great and complex pieces of music. I have worked with dance class musicians to better understand how different meters, rhythms, articulations, tempi, and phrasing lend support to a dancer’s efforts. Through these experiences, I have specific and practical musical knowledge as it relates to dance. But, I do not possess a full grasp of music theory. In attempting to gather information on the sarabande’s structural mutations, or better comprehend the nuances of each of my selections used in Sarabande Suite, I realized my limitations. Delving into a choreographic effort using the musical score as primary source, I recognized that my ability to closely read the subtleties of a score was restricted. Dancers develop a musical awareness not necessarily in alignment with traditional musical theory, but of their own device from a physically manifested
experience. I had to trust that the visceral level of knowledge I possessed was a worthy enough caliber of musical comprehension to serve this endeavor. 

After enduring creative block while attempting to decipher a score, I closely listened to the music instead. I then simply made up a phrase of movement to go with a phrase of the music. Once I had movement that corresponded to a musical line, I noticed musical repeats, variations, or when a new musical line was introduced. Through movement, I better heard and understood the structure of the score. It was this process of tandem choreographing and listening which lent support to my endeavor. The process became conversational—a back and forth between listening and movement invention. Once this process allowed me to better comprehend the structure of most of the sections, I could make intentional and artistic choices as to how to relate to the existing musical structure.

I performed Sarabande Suite for a live audience in the James and Martha Duffy Performance Space at the Mark Morris Dance Center in Brooklyn, New York on Sunday, April 29, 2018. George Shevtsov played piano for each section and included the cajón for the second movement, set to music by Lully. Georgy Valtchev played violin for the second movement and also for the fourth movement, set to music by Handel. Following the performance, Shevtsov and I engaged in a public “Conversation” as we discussed the history of the sarabande, some of our artistic choices, and the phenomenon of artistic influence.

Audience response was tremendously favorable. The crowd was a discerning group—a mix of premiere dancers from multiple generations of top dance companies, seasoned New York dancegoers, dance educators, administrators, musicians, designers,
and choreographers (including Mark Morris). Colleagues approached me in tears, visibly moved by the performance. Many spoke of the range of qualities, tones, personalities, and emotions within this solo dance. Morris—perhaps the most potentially discriminating voice of all—offered deeply valued praise, citing the dance’s beauty. Most everyone I spoke with, including musicians, were surprised by the story of the sarabande as told in the post-performance talk and as supported through my musical selections and choreographic choices. After learning some of the details of the sarabande’s little-known varied past, some spectators seemed to further reflect on the performance in relation to the new information gleaned about the form. Retrospectively, a narrative began to emerge for Manny Torrijos, one member of the audience, as he connected the content of the post-performance “Conversation” with that of the performance. He was intrigued by the progression of the piece and noticed the shifts in tone from section to section. As he processed the event, he pointed to a perceived duality, detecting my theme of free versus bound, expressive versus constrained.

The general audience response points to my success in creating an engaging work. Using musical principles to aid in crafting movement material can bolster the development of multifaceted steps, phrases, and sections. In-depth research of a musical form may support a sophisticated and diverse selection of musical accompaniment and potential thematic material for a choreographic work.

With a vast array of musical forms in existence worldwide and across history, one aspect of the method of dancemaking I practiced in this thesis project, in which one form is studied and then utilized as the source for a choreographic representation, offers plentiful opportunities for further creative fodder. Furthermore, relating to the inherent
meters, accents, beats, tempi, durations, articulations, rhythms, and phrasings of each form can be an entry point into movement conception and supply intrinsic drama through detail and variation of temporality and quality. Gaining a deeper understanding of the past and present incarnations of a musical form may further inspire emotional and conceptual content of a choreographic work; moreover, an artist may become part of a form’s future through the development of new creative responses. How might our encounters and engagement with the manifold rhythms across the cultures of our world be utilized to cultivate the growth of students across myriad disciplines and even bridge divides between societies?

As a teacher of dance, I choose the rhythms of each of my class exercises. Broadening my knowledge of the manifold rhythms of the world will allow me to expand the range within my classes. Students’ experiences can be enhanced through additional variety and challenge. Furthermore, in aurally and physically exposing students to rhythms from across a wide-range of global cultures, their classroom environment in turn supports greater diversity. My continued exploration of musical forms through the research of their history and structure will undoubtedly influence the content of my classes and therefore, the growth of my students.

This research will concomitantly continue to fuel new choreographic endeavors. The practice of this joint methodology—in which I apply musical principles to movement invention while using a singular musical form as a vehicle for the process—will serve as a means through which to make viscerally engaging material and may suffuse works with layers of meaning. Additionally, this musically-based approach offers opportunities to
forge cross-disciplinary connections—dance with music, visual art, drama, anthropology, political science, world studies, and more.

This format supports interdisciplinary collaboration as dance students may partner with music students (who may act as composers of new representations of older forms), or with students of anthropology, political science, or global studies (who may learn more about an era or phenomenon via a focused study of a musical form in conjunction with the development of a choreographic response to their findings). As the arts are increasingly regarded as irrelevant, this method of utilizing research of a musical form to support a choreographic endeavor can be a creative, experiential, and anomalous way for students in fields other than dance and music to define, describe, interpret, distinguish, and defend their line of research as they use the arts to design new points of view on a topic.

This music-centered entry point into the choreographic process may also provide students of dance composition a framework for their studies and practice. The methodologic requirements appeal to multiple levels of a student’s higher cognition and grant agency in the pedagogic process: a student identifies and examines musical principles; performs research to select a musical form of interest; gathers more information about the form’s history and structure; applies new knowledge to movement invention utilizing specific musical principles; and engages in the process of creation following recursive periods of analysis and examination.

Throughout time, dance has often engaged in a symbiotic relationship with music. The cooperative partnership between rhythm and movement has aided in communication, functionality, and emotional expression, and has provided enjoyment through intellectual
and visceral stimulation. A synthesized relationship between dance and its rhythmic
accompaniment can promote engagement of participants and spectators. Meaning and
significance may be imbued through musicality—both through an interplay between
physical action and aural rhythm and by a work’s development grounded in a base of a
multidimensional understanding of the history and structure of the medium used. Rhythm
and movement are innately solicited tactics used by humans for survival and prosperity;
we can continue to marry the two together to harvest the support that, together, they lend
to an enterprise.
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