

Program Notes

Michael Praetorius of Creutzberg and the *Terpsichore*

Few names loom as large in the pantheon of composers from the early 17th century as that of Michael Praetorius, German composer, collector, arranger, theorist and organist. For sheer output, he exceeds them all. Considering his relatively short life of just at 50 years, he managed an astonishing number of published works. Demonstrably fluent in all the contemporary styles from the complex, imitative polyphony of the Renaissance through the polychoral grandeur of Venetian origin to the new monody of the emerging Baroque, he applied his compositional skills mainly to sacred music for the Reformed church. Nevertheless, his interests led him as well to embark on a major project of collecting, arranging and publishing the largest and most complete collection of renaissance dance music ever compiled. His death interrupted the full completion of the project, but he did succeed in publishing the main installment in 1612, entitled *Terpsichore*, from which the music of this concert is drawn.

Born into a strict Lutheran family, Praetorius drew heavily upon and contributed enormously to the body of chorale tunes for the reformed church, many of which he set for from 2 to as many as 30 voices. His father, also named Michael, was in fact at the Lateinschule at Torgau a colleague of Johann Walther, who was Martin Luther's close friend, collaborator and chief hymnodist.

The German family name was actually *Schultheiss* (var. *Schultze*, *Schulte*) which referred to the head of a municipality in service to a ruler. The name originates and derives from its earliest function as tax collector, though by the 16th century simply meant the head of a town or village, something like our 'mayor'. The name *Praetorius* is the Latinized version of someone in this position, a Roman 'praetor' serving in a similar position as the *Schultheiss*. Just when and where Michael assumed this Latinized version of the name is unclear, but he used it throughout his professional career.

Praetorius' education at Torgau, Frankfurt an der Oder and Zerbst led him first to a position as organist at St. Marien, and then as organist and Kapellmeister at the court of Wolfenbüttel, positions he held from 1604 until his death. However, he traveled extensively, engaging with other of the great German composers of the day, including Heinrich Schütz in Dresden and both Schütz and Samuel Scheidt at Magdeburg from whom he learned composition in the prevailing Italianate style that marked the compositions of his later life. He was held in very high esteem in his own day and managed to amass a significant fortune. Upon his death he designated most of that fortune be used to set up a foundation for the poor. As the son and grandson of theologians, he was a devoted Christian all his life and is said often to have regretted not becoming a clergyman himself.

In addition to his composing, organ playing and directorial responsibilities, Praetorius was driven by a strongly didactic nature and a passion for cataloguing every aspect of the musical art and life of his day. This is evidenced most clearly in his major theoretical treatise, the

Syntagma Musicum (“Musical Treatise”), in which he explicates in great detail not only the composer’s tasks but also the demands and common practices of the performer, the ensembles and the occasions of performance, a valuable resource for modern interpreters/performers of today. In addition, the second volume of the *Syntagma*, published in 1619, includes a large section of woodcuts, entitled *Theatrum Instrumentorum seu Sciagraphia* (“Theater of Instruments or perspective Drawings”). Occupying 48 pages in the publication these illustrations depict over 100 musical instruments of the day. This compendium of the vast instrumentarium of the late renaissance and early baroque is drawn to scale and in great detail, sufficient that makers today are able to produce successful reproductions even when actual originals have not survived.

Despite his remarkable and substantial body of work, both his vast output of music for the church and his theoretical writings, Praetorius may well be best known among early music aficionados today for his collection of dance settings entitled ***Terpsichore***, after the Greek muse of dance. The printed edition, dating to 1612, contains 312 numbered entries, though some of the entries consist of suites of as many as 5 or 6 dances each. The total number of individual dances contained in the collection, then, raises that total substantially.

Praetorius tells us in the extensive preface to this publication that it “includes various dances as the French dancing-masters play them, which can be used to entertain and delight princely tables and banquets”. He further states that the dance tunes or melodies were given to him by a French violinist named Antoine Emeraud, then dancing master to the Duke of Brunswick. It seems that Emeraud had asked Praetorius to produce settings in four and five parts of these popular dance tunes. Consequently, the bulk of the dances in the collection are attributed to an M.P.C. (Michael Praetorius of Creuzberg). In these dances, Praetorius himself wrote the bass lines and inner voices to the preexistent tunes. A few are marked “incerti”, of uncertain source, since these were received with bass lines as well as the melodies, a form in which dance music was often transmitted. Praetorius added only the inner alto and tenor voices to these. Lastly, a small but significant number are marked F.C., referring to their authorship by a French violinist by the name of Pierre Francisque Caroubel, who had recently spent time at the Duke’s court at Wolfenbüttel with Praetorius and Emeraud.

Why French? Actually, Praetorius intended *Terpsichore* to be the first in a set of publications covering popular and courtly dances throughout Europe. Future publications were to present English and Italian dances, as well as other instrumental music, though only *Terpsichore* made it to publication. Furthermore, throughout the 16th century it was French composers and arrangers who flooded the market with dance publications in 4- and 5-part settings. One need only think of the many collections from Pierre Attaingnant, Claude Gervaise, Etienne du Tertre, Jacques Moderne, Jean d’Estrees and slightly to the north Tylman Susato and Pierre Phalese in Antwerp. Given this wealth of printed material already in existence, it only makes sense that Praetorius would have begun his intended series with the French dances. Nevertheless, *Terpsichore* contains dances drawn from or inspired by material from English, Italian and Spanish sources as well, giving it at least a taste of an international palette.

Having learned most of the tunes in *Terpsichore* from French dancing masters who played violin, Praetorius might have expected to hear his settings predominately on instruments of the violin family, as it was mainly the violin band that accompanied the formal dances at the French court of Praetorius' day and that served the dancing masters in their instruction. This situation reflects the origins of the violin in the 15th century as an instrument played mainly by itinerant musicians accompanying occasions of rustic, popular dancing. It was Isabella d'Este, Duchess of Ferrara In Italy, who first garnered in the late 15th c. a full violin band and literally brought that ensemble indoors.

However, in Germany most evidence points to larger ensembles of varied instrumentation entertaining at court balls and banquets, including many of the vast array of wind instruments depicted in Praetorius' own *Theatrum*. There is nothing in the composed dances themselves that makes them inherently or exclusively suitable to violins. Rather, most of the settings are in a 'neutral' style that lend themselves equally well to performance on wind instruments, or a combination of the two. One rather imagines the German courts ringing with a more extensive array of instrumental sounds and combinations when these dances were performed for the entertainment of the nobility, much as heard on this program.

The Dances Themselves

BOY Master, will you win your love with a French brawl?

ARMADO How meanest thou? Brawling in French?

BOY No, my complete master, but to jig off a tune at the tongue's end, canary to it with your feet...

Shakespeare, *Love's Labour's Lost*, Act 3, Scene 1, lines 8-12.

Bransle

Randle Cotgrave's 1611 French-English dictionary gives us a definition of the bransle which has never been bettered: "Bransle: a totter, swing, or swindge; a shake, shog, or shocke; a stirring, an uncertain or inconstant motion ... also, a brawl, or daunce, where in many (men, and women) holding by the hands sometimes in a ring, and otherwise at length, move together."¹

The most widespread French dance of the fifteenth century, the basse dance, had five basic steps, among which was the bransle, a step to the side. By 1500, the name had become associated with a group dance for multiple couples, also characterized by a sideways step and danced either in a ring or in a long line.

There are numerous types of bransles, each defined by its rhythmic profile and phrase lengths; apart from the generic bransle simple (duple meter, three-bar phrases), bransle double (duple meter, pairs of two-bar phrases), and bransle gay (triple or compound meter), many are named for the regions in which they originate (Bransle de Bourgogne, de Lorraine, and so forth). Essentially a rural folk dance, the music for bransles was often supplied by the singing of the

dancers themselves. There is thus a large body of French folk tunes which bear the rhythmic hallmarks of the bransle, among them “Je ne l’ose dire,” on today’s program, a bransle version of this chanson appearing as the first dance in *Terpsichore*. Another important type of bransle is a “miming dance,” like the “Bransle de la Torche.” This simple, 5-part setting, as with many dances of the time, serves more as a jazz lead sheet of today, begging ornamental variation added impromptu by the performers themselves. Our rendition in this program offers an example of this type of on-the-spot arranging, as each performer takes a turn at embellishing their line until at the end all embellish together, creating a mélange of improvisation that would surely have occurred in Praetorius’ time.

Courante

The courante takes its name from the French for “running.” A vigorous, athletic dance featuring sequences of hops, there were two varieties of courante in use in the early seventeenth century: a fast type, with relatively simple rhythms e.g. Courante de Tambour, and a slower dance, marked by a good deal of rhythmic counterpoint, e.g. Courante M. M. Wustrow on this program. Praetorius includes both in *Terpsichore*, making no distinction of title. By the century’s end, the two types had ossified into discrete genres, the fast becoming associated with the Italian word corrente. The courantes and the bransles together make up the majority of dances included in the Praetorius’s collection.

Ballet

‘Ballet’ is a French word which had its origin in Italian *balletto*, a diminutive of *ballo* (dance) which comes from Latin *ballo*, *ballare*, meaning “to dance”, which in turn comes from the Greek “βαλλίζω” (*ballizo*), “to dance, to jump about”. The word came into English usage from the French around 1630. Ballet originated in the Italian Renaissance courts of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. When the Italian born Catherine de’ Medici was married to Henry, duke of Orleans in 1533, she brought the *balletto* to France with her where it developed further and was danced by richly costumed amateurs of the nobility. The dance was often dramatically choreographed, depicting events and occasions. Praetorius says that the *Ballet des Bacchanales* was often danced on Shrove Tuesday, before the restraints of the Lenten season of the church took precedence.

Bourée

The bourée may have its origin in the bransle; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, writing in 1768, described it as the varietal of the bransle native to the Auvergne. While Rousseau’s account cannot be verified, the oldest surviving bourées are indeed from the Auvergne. The only extant choreographies are from the eighteenth century, but the rhythmic profile of Praetorius’s bourées and others from the early seventeenth century suggest that the eighteenth-century choreography is probably similar to how it was danced a century before. The essential step is the *pas de bourée*, a plié, élevé, step, and jump in quick succession. This step was of great importance in Baroque dance in general, figuring prominently in the subsequent minuet and sarabande.

Pavane

Pavana, or Padoana, simply means “from Padua.” This simplest of court dances originated there, first appearing in print in 1508. It was widely used as a processional dance and is dominated by simple steps forward. The music is in a slow duple time, often permeated by a persistent long-short-short pattern - sometimes made explicit by a drum, as Thoinot Arbeau proposes in his *Orchésographie* (1589). The pavane was often paired with another, faster dance: in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the saltarello, and the galliard in the main sixteenth and seventeenth.

Canaries

The canario comes from the Canary Islands and was brought to Spain in the sixteenth century. Forceful and startling, the choreography features jumps, leap, and percussive footwork. In the Canary Islands it was associated with both funeral rites and courtship.

Passamezzo

Few terms in music are at once as widely known and as vaguely defined as the passamezzo. All that can be definitely stated is that it is an Italian dance in duple time, with a sedate character, related but not identical to the pavana, and often but not always based on a repetitive harmonic pattern. There are two primary types, defined by the harmonic progressions on which they are built: the passamezzo antico, in a minor mode, and the passamezzo moderno, in a major one. These two patterns were important templates for improvisation, providing a clear, memorable structure, which musicians could readily vary. The two dances in Terpsichore labelled passamezze and performed on this program are fully composed, five and six-part ensemble versions that broaden this general meaning of the term. The passamezzo in this form at least was performed more quickly than its slower cousin, the pavana.

Gaillarde

The galliard, gaillarde or gagliarda, from the Italian for “robust,” originated in northern Italy, which may explain its strong association with the pavana. The galliard is an energetic triple-time dance. The triple meter is typically interrupted just before the end of each section by a hemiola, a temporary change in the pulse from groups of three beats to groups of two. The dance requires very high jumps and vigorous kicks, allowing the men to show off their athleticism, and their legs.

Reprinse

The reprinse or ripresa literally means “return.” Praetorius' reprinses are variations on a rhythmic formula, with highly variable harmonic and melodic content. “Reprinse” could also have referred to a dance step which was current in Praetorius' time, but as the title for a dance, it is somewhat mysterious. He himself states in the preface to Terpsichore that the reprinse “ends the gaillardes”, as is done on this program. The character of the music itself suggest a winding down after the vigor of the gaillarde, perhaps as the dancers ‘return’ to a state of more noble bearing, or to their seats panting after such exercise.

Volte

The volta, or volte, is an erotically charged Provençal couples dance in which high jumps in the air, one of which is a spring by the woman, assisted physically by her male partner, are performed to music of great restraint. Banned from the French court by Louis XIII, it fell out of favor in the middle of the seventeenth century, as more theatrical and stylized dances took hold in France.

¹ Cotgrave, Randle. *A Dictionary of the French and English Tongues*. London: A. Islip, 1632.

Bob Wiemken & Jude Ziliak