

Ethnomusichoreology? Ethnochoreomusic?

Karin Eriksson and Mats Nilsson

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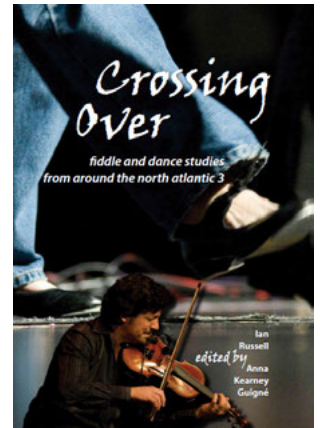
Crossing Over

Fiddle and Dance Studies from around the North Atlantic 3

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Ethnomusichoreology? Ethnochoreomusic?¹

KARIN ERIKSSON and MATS NILSSON

Music and dance are intimately linked in western countries. A great deal of music is intended for dancing while there are few dances, if any, that do not require some form of music. Here, we work on the presumption that on a number of occasions, music and dance are used simultaneously and function jointly in various ways. The material we study is Swedish traditional folk music and dance, and we focus mainly on dances and tunes that have been documented, played, and danced from 1800 to the present day. In this repertory we find dances and tunes such as the often rather fast $3/4$ time *polska* and the *engelska* (English country dance), where several of the melodies can also be found in different versions elsewhere, for example, in the British Isles.²

We limit ourselves to traditional/folk music and dance in order to be able to focus on this earlier repertory with roots in European peasant society and its usage up to our own time. The repertory we thereby omit in this context is what has come to be called popular music with its adherent dance: the music and dance with strong links to the USA, which was much in favour from around 1920 and, to begin with, went under the name of jazz.

This article is part of our mutual attempt to link the research into music and dance with a view to discover *whether* this can be done, in what way it can be done and what type of questions which then become interesting for further study. At the moment we are focusing on the metric level as that seems to be an important link between music and dance. After an introductory discussion on demarcations, we develop our thoughts on dance beat and musical beat. We suggest that in our material it is the 'beat' which provides the significant point of intersection in the encounter between dance and music.

Traditional music and dance were documented and collected in Sweden mainly in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The sources are, in other words, a crucial reason why we limit our studies to the period between 1800 and 2000. It is also interesting to note that mainly from 1900 onwards, the older sources and the practice exist simultaneously, while the possibilities of sound recording and later videoing further improve the source situation.

In the repertory that has been documented from the nineteenth-century peasant society music and dance to present times, there are several dances with two and three beats to the bar with associated music, for example *pol Skor*, *engelskor*, waltzes, polkas, mazurkas, schottisches, and so forth. On the music side, there are also some ceremonial types of tunes, such as bridal marches and meal-time music, so called *skänklåtar* (literally 'buffet tunes'), and tunes likely to have derived from songs. Large parts of the musical repertory are, however, linked to dance, even though these tunes are frequently played today in social contexts and on the stage without there being any dancing. The converse – dance without music – is not, however, present in the documented material.

By way of introduction, we can therefore state that dance in Sweden most commonly implies movement to music. The converse is, nevertheless, not always the case. What today's performers of Swedish traditional folk music mean when speaking about dance music is often music that can be danced to, or that has been danced to, even if they play it as concert music 'simply' to be listened to.

In our studies, and in our own performance, we have seen that it is possible for several different relationships to exist between music and dance. Although the focus here is on 'the meeting in the metre', it is still worth touching on some of the other interconnections.

Besides this elementary encounter in the metre, we see primarily four links between music and dance. Music and dance can meet on a general and discursive level, as in this text. It can also be a matter of the meeting between musicians and dancers when the former play music to which the latter dance, and this occurs in the same place at the same time. Another form of meeting between music and dance is when the music that is being danced to has been previously recorded (playback). When music and dance are presented simultaneously on the stage there is, besides the relationship between them, also an audience partaking of the performance. In addition to these four, we identify a fifth specific variant: dance music that is performed as concert music without dancers, for an audience.

These statements lead into our all-embracing thought that there ought to be links between research into music and research into dance and thereby between ethnomusicology and ethnochoreology, links as yet unexploited.

Terminology or terms as problems

How dancers and musicians – but also we researchers – term music and dances respectively proved early on to be an exemplification of the problem with the relationship between dance and music, but also a way of illustrating what had come to be called the emic–etic problem. Emic refers to what the dancers and musicians themselves call things and etic to the analytic perspective added by the researcher.³ This problem may be said to emanate from the idea that in an ideal case, the name of the dance and the name of the music and the current term for them all concur – what we might call ideal types. But the problem of terminology arises when we turn to the source material and to the dancers and musicians, and observe what they

play, dance, and how they name what they do. It is then not uncommon to find that the way a dance and/or a tune is designated may differ between both musicians and dancers and between the way a music analysis and a dance analysis will categorise the music and the dance respectively. The musicologists may call what is being played a mazurka, while the choreologists may categorise it as a polka, and, if asked, the performers will call what they are doing a 'rump quiver'.

Besides emic and etic terms, which differ and can in some way be related to the music and dance repertory in Sweden, our collaboration has also drawn our attention to the fact that with our different starting points, we put different meanings to the same concept, even within scientific discourse. First of all, there are several words originating from the music side that are used to describe dance. Some examples are: tempo, rhythm, beat, time, metre, and phrase. These concepts are used by both performers and researchers, but their meanings may vary. Several of the concepts, which are somehow used to describe dance, can consequently be traced back to corresponding musical concepts.

In addition to these joint concepts, there are musical concepts, which are not at all, or at least not to any great extent, used to describe dance, for example, harmony, melody, bar, and tonality. The latter, in particular, has been the focus within Swedish traditional folk music research for a long time, but is of less importance for dance research.⁴ It is, on the other hand, difficult to find dance words which are used about music. One exception is possibly the term 'dance music/dance tune', which is often used even in the context of a pure concert and not a matter of playing for dancing. Certain words, which dancers and dance researchers use on the other hand, have no real meaning for music and musicology, such as step, spring or *svikt*,⁵ dance repeat, balance, formation, and couple.

Meeting in the beat

In the introductory phase of our collaboration, we had many discussions around what we call 'things' and what meanings we award them. This, together with a wish to study one of the many relationships between music and dance, which transpired in our discussions, has caused us to feel a need to draw nearer to 'the sound' and 'the movement,' and to try to find a common terminology. Our hypothesis about the relationship is illustrated in Figure 1:

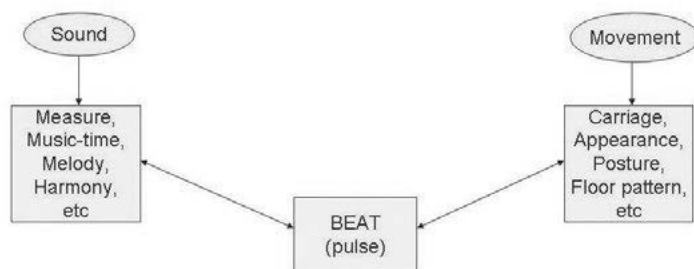


Figure 1 Let's meet in the beat

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In the figure the dance music (sound) and the music dance (movement) meet in the beat. Music, as well as dance, are to our minds culturally organised forms of expression: what is defined as music and dance respectively depends on who does the defining and in what context. For western art music there exists among performers, composers, and researchers a well-established terminology for describing the music. Parts of this terminology are used to describe other genres as well, such as traditional folk music and popular music. Consequently, the terminology has had to be adapted so as to better correspond to the music it describes; it has also, for the same reason, had concepts added to it, which have often been lifted from the music genre being described.

Swedish traditional folk music is, to a large extent, described in the same terminology as western art music. Researchers into traditional folk music frequently use such words as tempo, measure, bar, beat, pitch, range, and so forth. In dance music, it is primarily the metric construction of the tunes which is of interest for study, as that is central for enabling listeners and dancers to perceive what type of tune that is being played. Words such as beat and metre, or even bar and tempo are used and mean something to both musicians and dancers. But, do they mean the same thing for sound as for movement?

Dance is culturally organised movement in the same way as music is culturally organised sound. But, what is being organised is the movement of the body or bodies, and not of the sound (although the body sometimes produces sounds). These bodies move vertically and horizontally in a physical space while time passes. Of necessity, the dance, or rather the dancer, moves more in the space than the music. The clothes on the body also have a direct bearing on the movement, what the dancer is wearing (or is not wearing) has a direct effect on the movement, which does not to the same extent apply to the music.

Common for both descriptions above is that music and dance relate to time, through a beat. But music and dance do this differently. The beat is a joint platform for both music and dance and makes it possible for the two forms of expression to function together. How music and dance respectively are structured in relation to the beat is something which can be studied further. It can also provide increased knowledge about how music and dance function together, and meet in the moment.

How music and dance respectively produce the beat in different ways can, in our view, be seen as a musical metre and a dance metre, both of them emanating simultaneously from the same beat. The musical metre is created by experiencing the metric structure, which in itself is a complex combination of polyrhythms, melodic structures, rhythmic patterns, bowing (if played on string instruments), tempo and so on. The dance metre is an equally complex compound, but with components such as step, *svikt*, rotation, and tempo.

Conclusion

Even though the smallest common denominator is to be found in the beat, and the metre, movement and sound do not exist in a vacuum. There are also movements and sounds 'above' the beat and the metre, involved in creating the music and the

dance. This is where the entire performance – the making of music and dance – belong in both a cultural context and where people’s experience of and feelings for the dance and the music play an important role. That is why the real, experienced meeting between our two principal terms becomes considerably more complicated than simply a matter of beat and metre, as Figure 2 illustrates:

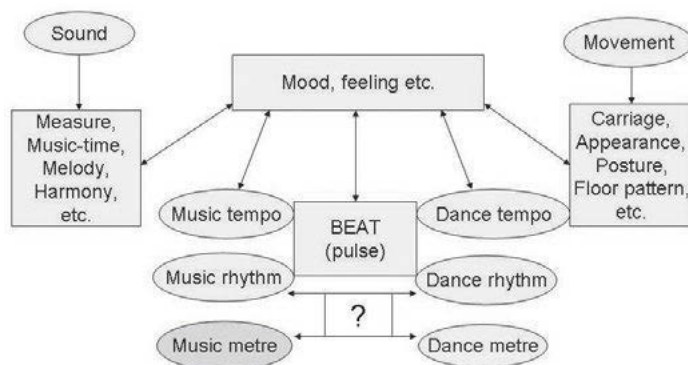


Figure 2 Let’s meet in the beat (revised)

The meeting of music and dance in the beat, and how the beat is produced in the dance music and the music dance is, as illustrated in the figure above, one of several points of intersection in a complex relationship between the two. Besides knowledge and analyses of the material level, what is needed in order better to understand how music dance and dance music work together is also, for example, knowledge of the social and historical context of which the music dance and dance music form a part. Dance and music, as well as the people who dance and play, are always part of a historical context, in exactly the same way as the ethnological research into music and dance. But in a study of the cultural context only, disregarding the very material of dance and music, a significant part of the analysis is missing, and we risk overlooking what in fact affects people, in this case the music and dance per se.

Notes

¹ This paper was translated from Swedish by Eivor Cormack.

² For example, different variations of ‘Soldiers joy’

³ See, for example, Thomas N. Headland, Kenneth Pike, and Marvin Harris, eds, *Emics and Etics: The Insider/Outsider Debate*, Frontiers of Anthropology (London: Sage, 1990).

⁴ See, for example, Sven Ahlbäck, *Tonspråket i äldre svensk folkmusik* (Stockholm: Not and Bok, 1985 and Märta Ramsten (ed.), *The Polish Dance in Scandinavia and Poland*, Ethnomusicological Studies (Stockholm: Svenskt visarkiv, 2003).

⁵ The Swedish term *svikt* refers to a soft but controlled flexing of knee and ankle joints when performing certain steps, walking and spring movements causing a particular type of springiness in the dancing.