

Anne Margrete Fiskvik:
Choreomusical Idealization and Practice. A Comparative Choreomusical Study
of 13 versions of *The Firebird*

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English abstract/summary

This dissertation presents a study of choreomusical relationships in theatre dance from a theoretical as well as a practical and analytical point of view. In addition to a methodological overview over current choreomusical research, I suggest some analytical tools suitable for comparative choreomusical analysis. I further apply these in a *textural* and *practical* study of the relationship between music and dance. The study thus aims to give insight into both how choreographers have idealized and described the relationship between music and theatre dance historically, and how they use music when choreographing a work.

The analytical part of the work has a special focus on *comparative choreomusical analysis*. Whereas choreomusical research has rapidly developed in the last 15–20 years, so far relatively little has been done in the area of comparative choreomusical analysis.

Through a comparative choreomusical analysis of the ballet *The Firebird*, (*L'Oiseau de Feu*), originally created by Michel Fokine and Igor Stravinsky and danced by Serge Diaghilev's Les Ballets Russes in 1910, I have looked at how different choreographers use the same music in their versions of the *The Firebird*. The comparative choreomusical analysis includes versions by Michel Fokine (staged by The Royal Ballet 2002, and Andris Liepa 2002), George Balanchine, Conrad Drzewiecki, Maurice Béjart, Eske Holm, John Taras, Glen Tetley, Anette Abildgaard/Warren Spears, Gloria Contreras, James Kudelka and Amanda Miller. This study gives insight into what extent choreographers are influenced by the music when they create a work of theatre dance.

The work has seven chapters: In chapter one I define the aim of the project and present some previous important research in the field by Elizabeth Sawyers, Paul Hodgins, Francis Sparshott, Inger Damsholt and Stephanie Jordan. My personal “credo”, or thesis for this work is in accordance with Stephanie Jordan who writes that *choreographers choose to take on the music*. I examine if and how choreographers “take on musical features” in my research material.

Chapter 2 discusses methodological issues related to choreomusical analysis. In the comparative choreomusical analysis I use some already established vocabulary and choreomusical tools, in addition to creating some new one. My choreomusical terminology uses as a basis Elisabeth Sawyers’ *synchronization* and *opposition*, Francis Sparshotts’ prepositional expressions dance *to*, *with*, *against* or *through* the music, my own dance *as* the music, and Paul Hodgins’ *extrinsic* and *intrinsic relations*. The second chapter also explains the method used in the comparative choreomusical analysis.

The third chapter is historically oriented: It refers and discusses how relations between music and dance are described textually in dance manuals, treatises and autobiographies. I have explored how choreomusical relations have been idealized and described in various texts dating from the renaissance and up to present times. The chapter also discusses how the libretto or plot of a ballet becomes increasingly important for choreomusical relations throughout the eighteenth century. The nature of this third chapter is primarily referential, and it shows that dance masters and choreographers historically have preferred a close relationship between music and dance. This is achieved through various types of synchronization. There are few instances of dance *against* or *through* the music before the 20th century, but these “newer” relationships are mentioned and described more by choreographers in the 20th century.

In the fourth chapter I present the original Firebird, and discuss briefly *how* the Firebird has “lived on” and *why* so many choreographers have chosen to choreograph their own versions to Stravinsky's music. This is an open question; one possible answer is that the music is well suited for ballet, with a clear structure and with a good mixture of *dansante* and *parlante* music. It might also be that some

choreographers want to “revisit the past”; this is a new choreographic trend developed in the 20th century through choreographers like Mats Ek and Matthew Bourne. The last part of chapter four presents an overview and a first analysis of the versions included in my material.

Chapter 5 describes the result of the detailed, intrinsic choreomusical analysis, and discusses these. The results show a preference for synchronizing music and dance, and especially rhythmical aspects in the music have been followed. The analysis shows that the purely classical versions use the most synchronisation, whereas the versions mixing classical and modern choreography include more dance *against* and *through* the music.

The analysis also shows that the 12 choreographers (in 13 versions) create quite a lot of similar movements to the same music. This is particularly evident in the classical versions. Even though classical choreographers have a more limited movement vocabulary, surprisingly often they choose the same movements to the same type of music.

The sixth chapter looks at the analysis from a broader perspective, and discusses the importance of the plot, choreographic style and the individual dancers’ contribution. The different Firebird versions can thus be defined as *changeable conceptions*, where the music remains the most stable part, and thus the choreomusical relations change according to the use of plot, movement vocabulary and choreographic style. In addition, the individual dancer also contributes to the overall choreomusical relations.

The final chapter, chapter 7, summarizes the work and discusses briefly strengths and weaknesses in my approach as well as new perspectives on this type of comparative choreomusical analysis. Many aspects are still left to be explored within the field of comparative choreomusical analysis, and I hope that my work can inspire to further research in this very exciting and somewhat under-explored area.