

## CHAPTER ONE

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### Introduction: Music and the Story

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If music doesn't express the feelings of players, what else is there to express them? Big arm movements are a poor language.

*Le Siècle*, 23 Sept. 1836

SEVERAL of the arguments in this book depend on my reading of ballet-pantomime music composed at the Opéra during the July Monarchy. Before setting out, then, I would like to offer a brief general description of this music, since it is for the most part unknown today.

Most important of all is the fact that for each new ballet-pantomime created at the Paris Opéra during the July Monarchy, a new score was produced. The reason for this is simple: these ballet-pantomimes told stories—elaborate ones—and music was considered an indispensable tool in getting them across to the audience. Therefore, music had to be newly created to fit each story.

Music tailor-made for each new ballet-pantomime, however, was only one weapon in the Opéra's explanatory arsenal. Another was the ballet-pantomime libretto, a printed booklet of fifteen to forty pages in length, which was sold in the Opéra's lobby (like the opera libretto), and which laid out the plot in painstaking detail, scene by scene. Critics also took it upon themselves to recount the plots (of both ballet-pantomimes and operas) in their reviews of premières. So did the publishers of souvenir albums, which also featured pictures of famous performers and of scenes from favorite ballet-pantomimes and operas.

Why were these stories made available to the public in so many ways? The mere fact that elaborate ballet-pantomimes were created at breakneck pace at the Opéra (about two new ones per year) is one reason: audiences had to learn a lot of stories if they were to understand what they were seeing (unlike today's ballet-goers, who are usually offered a rich variety of plotless ballets, and a handful of familiar old "story ballets" like *Romeo and Juliet* and *Sleeping Beauty*, but very few *new* highly detailed "story ballets"). The more often they could read the stories, the more likely they would understand them in the theater.

Why the French were so partial to such stories is another matter. Théophile

Gautier protested that, as far as he himself was concerned, a ballet story need “have no ending, no beginning, no middle, for all we care,” so long as the dancer’s foot “is tiny and well arched . . . if her leg is dazzlingly pure in shape and moves voluptuously in its mist of muslin . . . if her smile bursts forth like a rose filled with pearls . . .” But he did venture a guess about his countrymen’s affection for stories:

In England and Italy [the plot] does not matter very much, but in France the choice of subject is very important. The French are not artistic enough in the true sense of the term to be satisfied with the plastic content of poetry, painting, music and the dance. They also require a clear-cut meaning, a theme, a logical dramatic development, a moral, a clearly defined ending . . . This is both a shortcoming and a merit. This attitude, which has produced one of the most rational dramatic literatures in the world, makes us at times very critical, particularly towards ballets and operas, which three times out of four fail or succeed because of the scenario or libretto and not because the music is good or bad . . . If one dared, one would be invoking Aristotle in connection with a *cabriole* that is well or badly executed.<sup>1</sup>

In any case, composers were expected to play their part in communicating ballet-pantomime’s elaborate plots to the Opéra’s audiences, and to do so by creating a new score for each new work. They did sometimes weave borrowed music into these scores (though as the years went by critics came to look askance at this practice) (see Table 4.1). But in every instance—whether the score was fully original or not—the composer was expected to hew to the action, tailoring the music to fit the choreography.<sup>2</sup> For this reason the composer customarily worked closely with the ballet master, and sometimes with the dancers as well. As one observer wrote, “[d]ance airs are no longer based on a known model; the composer consults with the choreographer about the forms, character and length . . . ;” another described rehearsals at the Opéra in which the ballet master and the composer together indicated the movements for the dance and pantomime to the dancers.<sup>3</sup> Collaborating so closely with a choreographer—whose artistic ideas took precedence—could be vexing for the composer, and it is hardly surprising that the latter’s task was often considered a servile one.<sup>4</sup> The plight of the composer Jean-Madeleine Schneitzhoeffter, for example, stirs the sympathy of one critic in a review of *La Tempête* (1834):

There is no task more painful and thankless than that imposed on the composer of ballet music. When he has finished, they make him start all over again. He is pleased with one passage, which he has carefully cultivated and nurtured; then the ballet master arrives and says he must cut it, elongate it, cut out a phrase or even the whole passage. Then at the rehearsals the dancers ask for another instrumentation—trombones, or bass drum in place of, perhaps, flutes with a pizzicato accompaniment. The poor composer! . . . when the musician is a distinguished artist like M. Schneitzhoeffter [sic], one must truly feel sorry that he has found himself placed in such a frightful position.<sup>5</sup>

A later account, by Alphonse Duvernoy (who wrote music for ballets at the end of the nineteenth century), concurs:

In olden days, the scenarist began by finding a choreographer . . . Between the poet and the dancer a close collaboration was formed. Once the plan of the piece and the dances were arranged, the musician was called in. The ballet-master indicated the rhythms he had laid down, the steps he had arranged, the number of bars which each variation must contain—in short, the music was arranged to fit the dances. And the musician docilely improvised, so to speak, and often in the ballet-master's room, everything that was asked of him. You can guess how alert his pen had to be, and how quick his imagination. No sooner was a scene written or a *pas* arranged than they were rehearsed with a violin, a single violin, as the only accompaniment. I forgot to say that even after having servilely done everything the ballet-master had demanded, the composer had to pay attention to the advice of his principal interpreters. So he had to have much talent, or at least great facility, to satisfy so many exigences, and, I would add, a certain amount of philosophy.<sup>6</sup>

Creating a new score to suit the needs of each new ballet is, of course, no longer the norm (though the style of moment-to-moment musical shadowing is known to us from the music for cartoons and some early films). As Michel Fokine wrote in 1914, “The new ballet . . . in contradistinction to the older ballet . . . does not demand ‘ballet music’ of the composer as an accompaniment to dancing; it accepts music of every kind, provided only that it is good and expressive.”<sup>7</sup> Stringent requirements were imposed on ballet-pantomime music in the 1830s and 1840s, however. It simply cannot be overstated that, unlike most ballet music today, it was expected to help the audience follow the action; to provide something that the silent performers could not. As Carlo Blasis put it: “Ballet music and in general music . . . in dances must, so to speak, supplement [and] clarify for the audience all the mental movements which the dancer or mime artist cannot convey in gestures and the play of the physiognomy.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, according to critical consensus in Paris at least until the mid-nineteenth century, much of the burden for making ballet-pantomime performances understandable to the spectator lay on the shoulders of the composer. Some critics even saw the ballet composer's role as akin to that of a storyteller and stated outright their conviction that “the music has a *mission* to explain or translate [the scenes].”<sup>9</sup> These remarks divulge high expectations:

By their character, their expression and their style, the melodies [in ballet music] can and must complete the meaning of the gestures and the play of the physiognomie.<sup>10</sup>

Ballet music has a particular character; it is more accented, more *parlante* [i.e., communicative, lively], more expressive than opera music, because it is not destined only to accompany and enhance the words of the librettist, but to be itself the entire libretto.<sup>11</sup>

Generally, one does not ask for music from a ballet-pantomime composer, but for an orchestra that is the translation, the commentary of the text which one would not otherwise be able to understand.<sup>12</sup>

If music doesn't express the feelings of players, what else is there to express them? Big arm movements are a poor language.<sup>13</sup>

The composer is virtually charged with telling the action. . . .<sup>14</sup>

Only by understanding these strict exigencies can we fully understand why composers were hired to study the libretto, work with the choreographer, and follow the action so closely in their music.

### TWO TYPES OF BALLET MUSIC

Anyone who glances through ballet-pantomime scores of this era may easily see that they are constituted of two distinct types of music (as the very term *ballet-pantomime* indicates they should be). One type—dramatic or “pantomime” music—changes frequently in meter, key, and tempo, reflecting the action and following the vagaries of the characters' emotions. The other, intended specifically for dancing, tends to fall evenly into 8-bar phrases, and to remain within a single key, meter, and tempo for longer segments than pantomime music (see Table 1.1). Contemporary observers acknowledge the clear distinction between these two types:

[E]ach situation, each passion which comes momentarily to predominate, requires a new rhythm, new motifs, changes of tone and of phrasing. The skillful composer, despite the difficulties of these requirements, knows how to make a pleasing ensemble out of this mixture. This music must be imitative, capable of depicting images and exciting all sentiments which fit to diverse circumstances of the action. This imitation can be, it is true, objective: that is, this music can depict the physical phenomena of nature, for example a storm. But it must especially be subjective, in order to arouse in the spectator's soul the sentiments which he would feel if he found himself in circumstances similar to those created in the performance. . . . As for the dance airs, one conceives that they must be characteristic and analagous to the place where the action takes place, thus the dance airs of the Indians, the Scots, the Hungarians must have the character of the music of their countries. . . .<sup>15</sup>

In a ballet-pantomime, the *symphonie*, meant to depict the action and the sentiments of the characters, differs very much from the airs meant for the *pas* executed by the dancers. These airs are like the cavatinas, the duos, the trios of the singers, placed between recitatives. . . .<sup>16</sup>

It is true that dance music was sometimes introduced for a few moments into dramatic scenes when the situation required it. Yet these two separate types of

TABLE 1.1 *Lady Henriette*, ACT ONE, FIRST TABLEAU

<i>Tempo</i>	<i>Key</i>	<i>Meter</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Number of Measures</i>
<i>Dramatic Action and Mime</i>				
Andante	A <sup>b</sup>	6/8	Lady Henriette is dressing. She dismisses her friends.	17 21
un peu plus animé	E <sup>b</sup>	6/8	She is sad. Nancy presents her with a book.	8 3
Andante maestoso	C	2/4	A valet announces Tristan Crakfort, who begins to make a declaration.	15
Allegretto	G	2/4	Lady Henriette demands her fan. Tristan looks for the fan.	5 15
Andante maestoso	A	2/4	He recommences his declaration.	7
	C	2/4	She asks him to open the window. He responds. She asks him to close it again. She asks him to leave. She calls him back. She sends him away. Tristan falls exhausted into an armchair.	8 8 13 6 4 16 9
Allegro non troppo	E <sup>b</sup>	6/8	Nancy runs to the window. She returns to her mistress. The servants are going to the festival. She tells Nancy to summon the young women.	21 8 19 23
même mouvement	G	2/4	The women tell Lady Henriette of the festivities.	43
<i>Dance</i>				
Danse un peu moins vite	C	2/4	They perform character dances, which Nancy and Lady Henriette try to imitate.	109
un peu plus animé	F	2/4		82

NOTE: It is typical for the danced segments of a ballet-pantomime to be marked as such in the score (usually with the terms “danse,” “pas,” “divertissement,” or “ballet”), and for the dramatic music immediately following the danced segment to be marked “après la danse” [after the dance].

This table is based on a *répétiteur* for *Lady Henriette*, F-Po Mat 19 [346 (22)].

music still remained recognizable as such and were consistently distinguished from one another quite clearly in contemporary commentary. Let us consider the two types in turn.

### *Dramatic or Pantomime Music*

Composers went to great lengths to satisfy the requirements of depicting “the action and the sentiments of the characters” by providing a continuous current of music, through-composed and shaped by the constantly shifting needs of “each situation, each passion which comes momentarily to predominate.”<sup>17</sup> In so doing, they deployed a wide variety of techniques, writing all manner of descriptive music imitating the characters’ moods, actions and personalities, providing diegetic music and noises as appropriate (sounds heard by stage characters as such, like village-band music and knockings on doors), weaving in snippets of obviously “ethnic” music when the action required it, and using recurring motifs associated with particular characters or concepts and—sometimes—connotative borrowed music as well. They also brought a verbal aspect to bear (as will be discussed further in Chapter Four) by imitating the human voice in various ways and using so-called *airs parlants* (short snippets of melodies from folksongs or opera arias, which could introduce actual explanatory words into the viewers’ minds). This music, then, offered up a *mélange* of different types of music, and could deftly switch from type to type—one moment following gestures or action, the next providing diegetic sounds (including imitations of the human voice), the next expressing a character’s feelings.

In the famous opening scene of *La Sylphide*, for example, Schneitzhoeffler first imitates, with thirty-second-note neighbor figures, the flutter of the sylphide’s wings as she hovers near the unsuspecting James (Example 1.1). Then, after the sylphide disappears up the chimney, James’s mood is depicted with a dreamy adagio as he tries to convince himself that the Sylphide was merely a

EXAMPLE 1.1. The sylphide’s fluttering wings.

The musical score consists of two staves of music in G major (one sharp) and 6/8 time. The first staff begins with a *poco* dynamic marking, followed by a *f* (forte) dynamic marking with a wedge-shaped crescendo, and then a *p* (piano) dynamic marking with a wedge-shaped decrescendo. The lyrics "Les ailes battent plus vite. Tom est agité." are written below the notes. The second staff continues the melody with similar dynamic markings and lyrics.

[Note: Annotations in the score refer to “Tom” and “Garne,” with various spellings for the latter; in the libretto these characters are called James and Gurn.]

EXAMPLE 1.2. James summons Gurn.

The musical score for Example 1.2 is presented in two systems. The first system is in 6/8 time, marked *Adagio* and *Allegretto*. The right hand plays a melodic line, and the left hand plays a bass line. The tempo changes from *Adagio* to *Allegretto* at the beginning of the second system. The first system is labeled "[Tom (James) is contemplative]" and the second system is labeled "[Entrance of Garne]". The word *Duo* is written in the right hand of the second system. The second system is labeled "entre Tom et Garne".

[Tom (James) is contemplative] [Entrance of Garne]

entre Tom et Garne

[Duet between Tom and Gurn]

figment of his imagination. He summons Gurn (who is reclining nearby in the hay, and whose lack of refinement is pointed out by Schneitzhoeffter with a few bars of “country music” with a heavy drone) to inquire if he, too, had seen her (Example 1.2). The composer mirrors the dialogue between the two men by assigning them, alternately, the antecedent and consequent phrases of the melody (Example 1.3). Ferdinand Hérold is similarly attentive to the action and characters in the closing scenes of Act Two of *La Somnambule*, wherein the sleep-

EXAMPLE 1.3. Conversation of James and Gurn.

The musical score for Example 1.3 is presented in two systems. The first system is in 6/8 time, marked *Allegretto*. The right hand plays a melodic line, and the left hand plays a bass line. The tempo is marked *Allegretto*. The first system is labeled "Tom", "Garne", and "Tom". The second system is labeled "Garne".

Allegretto

Tom Garne Tom

Garne

EXAMPLE 1.4. Thérèse walks in her sleep.

Moderato

*ff*  
*Bruit dehors*

[pizz.]  
*Elle descend à la fenêtre*  
[sleepwalk]

[arco]  
*elle avance à pas comptés* *Étonnement*

*de M. Rambert*

[Noise outside / She comes down from the window / She advances in measured steps / Surprise of M. Rambert]

walking Thérèse climbs through a window into Saint-Rambert's chamber. The scene opens with a fortissimo *tremolo*, which imitates the startling noise that Saint-Rambert and Gertrude hear outside the window. Hérold then accompanies Thérèse's descent through the window into the room with suitably delicate, anticipatory thirty-second notes, all preparing the new E-major tonic of the pizzicato walking melody ("Che sarà" from Rossini's *La Cenerentola*, a piece sometimes translated as "What a fix!") which accompanies her initial sleepwalk. After this moment of commenting on the action, the music then switches to Saint-Rambert's surprise (Example 1.4).

A few moments later, a group of merrymakers from a village festival (including Thérèse's fiancé Edmond), come up to Rambert's room. For this scene, Hérold supplies first the actual music of the festival and then depicts, in rapid succession, the sentiments of various characters: the shock and anger of the vil-



EXAMPLE 1.5. Edmond becomes furious.

...les villegois par la fête

No.6 Furioso  
O ciel! Therese dans la chambre...

plus lent

No.7 Allegro  
Fureur d'Edmond...

[The villagers, coming from the festival / O heaven! Thérèse in the room . . . / Furor of Edmond]

lagers; the befuddlement of the awakening sleepwalker, the furor of her fiancé, Edmond (Example 1.5). Another rude awakening is depicted in Act Two scene i of Adolphe Adam's *Le Diable à Quatre*, which finds an imperious countess asleep in a basket-maker's humble hut. (She has been forced by magic to trade places with the basket-maker Mazourki's wife.) Her placid little pastoral "slumber" melody—ironically far too "country" for a countess, like the setting itself—alternates with short bursts of sixteenth notes as Mazourki vigorously attempts to awaken her. The Countess's startled arising is reflected by a fortissimo ascending scale; the busy little agitato melody in g minor that follows expresses her ensuing displeasure (Example 1.6).

The overture and opening moments of *Le Diable boiteux* provide an apt illustration of locale-setting. The rhythmic pattern,  $\text{♪♪♪♪♪♪}$ , a reliable cliché indicating Spanishness, pervades the overture as an accompaniment (Example 1.7). It then returns as the curtain rises on the ball scene, set in the resplendent foyer of the Royal Theater in Madrid; this time it is used in one of two alternating melodies (one played on the stage and the other in the orchestra pit), which, emanating from separate places, help re-create the chaotic sonic effects of the masked ball (Example 1.8).<sup>18</sup> The music of a later scene, set in the *salle* of the same theater (with both performers and audience in view), provides many

EXAMPLE 1.6. The Countess is awakened.

Musical score for Example 1.6, 'The Countess is awakened'. The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 3/4. It consists of four staves. The first three staves contain a melodic line with various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. The fourth staff contains a bass line with chords and eighth notes, providing harmonic support for the melody above.

EXAMPLE 1.7. *Le Diable boiteux* overture

Musical score for Example 1.7, '*Le Diable boiteux* overture'. The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 3/4. It consists of a single staff featuring a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and rests, with some melodic accents.

EXAMPLE 1.8. *Le Diable boiteux* masked ball, two alternating melodies.

Musical score for Example 1.8, '*Le Diable boiteux* masked ball, two alternating melodies'. The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It consists of four staves. The first two staves are marked 'Allegro moderato' and feature a melodic line with eighth notes and rests. The third and fourth staves are marked 'Allegro' and feature a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, with the fourth staff including triplets and a 9-measure rest.

of the sounds of the theater: the call-bell signaling the impending curtain-up, the tuning up of the orchestra, the music of a *pas de deux* (performed by dancers with their backs to the real audience), and the curtain speech made by the stage manager.<sup>19</sup>

Recurring melodies figured prominently in this repertory as a dramatic device (more copiously, in fact, than in the operas usually listed as predecessors in this regard to Wagner's operas—works of Méhul, Cherubini, Weber, and Meyerbeer, for example). Reminiscence motifs (or “recalling” motifs), for example, were used fairly often, whether the character doing the recalling was crazy, sleepwalking, or in a state of regular consciousness.<sup>20</sup> One may also find plenty of examples of the recurring identifying themes (of the type later disparaged by Debussy in his attack on Wagner as “calling cards”).

Composers who favored the use of recurring melodies, however, did not limit themselves to transparent identifying and recalling motifs alone. Consider, for example, Adam's transformation of a motif that is first heard when the starry-eyed Giselle dances with her dissembling lover in the Harvest Festival (Example 1.9). After returning as a recalling motif during the mad scene as her heart breaks, this motif comes back again, mournfully, at the beginning of Act 2 as Hilarion points out Giselle's grave to a group of hunters (Example 1.10). A transformed version—a shorter fragment stripped of its countrified drone bass and given a less stable harmony—is sounded when the Wili Giselle is first summoned from her grave by Myrthe (Example 1.11). The first three pitches of the melody ( $\hat{3}$ ,  $\hat{4}$ ,  $\hat{2}$ ) are answered ethereally, by solo flute, with a configuration of pitches similar in contour; this solo returns when the grief-stricken Albrecht first catches a glimpse of the Wili Giselle, who to his shock emerges from behind her own gravestone (Example 1.12).

EXAMPLE 1.9. *Giselle*, Harvest Festival *pas de deux*.

The musical score for Example 1.9 is titled "Allegro un peu louré". It is written in 2/4 time and features a melody in the right hand and a drone bass in the left hand. The melody consists of a sequence of notes: a quarter rest, a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The drone bass consists of a constant sequence of notes: a quarter note G2, a quarter note A2, a quarter note B2, and a quarter note C3.

EXAMPLE 1.10. Pointing out Giselle's grave.

[flute solo]

Andantino

pp  
[strings]

rall.

The significance of the “Harvest Festival” motif was not lost on the composer in Russia who later used it—quite fittingly—as the basis for a new variation for Giselle he added to the second-act *pas de deux*, wherein the two lovers express their undying love for each other.<sup>21</sup> Nor, perhaps, was it lost on Wagner, who attended a performance of *Giselle* in Paris the week of its première in 1841.<sup>22</sup> In any case such recurring motifs, along with the many other devices at the ballet composer’s disposal, proved valuable within a textless dramatic music to which the audience regularly turned for help in following the story.<sup>23</sup>

EXAMPLE 1.11. Giselle’s first appearance as a Wili.

[strings]      [flute]      [strings]      [flute]

pp      p

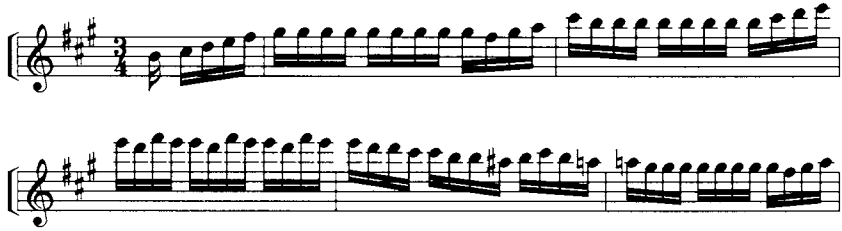
EXAMPLE 1.12. The Wili Giselle surprises Albrecht.

The musical score for Example 1.12 is presented in two systems. Both systems are in 3/4 time and marked 'Andante'. The first system shows a string part with a rapid sixteenth-note pattern and a flute part with a melodic line. The second system continues these parts. Dynamics include 'pp' (pianissimo) for the strings and 'pp' for the flute. The score is written for strings and flute.

### Dance Music

The style of the music written specifically for *dancing* in these ballet-pantomimes was legion in Europe for much of the nineteenth century and remains familiar even now because it has been carried over in works that are still in the repertory—for example, danced divertissements from French grand operas (*Les Martyrs*, *La Favorite*, *Les vêpres siciliennes*), and such enduring post-1850 ballets as *Don Quixote*, *Coppélia*, and *Le Corsaire*.<sup>24</sup> Standard stylistic features include a regularity of phrasing and simplicity of melody, harmony, and texture (two-voice textures are common; and often, for solo dances, composers wrote simply a solo for an obligato melodic instrument and a pizzicato accompaniment<sup>25</sup>), repetition by the full orchestra of a melody first stated by solo instrument, punctuation of sparsely textured passages with occasional tutti chords, extended tutti cadences increasing in volume and sometimes quickening in tempo toward the end, and a heavy reliance upon repetition, both of melodies and of catchy rhythmic patterns. Dances for solo dancers, or small ensembles, are often preceded by a short, very anticipatory-sounding introduction lasting eight or sixteen measures and dwelling on the dominant.

One may also identify certain distinctive melody types favored in this repertory. One is characterized by a nearly uninterrupted flow of sixteenth-notes—often making much use of repeating notes—well exemplified by this flute solo from a divertissement in *La Volière* (Example 1.13).<sup>26</sup> This melody-type was used for what Wiley has called the “coquettish” dance.<sup>27</sup> Its later masculine counterpart, the “bravura” dance, was not as common in this earlier repertory, though it was not unknown. Labarre, for example, composed this bravura-style music for the arrival of Myssouf in *La Révolte au sérail* (Example 1.14).

EXAMPLE 1.13. Flute solo from *La Volière* (feminine).EXAMPLE 1.14. Myssouf, in *La Révolte au sérail* (masculine).

THE DIVERTISSEMENT. Dance music found its most concentrated use in the danced divertissements (referred to sometimes as the “ballets”) that were featured in both opera and ballet-pantomime. These divertissements, indeed, constituted one of the most obvious points of similarity between opera and ballet-pantomime. In all cases the dancing within these divertissements was diegetic (that is, perceived by the other characters as dancing). Dramatic rationales included, for example, village festivals, wedding celebrations, masked balls, and entertainments performed for royalty (see Table 1.2). The same dancers were likely to turn up in both opera and ballet-pantomime divertissements, including Marie Taglioni and Fanny Elssler, for the custom of saving the best dancers only for the ballet-pantomime had not yet fully taken hold.

Formal construction of the divertissement adhered to certain rules: it usually featured dances both for the *corps de ballet* and for smaller small ensembles and soloists. (This sometimes included a *pas de trois* or *pas de deux*, dances that sometimes took a shape that by the time of the Tchaikovsky ballets had congealed into the formula of entrance / adagio / variations / coda.<sup>28</sup>) The composer also customarily ensured a contrast in tempo, key, or meter from dance to dance, which could make for a pleasing variety of mood (a sweet and sentimental adagio, for example, was likely to be followed by a brisk and vigorous allegro). In addition, divertissements commonly ended rousingly (often with multisectioned music entitled *final*).

TABLE 1.2 RATIONALES FOR DANCING IN OPERAS AND BALLET-PANTOMIMES

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<i>Guillaume Tell</i> (Act One) Opera, 1829	Celebration of a village wedding.
<i>Guillaume Tell</i> (Act Three)	Tyrol peasants are forced to dance during festivities celebrating Austria's dominion over Switzerland.
<i>La Sylphide</i> (Act One) Ballet, 1832	Celebration of a peasant wedding.
<i>Nathalie</i> (Act One) Ballet, 1832	Village girls demonstrate their joy at gifts from a lord and lady.
<i>Nathalie</i> (Act Two)	Celebration of a village wedding
<i>La Révolte au sérail</i> Ballet, 1833	Zulma and her friends sport in the water.
<i>Don Giovanni</i> (Act Two) Opera, 1834	Masked ball at the don's palace
<i>La Juive</i> (Act One) Opera, 1835	Spontaneous dancing as the emperor and victorious soldiers march into the city.
<i>La Juive</i> (Act Three)	Festivities in honor of Léopold's victory over the Hussites.
<i>Les Huguenots</i> (Act Three) Opera, 1836	Spontaneous dancing by gypsies on the banks of the Seine.
<i>Les Huguenots</i> (Act Five)	Celebration of a noble wedding.
<i>Le Diable boiteux</i> (Act Three) Ballet, 1836	Festival on the banks of the Manzanares.
<i>La Fille du Danube</i> (Act One) Ballet, 1836	Ball at which the Baron's squire is expected to choose a bride.
<i>Le Diable Boiteux</i> (Act One) Ballet, 1836	Masked ball in Madrid.
<i>La Chatte</i> (Act One) Ballet, 1837	Imperial festival at which the princess is expected to choose a bridegroom.
<i>Les Mohicans</i> (Act Two) Ballet, 1837	Dancing of the Mohicans, who can't resist the sound of the pocket violin.
<i>Les Martyrs</i> (Act Two) Opera, 1840	Dances of celebration in honor of the new proconsul.
<i>Giselle</i> (Act One) Ballet, 1841	Celebration of the grape harvest.
<i>La Gipsy</i> (Act Two) Ballet, 1839	Dancing by gypsies at the great fair of Edinburgh.
<i>Le Prophète</i> (Act Two) Opera, 1849	Dancing of villagers at Jean's inn.
<i>Le Prophète</i> (Act Three)	Spontaneous dancing by peasants near the Anabaptists' army camp.

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Any given divertissement, however, was likely to be altered to suit the talents of new dancers and the latest tastes of the ballroom. So receptive was the Paris Opéra to social-dance fashion, in fact, that dances new to the city's ballrooms in the 1830s and 1840s—for instance, the polka and galop—were virtually guaranteed to appear on the Opéra's stage.<sup>29</sup> Among these popular ballroom dances were so-called “national” dances (or “character dances,” as they are more commonly called in the twentieth century), such as the *cracovienne* and the *Jaleo de Xeres*. (By the same token, the Opéra's dancers sometimes ignited social-dance crazes with their spectacular, crowd-pleasing performances of national dances.) Though these national dances tend to be overlooked in many latter-day accounts of nineteenth-century ballet, they were so popular in the 1830s and 1840s, both in the ballroom and on the stage, that choreographers of divertissements often created not only a national dance appropriate to the setting of the work—like a jig in Scotland—but “foreign” dances as well. On at least one occasion, for example, a Hungarian dance was performed in the ball scene of *Don Giovanni*, the rationale being that the Hungarians were providing entertainment for the maskers, even though the ball was taking place in Spain.<sup>30</sup>

The demands placed on ballet-music composers, then, were many: they were expected to provide dance music for divertissements and to “tell the action” and help “express the feelings of players” in dramatic sections, to mingle these two distinct types of music together as the situation required, and to include music appropriate for the setting and ethnicity of the characters.<sup>31</sup> Because it is only the style of the dance music, and not the dramatic music, that is familiar to our ears today, we tend to think of these ballet-pantomimes as largely centered around dancing. Yet, as I hope to show in the pages that follow, dancing was only one element of the ballet-pantomime, a genre whose relationship to opera cannot be revealed unless one takes into account the non-dancing segments of these works and the music composed for them.