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Stravinsky and Balanchine: A musico-choreographic analysis of 
Agon

Stilwell, Robynn Jeananne, Ph.D.
The University of Michigan, 1994

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Stravinsky and Balanchine: A Musico-Choreographic Analysis of Agon

by

Robynn Jeananne Stilwell

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Music: Musicology) in The University of Michigan 1994

Doctoral Committee:

Professor Roland John Wiley, Chair
Professor Richard Crawford
Associate Professor Jessica Fogel
Professor Victor Miesel
Professor Glenn Watkins
*Agon* "may well be the highest point we have yet reached in manipulating the living anatomy of choreography."

—John Martin
For my parents, David and Karoyn Stilwell, 
who have always supported me, no matter what I thought I wanted, 
but never pushed.
Acknowledgments

My heartfelt thanks to Prof. Roland John Wiley, who guided this dissertation to its completion, and Prof. Richard Taruskin, who supported its inception. To Prof. Glenn Watkins for his stimulating seminars and comments on my work (and always the appropriate Stravinsky quote); Prof. Victor Miesel for the opportunity to put art, philosophy and music together; and Prof. Richard Crawford for his views on patronage and punctuation. To Beth Genné and Stephanie Jordan, who encouraged me in this area, and to Jessica Fogel for the dancer’s eye. To Anthony Dowell, Ann Hutchinson Guest, and Edward Villella for just the right words at just the right time. To Linda Spriggs for being my Labanotation pal; and to Virginia Doris and Lisa Machlin at the Dance Notation Bureau for their assistance in gaining access to materials. To the Horace H. Rackham School of Graduate Studies for the Dean’s Fellowship which allowed me the freedom to work on this dissertation full-time. And my personal thanks to Robin Armstrong, Robert Fink, Richard Hill, Mitchell Morris, Diane Schreiner, Maria Paula Survilla, Melina Watts, and Elizabeth Wirtz for support, encouragement, proofreading, and ice cream when warranted.
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Introduction

...I can only say Stravinsky's music altogether satisfies me. It makes me comfortable. When I listen to a score by him I am moved—I don't like the word inspired—to try to make visible not only the rhythm, melody and harmony, but even the timbres of the instruments.

— George Balanchine

Balanchine's visualization...exposed relationships of which I had not been aware in the same way. Seeing it, therefore, was like touring a building for which I had drawn the plans but never completely explored the result.

— Igor Stravinsky

Judged by almost any criterion—time span, output, reputation, artistic achievement—the collaboration of Igor Stravinsky and George Balanchine is one of the most important ever between a composer and a choreographer. The respect they expressed for each other's work was evinced in ballets with a deep, sympathetic interrelation of music and dance, two arts which are intimately intertwined in history and practice, yet rarely studied together. The culminating masterpiece of thirty years of collaboration, *Agon* (1957) is especially intriguing because of its variety of styles and elusive coherence, its pivotal position in Stravinsky's output, and its undisputed greatness as a ballet.

---


3The television ballet *The Flood* followed in 1961, but it incorporated elements other than music and dance. Balanchine would also choreograph a number of Stravinsky ballets in the 1960s and 1970s, but without the active collaboration of the composer.

1

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Agon was composed between 1953 and 1957, a time when Stravinsky was beginning to explore serialism, and the ballet contains some of his earliest serial composition. A compact, ostensibly non-narrative work lasting approximately twenty-three minutes, Agon comprises fifteen brief movements, each individual in orchestration, style, and compositional technique. Musically, Agon is a uniquely Stravinskyan melding of a neo-classical, diatonic style with serial techniques; choreographically, it brings together typically Balanchinian neoclassical technique modified by modern dance influences and the casual athleticism of Broadway-style hoofing. At various points, music and choreography refer to dances of different historical periods, from early Baroque court dances to classical ballet to 20th-century jazz.

In studying the Stravinsky-Balanchine collaboration, an interdisciplinary approach is essential, not only because of the interaction of the contributory arts, but also because of the nature of the artists. Stravinsky's music is motivated by a strong impulse toward movement, while Balanchine's choreography is shaped by his not inconsiderable musicality. The choreography follows musical procedures. The lines and texture of the dancers' gestures are related—sometimes directly, sometimes in opposition—to the musical gestures in a kind of counterpoint. Motif, canon, polyphony, and cadence in the dance, as well as devices of phrase construction and thematic development, are worked out in a manner and on a scale more familiar to musical structures than to classical choreography. One of the most perceptive dance critics of the 20th century, Edwin Denby, described the musicality—the musical nature—of George Balanchine's choreography.

---

4If one takes the continuous Adagio, Variations, and Coda of the Pas-de-Deux as one movement.

Balanchine thought of dance as having a musical subject matter, which is quite different from a plot. The sequences of steps, the variety are all related to the music. The musical subject matter of Balanchine dances is difficult to describe, but it can be deeply felt. There is a completeness about Balanchine’s dances within that context. It is not really so very difficult to understand if, in Balanchine’s words, you are willing to “see” the music and “hear” the steps.6

Conversely, in reviewing an early concert performance of Agon, Rollo Myers astutely suggested that comprehension of the work could be aided by a knowledge of the dance: “Perhaps with choreography added, its effect will be even more convincing and certain obscurities clarified.”7 Almost fifteen years later, Horst Koegler made a similar observation about the effect of Balanchine’s choreography on many of Stravinsky’s late compositions: “…his difficult later works are easier to understand if the eyes can come to the aid of the ears.”8

Despite the interdependence of music and dance in a ballet, the relationship of the two arts is rarely explored. Authorities on music tend to disregard the dance (and vice versa), which reduces “ballet” to a generic tag, like “symphony” or “concerto.” The demands of specialization, while understandable, have thus limited perspective and imposed restraints on scholarship. Agon, though recognized as an important work, is discussed very little in musical literature and, except for one article by Irene Alm,9 is not treated as a theatre piece but as abstract music.

---

6“Balanchine’s Poetics,” in Dance Writings, ed. Robert Cornfield and William MacKay (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986): 491. The italics in the first sentence are Denby’s; those in the third sentence are mine. The consistency and even vehemence with which so many critics, dancers, and musicians stress the musicality of Balanchine’s choreography testify to the rarity of such a quality in the work of other choreographers.


Dance history is still a young field, and most efforts in it to date have involved narrative and descriptive history, biography, and reconstruction. For insight into the musico-choreographic relationship, one must turn to the words of dancers, choreographers and critics, where one typically finds brief, evocative comments—tantalizing glimpses urging further exploration. In reviewing Lynn Garafola’s *Diaghilev's Ballet Russes*, Claudia Pierpont addressed the lack of focus and undeveloped methodology of dance history with an exhortation: “The field of dance history is wide open. Forget the answers; learn to ask the questions.” Those questions must certainly include how music and dance relate to one another. Can or must one dominate, or can they form a sum greater than the parts? This dissertation will explore the contention that in *Agon*, the arts of Stravinsky and Balanchine come together to create something that is not merely a combination, but a synthesis.

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10 As this dissertation was nearing completion, with the analysis already finished, Stephanie Jordan published an article on music and dance in *Agon* [“*Agon*: A Musical/Choreographic Analysis,” *Dance Research Journal* (Fall 1993)] which finds many of the same striking details regarding the interaction of music and dance as are discussed in Chapter Four. With its concentration on the rhythmic aspects of the music-dance interaction, Jordan’s analysis is truly welcome in dealing with literal musical-choreographic connections, although she does not attempt to show an interlocking structure for the entire ballet, to which music and dance contribute equally.

Chapter One
A Review of the Literature and Sources

Because studies of Agon and of the collaboration of Stravinsky and Balanchine have so far been conducted mostly from the point of view of either music or dance, they present only part of a comprehensive, interactive analysis. The musical literature on Agon tends to be either cursory—overviews in monographs on Stravinsky or reviews with analysis of early concert performances—or highly specialized, concentrating on a single element of Stravinsky's compositional technique. Much of the writing about Agon is to be found in surveys of Stravinsky's œuvre, where almost all the analyses deal with the ballet as the incubator of Stravinsky's serial technique; they are works of the most abstract musical theory, tending to focus on pitch content. Other aspects of musical composition—style, sonority, rhythm—are more frequently noted by dancers and dance critics, who nonetheless tend to be more anecdotal or poetic than analytical about the choreography. Integrated analysis of music and dance is almost non-existent.

Henri Pousseur provides the most extensive musical analysis of Agon to date.¹ He was first to propose a structural unit for the entire ballet, made up of two four-note cells. Not only is Pousseur able to demonstrate unity in Agon from these cells, but he also connects them to Stravinsky's music as a whole, referring to them in other works, especially Le Sacre du Printemps. Yet there are problems with his approach. In the first place, the cells are so general to Stravinsky's music that they preclude a specific stylistic profile of Agon. In

the second, these cells are not really audible; Pousseur’s concentration on pitch/interval
constructs signals his bias as a serial composer toward pre-compositional materials and the
expected approach at the time in which he was writing—the early 1970s, when serialism
was still the dominant mode of art music composition.

In his analysis, Pousseur also proposes that “maintained tension,” or a lack of
harmonic resolution, is a long-time constructive strategy of the composer. In part, this
principle of maintained tension is a rebuttal of Boulez, whom Pousseur takes to task for his
polemical stance against Stravinsky. Boulez’s veneration of Webern led him to argue that
any deviation from Webern’s method of composing was a fatal flaw, leading to moribund
compositional practices; therefore, Stravinsky’s fundamental opposition to the tenets of
the Second Viennese School made him anathema to Boulez.²

Pousseur elegantly turns Boulez’s negatives (“inconsistency,” “wrong notes”) into positives by shifting perspective away from the Second Viennese School and toward
Stravinsky himself. The laws of Stravinsky’s language (“syntax”), Pousseur maintains,
should be defined by Stravinsky, not Webern. Yet Pousseur argues this point while still
holding up Webern as a model: he makes frequent comparisons between Stravinsky and
the Austrian composer, and even derives the basic cells of Agon from the row of Webern’s
Variations for Orchestra, Op. 30. There seems to be no evidence of an intentional
borrowing, but Stravinsky may in fact have been paying homage to the composer who,
by most accounts, spurred Stravinsky’s interest in serialism; if Stravinsky’s borrowing was
not intentional, the similarity in pitch-interval structure could be attributed from anything
to subliminal influence to coincidence.

Although he deals with the non-serial sections of Agon more than anyone else,
Pousseur spends most of his time with the serial sections. He mentions timbre and rhythm

²See “Stravinsky remains” and especially “Trajectories: Ravel, Stravinsky, Schoenberg,” both
reprinted in Notes of an Apprentice, ed. Paule Thévenine, trans. Herbert Weinstock (New
briefly near the end of his article, but says little about their possible structural significance, let alone their role in the dance. His emphasis on pitch is illuminating in that he establishes continuity between the diverse sections of *Agon* in the prevalence of these four-note cells. This high degree of abstraction, however, limits Pousseur’s perspective; he does not discuss the many other ways in which Stravinsky unifies the parts of *Agon*, including the variations in treatment of the cells. His analysis defines a particular alphabet which applies to certain dimensions of *Agon*, but (despite his stated concern with syntax) without establishing a vocabulary and grammar—that is, the diverse ways in which Stravinsky uses these cells as building blocks. Pousseur himself makes no claim to completeness, inviting new investigations to which his analysis may serve “if not as a guide, at least as a companion” [p. 144].

Although he draws connections to other of Stravinsky’s works in his article, Pousseur makes *Agon* the centerpiece of his study. Pieter C. van den Toom addresses *Agon* within the broader scope of his analytical survey of Stravinsky’s entire output. He is

Pousseur points out that there are other levels of musical analysis which may be pursued, acknowledging that he himself is at the most abstract, the level of “scales,” or unordered collections of pitches. However, it is clear that Pousseur is limiting analysis to sheer pitch content. His levels never extend as far as rhythmically or directionally defined motives, themes or styles. At his highest level (“structures which are definitively registered and ordered in time”), the sense of motive or theme these structures might have is weakened by a further statement (“a level which rhythm and instrumentation can also more or less deform.”) [119-20].

The first cell for example—semi-tone/[minor] third/semi-tone (without specified directions of pitch movement)—can be re-ordered as an octatonic construction, and the second—[minor] third/semi-tone/[minor] third—forms a triad with both a major and a minor third, a common sonority of Stravinsky’s neoclassicism. Pousseur points out the major/minor triad, but in connection with Webern, not Stravinsky. Similarly, Meir Wiesel has proposed a concept of “motivic space,” or motivic equivalence between motives with similar intervallic structure. Wiesel finds two similar “motivic spaces” in *Agon*, roughly equivalent to Pousseur’s two cells, but abstracted even further into three-note groups—half-step/whole step, and step and a third, in which the major or minor quality of the intervals is not specified. His first motivic space, that of the half-step/whole step, obviously generates octatonicism, but Wiesel’s approach is so reductive that this possibility is not pointed out. See “Motivic Unity in Stravinsky’s *Agon*,” *Orbis Musices* No. 7 (1979-80): 119-24.


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drawn to this ballet more than to many of Stravinsky’s other works, as is clear from his
enthusiastic tone:

For it is *the whole of Agon*, the whole of its vast, pluralistic reach in historical
reference, that is bold, unique, and—because the synthesis “works”—
breathtakingly—well-nigh miraculous. (p. 414)

Besides the pitch structures, effectively detailed by both Pousseur and van den Toorn
(albeit from different perspectives), other parameters of the composition invite analysis.

Van den Toorn writes of the “inventiveness in instrumental detail; the exquisite delicacy
and sophistication of the neoclassical (or ‘neo-Renaissance’) effort, especially in the Prelude
and in the ‘Gailliarde’” [p. 413]. He states, however, that “it is to the serial miniatures of
*Agon* that our eyes and ears are drawn” [p. 397], and it is to the serial parts of *Agon* that he
devotes most of his study. Yet Stravinsky composed these movements in the second half of
the ballet using relatively obvious serial principles, while in other movements, drawing on a
variety of styles, he employed residual tonality, polytonality, octatonicism, and even diatonic
serialism in a complex mixture that is not so easily divined and described. These remarkable
latter qualities are not addressed by van den Toom because they fall outside his theoretical
framework. He does not satisfactorily address how, in its “vast, pluralistic reach in historical
reference,” the “synthesis ‘works’.” Indeed, by calling the synthesis “miraculous,” the
analyst is absolved as if by divine intervention and does not have to explain how *Agon* is
both tonal and serial; why Stravinsky calls for a large 19th-century orchestra, but uses it in
an understated 20th-century manner; or how he variously evokes 17th-century France,
19th-century St. Petersburg, and 20th-century Vienna. The grand synthesis becomes,
therefore, one not just of historical referents or even pitch structures, but also one of
reconciling, to some degree, the theoretically separate realms of tonality and serialism.

Some scholars—especially those writing at mid-century for whom the Second
Viennese School exemplified the principles of atonality and serialism—emphatically reject
the possibility of such a synthesis. One of the most eloquent defenders of this belief is
Robert Siohan:

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...in rejecting the architectonic consequences of serialism, Stravinsky is really showing himself to be opposed to its very spirit, for by this attitude he refuses to allow it to produce its own natural forms. It must be affirmed that the idea of achieving a synthesis of tonal and atonal music, which represent two absolutely irreconcilable worlds, is a chimera. Atonality is a complete system in itself; and the mixture in a single work of two mutually exclusive methods of thought is a contradiction that is bound to create incongruous results.  

Stephen Walsh, twenty years later, saw a larger swath of history and detached the polemics from the method:

Where for Schoenberg serialism was a way of sustaining the organic forms of German classicism and the harmonic and structural unity of music that was at the same time intricately varied in detail, it seems to have been the closed system itself that interested Stravinsky. His serial treatments typically make capital out of the fact that twelve-note rows are in essence repetitive.  

Walsh’s insight is bolstered by a statement of Stravinsky’s, made when he was composing *Agon*, which presents serialism as a cubist approach to musical composition: “A series is a facet, and serial composition a crystallized way of presenting several sides of the same idea.”

Lawrence Morton’s brief, early review-analysis was to prove the most influential piece of writing on the ballet for thirty years, shaping (or at the very least, foreshadowing) the way later musicologists wrote about *Agon*. Morton set the precedent for dividing the work into four parts:

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I. Pas-de-Quatre (4 male dancers)  
   Double Pas-de-Quatre (8 female dancers)  
   Triple Pas-de-Quatre: Coda (4 male, 8 female dancers)  

II. First Pas-de-Trois:  
   Prelude (1 male, 2 female dancers)  
   Saraband-Step (male solo dancer)  
   Gailliarde (2 female dancers)  
   Coda (1 male, 2 female dancers)  

   Interlude

III. Second Pas-de-Trois  
   Bransle Simple (2 male dancers)  
   Bransle Gay (female solo dancer)  
   Bransle Double (2 male, 1 female dancers)  

   Interlude

IV. Pas-de-Deux  
   Four Duos (male and female)  
   Four Trios (male and [2] female)  
   Coda (all the dancers)

This division of the ballet is justifiable as regards music: it is articulated by the Interludes (which are variations of the Prelude to the First Pas-de-Trois), and it is supported by Morton’s analysis of Stravinsky’s serialism. Morton finds three rows, similar in interval content and tonal implication, each governing one of the last three sections.

In his article, Morton emphasizes serial constructions—four of six pages, a proportion understandable when addressing a major new development in Stravinsky’s work, but which little helps us to understand Agon in its entirety. Subsequent authors, following Morton, are brief (averaging about five pages); generally, they point out that the first half of Agon was written before his turn to serialism and thus are neoclassic, then devote their complete attention to the serial half. Eric Walter White’s discussion is unusual among these in that, while it is quite brief, it devotes equal space to the serial and non-serial sections.10

Some of the analyses, like that by Roman Vlad,11 are tinged with Boulez’s “saved-by-

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serialism" evangelism, according to which Stravinsky's importance is validated by his "conversion" to dodecaphony.12

Three articles take more specific and exceptional approaches than taken by the authors of surveys. Hans Keller examines Stravinsky's rhythms by comparing them with those of Schoenberg and Gershwin, a rare approach that elevates the discussion of rhythm above simple description.13 Glenn Watkins, taking Agon as one representative work, examines canon as both homage to historical models (including Webern) and a structural strategy ordering the expansive synthesis of techniques in Stravinsky's late style.14 And Jonathan D. Kramer makes one of the few attempts after Pousseur to view Agon as a coherent musical entity.15 According to Kramer, the stylistic shifts (and on a finer level, textural and harmonic shifts) in Agon are markers of structural divisions or "moments" that are variations on a single proportion, 1.19:1 (which is also 4\sqrt{2}:1). This seemingly arcane proportion generates a series that doubles each fourth term, creating a related and more easily perceptible ratio of 2:1. Kramer's approach is theoretically similar to analyses of tonal music based on the so-called "Golden Section"; intention is not directly addressed in the analysis, although in his conclusion, Kramer says that this proportional method of composition was "apparently intuitive" on the part of the composer.


Very little has been done with Agon, or with Stravinsky’s late period in general, in Soviet musicology, due in no small part to ideological opposition to Stravinsky. Only one article dedicated to Agon is readily accessible. Yuri Keldysh describes each movement briefly, then examines Stravinsky’s role in contemporary ballet. Unlike Western scholars, who frequently turn to Balanchine’s comments for insight into the dance elements of the composer’s music, Keldysh cites Serge Lifar, who almost alone among choreographers believes that Stravinsky’s rhythms are too intractable for inventive choreography. Keldysh concludes that

the extreme rhythmic complexity of the music in connection with the mechanistic, unbalanced design, and complete absence of natural breathing is not conducive to the dance, but on the contrary, inhibits plastic movement... It is simply not possible to “translate” completely Stravinsky’s score into “the language of the dance.” [Agon] reaffirms the


18It is not uncommon for new music to be deemed unsuitable for dance: among the works that have been considered “undanceable” are Tchaikovsky’s Swan Lake and Ravel’s La Valse. Music’s perceived suitability for dance may also be hampered by its greatness as concert music. Arthur Franks has summarized such opinions, which, though refutable by individual example, have permeated the history of dance:

A number of dance-lovers as well as music-lovers have gone so far as to claim that some music is danceable and some is not. What they mean of course is that certain melodies and rhythms seem appropriate to them to be set to dances, whereas others seem inappropriate. Any work generally recognized as great they put outside the scope of ballet; and claim, furthermore, that to set dances to such music is to display a lack of feeling for music and to damage the effective power of the music itself by giving it arbitrary and unfair aural associations. [Twentieth Century Ballet (London: Burke, 1954): 36.]

Although Balanchine never shied away from using music considered “great,” not least Stravinsky’s difficult late serial compositions, even he said there were two works that he would never choreograph because they were “too important.” Balanchine does not make clear what he meant by “too important” in this brief interview, but it may have had to do with their importance to musical history. Ironically, the two works were The Rite of Spring and Petrouchka, both expressly composed for ballet [See Antoine Livio, “Balanchine et Stravinsky 40 ans d’amitié,” Ballet Danse, l’Avant Scène, Le Sacre du Printemps (August/October 1980): 124].
characterization given to [Stravinsky by Lifar]..."the musician who is completely alien to the dance." 19

Although he finds it unsuitable, the Keldysh at least focuses on Agon as music for dancing; few Western scholars have addressed Agon as a ballet.

Laurence Sherr's doctoral dissertation on Agon does deal with the collaboration of Stravinsky and Balanchine. Described in the abstract as a "narrative of events" which brought the ballet to the stage, Sherr's dissertation includes a number of interviews with artists involved in the original production, but is more reportage than analysis. 20

In her examination of an outline worked out by Stravinsky and Balanchine together, Irene Alm establishes several elements of construction upon which the collaborators had decided before beginning work on the ballet, including a three-part architecture. 21

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19 Крайняя ритмическая усложненность музыки в сочетании с механичностью, изложенной рисуноком и полным отсутствием естественного дыхания не побуждает к танцу. А наборот, сковывает пластику движений. ...партитуру Стравинского просто невозможно полностью "перевести на язык танца". [Agon] подтверждает данную ему..."музыканта. полностью чуждого танцу". 

[1963: 179] The translation by Boris Schwarz ["Stravinsky in Soviet Russian Criticism," in Stravinsky: A New Appraisal of His Work, ed. Paul Henry Lang (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1963): 74-95] is perhaps more elegant, but re-orders Keldysh's argument and may misrepresent one phrase. He translates "mechanistic[ism] and unbalanced[ness]" as "artificiality," and "natural" as "aesthetic." It is easy to mistake "natural" (ecrecrBeHHUH) for "aesthetic" (ocreraiecKHH), but the difference in meaning is considerable.


I. Pas-de-Quatre (4 male dancers)  
   Double Pas-de-Quatre (8 female dancers)  
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   Prelude (1 male, 2 female dancers)  
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   Second Pas-de-Trois  
   Bransle Simple (2 male dancers)  
   Bransle Gay (female solo dancer)  
   Bransle Double (2 male, 1 female dancer)  

   Interlude

   Pas-de-Deux

III. Four Duos (male and female)  
   Four Trios (male and 2 female)  
   Coda (all the dancers)

This three-part form had been put forward before. Soon after Agon was completed, Robert Craft had published an article that contained a description of the main features of each movement and outlined a tripartite form for the ballet which, though derived from the Stravinsky-Balanchine notes, was superseded by the four-part form in subsequent publications by other authors.22 Even Craft would yield to the later view, however—in his liner notes for the album American Stravinsky: The Composer, Volume IV, he divides Agon into four parts identical with the Morton model.23

Taking the collaborators' own design and the final result into account, Alm presents the ballet in a more symmetrical, arch-shaped form than the four-part scheme would allow.24 With an eye toward the dance, Alm also explains one element that frustrated van den Toorn's efforts to bring the ballet into focus. Twice in his analysis of Agon (pp. 391,


24Horst Koegler in "Balanchine choreographiert Agon," Melos 30 (1963): 237-41, also arrives at a tripartite structure—again, by observing the dance rather than the score.

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van den Toorn finds the interludes "unconvincing" or irrelevant in articulating the structure of the work. To Aim, the interludes are readily comprehensible from the standpoint of choreography: in performance they function as transitions to move one group of dancers off and another group onto the stage. And musically, they do not articulate a large-scale structure at all, but rather secondary divisions within a central main section. The simplicity and elegance of Aim's solution compared with van den Toorn's points up the desirability of considering music and dance together.

Scholarship on the relationship of music and dance is still largely to be written. As is true conversely of musicians who seek to describe ballet, most writers on the dance have little or no technical knowledge of music and thus cannot describe the musical parallels with the dance. Musicologist Stephanie Jordan's examination of Frederick Ashton's *A Month in the Country* is the rare example of an article that considers both music and dance. She discusses the score, based on little-known Chopin pieces for piano and orchestra as assembled and edited by Ashton and John Lanchbery. Jordan also traces some of the literal connections of mime and dance to the score.25 Jordan's recent article on *Agon* is also concerned with the close connection of musical and choreographic gestures.26

Dance in its relation to other disciplines is also beginning to be explored, and some of the most provocative work in this regard has been done with Stravinsky's early ballets. Musicologist Jann Pasler's article in *Confronting Stravinsky* explores the philosophical background for the creation of *The Rite of Spring* and *Petrushka*27 and dance historian Millicent Hodson's recreation of Nijinsky's choreography for *The Rite of Spring* forms the


27 "Music and Spectacle in *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring*": 53-81.
basis of an article in which she traces the connection between the choreography and the anthropological sources provided by Nicholas Roerich, archaeologist and designer of the first production.\textsuperscript{28}

In his response to an earlier article by Pasler that examines Stravinsky’s choreographic notes for \textit{The Rite of Spring},\textsuperscript{29} Roger Shattuck’s witty tone does not detract from his raising of a number of slippery, difficult, but tantalizing questions dealing with the physical nature of music.\textsuperscript{30} Couched as an exchange of letters between an “aging, part-time graduate student” and a musicology professor who has written an article with more than a passing resemblance to Pasler’s, Shattuck’s discussion grapples with a topic rarely addressed in the study of Western art music—the reflection of the physical body in the music.\textsuperscript{31} Shattuck’s argument is related to the conception of \textit{musique dansante}, but is broader, encompassing not only the dynamic impetus created by the music, but the dynamic impetus that \textit{creates} the music. Are we as listeners aware of the energy of composition or the physical means of production when we experience music?\textsuperscript{32} Can music \textit{have} a physical

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\item \textsuperscript{29}“Stravinsky’s Visualization of Music: The Choreography for \textit{The Rite of Spring},” \textit{Dance Magazine} 55 (1981): 66-69.
\item \textsuperscript{30}“The Devil’s Dance: Stravinsky’s Corporal Imagination,” in \textit{Confronting Stravinsky}, 82-88.
\item \textsuperscript{31}Roland Barthes wrote of the manifestation of the body in music in his article “The Grain of the Voice” [in \textit{Image-Music-Text}, reprinted in \textit{On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word}, ed. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990): 293-300]. In defining the presence of the body, Barthes uses Western art music as a negative example; he sees it as lacking in “body”—the physical traces of effort in performance. Although many may protest his specific examples, Barthes’s article has been quite influential, especially in the study of popular music.
\item \textsuperscript{32}Like Barthes, iconoclastic American composer Harry Partch was distressed by the negation of the body in Western art music, and even the construction of his unique instruments was designed to redress this. The instruments require a three-dimensional, almost “choreographic” mode of playing. [See Ben Johnson, “The Corporealism of Harry Partch,” \textit{Perspectives of New Music} 13/2 (1975): 85-97; my thanks to Glenn Watkins for drawing my attention to Partch’s views on corporeality.]
\end{itemize}
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element? Can an art as non-corporeal as music reflect and/or demand a physical action? Because these questions are so little discussed, the language for addressing them is poorly developed. Shattuck's method allows him to argue from two points of view, an emphatic "yes" (as the graduate student) and a "maybe, but show me" (as the musicology professor). He concludes that the physical impulse of movement is of paramount importance in Stravinsky's style, leaving the indelible traces of movement in the music.33

The physical impulse to movement reaches its artistic culmination in dance, a field which has the least-developed scholarly apparatus of all the major arts, although much has been written by critics and dancers that is perceptive and intriguing about the relationship of the arts of Stravinsky and Balanchine. Balanchine himself, when asked by puzzled dancers what *Agon* "meant," directed them to the reviews of John Martin.34

Martin, esteemed dance critic of the *New York Times*, wrote two substantial critiques of *Agon* in its first months, the first after a preview in December.

There is no man alive who, after one contact with it, can tell you what there is in it, for it is complex, ingenious, and fantastically off the beaten path formally. But there is nothing fuzzy or turbid about it, and even at first sight you can get from it all you can possibly absorb, and be teased into having a wonderful time while you are at it. Somewhere in the remote subconscious of both the agonists [Stravinsky and Balanchine] are some court dances of the seventeenth century—bransles, sarabandes, galliards—and from time to time when either of them chooses, we are shown whiffs of style and hints of form that are wittily reminiscent of these sources. But they constitute no more than a bare excuse for devious adventures in formal construction. ...Here it is all of a creative piece, sparse, dry—no, rather sec—classic. The bones have been stripped of every bit of flesh and re-articulated into a fresh body, but it is a body that still moves in clean and

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33 One is reminded here of a passage in Gertrude Stein's biography of Picasso: "Picasso said once that he who created a thing is forced to make it ugly. In the effort to create the intensity and the struggle to create this intensity, the result always produces a certain ugliness..." [Picasso (London: B.T. Batsford, Ltd., 1939): 9]. Picasso recorded the traces of his effort in his work—the process becomes part of the work itself. So too, according to Shattuck's graduate student, is Stravinsky's physicality inseparable from his music. Although Shattuck is unwilling to say that the dance element vanished in Stravinsky's later, serial, "cerebral" works like *Agon*, he does say (in the guise of his graduate student), that he cannot feel it.

functional phrases, however irregular in measure, incredible in aural timbre, and inexplicable in relation to normal human movement.35

Martin’s comment that the court dances “constitute no more than a bare excuse for devious adventures in formal construction” is a strikingly apt assessment of the musical and choreographic faithfulness of the ballet to its nominal inspiration. As early as 1951, Lincoln Kirstein, the American intellectual and millionaire who was Balanchine’s patron and champion and the man who commissioned Agon, had suggested the idea of early dances within the frame of Terpsichore, his proposed completion of the so-called Greek trilogy of Balanchine-Stravinsky ballets which also includes Apollo (1928) and Orpheus (1948).36 In August 1953, Balanchine proposed the idea of a contest (the literal meaning of the word agon). The competition would take place before the gods: “the gods are tired and old; the dancers re-animate them by a series of historic dances.”37 This scenario would have rounded well with Apollo, the first Greek ballet, in which three muses present their arts for Apollo’s approval. But as work on Agon progressed, the ideas of the contest and of the historical dances receded to the background. They became as the grain of sand around which a pearl is formed, recalling a statement by Pierre Boulez about the freedom that comes from an abstraction—even an incomplete understanding—of an inspiration:

I would even say, without any sense of paradox, that the smaller the windows to the outside, the more my imagination is strengthened. Too great a knowledge of things inspire respect in us and prohibits spontaneous usage. On the contrary, a scattered knowledge fires the imagination; it is from such a small nucleus, much as the grain of sand in the oyster nurtures the pearl, that our ideas take shape, without being preoccupied with a profound preliminary study of civilizations.38


37 Letter from Lincoln Kirstein to Igor Stravinsky of 31 August 1953, in Stravinsky: Selected Correspondence, vol. 1, 286-87.

38 Je dirais même, sans paradoxe, que, plus les fenêtres sur les ailleurs étaient petites plus mon imagination était puissante. Une trop grande connaissance des choses nous inspire le respect et nous en interdit l'emploi spontané. Par contre, une connaissance sporadique met
Throughout his career, Stravinsky's imagination had been sparked by such fundamental elements. In his early ballets, Stravinsky had turned within his own culture to the folk (Firebird, Petrouchka, Les Noces, Renard) and the primitive (Le Sacre du Printemps); Pulcinella draws on the Italian commedia dell’arte tradition and the opera-oratorio Oedipus Rex on one of the earliest dramas in Western civilization. Such an attraction to the early model is not uncommon, as Edward Said remarks: “The beginning as primordial asceticism has an obsessive persistence in the mind... Formally, the mind wants to conceive a point in either time or space that marks the beginnings of all things.” The dances named in Agon—the galliard, the branle—are among the earliest European dances about which we have any knowledge and are the genesis of the evolution of ballet.

Two months after his initial review, Martin had absorbed the new work more deeply, emphasizing the tentative connection between the stated models and the deviance from them:

In its actual detail, Agon is a difficult work. It has no story, no costumes, no scenery. Its subject—or rather its taking-off point—is a set of old social dances in a midseventeenth-century French dance manual.

Nothing recognizable is reproduced; nothing objective that is. Very clearly recognizable is the reaction of the composer and the choreographer to the flavor and overtones of an old book that obviously delighted them. Something suggestive of the bransles, galliards and sarabandes emerges in the texture of the piece; something, also, markedly unliteral of the dusty-paged period. It is full of “reverences” and formality, or naïveté wedded to the most profound dignity, of an intricately built absurdity; yet it is utterly without ridicule. Ancient courtliness has simply been disintegrated and reassembled in a new set of dimensions. It is full of comment and humor; but it is in no sense a satirical or a funny work by nature or intent. The choreography, growing directly from the music according to Balanchine’s invariable practice, manages to give a remarkable clarification to the fantastic score.

From the bedeviled instrumentalists in the orchestra pit come now thin twangs and tweets, now blasts of brass, plus an amusingly persistent melodic

en bransle l'imagination; c'est à partir de ce petit noyau, tel le grain de sable dans l'huitre devenant perle, que votre idée prend corps, sans se préoccuper d'une étude préalable approfondie des civilisations.” “Exist-t-il un conflit entre la pensée européenne et non-européenne?” in Europäische Musik Zwischen Nationalismus und Exotik, Forum Musicologicum IV (1984): 139. My thanks to Glenn Watkins for drawing my attention to this quote and the one from Edward Said, and for suggesting the pursuit of this idea.

line wheezing or burbling through periodically. On the stage the dancers are moving in phrases of irregular measure that are both angular and rolling at the same time. They seldom move together; indeed, only in an arsenal could you find more canon! The shape of the movements is unprecedented and solemnly grotesque.

Yet in spite of all the tautness of structure, it is relaxed in surface, and for all the complication in workmanship it is simple in effect. It may well be the highest point we have yet reached in manipulating the living anatomy of choreography.40

Martin captures the essence of Agon in both reviews, though the second reflects a deeper understanding of the ballet. In the third paragraph, he alludes to the interdependence of music and dance; yet in the fourth paragraph, he speaks to their independence. Upon close scrutiny, the specifics tend to evaporate and one is left only with the passing flavor, as is true of so much that is written about Balanchine's choreography. In “The Three Sides of Agon,” Edwin Denby gives a tantalizing sample of specific musical connections with the dance.

The first move the dancers make is a counteraccent to the score. Phrase by phrase, the dancers make a counterrhythm to the rhythm of the music. Each rhythm is equally decisive and surprising, equally spontaneous... The Balanchinian buoyancy of impetus keeps one open to the vividly changeable Stravinskyan pressure of pulse and to its momentum.41

Choreographic counteraccent to the music was not invented by Balanchine, but such an analytical, pervasive, and fundamentally structural use of syncopation between the music and the dance is manifestly remarkable in the eyes of Denby, a keen observer of the dance. After this brief, provocative statement, however, he returns to the evocative but non-specific realm of emotion and “a chance event that passes with a small smile and a musical sound forever into nowhere.”

One of the earliest and most incisive analysts of Stravinsky, Boris de Schloezer, describes the technical derivation of the “Stravinskyan pressure of pulse.”

41From Dancers, Buildings and People in the Streets (1957); reprinted in Dance Writings: 459-64.
Nothing is fecund save the strife versus the obstacle, there is no creation save in the action of overcoming resistance. Stravinsky has never destroyed the measured bar; he struggles against it, he disarticulates it, he multiplies and hooks up the different metres, but he never permits himself once, and for good and all, to get rid of this bothersome fiction, for he needs the annoyance, the resistance, against which to leap and surge, for there is no rhythmic diversity without stability.42

Others since have observed the results of this rhythmic impetus. Stephen Walsh’s description of Agon particularly describes its momentum:

The sense of movement, almost of flight, about this piece is however purely Stravinskian. It dances across spaces... The silences have, that is, a value as pulse... Even in the most disjointed textures of Agon—in the ‘Pas de deux’ and its coda, where the fragmentation of pitch reaches almost Boulezian dimensions—the centrifugal tendency of the lines is invariably channeled into rhythmic energy.43

This observation could have come from the single most illuminating discourse on “The Dance Element in Stravinsky’s Music,”44 written by Balanchine himself. In this article, the choreographer ties together the irregularity and the regularity of Stravinsky’s rhythm and its dance-like impulse:

In Stravinsky’s music, the dance element of most force is the pulse. It is steady, insistent yet healthy, always reassuring. You feel it even in the rests. It holds together each of his works and runs through them all...

Stravinsky’s strict beat is his sign of authority over time; over his interpreters too. A choreographer should, first of all, place confidence without limit in this control. For Stravinsky’s rhythmic invention, possible only above a stable base, will give the greatest stimulus to his own powers.

A choreographer can’t invent rhythms, he only reflects them in movement... "The organizing of rhythm on a grand scale is a sustained process. It is a function of the musical mind. Planning rhythm is like planning a house, it needs a structural operation.

As an organizer of rhythms, Stravinsky has been more subtle and various than any single creator in history. And since his rhythms are so clear, so exact, to extemporize with them is improper...

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42In Igor Stravinsky, ed. Merle Armitage (New York: G. Schirmer, Inc., 1936): 69-137. The article is an abridgment, selected from de Schloezer’s articles which appeared in the 1928-29 issue of The Dial, translated by Ezra Pound. The quotation is from p. 100 of Pound’s translation.


What holds me, now and always, is the vitality in the substance of each measure. Each measure has its complete, almost personal life, it is a living unit. There are no blind spots anywhere. A pause, an interruption, is never empty space between indicated sounds. It is not just nothing. It acts as a carrying agent from the last sound to the next one. Life goes on within each silence.

In this oft-quoted essay, Balanchine expresses an understanding of the music which even Stravinsky admired. Balanchine also discusses line and texture, but he clearly finds in Stravinsky's rhythm his greatest call to choreography. Echoing Balanchine's "house plan," Stravinsky remarked (above, p. 1) that in building the structure from the musical blueprint, the choreographer revealed elements of Stravinsky's own work of which the composer himself was not aware.

Stravinsky was not the only admirer of Balanchine's musicality. It is the most frequently remarked element of his choreography by critics, dancers, choreographers, and other musicians. When in 1948 Balanchine conducted Tchaikovsky's *Theme and Variations* at the Metropolitan Opera for a performance of his ballet, Robert Craft reported that friends of his in the orchestra thought Balanchine was "the most musical conductor we have ever had."46

In Stravinsky's music, Balanchine the musician found a message for Balanchine the choreographer. In 1928, he choreographed *Apollo (Apollon Musagète)* and later he was to say:

...*Apollo* I look back on as the turning point of my life. In its discipline and restraint, in its sustained oneness of tone and feeling the score was a revelation. It seemed to tell me that I could dare not to use everything, that I, too, could eliminate. ...I examined my own work in the light of this lesson. I began to see how I could clarify, by limiting, by reducing what seemed to be multiple possibilities to the one that is inevitable.47

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45 Final movement of Suite No. 3 in G Major for Orchestra.


This inevitability is touched upon by many commentators on his choreography, and the testimony of dancers with whom he worked indicates that he proceeded with large-scale structures in mind and was relatively unconcerned with such details as steps.

Dancer Arthur Mitchell's description of Balanchine's working style accentuates the musical source of the choreographer's ideas:

Many times when he was choreographing he would work rhythmically and then put the step in. If you were looking for a step, it wouldn't be there. But if you got dah, da-dah-dah-dah, it would come out. The rhythm was always the most important. The choreography was set in time and then space.

Dancer and choreographer Paul Mejia carries this idea further. The emphasis on rhythm and structure supersedes the details. "He was very good at making things interesting between point A and point B. That's why you can change the steps in his ballets and still have the same wonderful works." The great dancer Rudolph Nureyev remembered vividly the way in which Balanchine created a dance with him: he started from the end, working backward. The inevitability stemmed in part from Balanchine's establishment of structural points. The dance then became connective tissue growing organically from this skeleton, stretching toward and away from these structural joints.

The sense of continuity inherent in Balanchine's working technique, to which all these dancers allude, was an inspiration to another great artist of the 20th century. The musician within the choreographer had his influence on composer Elliott Carter:

48 For example, his protégé Peter Martins said, "He made the movements seem inevitable: when you listen to any music to which he set choreography, you can see his work and you know there are no choices but the choices he made." "Foreword," Portrait of Mr. B: Photographs of George Balanchine (New York: The Viking Press, 1984): 9.


50 In Mason, I Remember Balanchine, 482.

51 Described by Nureyev in the documentary Nureyev, aired on Public Television, March 1993.
I was...interested by the onward-moving continuity in the ballets of George Balanchine—every individual momentary tableau in the best of his ballets is something that the viewer has seen interestingly evolved, yet it is also only a stage of a process that is going on to another point; and while every moment is a fascinating and beautiful thing in itself, still what's much more fascinating is the continuity, the way each moment is being led up to and led away from—something you are not aware of in the ballets of most other choreographers as being anything of interest or which has even been thought about much. Indeed, the Balanchine ballets have been very stimulating to me in this way ever since 1933, when I saw many of them in Paris. They have been important as an example, in another art, of what one might do with music: one wanted to have very vivid moments, but what was more interesting was the process by which these moments came into being and by which they disappeared and turned into other moments.

...Balanchine doesn't follow the music exactly. What's interesting is the fact that he's making a choreography that is basically a comment on the music and not a specific Mickey-Mousing from one measure to another... This remains fascinating for a musician to see, how he's constantly developing a choreography that's tangential, somehow connected to the music.

Despite the recognition of Balanchine's ballets among critics and musicians, only in recent years have musicologists begun to recognize the collaboration of Stravinsky and Balanchine as a significant artistic partnership. Stephen Walsh maintains that

[4] though these works fluctuate between the abstract and the narrative, they reflect as a group the particular attraction for a choreographer who worked not as a scenarist but as a dance contrapuntist, realising his images directly from the interior relationships of the music.

André Boucourechliev is the only author of a monograph who consistently refers to Balanchine's choreography while discussing Stravinsky's music, although Eric Salzman makes perhaps the strongest statement for considering the collaboration of the two men as a whole:

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52 A term used by dancers, choreographers, and film editors referring to the slavish imitation by movement of line and rhythm in music.


54 The Music of Stravinsky, 183.

55 Throughout the book Stravinsky, as he deals with each work that Balanchine choreographed, Boucourechliev makes brief reference to the dance.
The Stravinskian ballet—or, one should say, the Stravinsky-Balanchine ballet—is characterized by the development of equal, abstract closed forms of movement and sound which in no way intersect or "express" each other but remain completely independent if parallel.56

Salzmann is perhaps too strong in emphasizing the separateness of the two forms. As the present analysis is intended to prove, they are independent, but they do intersect; in fact, more than merely intersect, they interact.

The Sources

The understanding that Balanchine and Stravinsky had of each other's work is revealed in a number of illuminating statements from both men about the interrelationship of music and dance. Balanchine was more explicit about the music than Stravinsky was about the dance, but both suggest more than they state, inviting an exploration of their collaboration. Agon is an excellent point of departure for such an exploration.

Several sources provide insight into the collaboration. Stravinsky's autograph of Agon and the outline of the ballet worked out between Stravinsky and Balanchine, are in the Stravinsky Archives of the Paul Sacher Foundation in Basel. The autograph reportedly contains choreographic notes,57 but they have not been published. The outline, reproduced in Alm58 and in the New York City Ballet's 1982 Stravinsky Centennial Celebration Souvenir Program in the New York Public Library, contains a list of dances with durations noted. The Baroque dances are not referred to here, but the genders of the dancers who will perform each dance are indicated by little stick figures, some with skirts. Some broad choreographic and musical ideas are also contained in the outline: the three Introductions (as the Prelude and two Interludes are called here) are specified as having


57Shattuck (p. 82) and White (p. 455) briefly mention that Stravinsky made notes in the manuscript.

58"Stravinsky, Balanchine and Agon."
"the same music, but in variation," and the idea of beginning and ending the ballet with the four boys with their backs to the audience is noted. Bernard Taper's biography of Balanchine includes a selection of Martha Swope's photographs from the final rehearsal attended by Stravinsky, with captions recorded by Taper from conversations between the composer and choreographer. In addition to Martha Swope's photographs, an audio tape of Balanchine discussing the creation of the ballet is part of the Dance Collection of the New York Public Library. As far as I am able to ascertain, no one has yet dealt with this audio tape, and I have as yet been unable to access it.

The most important sources for the dance analyst, as for the music analyst, are a notated score and a recording (or recordings). While the music analyst normally depends more on the score than the recording, the balance is reversed when studying dance. A visual record of the dance is absolutely essential, and fortunately a very good one exists for Agon, broadcast on 14 February 1983 as a part of the Public Television (PBS) series Dance in America. Recorded during the 1982 Stravinsky Festival of the New York City Ballet, it was one of the last performances of the work that Balanchine supervised. The performance includes one element of the original production that was not always observed in subsequent stagings—a black male dancer (Mel Tomlinson) in the Pas-de-Deux. Remarks by the original dancers, Arthur Mitchell and Diana Adams, have made it clear

59 "Boy" is standard dance terminology for male dancers, just as "girl" is standard for female dancers.


61 The dancers in this performance are:
4 boys: Victor Castelli, Daniel Duell, Peter Frame, Mel Tomlinson
8 girls: Helene Alexopoulos, Maria Calegari, Carole Divet, Renée Estopinal, Wilhelmina Frankfurt, Linda Homek, Catherine Morris, Heather Watts
First Pas-de-Trois: Duell, Estopinal, Frankfurt
Second Pas-de-Trois: Calegari, Castelli, Frame
Pas-de-Deux: Tomlinson, Watts

62 These comments were made in televised interviews with the dancers. Arthur Mitchell was interviewed in the ABC news magazine 20/20 in 1991, and Diana Adams in the PBS documentary Dancing for Mr. B in 1990. Also quoted in Robert Tracy with Sharon
that Balanchine was keenly aware of the patterns made by the contrasting skin colors of the couple in the Pas-de-Deux, and when it is performed by two white dancers (or two black dancers), the patterns are lost, or at best muted. There is also a film clip in the 1980 PBS documentary Balanchine which records the Adagio of the Pas-de-Deux as danced by Adams and Mitchell, and the 1993 PBS series Dancing contains an excerpt of the Pas-de-Deux danced by Mitchell and Suzanne Farrell in the early 1960s. A recent live performance of Agon by the New York City Ballet company, though flawed by a near-fall of one couple in the Four Duos and with ragged unisons throughout, was illuminating because the flaws accentuated the qualities that caused Bernard Taper to deem Agon “a high-wire act, a contemporary comment on skill and danger” [p. 255].

Several valuable documents pertaining to the dance are preserved in the library of the Dance Notation Bureau (DNB) in New York City: a complete choreographic score; choreographic notes for a few individual movements; and a musical score which has been marked with dancers’ counts and choreography cues. The choreography is recorded in Labanotation; the complete score was made in 1987 by Virginia Doris, the DNB’s head of education, based on the choreography taught to Les Grands Ballets Canadiens [Montreal] in 1985 by Sara (“Sally”) Leland, a balletmistress of the New York City Ballet and an understudy to the original choreography; the individual movements were notated during or soon after the ballet’s creation by a number of Labanotation pioneers, including Ann Hutchinson Guest, Muriel Topaz, and Billie Mahoney. [A brief introduction to the principles of Labanotation is found in Appendix A.]

Dance notation can give insights into Balanchine’s interpretation of the music. Comparing the phrase structure (including dancers’ counts) to the musical notation can

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illuminate Balanchine's rhythmic conception, whether in agreement with Stravinsky's or in counterpoint to it. Notation also aids in understanding the dance as a large-scale structure; just as in musical notation, it provides easy comparison of diverse sections, of subtle variations in motives and phrases.

The extreme density of materials in *Agon* has proved to be one of the most formidable hurdles to an understanding of it. The diverse approaches in the secondary literature and the difficulty that analysts have had in agreeing on even a basic form testify to its complex, tightly woven patterns of various structural elements. With the musical and choreographic sources outlined above, it is possible to look at *Agon* as an entity of dance and music. In doing so, one can begin to find a concrete basis for the elusive, but eloquent words of the likes of Edwin Denby and John Martin.
Chapter Two
The Music of *Agon*

As the work which marks Igor Stravinsky's turn to serialism, *Agon* is of considerable historical significance, a fact that may have hindered our understanding of it by focusing attention on this new element of the composer's technique. Begun in 1953 and finished in 1956, *Agon* bridges Stravinsky's thirty-year avoidance of the principles of the Second Viennese School and his apparently sudden embrace of Webern. As the transitional work, it has been viewed primarily as an incubator of the composer's serial technique.

Stravinsky might well have been pleased that analysts have been more baffled than enlightened in concentrating on the innovations of this complex ballet. One such baffling element was misdirection, which Stravinsky loved. Misdirection exploits ambiguity: on closer scrutiny or further development, something apparently familiar is interpreted in an unexpected way. Sometimes Stravinsky's ambiguity is multivalent—it supports two or more persuasive interpretations. Misdirection, as used in this analysis, is related to the literary principle of misreading as defined by Harold Bloom,¹ according to which a poet follows a previous poet to a certain point, then diverges to rewrite the previous poem in a new interpretation. Misdirection is in some respects the opposite of misreading, for it is perpetrated not on the past but on the future: a poet leads the reader on an apparently familiar path to a certain point, whereupon the reader realizes that he or she is actually on a different path. Almost any musical element—a pitch, a chord, a sonority, an historical style,

a compositional device, or a constructive principle such as tonality or serialism—can be used to misdirect, and few of Stravinsky's works illustrate this principle better than *Agon*.

*Agon* is frequently described as “eclectic.” Antoine Goléa found that it suffered “from a regrettable disparity of writing and style,” an opinion widely shared (although the degree to which the disparity is considered “regrettable” has varied). While stylistically diverse, the piece is not an indiscriminate juxtaposition of styles. It unifies by allusion—to historical styles, tonality, various linear processes including serialism, timbre and sonority, rhythm, and the play between binary and ternary structures. In writing about the ballet, Balanchine claimed that it was a work of “symmetrical asymmetry.” At first this may seem like a platitude; but Stravinsky respected Balanchine the musician, and a scrutiny of the score bears out his description. For *Agon* is a work whose components balance one another in unusual and unexpected ways. In the Double and Triple Pas-de-Quatre, Stravinsky serializes diatonic pitch collections; in the Four Duos and Four Trios, a 12-tone row is used in canon and fugue, with the voices entering at the tonally-oriented intervals of the perfect fourth and fifth. Stravinsky constantly shifts the balance among his components, emphasizing different ones from movement to movement, sometimes from phrase to phrase. Stylistic diversity is itself a unifying principle in *Agon*, made consistent in the use of the familiar to misdirect.

*Agon*’s density of materials poses a particular analytical challenge. Stravinsky once said that “portions of *Agon* contain three times as much music for the same clock length as some other pieces of mine.” Its music and its choreography are composed of short,

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discrete units, and these brief units—some of only a few measures' length or a few seconds' duration—are intricately devised, packed with information as threads of continuity intertwine. Stravinsky’s concentration of means, no doubt influenced by the concise, aphoristic style of Webern’s music, demands an unusually detailed analytical approach—much more so than the same number of bars in Stravinsky’s earlier works—if the full implications of his rich store of referents are to be grasped and appreciated. The intricacy of style in Agon makes it useful to present an overview of the principal referents before turning to a detailed examination of the music.

Historical Reference

Although virtually every music analyst has ignored this fact, Agon is a ballet, and a vital source of its unity as a composite artwork lies in dance. For Agon is a suite of dances, both nominally and in its stage realization.\(^5\) Stravinsky wrote his score to be danced, and with full knowledge that it would be danced by a classically trained ballet company.

On two different structural levels, the ballet bears dance designations. The larger sections of the work take their names from classical ballet: Pas-de-Deux, Pas-de-Trois, and Pas-de-Quatre. The interior structure of the Pas-de-Deux follows the prescribed structure of the classical grand pas de deux—Entrée, Adagio, Variations, Coda; instrumental clichés of classical ballet are also respected in Stravinsky’s score, as will be discussed in the section on Timbre and Sonority below. The dances within the two Pas-de-Trois are named after Baroque counterparts: the sarabande, galliard, and branle.\(^6\)

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\(^5\)Specifically choreographic historical references will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three: The Choreography of Agon.

\(^6\)These are the standard spellings of the Baroque dances; when used with an initial lower case letter, these refer to the prototype. Stravinsky and Balanchine’s versions of these dances are spelled differently and, to distinguish them, will be presented throughout with an initial upper case letter.
These courtly dances are thought to be the earliest precursors of ballet. Although Stravinsky stylizes the musical traits of these dances almost to the point of abstraction (perhaps the reason the models have been given little attention by analysts), some traditional features remain—the metric ambiguity of the Gailliarde, for instance, or the grave triple meter of the Saraband-Step with its emphasis on the second beat. As one of his sources for Agon, Stravinsky cited a modern edition of a 17th-century thesis on courtly dance: F. de Lauze’s Apologie de la Danse: A Treatise of Instruction in Dancing and Deportment (1623). The treatise contains musical examples by Marin Mersenne, but while Stravinsky may have taken the names of the dances from this source, the only direct musical reference in Agon to the Apologie is the ostinato rhythm of the Bransle Gay. Occasionally Stravinsky goes directly against de Lauze, who identified the galliard (gailliard) as a dance for a male dancer. Stravinsky and Balanchine set their Gailliarde (an apparently unique spelling) for two girls.

The composer thus leads the scholar to de Lauze, but the musical references are at best tenuous in Agon, while some musical features of Stravinsky’s courtly dances seem to come from other sources. A later Baroque source, perhaps J.S. Bach, appears to have inspired the Saraband-Step. The rhythmic structure and tempo are more typical of the early 18th century than the mid-17th, and the principles of binary form are manifest not only in

8 A more incidental reference is the use of trumpets for the Bransle Simple, which Stravinsky said was inspired by an engraving in the book [Robert Craft, “Agon: Ein Ballett für zwölf Tanzer,” Melos 24 (October 1957): 284]. The “trumpets” in the engraving (opposite page 33 in the modern edition) actually appear to be wooden cornets.
9 The movements, their durations and the personnel for each were worked out by Stravinsky and Balanchine prior to composition. Evidence of this is an outline which is reprinted in the New York City Ballet program as well as in Eileen Alm, “Stravinsky, Balanchine and Agon: An Analysis Based on the Collaborative Process,” The Journal of Musicology 7/2 (Spring 1989): 257-58.
structural layout, but also in tonal relationships that were not standardized until around 1700.10

Linking these court dances to de Lauze may be a case of verbal misdirection, but it is also representative of Stravinsky’s opinion on tradition:

...the true tradition-making work may not resemble the past at all...
Tradition is generic; it is not simply “handed down”...but undergoes a life process: it is born, grows, matures, declines, and is reborn, perhaps. These stages of growth and regrowth are always in contradiction to the stages of another concept or interpretation: true tradition lives in the contradiction.11

Another kind of dance music—jazz of the 1920s—contributes to the stylistic mix in Agon. Stravinsky said that Agon was one of his jazziest scores;12 but this may have been another case of misdirection, for the musical references are little more than hints, as will be discussed, and drawn more from the “hot” European dance music of the 1920s than from Afro-American jazz. Stravinsky’s translation of jazz in Agon is similar to his versions of the Baroque dances or of ragtime in L’histoire du Soldat or Ragtime—stylization.

A more audible style in Agon is that of the Second Viennese School. Stravinsky’s conversion to serialism, spurred by his study of Anton Webern and even perhaps by Arnold Schoenberg’s death, is not complete. In Agon, the Webernian references are more aural imprints (timbre, melody, texture) than conformity to compositional principles.13 Unlike


13In “Stravinsky selon Webern selon Stravinsky,” Henri Pousseur has pointed out a structural similarity between the pitch interval cells at the basis of Agon and some of Webern’s constructions, especially the row of Webern’s Variations for Orchestra, Op. 30. [Musique en Jeu 4/5 (1971); reprinted in Perspectives of New Music (1972): 13-52 and (1973): 112-45 as “Stravinsky by Way of Webern: The Consistency of a Syntax,” trans. Marcelle Clements.] However, the influence of Webern is also present in the orchestration of the Gailliarde, and in the texture and style of the Pas-de-Deux, the Bransle Double and the Four Duos as well as the middle sections of the Bransle Simple and the Bransle Gay.
other serialists of the 1950s, some of whom were intent on obliterating tonality altogether, Stravinsky stops short of relinquishing tonality.\textsuperscript{14} His use of serialism may actually be interpreted as strengthening \textit{Agon}'s tonal centering.

Even the composer's own past is a referent. The sonority of chiming bells and octatonicism had been traits of Stravinsky's music from his so-called Russian period; the chiming intonation is an important sonority in \textit{Agon}, and his rows in the Bransles and in the Coda of the First Pas-de-Trois are based on octatonic scales of a kind he had used in earlier compositions. Neoclassicism is present not only in the modeling on court dances and classical ballet, but in the tonal balance of sections based on the interval of a perfect fifth and in the frequent use of triads containing both a major and minor third.

\textbf{Pitch, Interval, and Tonality}

Today harmonic novelty is at an end... Rhythm, rhythmic polyphony, melodic or intervallic constructions are the elements of musical building to be explored today.

\textit{— Stravinsky}\textsuperscript{15}

This remark conveys a typically Stravinskian ambiguity concerning intervallic construction and its relationship to the concept of harmony. What distinguishes harmony from intervallic construction? Does not intervallic construction—the intervals that a composer uses both horizontally and vertically—constitute harmony? Perhaps he is only referring to chordal composition; before the quoted passage, Stravinsky speaks about chords, referring to traditional, functional triads, but triads are simply one kind of intervallic construction. By stating that harmonic novelty is at an end, is he proclaiming the demise of

\textsuperscript{14}"The intervals of my series are attracted by tonality. I compose vertically and that is, in one sense at least, to compose tonally... I hear harmonically... and I compose in the same way I always have" [\textit{Conversations}, 22]. As to his composing vertically, while that may have been his process, I would contend that the ear (and the eye) would tend to be drawn horizontally.

\textsuperscript{15}\textit{Conversations}, 121.
functional tonality? Is he saying that functional harmony of the Western European musical
tradition has been pushed to the limit? If he had shared Schoenberg's view that this was so,
his turn to serialism would be explicable. But in *Agon*, what Stravinsky creates is harmonic
novelty, a hybrid of tonality and serialism.

Tonality in *Agon* is more allusive than declarative, but then, how much of a tonal
center was necessary in the mid-1950s to be heard as having structural significance?
Stravinsky establishes pitch centricity by the emphatic prominence of a note, by pedal points
either sustained or rhythmicized, or by melodic configurations that circle around a pitch. A
passage may contain only the barest suggestion of tonality, or more than one tonal cue, but
in either case it is enough for the Western ear to interpret as having a tonal basis. The use
of tonal terms in the present analysis—tonic, dominant, tonality, and so forth—should be
understood as allusions, and not literal chord functions unless so stated.

*Agon* is built on the pitch C: the closer the scrutiny, the more one finds this to be
ture. C is pervasive at the beginnings and ends of important phrases, movements, and
sections. The ballet begins and ends with C as a prominent pitch, and C appears
persistently as an anomalous note in the texture of sections which have other pitch centers—
or even none, like the Adagio of the Pas-de-Deux. Subsidiary pitch centers cluster
symmetrically around C—F and G, the fifth above and below C, as well as D and B♭, the
whole steps on either side of C. The second, major or minor, is an important interval in
*Agon*, appearing as an added pitch in chordal structures, faintly reminiscent of jazz
harmonies (the added second or seventh at cadences), or defining chordal structures
themselves. The juxtaposition of thirds (even triads) at the interval of a second is a
fundamental harmonic unit in the ballet. This juxtaposition is an echo of Stravinsky's
octatonicism, based on the linking of alternating seconds; and the chord sounding a fifth
with both the major and minor third was, as mentioned, a trait of his neoclassic style.

In contrast to the chord sounding both major and minor thirds, others may be
outlined by only two notes or by melodic motion. Sometimes full triads are juxtaposed (as
in the Double Pas-de-Quatre) so that a tonal center is negated rather than suggested. Triads which suggest a tonic often appear in second inversion. Other three-note chords contain a root and a fifth, with the third pitch one step away; such trichords are usually constructed of a stack of successive fifths—for example, the trichord $B^b-E^b-F$ may be redistributed as $E^b-B^b-F$. Both of these constructions—the second inversion and the quintal triad—weaken the sense of a traditional tonic that root position triads would convey.

Functional progressions may also be abstracted. In a compression of harmonies, Stravinsky will combine simultaneously chords which, if sounded successively, would make functional sense. Elsewhere, two tonalities may be sustained in separate strata of a bitonal texture. Stravinsky distinguishes such layers by contrasting instrumentation, and frequently by differences in rhythmic activity. Even though “polytonality” is a problematic term, it nevertheless seems to apply to Stravinsky’s harmonic language in certain passages of *Agon*.

The perfect fifth and fourth are vital intervals in *Agon*, strengthening the sense of tonal centering in both horizontal and vertical constructions. The fifth (and its equivalent, the fourth) defines harmonic relationships by the quintal trichords already mentioned, by serving as the interval separating polytonal layers, and by defining the pitch levels of sections within movements (a section on C followed by a section on G, as in the opening Pas-de-Quatre). Canons are almost always at the fourth, and at the end of the ballet (the Four Duos and Four Trios), various forms of the twelve-tone row are all begun on either C or F.

These factors—pitch-centeredness, triads and trichords, polytonality, structural uses of the perfect fourth and fifth—are combined and recombined throughout the ballet. Their interplay creates some of the most intriguing of Balanchine’s “symmetrical asymmetries.”

Linear Processes

In *Agon* horizontal conceptions take precedence over vertical ones. The relationship between them varies from movement to movement and section to section, but Stravinsky makes linear processes his primary focus. He emphasizes the horizontal aspect of *Agon* by
canon and serialism: canon leads the ear horizontally, and Stravinsky almost always deploys his rows horizontally. Only twice in the entire ballet (the Bransle Gay and the Bransle Double) does Stravinsky use the row vertically, both times using the contrast between horizontal and vertical to mark structural divisions.

Stravinsky applies serial techniques to diatonic pitch collections, which lends serial passages a tonal resonance. For this reason “serialism,” like “tonality,” needs to be defined for Agon. “Serialism” will refer to the pervasive use of a hexachord or 12-tone row throughout a section, “serial technique” to compositional processes associated with serialism—transposition, inversion, retrograde, retrograde inversion—that are applied to groups of notes other than the hexachord or 12-tone row. The term “cell” shall refer to a group of three or four notes, and “set” to a more extensive series of notes.

The method of strict ordering Stravinsky invokes most frequently in Agon is symmetry—a set displays the same intervals or pitches on either side of the center (Doppio lento of the Pas-de-Deux). The palindrome is a special case of symmetry, in which a set displays the same intervals and pitches on either side of the center. Agon is replete with palindromes, from diatonic sets (Pas-de-Quatre) to 12-tone rows in which prime order and inversion are fused (Four Duos). Stravinsky’s serial technique will be discussed in more detail as each movement is addressed.

Stravinsky prefigured many of these linear procedures in the compositions just before Agon—the canons in the Cantata and In Memoriam Dylan Thomas, the eight-note row in the Gigue of the Septet. Like the octatonic tendencies in his scale construction (also

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16 The Gailliarde, with its block-chord accompaniment beneath a canon, is a striking and unique instance drawn from both ends of the horizontal/vertical spectrum.

17 Although these techniques can be found in composers throughout music history, their designation as “serial techniques” may be justified by their fundamental importance to serial composition in the twentieth century. The restriction to 6- or 12-note groupings is more arbitrary, but based on the manner in which Stravinsky uses note groupings in Agon. Smaller note groupings (four-note cells, for example, in the Pas-de-Deux) seem less like serial constructions and more like a harmonic unit, equivalent to a triad in tonal music.
present in some of his rows), the major/minor triad familiar from his neoclassicism, and even the chiming sonority, Stravinsky's diatonic-serial procedures seem to be a summing-up of his own compositional history as he makes the approach to 12-tone serialism.

Stravinsky's serial treatment often subverts tenets set down by the Second Viennese School, a willful contradiction that creates the true tradition as Stravinsky might argue (above, p. 33). In a number of passages, the intervallic content of a row supersedes pitch content: Stravinsky may reverse the direction of an interval in a row, changing its pitch content while retaining its intervallic content. Or he may repeat fragments of the row before the entire collection has been presented. This sort of serial "stutter" is used as an extension, or more often at the beginning of the row, with such departures from strict serialism often reinforcing a tonal center.

Timbre and Sonority

Webern's influence on Stravinsky seems to have had less to do with the rigors of serial technique than with his sound, which also serves Stravinsky as a historical referent. Besides mimicking the wide leaps and intricate rhythms of Webern's style, Stravinsky adopts the Austrian composer's concentration of musical materials. Although Agon is scored for a large orchestra, its texture is sparse, with a different collection of instruments for each dance. Seldom do more than four or five voices sound at once. Within a dance, the orchestration changes, instruments constantly entering and dropping out. The most orchestrationally consistent movements are those of the First Pas-de-Trois, which contain some of Stravinsky's earliest music for the work.

Agon's distinctive sonority is affected by pitch and interval. For instance, a second-inversion tonic chord within a sparse texture, often orchestrated with a bright timbre, creates the light sound typical of the score. The rub of seconds (and, by extension, simultaneous major/minor thirds) is present throughout the ballet, giving a piquant
sharpness to a delicate texture or a brassy edge to a fuller one. And even though there are no bells in the orchestra, chiming intonations are heard throughout *Agon*.

Chiming intonations were noted by Asafiev as early as 1929 as a distinctive trait of Stravinsky’s sound. Bell sounds, found in much Russian art music, are a prominent feature of Stravinsky’s early Russian period, during which, Asafiev posits, the chiming intonation moved from pictorial folklorism to a structural element (in *Les Noces*). Chimes also appear in a number of Stravinsky’s later works, but in *Agon* they are an important articulating sonority, often beginning and ending a section. They are, in fact, the first and last sonorities in the ballet. The pitch content at these critical points is derived from Stravinsky’s principal constructive intervals for *Agon*, which are also related to the sound of bells: stacks of fifths, containing seconds, and often major/minor thirds with the minor third underneath. These beginning and ending sonorities are played with an accent on an upbeat involving about half of the instrumental forces in a staccato attack while the other half (mainly in the upper registers) sustain their pitches, emulating overtones. In Stravinsky’s chiming intonations, instrumentation is less crucial to the sonority than interval structure, attack, and duration.

Sonority in *Agon* is also affected by the historical referents already mentioned. Stravinsky himself linked the Bransle de Poitou [Double], which he scored with trombones, and the Bransle Simple, for trumpets and clarinets, to jazz influences. Many of Stravinsky’s sonorities also seem to have been influenced by the clichés of classical ballet. As in a typical grand pas de deux, the Adagio of Stravinsky’s Pas-de-Deux is scored for strings.

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19Louis Andriessen and Elmer Schönberger present a whole list of “chiming” works in the last chapter of *The Apollonian Clockwork: On Stravinsky* (trans. Jeff Hamburg (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989)), but they omit *Agon*, although some of the works listed are less obvious manifestations of the intonation.

20*Dialogues and a Diary*, 53-54.
with a solo violin. This simple texture and rhythmically flexible solo can accommodate the bodily movements of a particular dancer, much as the rhythm of an Italian opera aria can be adapted to suit the performance of a particular singer. Certain timbres connote gender in Agon, as in the older ballet repertoire: brass are associated with male dancers (the trumpets in the Pas-de-Quatre and the Bransle Simple, the trombones in the Saraband-Step, the horns in the male variation of the Pas-de-Deux); flutes are associated with female dancers (the Gaillarde, the Bransle Gay, the female variation of the Pas-de-Deux).

Rhythm

Because Agon is a ballet, rhythm is of great importance. Because it was written by Stravinsky, the rhythmic structure is complex and unpredictable. The tension between regularity and irregularity of rhythm is maintained throughout the ballet, almost to the point that irregularity becomes regular. The devices by which Stravinsky accomplishes this are ostinati, the coalescence and erosion of rhythmic figures, silent downbeats, and a contravention of the traditional function of the barline.

Ostinati are a hallmark of Stravinsky's style, and are useful besides to dancers performing to music that is otherwise rhythmically complex. In Agon, the ostinato often provides a steady background against which the musical middleground shifts (most obviously in the Bransle Gay). While the listener may be struck by the rhythmic variety in Agon, a steady pulse is present in almost every movement. The most rhythmically flexible section of the ballet is the Adagio of the Pas-de-Deux, where two artists, not dancing in unison, preclude any problem of ensemble.21

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21In the classical ballet, the adagio is an extended section of partnering, with the male dancer supporting the ballerina almost constantly, allowing her to display and extend her technique—multiple turns, long or high leaps, even dramatic, acrobatic dives that would be impossible without her partner. (It is also an opportunity for her to display her line and extension at a slow tempo.) Stravinsky would surely have been aware of this convention and exploited the ease of ensemble here.
Frequently set against the regularity of an ostinato are phrases that start from a tiny cell and gradually grow into a melody (the Double Pas-de-Quatre or the Bransle Gay, for instance). The conflict between the ostinato and the expanding melodic phrase creates a dynamic rhythmic tension. Sometimes the coalescing phrase sounds alone, precluding a sense of steady rhythm, even when the expansion is regular (the Pas-de-Quatre). In contrast, in the Prelude/Interlude movements, the center is marked by the opposite effect, the erosion of a theme into rhythmic instability.

Roger Shattuck has written that Stravinsky “inverts our conventions of hearing so that silence has more weight than sound.” In Agon, Stravinsky experiments with the play of sound and silence. A sense of anacrusis pervades the score: the silent downbeat/upbeat beginning of phrases, or the upbeat cadence after a rest. The jazzy quality of Agon strikes the ear most readily in this upbeat cadence, especially as the cadential chord is often shaded by a second masquerading as a seventh. In phrase repetitions, the first note is sometimes shortened or omitted to make a phrase which formerly began on a downbeat begin on an upbeat.

In other passages, regular rhythms are set across barlines, the displacement making steady rhythms unsteady and providing silences that, rather than impeding the rhythmic flow, energize it. The unsettling effect of these displacements is reminiscent of Stravinsky’s supposedly poor text setting, which Richard Taruskin has argued was a

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23 This quality, long a part of Stravinsky’s personal style, was also one he admired in Webern [Igor Stravinsky, Themes and Conclusions (London: Faber and Faber, 1972): 94].

conscious choice, defamiliarizing the text and sensitizing the listener to the sounds of the words.25

Symmetrical Asymmetries

With so many complex devices composed into a relatively short work, how did Stravinsky organize Agon? In no sense did he systematically give exposition and resolution to all the disparate musical elements in the ballet. More apt than an architectural model in Agon is the analogy to weaving patterned cloth: pitch groups, techniques, structures appear and disappear in shifting configurations in a music that, for all its surface diversity, is tightly bound together by the interaction of its elements.

At the largest level, of course, this plan projects architectural symmetries. The score is organized by threes: three major parts, each with three main sections. In the central part, each section has three subdivisions which can be divided into groups of three dances by setting aside the Prelude/Interlude; or as (1) Prelude/Interlude, (2) paired dances, and (3) coda. The Pas-de-Deux has three variations. Thus, the middle part contains a number of interlocking tripartite symmetries. Within the individual movements, binary and ternary divisions are often superimposed. Taken together, the outer divisions create their own symmetries. Perhaps most obvious is that the opening Pas-de-Quatre is almost literally recapitulated at the end of the Four Trios. This reprise frames the entire ballet with nearly identical music and produces an arch-shaped pattern in the whole [see Table 2.1].

Agon is built of brief movements, most of which have distinct interior sections, the disparate styles of which are the likely source of Agon's reputation as "eclectic." Although the sections vary greatly in orchestration, style, and compositional technique, the recurring elements we have explored—historical reference, tonality, linear processes, timbre and

sonority, rhythm, symmetrical asymmetries and the play between binary and ternary—create continuities that can be sensed by listeners without a technical musical background, such as dance critics Edwin Denby and John Martin, and George Balanchine's patron and business partner, Lincoln Kirstein. Yet these elements are not usually considered by music analysts, who deem them surface or foreground events, leading to a perhaps exaggerated view of \textit{Agon}'s eclecticism—Goléa's "regrettable disparity of style." An examination of the various movements of \textit{Agon} will help illustrate how Stravinsky weaves his musical fabric from these threads.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. \textit{Pas-de-Quatre} (4 boys)</th>
<th>diatonic (C)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Double \textit{Pas-de-Quatre} (8 girls)</td>
<td>diatonic (D), serial techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triple \textit{Pas-de-Quatre}: Coda (4 boys, 8 girls)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| II. First \textit{Pas-de-Trois}: | |
| \textit{Prelude} (1 boy, 2 girls) | bitonal (C/B\textsuperscript{♭}) |
| Saraband-Step (1 boy) | almost tonal (B\textsuperscript{♭}-F-F-B\textsuperscript{♭}) |
| Gailliarde (2 girls) | diatonic (C) |
| Coda (1 boy, 2 girls) | serial (C) octatonic |
| Second \textit{Pas-de-Trois} | |
| \textit{Interlude} (2 boys, 1 girl) | bitonal (C/B\textsuperscript{♭}) |
| Bransle Simple (2 boys) | serial (D) octatonic |
| Bransle Gay (1 girl) | serial (b minor?) |
| Bransle Double (2 boys, 1 girl) | serial (C) octatonic |
| \textit{Pas-de-Deux} | |
| \textit{Interlude} (1 boy, 1 girl) | bitonal (C/B\textsuperscript{♭}) |
| Adagio (1 boy, 1 girl) | cellular construction, minor 2nds and 3rds |
| 1st variation (1 boy) | Major 2nds and 3rds |
| 2nd variation (1 girl) | Major 2nds, minor 3rds |
| Refrain (1 boy) | Major 2nds and 3rds |
| Coda (1 boy, 1 girl) | symmetrical sets, minor 2nds and 3rds |

| III. Four Duos (4 x 1 boy, 1 girl) | serial, minor 2nds and 3rds (C/F) |
| Four Trios (4 x 1 boy, 2 girls) | serial fugue (C) |
| Coda (4 boys, 8 girls) | diatonic (C) |

\textit{[recapitulation of Pas-de-Quatre]}

\textbf{Table 2.1: Plan of \textit{Agon}, based on the outline devised by Stravinsky and Balanchine}
Pas-de-Quatre

The music of the Pas-de-Quatre is built of variants of several small sections (labeled with lower case letters in Table 2.2), each a few measures in length, distinct in texture, melodic profile, harmony, and sonority. These small blocks are repeated in the same order each time, creating a series of musical strophes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strophe 1</th>
<th>Strophe 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 1-6</td>
<td>7-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-B-C</td>
<td>F-G_(b)-C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(C: I)</td>
<td>(V)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a'</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-19</td>
<td>19-22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(D-g-A)</td>
<td>F-G_(b)-C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(V)</td>
<td>(V)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ext</td>
<td>palindromic transition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strophe 3</th>
<th>Strophe 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a''</td>
<td>b'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>35-38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c-D_b-G_b</td>
<td>F-G_(b)-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shift to 4th</td>
<td>shift to 4th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sonority</td>
<td>sonority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a'''</td>
<td>d'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-53</td>
<td>54-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-C-G =&gt;</td>
<td>semi-functional,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shift to 4th</td>
<td>cadence to (V)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-B_b-E_b</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2: Structural pattern of the Pas-de-Quatre

The opening measure of the Pas-de-Quatre, in which the trumpet reiterates the pitch C over a F-B-C trichord, introduces three important devices in the score: a silent downbeat; a chord of three pitches, formed by a fifth with the third pitch a second away; and a rhythmicized pedal point [see Example 2.1]. The reiterated pitch is not just an important rhythmic motif; it establishes a pitch center. The second and third bars also start with a silent downbeat, each bar extending the C for a longer time; the third iteration continues into the first melodic motion away from C, at which point the second trumpet enters in imitation with an abbreviated version of the first trumpet's phrase. The fanfare cadences in the horns in measure 6, arriving on C on an upbeat. The upbeat cadence, like the upbeat phrase beginning, recurs throughout the ballet.
Example 2.1: The opening of the Pas-de-Quatre (mm. 1-6)

After the fanfare [a in Table 2.2] a more homophonic section [b] continues the premises: it enters on an upbeat and is based on a sustained F-G-C trichord. The pitch B is retained in the section as the basses and cellos oscillate between G and B in 16th-note triplets. This oscillation strengthens the sense of C Major with a response on the dominant to the fanfare’s call on the tonic. The three bars of the b section, with its static melodic motion and sustained fifths in the winds, provide a moment of repose between the fanfare
and the section which follows in bars 10-13. After the heralding quality of the a section, the b section’s inactivity might be anticlimactic without the change of harmony.

The pitch G provides the tonal center of section c. The texture of c, although thicker than in the other sections, still does not support full triadic part-writing. Instead, Stravinsky continues to suggest functional harmony by melodic outline and brief vertical coincidences [see Example 2.2].

Example 2.2: Compressed chord progression: part c of Strophe 1, mm. 10-13

There are two strands of harmony—one in the harp and mandolin (doubled by harmonics in the solo basses), and one in the low strings and piano. The lower strand starts on G then sketches out an A minor triad (ii of G). In the upper, two lines moving

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26 The G in the cellos has two possible, interrelated readings, neither exclusive of the other: it could imply a ii7 chord, or it could be a participant in the pedal G of the basses and piano.
narrowly in contrary motion allude to a progression of V-vi*-V/ii, repeated, ending on V. Neither of these progressions makes much tonal sense on its own, but their vertical interaction gives them a functional resonance—tonic and dominant sound at once, on G and A in alternation. Here we have a more extended presentation of a tonicized pitch (G, with a fifth and a leading tone) against a less strongly established pitch a second away (the more tenuous A minor).

The a' section at the beginning of the second strophe is an inversion of the first in melody and pitch level. Whereas the melody of the first a was narrow, at first static then descending, that of a' has a more expansive curve, rising almost through an octave before descending; and whereas in a the principal pitch (C) was a fifth below G, in a' it is a fifth above G (D), though less strongly emphasized. The melody cadences on G in the first trumpet and on A by the following first horn, again producing the characteristic sonority of a fifth with a second (D-G-A).

The next components of the second strophe, b and c, return much the same as before, with slight internal rhythmic variants, but the extension of the second strophe in measures 26-29, derived from the texture of c, also offers something new. While not serial in the manner of the Second Viennese School, the passage is highly organized, linear and symmetrical. Only two notes of the twelve are missing (F and A*), and each instrument has its own group of a few notes which it spreads over wide-leaping intervals. The clarinets are the pivotal instruments, playing the first palindromes in the score: each has a set of eleven notes with a two-note tag of pitches already sounded [see Table 2.3 and Example 2.3]. The two sonorities chosen for this tag, C-E and A-C# are significant, as they mark structural points of symmetry in the palindromic set: the C-E is the central point of the palindrome;

27An imitative fanfare in the trumpets, each a' is more a reprise of texture and instrumentation than of melodic content.
and the A-C# is at the halfway point of the series on either side of the center. This tag is like a musical pointer, emphasizing the symmetry of the ballet's first palindrome and hinting at the future importance of such structures in the score.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cl. 1</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>Bb</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>Bb</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>Bb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cl. 2</td>
<td>Bb</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>C#</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C#</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.3: Palindromic set in mm. 26-29

Example 2.3: Palindromic section, mm. 26-29, and return of a (third strophe)

These two pitch pairs are also the ones which have been least used in the section: C-E only at the central point, and A-C# only twice. The G-B in 4th and 8th position in the set is heard only twice in the clarinets, but it is heard throughout the section in the flutes.
The extension of Strophe 2 occurs at the center of this 55-measure movement. It thus introduces a new element into the weave, permitting the Pas-de-Quatre to forecast the harmonic plan of the entire ballet—tonal/serial/tonal—a sequence that also recurs on a number of smaller levels. The tripartite division of the movement created by this extension also has bipartite implications: it separates the first two strophes from the second two, the second two being a harmonic inversion of the first.

The fanfare of Strophe 3 returns to C, as in the first strophe, but now against a new harmonic background of D\textsuperscript{b}-G\textsuperscript{b}. The C-D\textsuperscript{b}-G\textsuperscript{b} trichord contains the same elements as the trichord in Strophe 1 (a fifth with a minor second), yet in this new context the fifth is now clearly voiced as a fourth and the minor second is placed outside the fourth. In addition, the minor-second pitch is the active voice [see Example 2.4].

![Example 2.4: Comparison of the harmonic structure in Strophe 1 and Strophe 3](image)

Stravinsky here pays homage to the protocols of traditional key patterns, even though not in a traditionally tonal fashion. D\textsuperscript{b}-G\textsuperscript{b} is the furthest departure (in functional terms) from the tonic C, and it even occurs at approximately the same point as would the furthest harmonic remove from the tonic—the third strophe of four in the Pas-de-Quatre is analogous to either the beginning of the second half of a binary form, or the development section of a sonata form (the third section if the exposition is repeated). The D\textsuperscript{b}-G\textsuperscript{b} harmony is multivalent in this ballet, however; although here it plays the role of the harmonically distant tritone, it will nevertheless act in later passages as a dominant (most
prominently in the retransition to the recapitulation of the Pas-de-Quatre in the Four Trios), leading to the tonic by expanding linearly to a C-G fifth.

Strengthening the sense of harmonic inversion in the third strophe, the ensuing b' section is based on the trichord E\textsubscript{b}-B\textsubscript{b}-F, containing the two fifths below F instead of F-C-G, which contains the two fifths above it. Rather than the expected reprise of the c section, b' is followed by seven bars of d, a section that extends the bass oscillation of b' and adds to it another, slower oscillation in the winds between the two harmonies associated with the b sections (F-C-G/F-B\textsubscript{b}-E\textsubscript{b}).

The brief a''' and d' of Strophe 4 bring the movement to a close on a sonority built up of fifths, F-C-G-D.\textsuperscript{29} Without the D, this sonority is the trichord associated with the b sections in the first two strophes; however, it may also be construed as the central pitch C flanked by two fifths (subdominant and dominant), and when it serves as the final sonority of the Pas-de-Quatre (and the entire ballet), it sounds rhetorically as a tonic. The voicing of the chord, with C as the lowest note, strengthens the sense of tonic; but in the context of this movement, it assumes the role of the dominant. This kind of multivalence is in keeping with Stravinsky's general penchant for ambiguity and misdirection, and recalls simpler parallels in earlier music, such as Beethoven's ploy in the first chord of his First Symphony, where the tonic pitch in the bass serves as the root of a secondary dominant.

To summarize: the Pas-de-Quatre is a concise exposition of the ballet's most striking features, and as it returns at the end of the ballet in an almost literal repeat, it will also serve as a summation. Particularly important in this exposition are:

1. The rhythmic pedal (especially the sixteenth-note triplet), a prime constructive element of the ballet particularly prominent throughout the three Pas-de-Quatre, and the upbeat patterns of phrase beginnings and cadences that pervade the entire work.

\textsuperscript{29}The cadential figures, based on an augmentation of the trumpet phrase in measure 4, heightening the movement’s sense of symmetry.
(2) A tendency toward serialism and symmetry in the tonally resonant Pas-de-Quatre, introduced at the extension of the second strophe, where, in the center of the movement, Stravinsky brings in the tightly controlled pitch content of the clarinets' palindromic set.

(3) The tonal centers (C, D, F, G) explored in the Pas-de-Quatre, primary ones for the ballet. Their prominence also highlights the emphasis on fifth-relationships in the harmonic structure of the score. The late-appearing $D_b-G_b$ returns in the ballet in a secondary but significant harmonic role, as a sort of dominant leading to the recapitulation of the Pas-de-Quatre at the end.

(4) The tendency to think in terms of both binary and ternary divisions, adumbrated in the pattern of the movement. The four strophes are easily divisible into two halves: the third strophe is a harmonic mirror of the first, inverting the primary fifth to a fourth and building a stack of fifths down from F rather than up from it. In a smaller echo of this bipartite structure, each pair of strophes in the two halves of the movement is similarly constructed. The tripartite divisions are smaller and more subtle: three sections are present in three of the four strophes, and the palindromic, almost-serial section is at the center of the movement, flanked by almost-tonal areas.

**Double and Triple Pas-de-Quatre**

In the score, the Double Pas-de-Quatre and Triple Pas-de-Quatre are separate movements. The listener, however, is unlikely to hear them that way, because the Triple Pas-de-Quatre (also marked Coda in the score) begins *attacca* from the Double Pas-de-Quatre with a recapitulation of its opening material. The only persuasive reason to perceive any break between the two movements is choreographic—someone watching the ballet will distinguish the two movements by the return of the male dancers to the stage. Taken together, the Double and Triple Pas-de-Quatre create an ABA' pattern, with a nested aba' in the first A section [see Table 2.4].
Table 2.4: Structural pattern of the Double and Triple Pas-de-Quatre

The major rhythmic components from the first Pas-de-Quatre are still present here, though rearranged. Like the first movement, the Double Pas-de-Quatre begins with a rhythmicized pedal point, but this one develops into accompaniment rather than melody (a symmetrical asymmetry). As in the opening Pas-de-Quatre, the pedal establishes a sense of tonal centering, this time on D. The rhythm is similar to the triplet “rumbling” figure in the low strings in the Pas-de-Quatre, but all the strings play this pedal point. In contrast to the previous movement, the downbeat quality here is strong, likely a practical expedient to help keep eight (and later twelve) dancers together. The result is a regular pulse, over which the oboe and bassoon play a duple line (more a heterophonic decoration of the pedal point than a melody) with a silent downbeat at the beginning of every phrase.31

In the first three measures (mm. 61-63), the oboe and bassoon outline a structure similar to the F-C-G construction of the first movement. The central pitch (D) is symmetrically flanked, though this time by minor thirds rather than fifths—a linear manifestation of Stravinsky’s concern for symmetrical intervals. Each phrase of the winds is slightly longer, reiterating and extending its predecessor (as did the trumpet in the first movement), slowly unwinding chromatically through a tritone, a minor third above and below the central pitch, D. As the phrases grow longer, they also grow more expansive in range.

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30Stravinsky numbers the measures consecutively throughout the score.

31The triplet ostinato against the duple melody is a small but recognizable manifestation of the conflict of the binary and ternary division.
At the end of the a section, a full measure (m. 68) on an A pedal in the cellos gives a definite sense of an half cadence (I-V), an important tonal resonance as the music now moves to a new section. Though attenuated in local progressions, tonality is still operating in Stravinsky's architecture.

In the b section, the rhythmic ostinato continues on the pitch A. Flutes, clarinets, and trumpets play triads antiphonally with clarinets, bassoons, and horns, but neither their motion nor their relationship to the A pedal is tonal: B♭-minor and D♭-minor trade with E-minor and C-minor. These chords emphasize the conflict of major-minor thirds found throughout the ballet, and provide another example of Stravinsky's misdirection: the b section is one of the few in the entire ballet with explicit triads, yet it is more destructive of a tonal sense than most of the serial sections.

Despite the lack of tonal orientation in this section, one chord—C-minor in its second inversion—does assume importance by its relative tonal stability above the pedal, its rhythmic placement, and its meaning for the entire ballet. C is more consonant with A than B♭ or D♭, and the C-minor chord falls on the downbeats of bar 70 and its repetition in bar 72. An alteration of the ostinato with a descending scale shoves the apparent downbeat one beat forward, aligning with the written downbeat so that a fleeting G reinforces the sounding C-minor chord in the winds. In the context of this ballet, where “tonic” triads often appear in second inversion, the normally weak voicing lends additional weight to the C-minor chord. This is also the first appearance of C as an apparently irrational pitch, reminding the ear of its centrality to the whole despite local surroundings which contradict it [see Example 2.5].

32 Their figure recalls the d section of the Pas-de-Quatre.
Example 2.5: Double Pas-de-Quatre, measures 69-70

The directed expansion of the first a is curtailed almost immediately in a' at measure 73. The ascent from D to F is not answered here by a descent to B, but stalls instead on C, reinforcing the C-centricity hinted at by the C-minor triad in the previous section. The melodic motion becomes increasingly constricted to the D-E♭ of the ostinato, returning to the heterophonic effect of the beginning. A crescendo in measure 79 leads to an expectant beat of silence and a *forte* restatement of the ostinato, but instead of the established pattern of four beats, the ostinato sounds for only three. This rhythm is ambiguous. Is the beat of rest a silent downbeat, as we have seen so often in the ballet, or is the measure shifted to the right and amputated? Balanchine evidently considered the answer to be both, for he sets both possibilities on different groups of dancers.
The final section (c) of the Double Pas-de-Quatre (beginning in m. 81) introduces a significant style shift: it is constructed on serial, though not dodecaphonic principles. As this section is also the B section of the two-movement group, it creates another tonal/serial/tonal arch. In place of a row, Stravinsky uses melodic fragments or sets consistently associated with instruments or groups of instruments. Only the triplet rhythmic motif from the ostinato remains from the previous sections, played by the trumpets to reinforce the A-minor arpeggio in the bass voices. The A-minor triad is the set for the low instruments, both complemented and conflicted by the antiphonal figure for the violas and cellos, A-B-C♯-C, another manifestation of the Major/minor conflict that may be observed throughout the ballet. The repetition of these short, accompanimental sets (the A-minor triad and the A-B-C♯-C) is easily detected. The use of the other sets is more covert, hidden by greater length, rhythmic alterations and serial operations. All of the sets are repeated at least twice in prime order, albeit with slight rhythmic alterations, before different versions are introduced. In addition to the serial techniques of inversion, retrograde, and retrograde inversions, there are also slight variations in the reversal of an interval (a major third up instead of an expected minor sixth down; a fifth down instead of a fourth up). Sometimes, prime versions of the sets are immediately retrograded, creating palindromes. The longer sets, all of them with internal elements of symmetry, are diagrammed in Example 2.6, which also indicates the instrument that introduces the set.

33Robert Craft (Agon, 1957) and Sabina Jahnke ["Für die Praxis: Igor Strawinskys 'Agon'," Musik und Bildung no. 3 (1971): 597] have both mentioned this section as serial, but neither wrote in detail about how the serialism operates; Craft mentions only the flute motif.

34For example, in measures 85-86, a prime statement in the clarinet is retrograded in the bassoon.
Example 2.6: The serial sets in the Double-Pas-de-Quatre

The re-insinuation of tonally-oriented music begins in measure 86, with short scalar figures and mordent-like figures based on the triplet-ostinato rhythm; the flute has a version of the chromatic oboe/bassoon line from the opening of the movement. These figures turn the harmony toward G (minor), a fourth above the central pitch (D) of the movement. By measures 89-90, these tonal figures have emerged from background to foreground, pervading all the instruments, as the harmony shifts to C-Major/minor. The remaining few measures are triadic, if non-functional, and the movement ends on a strong G-Major chord with an added C, another manifestation of the non-functional but pervasive C.

The Triple Pas-de-Quatre fuses features of the two sections of the Double Pas-de-Quatre—the ostinato and chromatic heterophony/melody from the first part with the serial sets of the second. The Triple Pas-de-Quatre is the longest section in one style and texture so far, a fitting conclusion for the first part of the ballet.
The movement begins *attacca subito* from the Double Pas-de-Quatre on a D pedal. This time the ostinato is stated in the winds, while the slowly unwinding chromatic line moves to the strings, reversing the orchestration of the Double Pas-de-Quatre. At the end of measure 97, a version of the flute motif appears in the flutes and trumpet, emerging out of the rhythmic ostinato figure. The timbral association in this ballet—flutes with the girls and trumpets with the boys—hints symbolically at the first combination of all the dancers on stage.

With a silent upbeat in measure 104, the unwinding melody becomes octatonic, not chromatic. As the movement progresses, octave displacements begin to invade the texture; by the last four measures, almost all linear motion is by ninth and seventh. The movement ends on a quintal harmony in the upper registers, $B^b-F-C-G-D-A$, adding a fifth on either side of the final sonority of the first Pas-de-Quatre and encompassing the major pitch areas of the Pas-de-Quatre movements.

The Double and Triple Pas-de-Quatre reinforce the main features of the first Pas-de-Quatre:

1. The rhythmic pedal retains its structural importance, here in an accompanimental rather than a melodic role. Phrases and sections continue to begin and cadence on upbeats.

2. The serial implications and palindromic structure of the four measures at the center of the Pas-de-Quatre are expanded in the serial sets of the center section of the Double and Triple Pas-de-Quatre. Whether this was part of the initial conception of the Pas-de-Quatre (a seemingly natural progression from the works immediately preceding *Agon*) or was part of the revision that Stravinsky undertook after working on the dodecaphonic sections, this integration of serial technique into the first part of the ballet negates the view expressed by Morton and others.

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Craft, 284.
that serialism in *Agon* does not begin until the Coda of the First Pas-de-Trois, where the first complete 12-tone row appears.

(3) The final chord of the three Pas-de-Quatre comprises all the major areas (B⁻, F, C, G, D, A) of the movements. While B⁻ and F are comparatively underrepresented in this first part of the ballet, their presence here foreshadows the next part: B⁻ is a primary pitch area throughout the second part, and B⁻F is the harmonic polarity of the Saraband-Step, the first movement after the Prelude.

(4) The interlocking binary and ternary divisions observed in the opening Pas-de-Quatre are raised to a higher level in the Double and Triple Pas-de-Quatre. The Double Pas-de-Quatre is divisible into two large sections, the first section of which contains a smaller ternary structure. The two movements together create a ternary form, expanding and developing the tonal/serial/tonal ternary tendency of the Pas-de-Quatre.

**First Pas-de-Trois:**

**Prelude**

The music of the Prelude appears three times in *Agon* (the second and third times, it is labeled an "Interlude"), functioning much like a ritornello in the Baroque concerto.³⁶ The Prelude announces the central part of the work, and the Interludes articulate its major sections (the Second Pas-de-Trois and the Pas-de-Deux). A further parallel with the Baroque concerto is suggested by the contrast between the relatively full orchestral texture of the Prelude and the more lightly scored dances—the concertino, as it were—which follow it.

³⁶Like the Saraband-Step which follows the Prelude, the ritornello effect suggests a later Baroque model than the 17th-century dance manual that was the nominal inspiration for the ballet.
In initiating the next major part of the ballet, Stravinsky retains tonal and gestural aspects of the preceding part. The balance of C and G tonal areas in this movement is reminiscent both of the beginning of the first Pas-de-Quatre and, by transposition, of the Double Pas-de-Quatre, which moved from D to A. B♭ is a secondary tonal layer in both the C and G sections, foreshadowed by the Double and Triple Pas-de-Quatre and foreshadowing the Saraband-Step. Gesturally, the trumpet plays a reiterated pitch at the beginning of the movement, and the transition is marked by sustained sonority with a low, rhythmicized pedal—a striking similarity to the opening of the Pas-de-Quatre (a and b), an almost subliminal marker of a major structural division of the ballet.

The Prelude is richly scored: three flutes, two bassoons, four trumpets, viola, bass, three solo cellos, three solo basses, timpani, tom-tom (alternatim high timpani), and harp. Although the lower registers seem to dominate the instrumentation, almost all of the instruments sound in the octave above middle C, including the double basses, which chiefly play harmonics. Trumpets, not flutes, have the highest range, resulting in a bright and transparent sonority, even within a close texture. The orchestration of the Prelude/ritornello will shift subtly later as the music is placed in new contexts, absorbing the sonorities of the dances that surround it.

The twenty-four measures of 3/4 in the Prelude are divided into two sections of different length and character [see Table 2.5]. The first ten measures [A] are sweeping and urgent, with some bars sub-divided into two 3/8 measures. Then follow four bars of transition, and ten measures of new music [B]—slower, with a stately, almost grave character. This section is reminiscent of an ancient courtly dance, forecasting for the ear, even more plainly than much of the music that follows, the part of Agon modeled on Baroque dances.
Table 2.5: Structural pattern of the Prelude

The movement is strongly pitch-centered but not functionally tonal. Almost all of it is set out in a texture of two layers, each with its own instrumentation, range and central pitch. In the A section, the lower layer is basically one line dominated by the timpani and tom-tom. The timpani play a rhythmicized pedal point which arpeggiates a B♭-minor chord, reinforced by the bassoon.37

Pizzicato violas added in measure 128 mark a shift of harmony: B♭ remains the predominant pitch, but the arpeggio pivots around B♭ to B♭-G♭-Eb. This harmonic axis of the fifth, exemplified by the B♭/Eb shift, is also reflected in the higher and more complex layer of texture in the Prelude.

In this layer, the two primary elements are a rhythmic pedal on C in the trumpet and an upward-sweeping figure in the flutes and solo cellos at the unison: C-D-F-G-B-C. These pitches tonicize C while pointedly avoiding modality. Stravinsky deploys this octave figure in canon in measures 126-28, set forth so that the entrances of successive voices form a fifth with the voices already sounding; the fifth resonates in the ear as a structural element.

37The bassoon’s broad leaps produce more distinctive timbral changes than in the other instruments, as it crosses the break from the rounder, low-register pitches to the airier, reedier middle-register half-holed pitches. Most of these leaps also require “flicking”—lightly hitting the whisper key, which not only makes the indicated slurs almost impossible, but often creates a percussive attack to the note—in other words, the bassoon is partially converted into a percussion instrument.
The trumpets are the primary sonority in measures 128-31, and apart from their striking sound (which echoes the beginning of the ballet), Stravinsky uses them to apply a structural principle. With the dissolution of the canon in bars 128-29, the trumpets assume primary importance with a polyphonic fanfare that intersperses the repeated-note figure of the first Pas-de-Quatre’s pedal point with aggressive short-long dotted figures that (except for Trumpet II) move upward. In the succession of its vertical structures, the trumpet passage lacks a harmonic progression; the parts, separately and in combination, nevertheless do melodically outline chords basic to the key of C [see Example 2.7].

Example 2.7: Trumpets, mm. 128-31

Although the chordal allusions are rapid and simultaneous, one can hear a sense of the dominant, G. In a familiar harmonic rub of seconds, A minor is present against the G throughout the section, though it gradually loses prominence. Perhaps the most striking harmonic moment comes in the second beat of measure 128, framed by a rest as the flutes

\[ \text{Example 2.7: Trumpets, mm. 128-31} \]

\[ \text{Although the chordal allusions are rapid and simultaneous, one can hear a sense of the dominant, G. In a familiar harmonic rub of seconds, A minor is present against the G throughout the section, though it gradually loses prominence. Perhaps the most striking harmonic moment comes in the second beat of measure 128, framed by a rest as the flutes} \]

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38This is the point where the lower layer reverses the direction of its intervallic minor third from B\textsuperscript{b}-D\textsuperscript{b} to B\textsuperscript{b}-G\textsuperscript{b} and will eventually reach E\textsuperscript{b} at the end of the section (m. 131), creating a E\textsuperscript{b}-minor triad in retrospect.
and cellos finish their canon—Trumpets II and IV sound A and E together,\(^{39}\) filling in the scalar gap in the octave motif and establishing a major modality for C, even as the harmony now moves on to G. By this point in the ballet, the tonal juxtaposition of fifth-related tonalities is firmly established as a compositional device.

A G-Major chord in second inversion is sustained by the three solo basses in harmonics from the middle of bar 131 to the beginning of the B section (upbeat to bar 136). Gesturally, this recalls the trumpets at the beginning of the movement, with a sustained sonority building anticipation toward the next section. Where the trumpet played a rhythmicized pedal, the basses sustain a triad. The timpani returns to B♭ minor (this time accentuated by the harp). The rhythmic figure played by the timpani and harp diminishes from 3 beats to 2 beats to \(1\frac{3}{4}\) to 1 [see Example 2.8].

![Example 2.8: Fragmenting bassline, mm. 132-135](image)

The pattern which began the movement on the downbeat of a bar now starts on the third beat of the bar, and the continual shortening of the figure erodes the sense of a steady meter and reverses the process of the first two Pas-de-Quatre, where motivic fragments built up a theme.

The polytonal layers of A are maintained through the first four bars of B: the timpani and harp sedately arpeggiate a B♭-minor chord as one solo bass sustains its D, and the other two wind in thirds around a G-Major triad. The flutes accentuate the periodic sounding of the G-Major triad in the basses, while a solo cello fills in the rests with a C, a lightly stressed pedal which momentarily splits the upper, apparently G-Major layer into its

\(^{39}\)The lower tonal layer (timpani, bassoon, viola) moves to G♭ for the first time on the second beat of bar 128, and this incidental sonority with the trumpets across the two layers is a familiar one, G♭-A-E, another variation on a fifth with a semitone.
own opposition of fifths, G and C. In measure 140, the timpani and harp drop out and C reasserts itself as tonic. The first substantial harmonic progression in the Prelude closes the movement in C Major.\footnote{Although there is no third in the final chord, the E in the bassoon from the previous measure rings through. The only anomalous note is the B in the first solo cello, but it is so weakly voiced that it seems to be more coloration than function, or rather, its function is color, weakening the final C-G fifth with a hint of the jazzy major seventh. It also, of course, is another manifestation of the semitone with a fifth.}

Although it begins on a downbeat, the Prelude exhibits the same metric ambiguity and sense of anacrusis as the other movements: the sweeping octave figures in A are first presented on an upbeat;\footnote{Although some later entries of the figure enter on a downbeat, they are entries internal to the canon and do not have a strong enough downbeat impetus to detract from the initial impression of an anacrusis.} as the trumpets come to the fore in mm. 128-131, their rising short-long dotted rhythms shift the emphasis from the downbeat to the higher, upbeat note; and the sustained chord in the solo basses in measure 131 splits the measure in half with its attack, echoing of the subdivision of bars at the beginning. With the erosion of the reiterated figure in the transition, rhythmic instability reaches its peak. The B section reasserts a steady rhythm, but with subtle counteraccents. The opposite of the split bars occurs here—the combination of two bars into one “hyperbar,” heightening the sense of broadening with the slower tempo.\footnote{Beginning with a syncopated upbeat, the rudimentary melody in the solo basses groups bars 136-137 and 138-139, and the cadential figures in the winds fall into two measure groups, 139-140 (sliding the “melodic” hyperbars), and 141-142. The final cadence, in measure 143-144, ends, typically of \textit{Agon}, on an upbeat (sustained into an extra measure).} Stravinsky disarticulates, multiplies and hooks up the different meters, as Boris de Schloezer noted of his rhythmic composition.\footnote{\textit{Igor Stravinsky}, ed. Merle Armitage, 100.}

It is impossible to give a precise dance designation to the brief B section. A suggestion of cross-rhythm negates an emphasis on beat two that would suggest a sarabande, and the tempo is too fast for a minuet. It seems almost an abstraction of a
dance, minimal in melodic contour, harmonic language, even rhythm. Yet it sets the stage, in gesture and atmosphere, for the Saraband-Step that follows.

**Saraband-Step**

In some respects, the Saraband-Step is the most traditional movement in *Agon*. Stravinsky’s historical model is not the fast Italian model in de Lauze, but the slower, later French sarabande. The French model is the more common and recognizable today, familiar from its inclusion in the Baroque suite. The French sarabande’s characteristic rhythm \( \frac{1}{4} \frac{3}{4} \) emphasizes beat two of a grave triple meter, and the dance is typically in binary form, with a tonic \( \Rightarrow \) dominant : dominant \( \Rightarrow \) tonic tonal structure. Stravinsky follows these conventions even as he reinterprets them.

Like the Prelude, the Saraband-Step is unusual in *Agon* for its sounded downbeats. This is not to say, however, that the dance is free of metric ambiguity. The rhythm of the traditional Saraband carries an implicit shift of emphasis away from the downbeat, with a stress on 2. Stravinsky respects this tradition without using the stereotypical rhythm. In almost every measure, the longest note is on the second beat, or the second beat is syncopated—in either case, 2 receives an agogic accent. On a smaller level, the short-long rhythm appears, in diminution, as a marker on the downbeat of each half of the dance.

Since most of the sarabandes with which we are familiar today are for the keyboard, it is possible that keyboard textures affected Stravinsky’s choice of texture and timbre. Although there is no documentary evidence of Stravinsky referring to Bach, Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft note that during the composition of *Agon*, Stravinsky familiarized himself with John Dowland’s lute gailliards in versions for guitar,\(^44\) and the *stile brisé* character of lute dances (not to mention the light texture, delicate timbre, and the inclusion of the

\(^44\) *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents*, 645.

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mandolin (probably also influenced by Webern) appear in the shifting instrumentation of the Gailliarde.

The sarabande brings with it not only the rhythmic expectations, but an expectation of homophony, which Stravinsky's contrapuntal texture evades. The close, four-voiced (although not particularly homophonic) texture of Stravinsky's Saraband-Step is sustained throughout, almost as if it were an orchestration of a keyboard piece. The timbre of the movement, like the texture, is unusually consistent for Agon, perhaps emblematic of this first solo dance. The dance is scored for solo violin, playing double- and sometimes triple-stops, tenor trombone, bass trombone, xylophone, and the cadential cellos. Despite the close texture, the frequent double-stopped fourths and fifths in the solo violin maintain the angular sonority of much of the score, and the sevenths and ninths in some of the triple-stops carry a reminder of the "chiming" intonation with their interval structure, accented attack, and sustain of the upper pitches.

In the most obvious reflection of its model, Agon's Saraband-Step is in clear binary form; each half is eight measures long, and there is a two-measure codetta [see Table 2.6].

The second half is an inversion of the first half at the fifth, a technique unusual in a

45 Not all Baroque keyboard sarabandes are in four constant voices, but four voices are the norm in Bach. In the Saraband-Step fifth voices appearing only fleetingly, usually in a reinforcement of a structural pitch (most obvious in the presence of the xylophone). The exception is the addition of the cellos in a turn-like cadential figure in measures 152 and 160. Both types of added voices are not uncommon in Baroque keyboard music.

46 Merely stating that the second half of the Saraband-Step is an inversion of the first does not properly indicate the complexity of Stravinsky's compositional maneuver. If we set aside the xylophone and the cellos, which function only incidentally (the xylophone doubles pitches already present in the texture, but also highlights the significant intervals of the ballet: in measure 146-147, the thirds D-F and E-C are juxtaposed, and in measures 154-155, it is the fifths D-A and F-C) the two trombones and solo violin turn the texture inside out. The two inner voices of the first half of the movement become the outer voices in the second half and the outer voices become the inner. For the most part in the B section, the bass and tenor trombone trade parts, transposed down a fourth and inverted; the solo violin part is subjected to the same process, with the soprano and alto voices trading places. The inversion reflects tonal adjustment, rather than a literal "real" interval inversion, and, measure-by-measure, the relationship of the instruments does not remain constant. In measures 155 and 160 compared to measures 147 and 152, the trombones do not simply trade places and invert their parts at the fifth—each retains its own part. In measure 155,
Baroque sarabande but frequent in the gigue, and also foreshadowed in Agon when the second half of the Pas-de-Quatre began with a harmonic inversion of the first half.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>A'</th>
<th>codetta</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 146-153</td>
<td>154-161</td>
<td>162-163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B♭ =⇒ F</td>
<td>(inversion of 146-153) F =⇒ B♭</td>
<td>F =⇒ B♭₆₅</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.6: Structural pattern of the Saraband-Step

The Saraband-Step is vestigially tonal; its large-scale B♭-F:F-B♭ movement in the bass in each half is difficult to interpret in any other way. But the harmonic language between these boundaries is not traditional: chords are outlined more horizontally than vertically, and the vertical interaction of harmonies is multivalent—chords that seem clear linearly are distorted when heard in combination with other layers.

The most unequivocal chords in the Saraband-Step, not surprisingly, mark the halves of the binary structure, establishing the expected tonal contrast of the movement. Stravinsky’s rendering of the dominant, traditionally reached at the cadence of the first half, is actually a cluster on F, G, and A, but the F is doubled and in the outer voices; the A, of course, provides the third of the F-Major triad, while the G is the now-expected added second. The B♭ cadence in measure 161 is much stronger, as it is the concluding expression of the principal tonal center. Here Stravinsky places B♭₆₅ in the outer voices—the trombones—and within them, D and A in the violin.⁴⁷ The codetta, however, seems to lighten the force of the cadence, ending on B♭₆₅, a variant, for present purposes, of the tonic ⁶₄ chord.

the bass trombone is not inverted, although it is transposed down a fourth; in measure 160, the trombone parts are switched only for the first beat, and both parts are tonally adjusted. The most intricate exchange occurs in measure 156. The tenor trombone takes the upper violin line of measure 148 up a whole step and inverts it; the bass trombone has a simple inversion of the lower violin line; the upper violin part is an inversion of the bass trombone part, down a fourth; and the lower violin part is an inversion of the tenor trombone part, beginning on the same pitch, then jumping to a fourth below.

⁴⁷As the seventh (which can also, of course, be read as a second) is part of the tonic sonority since the opening, its presence here does not significantly weaken the finality of the cadence.
Tonality in the Saraband-Step is more linear than vertical. Single melodic lines may clearly imply diatonic chords. Their vertical combination, however, does not always produce functional progressions, but rather layers of polytonality, as in the Prelude. As the movement begins, all the voices are aligned on a $B^b$-Major/minor seventh chord, but almost immediately they begin to slip out of synchronization, creating the layers as each progresses at its own harmonic rhythm. On the second and third beats, the bass trombone moves toward G-Major, reinforced on beat three by the violin and xylophone, leaving the $B^b$ in the tenor trombone with a dual function—as a tonic pedal, and as a minor third in a Stravinskian major/minor triad.

The harmonic ambiguity built into Stravinsky’s compositional plan reaches a peak in the next two measures. To take bar 148 as an example, each voice has strong triadic tendencies when perceived linearly: the violin stays mainly within C-Major, the tenor trombone D-Major, and the bass trombone B-diminished. Yet notes which seem like passing tones stress other harmonies in vertical interaction with the other instruments: the A and F in the violin reinforce F with the trombones, while E in the violins makes the trombones’ “lower neighbors” on the second half of the first beat sound an E-minor harmony. Likewise, the C-G fifth in the violin on beat three makes the C and E in the trombones sound like chord tones, while linearly they seem like mere passing tones. These horizontal/vertical interactions, however fleeting, are also reflected at a larger level. The

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48 Of course, common-practice tonality is expressed linearly as well as vertically, but the two tend to be in equilibrium. Here the horizontal is more traditionally tonal than the vertical.

49 The A in the violin could also be read as an appoggiatura to the following $B^b$.

50 In measure 147, these linear voices all make a certain diatonic sense—the violin part could be read in $B^b$ as I-vii*/V-V-IV-I over the tonic pedal of the tenor trombone. When one adds in the bass trombone, however, the function of parts of this progression appears to change. The G sixteenth-note in the violin on the first beat of the bar could be seen as a carryover from the G-chord in the previous bar; however, with the $E^b$ in the bass trombone, the G makes the first chord sound like an $E^b$-Major triad with an added second—or it strengthens the C-minor triad outlined in the bass trombone. The same vertical sonority can be interpreted in three different ways, and the three different “solutions” seem equally valid.
trombones play in parallel thirds, and taken together, they strengthen a B-diminished-seventh reading of the measure, juxtaposed to the C-minor of the violin. This creates not only a C/B conflict (the ever-present second), but a simultaneous dominant/tonic [see Example 2.9].

![Example 2.9: Measure 148 of the Saraband-Step](image)

Stravinsky’s chordal “interweaving” creates a dense harmonic texture that, added to the close voicing and dark timbre of the Saraband and the relatively sedate, steady tempo, gives the movement a strikingly heavy affect. This affect is in keeping with the traditional gravity and seriousness of the Baroque sarabande and creates an effective balance with the light, airy Gailliarde that follows.

Gailliarde

The Gailliarde is the strongest aural manifestation in *Agon* of Stravinsky’s interest in Renaissance music, perhaps intentionally balancing the more Baroque tendencies (both in formal structures and complexity) of the Saraband-Step. In describing the typical late 16th-century galliard, Alan Brown writes that it is “almost invariably in triple meter, usually in three strains of regular phrase structure (8, 12 or 16 bars), and...in a simple, homophonic
style with the tune in the upper part. Stravinsky's Gailliarde has three strains—of 7, 8, and 6 bars, with the second strain repeated—making the overall pattern ABBA' with both binary and ternary tendencies, as was seen in earlier movements [see Table 2.7].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B (B)</th>
<th>A'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 164-167</td>
<td>mm. 168-170</td>
<td>mm. 179-184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>171-178 (twice)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C/G</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>G/D =&gt; A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.7: Structural pattern of the Gailliarde

Of the normative three strains, only the middle one has Brown's regular phrase structure. The first is divided into two closely related phrases of different lengths (a and a'); and the last is a varied repeat of "a" preceded by a transitional bar and followed by a bar of cadence. The strains are thus not only irregular in periodicity but also in relation to each other. As for the simple, homophonic texture and the triple meter of the prototype, Stravinsky's Gailliarde contains the most extensive use of canon in Agon and constitutes the most metrically ambiguous movement of a ballet in which metric ambiguity is a constructive principle.

Scored for three flutes, mandolin, timpani, piano, harp, solo viola, three cellos, and two contrabasses, the Gailliarde emphasizes transparent textures and upper registers. Stravinsky rarely doubles parts. The flutes and harp often play harmonics, and the basses only harmonics, leaving the cellos to supply the bass. The unusual timbre and a proclivity toward cross-relations enliven the simple harmony of the dance. Except for some quartal (quintal?) harmonies at the cadence, the first phrase of the Gailliarde may be analyzed as a "Galliard," The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, ed. Stanley Sadie, vol. 7 (London: Macmillan, 1980): 105-107.

This tendency toward cross-relations may have been influenced by their presence in English keyboard and lute dances of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Stravinsky familiarized himself with other types of music during the composition of Agon: we know that he studied Dowland galliards (see above, p. 64-65??), and the Saraband-Step seems influenced by the keyboard suites of the later Baroque.
surprisingly simple tonal progression in C \([I-I_6-I-vii^6-I_6-vi^5-IV-ii (or V/V)-V/ii-ii (quartal)-V_6-vi (quarcal)]\). These chords are used more to color than support the melodic material, which consists of a canon between the harp and the mandolin [see Example 2.10].

![Example 2.10: Canon of the Gailliarde](image)

The harp\(^{53}\) begins the canon on G and is followed three quarter notes later by the mandolin on C. The audibility of a canon between such soft instruments in an orchestra pit is questionable, but the timbre and softness of the harp and mandolin evoke a lute. The canon almost becomes a timbral aura, reducing the delicate polyphony to an embellishment of the chordal harmonies.

The melody of the B section is derived from motifs in A, and the canon shifts to the time interval of two quarter notes and the pitch interval of a third, with the mandolin now leading. The texture is enriched by the flutes, at times augmenting fragments of the theme, at other times doubling the melody [see Example 2.11].

---

\(^{53}\)The harp doubles some of its melody pitches with harmonics, and toward the end of the phrase, provides simple counterpoint. Serving the same function for the mandolin is the third flute, which doubles the melody with some octave displacements.

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Example 2.11: Derivations of the flute counterpoint in B

The return of the A section is foreshadowed by the flutes, and the original canon is inverted: the mandolin leads on G, and the harp enters on D. The inverted reprise continues the precedent set in the Pas-de-Quatre and Saraband-Step.

The A Major of the B section and of the final cadence balance each other in a binary division (ABAB, rather than the thematic ABBA') but they may be analyzed in two different ways based on the harmonic principles of the ballet. The A Major of the B section is a second away from the Gs which flank it in the A sections, but the A Major of the final cadence is a fifth away from the D introduced into the canon in A', making the composite harmony of the section D-G-A, the fifth with a second.

Brown cites "a pleasing rhythmic ambiguity" as an historical feature of the galliard, created by hemiola in 6/4 meter; Stravinsky builds a complex structure of metric tension throughout his Gailliarde. With the complex syncopations of the Gailliarde, the constant quarter-note pulse throughout the movement is doubly necessary: it provides a musical point of reference (if there is no regularity, it is difficult to perceive an irregularity), and a beat for the dancers, who must perform unison movements throughout the dance. Against this pulse the meter fluctuates almost continually. Except for the last three bars, Stravinsky subdivides the measures with dotted lines. Yet almost without exception, the accents of the music contradict this meter. Significantly, the points at which the accents coincide with the
Table 2.8: Metric structure of the Gaillarde
meter are just before cadences—traditionally a point at which the hemiola would occur; Stravinsky has turned the rhythmic convention on its head, offsetting metric stresses during a phrase, adhering to them only in the last bar. Combined with the irregular notated meter, the constant metric friction creates a rhythmic momentum which is hardly dispelled by the long note which concludes the movement.

The instruments accompanying the canon are largely responsible for defining the perceived meter of the music. The canon itself begins on the downbeat; the accompaniment enters on the second beat, setting up a conflict. When the canon repeats in the second half of the first strain, the first note (2 beats long) in each voice is dropped, which shifts rhythmic emphasis because now the canon begins after the accompaniment. Table 2.8 shows the meter as mapped out in the score (top line) and the meter as implied by the music (lower line).

Coda (First Pas-de-Trois)

The Coda of the first Pas-de-Trois is typical of Agon in its simple structural pattern, this time a barform, AA'B (although B could also be interpreted as a coda to a binary form) [see Table 2.9]. The structural units in this movement are larger than in the other dances in the Pas-de-Trois, but that is mostly due to short measures of 6/8; in performance, the Coda is only slightly longer than the Gailliarde.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>B (Coda)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 185-207</td>
<td>208-228</td>
<td>208-228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-tone row</td>
<td>retrograde of row</td>
<td>fragmented row</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C/G pedal</td>
<td>F/C pedal</td>
<td>B♭ pedals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.9: Structural pattern of the Coda

This movement shows a number of connections with the other dances of the Pas-de-Trois, as well as with the Double Pas-de-Quatre from the first part of the ballet. In its orchestration, the Coda serves as a reprise of some of the more distinctive timbres in the
Pas-de-Trois: flutes (prominent in the Prelude and the Gailliarde); trumpets (used in the Prelude); tenor and bass trombones together with the solo violin, which constitutes the sonority of the Saraband-Step; solo cello and solo bass (both prominent in the Prelude); and the mandolin, harp, and piano which, with the flutes and solo bass harmonics, create the delicate sonority of the Gailliarde. The sustained open fifth in the trumpets and mandolin, entering on an upbeat, recalls not only the transitional section of the Prelude with its bass harmonics, but also the very opening of the ballet. The C-G fifth is colored by the opening notes of the row, A and B, which lie on either side of the fifth, and these notes tend to strengthen the similarity of the sound to that of a bell, a pure fifth amidst overtones. The weakly voiced B beneath the sustained C (usually only one instrument against greater orchestral forces) is also a characteristic sound of Agon.

As in the Double Pas-de-Quatre, Stravinsky weaves in the new with the familiar. The Coda is the first movement of Agon in which Stravinsky used 12-tone serialism, but there is no clear break in style here from earlier movements: the sections of serial technique in previous movements have set a precedent, even an expectation, for the advent of a 12-tone row, and while serial operations may be pervasive in this movement, Stravinsky alludes constantly to tonality. He stresses the C-centrality of the ballet by the pedal C-G fifth in the trumpet and mandolin at the beginning, providing a tonal counterbalance to the row.

The row used here is distinctly Stravinskian: it is almost an octatonic scale. Although this feature is somewhat disguised in practice by the use of octave displacements, producing a profusion of melodic ninths, the row consists of alternating whole and half steps [see Example 2.12].

Example 2.12: Row for Coda (First Pas-de-Trois)
Only the two half-steps that move down instead of up—between the B and B♭ and the G♭ and F—keep it from being a pure octatonic scale. These backward slips allow the scale to extend through ten notes of the octave, while a move directly from the tenth to twelfth notes would complete the octave with eleven “octatonic” steps. The interpolated D in eleventh position does more than fill out the 12-tone complement: placing D between G and A♭ gives the row two distinctive, important intervals—the fourth and the tritone. Because of its texturally separate presentation and strongly tonal pull, the C-G pedal must be considered outside the row; C and G take their place in the row when they are introduced in the harp and cello.

Beneath the sustained fifth, the row unfurls in large leaps handed off in eighth-notes between the harp and a solo cello. After the first five notes are presented, the row restarts on the second pitch and continues to the end, the first example of Stravinsky’s serial “stutter,” or the interpolated repetition of a fragment of the row.

Once the C-G fifth ceases, the solo violin enters in double-stops in sixths, repeatedly returning to a C-E sonority. The violin’s set is not serial, and its repetitions far surpass even Stravinsky’s most pronounced “stutters.” At the same time, it is a rigidly controlled set composed of dyads [see Example 2.13].

![Example 2.13: Solo Violin Set](image)

The violin starts in the center [C-E] and ascends to the D♯-F♯, before dropping down to start again at A-C♯. The unwinding effect is reminiscent of the woodwind melody from the Double Pas-de-Quatre, which expanded a minor third above and below a central pitch. Although not exactly in the middle, C-E is the perceived tonal center (prepared by the opening pedal point); moreover, the high point of E-G is postponed so long [m. 202] that the first five dyads of the set predominate, an arrangement which would make C-E the
central point. The sixths are always played in the same order, usually coming to rest on C-E and finally reaching E-G in measure 202 beneath the cadential repetition of the flute’s 12-tone melody. The second phrase is half as fast (quarter-note motion rather than eighth-note motion), and the D-F and D♯-F♯ sixths fuse into a D-F♯ dyad.

The restatement of A is varied in its first three measures (by 219, the music continues as from 198ff). The initial statement is compressed and “transposed”—the row is retrograded, the C-G fifth pivots around the tremolo C in the mandolin to become F-C. Like the Saraband-Step and the Gailliarde (and the first Pas-de-Quatre), the Coda reprises its opening material at the fifth and inverts it in some fashion, a remnant of the binary dance structures on which Stravinsky models his ballet movements.

In the B section, Stravinsky makes B♭ an important tonal center, as he had in the Saraband-Step, the first movement of the Pas-de-Trois. B♭ is asserted in measures 229-233 by three pedals: B♭ (in the bass trombone [sustained] and first trumpet [arpeggiated]), F (solo bass), and D (in the solo violin). The perpetual anomalous pitch, C, is a fourth pedal in the mandolin.

The pedals drop away in measure 234, and fragments of permutations of the prime row (with no transpositions) recapitulate different melodic fragments of the Coda. In bars 234-48, there are no overt tonal references, and the sustained chords of the final cadence comprise all the chromatic notes of the scale.

To summarize the main features of the First Pas-de-Trois:

(1) Stravinsky introduced a new element into the weave; this section of Agon contains the first unmistakable historical references to dance styles, reinterpreting rhythmic and formal clichés within the context of compositional principles established earlier in the ballet.

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54 The retrograde’s last pitch becomes the first note of the repetition of the prime row in measure 219, creating a palindrome out of the row.

55 The major/minor triad makes its brief appearance in this movement, as the trumpet ascends its arpeggio in major and descends it in minor.
The historical dances to which Stravinsky alludes have rhythmic features in keeping with the prevalent upbeat emphasis throughout the ballet: the stress on beat two in the sarabande and the metric ambiguity of the galliard. The silent downbeat also appears in the Prelude and the Coda.

The binary form of the Baroque dance is the primary structural referent of the dances, although (except for the Saraband-Step) the movements have ternary tendencies as well. The reprises are all at the fifth and inverted, and the row of the Coda is also retrograded.

Stravinsky intensified the linear processes: the Prelude introduces the first extensive use of polytonal layers, which is expanded in the Saraband; the Gailliarde is built upon canons; and the Coda contains the first complete 12-tone row.

Second Pas-de-Trois:
Interlude

The Interludes are based on the music and formal structure of the Prelude, with the second part [B] unchanged. The A section of each Interlude is varied with layers of new music that alter the balance of tonal power between the pre-existing polytonal layers and reflect a sensitivity to the tonality and instrumentation of the surrounding movements.

The additional music in the first Interlude strengthens the C-centricity of the A section. Stravinsky adds violas and cellos, playing a pizzicato augmentation of the upward-sweeping octave figure on C in the flutes and solo cellos, and pizzicato basses play fragments of the augmented figure [see Example 2.14].
Example 2.14: Interlude, mm. 258-259bis

The derivation of the various fragments here from the motifs of the Prelude is clear, but in their juxtaposition they now jostle each other, creating an aural impression of randomness: beginnings and endings overlap in uneven, sometimes unexpected intervals. The sense of a linear composition with incidental vertical simultaneities, rather than an harmonically conceived texture, increases. The augmented rhythm creates more rhythmic complexity than in the corresponding part of the Prelude, perhaps reflecting the metric ambiguity of the Gaillarde.
The Prelude and Interludes, which are choreographically necessary because they provide entrées for the dancers, serve musically as articulations within the center part of the ballet. Stravinsky avoids simple repetition and even classical variation techniques by gradually adding music rather than altering what is already there. By increasing complexity, he builds intensity toward the Pas-de-Deux, which follows the final presentation of the Interlude. The Interludes also serve as tonal bases for the alternations of tonality and serialism throughout the middle part of the ballet. The first Interlude is a tonal median between the first explicitly twelve-tone movement, the Coda (admittedly one with a strong tonal pull), and the serial bransles of the second Pas-de-Trois.

The Bransles

The second Pas-de-Trois of Agon is a collection of branles. According to de Lauze, branles were performed in a series, and the three that Stravinsky and Balanchine chose—the Bransle Simple, the Bransie Gay, and the Bransie Double (de Poitou) are the first, second, and fourth in the suite that de Lauze describes.

Despite the names and the prescribed order of the dances, the Bransles in Agon bear only a tenuous connection to de Lauze's descriptions. The branle was a group dance, performed in a circle or a line; in Agon, Stravinsky treats the Bransles as a pas in which the Interlude is the entrée, the Bransle Simple is a duet for two male dancers, the Bransle Gay a solo variation for a girl, and the Bransle Double is a coda for all three dancers to close the pas.

In tempo and meter, Stravinsky hews a bit closer to his source. The bransles as described by de Lauze and Mersenne are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bransle Simple</th>
<th>Slow</th>
<th>Duple</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bransle Gay</td>
<td>Quicker</td>
<td>Triple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bransle Double</td>
<td>Very Quick</td>
<td>Triple</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The metronome markings and meters in Stravinsky's score are:

- Bransle Simple \( \boxed{\text{= 84}} \) \( \boxed{3/8} \) \( \boxed{C} \)
- Bransle Gay \( \boxed{\text{= 92}} \) \( \boxed{3/8} \) (basically)
- Bransle Double \( \boxed{\text{= 112}} \) \( \boxed{3/2} \)

While 84 beats per minute is not slow, the tempo does increase with each dance. The driving eighth-note rhythm of the Bransle Simple and the sedate, short-long rhythms of the Bransle Gay, however, reverse the expected contrast between the slow Bransle Simple and the lively Bransle Gay. The metronome markings in the Labanotation score\(^{56}\) of the ballet accentuate these tendencies, making a fast-slow-fast pattern of the three dances:

- Bransle Simple \( \boxed{\text{= 144}} \)
- Bransle Gay \( \boxed{\text{= 84}} \)
- Bransle Double \( \boxed{\text{= 104 (max)}} \)

It is not known who altered the tempi of the dances from musical to choreographic score, or why. Perhaps it was a decision imposed by choreography. For his part, Stravinsky is paying no more than lip service de Lauze (or is willfully contradicting tradition again), except in the Bransle Gay. Mersenne gives the rhythm \textit{short-short-long-long—}the rhythm of the castanet ostinato running throughout the shifting meters of Stravinsky's dance.\(^{57}\) By citing de Lauze, it seems again that Stravinsky is setting up an expectation which he then contradicts.

\(^{56}\)Notated by Virginia Doris, 1987, copyrighted by the estate of George Balanchine. The unpublished score is in the library of the Dance Notation Bureau in New York City.

\(^{57}\)According to Robert Craft and Vera Stravinsky in Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents [p. 429], the ostinato was an afterthought. The reason for this addition is unclear: Was it purely a musical decision? Did Balanchine suggest it? Did Stravinsky take another look at de Lauze and discover the rhythmic motif? Perhaps it was merely the \textit{notation} that was the afterthought, as the other voices depend on the ostinato for clarity and coherence. The measures in which the ostinato is heard alone mark various symmetrical structural points in the dance, suggesting that the ostinato was integral to the conception rather than an afterthought. (My thanks to Glenn Watkins for discussion regarding this movement.)
Compositional technique binds the Bransles together more than any historical allusion: the Second Pas-de-Trois is the first wholly serial section of *Agon*. The row governing the Bransles is composed of two hexachords which operate with almost complete independence: the Bransle Simple is based on the first hexachord, the Bransle Gay on the second (although the first hexachord, re-ordered, makes a brief appearance in the Bransle Gay). The complete row is used only in the Bransle Double, where Stravinsky slightly re-orders the second hexachord [see Table 2.10].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bransle Simple</th>
<th>Bransle Gay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D  E  F  G  F#  B  A  C  B♭  E♭  D♭  A♭</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(as re-ordered in the Bransle Gay)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B  G  D  F#  F  E  A  B♭  C  D♭  E♭  A♭</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(as re-ordered in the Bransle Double)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bransle Double</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D  E  F  G  F#  B  A  B♭  C  D♭  E♭  A♭</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.10: Row of the Second Pas-de-Trois (at the pitch of the Bransle Simple)

This row has octatonic tendencies. As it appears in the Bransle Double, it is composed of two similar hexachords: a rising series of alternating whole and half steps ending with an upward leap of a perfect fourth. The first hexachord begins with a whole step, the second hexachord with a half step; the link between the two hexachords is a downward whole step. The only exception to the overall octatonic scale pattern, other than the fourths, is the downward half-step between G and F# in the first hexachord. The octatonicism is another historical allusion, a part of Stravinsky’s own history; but it is a covert allusion in that the octatonicism may be seen but is not really heard.

The density of referents reaches a peak in the Bransles. The names and structures of the individual dances recalls Baroque social dance, but the group of dances forms a classical pas. The serial organization is orderly on one level (the two separate hexachords coming together to form the full twelve-tone row in the final dance), but disorderly on another level (the structurally inexplicable re-ordering of the hexachords after they are introduced).
Adding to the harmonic complexity, these serial dances are octatonic and, in the case of the
Bransie Simple, tonal as well.

**Bransie Simple**

The Bransie Simple is one of the most pervasively serial movements of *Agon*, but its
six-note row has tonal implications, suggesting the scale of D Major/minor. The manner in
which Stravinsky deploys this row enhances the sense of D as a central pitch and produces
layers of associated tonalities, primarily Bb Major and G minor.

In the Bransie Simple, each section of the ABA' form is 10 measures long, except
the return of A where the two extra measures are a repeated bar and the final chord [see
Table 2.11]. A carries a gestural reminiscence of the structure of the Pas-de-Quatre and the
Prelude/Interludes, with a trumpet call answered by other, softer instruments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>278-284</th>
<th>285-287</th>
<th>288-293</th>
<th>294-298</th>
<th>299-304</th>
<th>305-309</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>278-284</td>
<td>285-287</td>
<td>288-293</td>
<td>294-298</td>
<td>299-304</td>
<td>305-309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>canon</td>
<td>layered cadence D/Bb Gm</td>
<td>&quot;Webenesque&quot;</td>
<td>layered cadence D/Bb</td>
<td>canon</td>
<td>layered cadence D/Bb (Gm) =&gt; hexachord</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2.11: Structural pattern of the Bransie Simple*

The A-phrase is built on a canon for two trumpets, answered by a cadence in the
clarinets, harp and basses (playing harmonics). The canon, which is at a temporal interval of
two beats, begins with a stutter—the repetition of the pitches D-E, emphasizing the
centrality of D—before continuing through the row. The constant eighth-note rhythm, the
close canon, and the bright timbre of the C trumpets create an energetic, athletic, almost
machine-like affect. The sense of perpetual motion at the beginning is heightened by the
tightly controlled pitch content of the canon theme. Due to the palindromic application of the hexachord, the theme is built almost completely on the same six pitches.\footnote{The pitch B at the end of the prime row links with an inversion beginning on B (I₀). The inversion naturally ends on D, which is followed by two repetitions of the prime row. Only then does the theme introduce a transposition (P₁), and finally a retrograde inversion (RI₃). As the first trumpet falls away at the end of the theme, the second trumpet is joined by a brief retrograde statement in the third trumpet (R₀).}

As the canon ends, the A-phrase displays a harmonic layering similar to the Prelude/Interludes, although the tightly woven web of tonal relationships is more reminiscent of the Saraband-Step. Each instrumental group establishes its own tonal center—D for the trumpets and the clarinets answering them; at the cadence, the trombones enter on their own tonal stratum, Bᵇ. The harp becomes a mediator between the two tonal layers, linking the two primary pitch areas, as its G-minor is closely related to both.

The trombones' layer is separated from the trumpet canon not only by instrumentation and tonality, but also by its velocity. The trumpets proceed almost completely in eighth notes, the trombones in halves. While the aggregate of the trombones' pitches is an inversion (I₀) of the prime row, the way the notes are distributed implies a V-I cadence in Bᵇ Major [see Example 2.15].

Example 2.15: Trombone cadence, mm. 284-287
The second and first trombones clearly arpeggiate an F-Major chord, while the first trombone and bass trombone together spell out a B♭-Major chord. The B-natural in the bass trombone functions not only as a member of the row, but as a passing tone from the second trombone’s C to its own B♭. The presentation of the B♭ triad, with the fifth sounding by itself at the end, implies a second inversion. The F in the bass erodes the traditional strength of B♭ as the tonic pitch, but the context of the ballet supports it, as many of Agon’s tonic chords appear in second inversion.

The clarinets join in the cadence of the A-phrase at yet another speed, the quarter note. Their melody is built on the primary row, played in thirds (P9 and P5), and cadences on a D64 chord (another tonic inversion) reinforced by harmonics in three solo basses. The arrival on D [m. 287] occurs on an upbeat after a rest, just like the first note of the movement. The only dissenting voice harmonically is the late-arriving harp, which plays a B♭. The harp’s approach to the cadence is an inversion of the row beginning on G (I5): if the rest separating the D from the B♭ were filled with an E♭, the row would be complete. The B♭ is not only a carryover of the trombones’ B♭ Major, but the melodic structure of the harp’s line hints at yet another tonality, G minor, the relative minor of B♭. At that point, the trumpets’ D harmony would stand in a dominant-tonic relationship to the harp.59

In the B-phrase, the close intervals of the A-phrase are transposed to ninths, and the constant rhythm is slowed and broken up. The row is altered by the same side-slipping motion that extended the “octatonic row” of the First Pas-de-Trois’s Coda through ten notes. The row as it stands at the beginning of the B-phrase is B-C♯-C-D-E-D♯-G♯; if the C were omitted, it would be a perfect transposition (P9). Once again, the anomalous note

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59The 2:1 proportion of the row, 4 octatonic notes plus 2 which are a perfect fourth, is echoed in the construction of the phrase. If we take the first bar as an upbeat, the six bars of trumpet with three bars of trombone, clarinet and harp match the proportions exactly. In the initial statement of the row, the F♯ is the longest-held note, the pivot from octatonic to fourth; in bar 285, the sonorities merge as the phrase moves from one sonority and tonal plane to another.
is C, as if Stravinsky were reminding us that this whole ballet is about C, even if it is not an expected part of the discourse in any given passage.

In measure 289 a prominent D-Major chord with an added G strengthens the dominant-tonic relationship of D and G. The other dominant-tonic pair, F-B\textsuperscript{b}, is stressed in the next four measures, as the violins and violas play a pizzicato dyad F-C, and the trumpet melody rocks around a B\textsuperscript{b}. The B-phrase cadences almost exactly the same way as the A-phrase, without the trumpets; this repetition creates a symmetry between the two phrases, as well as dividing each into two discrete sections even though no major break is heard. The B-phrase cadence is extended by two 2-beat stutters [beats 2-3 in measure 295 and beats 3-4 in measure 296, rhythmically altered by an inserted rest; see Example 2.16].

\hspace{1cm}

\textbf{Example 2.16: Cadence of the B-phrase}
The $A'$-phrase is an almost literal repeat of the first statement, but with new parts layered on. As in the Interludes, these additions do not disturb the original musical content, but supplement it. The harp moves between $F$ and $C$, strengthening the dominant for the $B^b$ cadence in the trombones. The bass clarinet straddles both layers, the $B^b$ and the $D$ (leaning, however, toward $D$). A few notes (the Cs in measures 299 and 303, the $F$ in measure 302) double the harp; if we eliminate these notes, the series of tones played by the clarinet sketches out a basic progression in the key of $D$ Major, sometimes but not always coinciding with the implied harmonies of the first trumpet's theme [see Table 2.12 and Example 2.17].

\[
\begin{array}{ccccccc}
D & G & C^# & E & F^# & B & C^# \\
I & IV & V & & vi & V (or vii) & I \\
\end{array}
\]

Table 2.12: The bass clarinet’s “progression” mm. 298-304

As in the $B$-phrase, the cadence of $A'$ is slightly altered by a stutter—two 2-beat repetitions in measure 307. Also as in the $B$-phrase, and typically throughout $Agon$, the second repetition is rhythmically altered by an eighth-rest on the downbeat, pushing the two-beat segment to the right; the second beat is clipped off to fit it into the four-beat bar.

At the end of the movement, the $D$ Major/$B^b$-chord slides to a final chord built from all six pitches of the row. This cadential chord is widely spaced to create the transparent sonority of the chiming intonation evoked by its upbeat presentation and its intervallic layout—the smallest interval is the minor third between $E$ and $G$ on the bottom, and the most dissonant interval, the tritone between $B$ and $F$, is on top, mimicking the overtones of a bell.
Example 2.17: The bass clarinet’s “progression” mm. 298-304

Bransle Gay

Like the Bransle Simple, the Bransle Gay has an ABA' structure [see Table 2.13], but its parts are tied together by a constant 3-beat rhythm in the castanets, barred separately in the score [see Example 2.18].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>A'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm.</td>
<td>310-320</td>
<td>321-331</td>
<td>332-335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(11 ostinato bars)</td>
<td>(9 ostinato bars)</td>
<td>(4 ostinato bars)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vertical presentation of the row</td>
<td>linear row (\Rightarrow) B\textsuperscript{5} hexachord</td>
<td>vertical presentation of the row</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.13: Structural pattern of the Bransle Gay
Example 2.18: Castanet ostinato

The arch-shaped A section encompasses almost half of the movement—11 (out of 24) repetitions of the ostinato—and exhibits binary divisions on several levels, with each of its two phrases divided in two. The first phrase may be divided into two sections of six beats each which are reversed in the second phrase [see Table 2.14].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3+</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>+3+</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>+3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>310</td>
<td>7 + 5 5 + 7 5 + 7 7 + 5</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>311-312</td>
<td>313-314</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>316-317</td>
<td>318-319</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.14: A-Section of the Bransle Gay

The first measure, a castanet solo, returns to divide the A section and again to close it. Between these solo bars Stravinsky places two parallel four-bar phrases for flutes, bassoons, and harp. The six-note row is introduced in the second bar (measure 311). It is built of expanding intervals moving upward—a minor third, a perfect fourth, and a perfect fifth—connected by downward whole steps [see Example 2.19].

Example 2.19: 6-note row of the Bransle Gay

Stravinsky's presentation of this row in measure 311 is unusual for his serial methods in that it is more vertical than linear. Pitches 1 and 2 are introduced vertically in the flutes, followed at the interval of a sixteenth-note by pitch 3; pitches 4, 5, and 6 follow suit [see Example 2.20].

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The mirroring of the two halves of the first phrase in the second phrase (mm. 316-19) results in an unusual musical structure, in that a measure previously heard as a cadence (m. 314) becomes internal to the phrase (m. 317). The final vertical sonority of the second phrase (identical to m. 312 in Example 2.20) is B^b-Eb-F, a common sonority in *Agon*. Although thematically the phrase seems to hang in mid-air, this chord seems more stable than the one that ended the first phrase of A, linking the two sub-phrases in an antecedent-consequent relationship.

The interlocking binary divisions of the A section are principally thematic; in the B section, the binary division is harmonic. In B, the row is disposed more horizontally than in A, and the meter is a steady 5/16 against the 3/8 ostinato. On the second sixteenth note of measure 328, coincident with the beginning of an ostinato statement, the clarinets introduce a “new” six-note row—the six notes of the row from the Bransle Simple, transposed up a whole step and re-ordered. Stravinsky signals the interpolation with a
timbral change. The notes of the Bransie Simple hexachord are fashioned into a chord prominently stated in measures 330 and 331 by the harp and strings (their only appearance in the movement). The borrowed row appears for only three statements of the castanet ostinato, and its strong chordal disposition, just before the return of A, invites a comparison with the use of a dominant in a tonal form.

The A section returns in bar 332 and is shortened to only the first three measures. The repetition is literal in the woodwinds, but for some slight variations in beaming and the dropping of the first sixteenth note from the phrase. This additional rest at the beginning of the phrase draws attention to the fact that the ostinato does not begin with the measure as before, but is moved a sixteenth-note to the left, intensifying the upbeat quality of the phrase beginning. Similarly to the end of the first A section, the movement ends on the relatively stable F-E⁷-B⁷ sonority before closing with a final, solo castanet measure.

Bransie Double

The Bransie Double which serves as the coda to the second Pas-de-Trois also follows an ABA' pattern, with its own extensive coda [see Table 2.15]. At 51 measures and about a minute and a half performance time, it is almost as long as the Bransie Simple (32 bars) and the Bransie Gay (24 ostinato bars) together. This proportion is typical of the coda of a classical ballet, which is usually about as long as the solo variations (or other dances of smaller groups) put together.

---

60 Cross-movement quotation is a prevalent 19th-century technique, one used by Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov, two composers who greatly influenced Stravinsky. In the earlier composers' works, however, these cross-movement quotations would have been far more obvious and audible than with Stravinsky—Stravinsky is, in effect, "quoting" the technique.
The coming together of the two hexachords to form a 12-tone row creates a sense of the music of Bransle Simple and the Bransle Gay combining in the Bransle Double, as the dancers do. This simple but effective ploy is one of the most obvious Stravinsky uses in *Agon*, though until the two similar hexachords actually fuse into a 12-tone row in the Bransle Double, there is no compelling compositional reason to expect they will. The only prior hint is the disguised return of the Bransle Simple’s hexachord in the B section of the Bransle Gay.

The row is presented in the violins at the beginning, primarily in unison but with occasional octaves between the first and second violins. As in the Bransle Simple, the row is immediately retrograded on the final pitch (G^b) to create a palindrome. Against the row the trumpet and trombone carry a counterline built on the second hexachord (balancing the use of the first hexachord in the Bransle Gay). The counterline, like the prime row, moves mostly in half notes, but it begins with an eighth-note syncopation, and most of the notes are therefore offset a quarter note against the movement of the violins, heightening the metric tension.

These first eight measures are repeated almost literally. The major alteration is in the addition of the lower strings with a second, more rhythmically active counterline, also based on the row’s second hexachord. The first time through, the hexachord is presented in inversion, then in a prime statement with the last two intervals inverted [see Example 2.21].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>A'</th>
<th>Coda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>336-351</td>
<td>352-364</td>
<td>365-372</td>
<td>373-386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>linear row</td>
<td>chordal</td>
<td>linear row</td>
<td>half time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/2</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>3/2</td>
<td>2/2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.15: Structural pattern of the Bransle Double

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Example 2.21: The low strings’ counterline

This change affirms Stravinsky’s statement that intervals were objects to him,\textsuperscript{61} for the intervallic content of the row remains intact, although the pitch content is altered.

Stravinsky’s contravention of dodecaphonic principles (pitches supposedly define the row, not intervals) is heightened by his treatment of the “row” in the next section.

The low strings’ counterline in mm. 348-52 does not fit into any part of the row. The intervals are basically whole and half steps with occasional upward leaps of a fourth—the basic building blocks of the row—but the style of this section is reminiscent of a tonal transition, a development of motifs used to move the music from one tonal area to another. Adapted to serialism, this is what happens here.\textsuperscript{62} For just as a transition in Classical music announced a change by a new texture and key, so Stravinsky marks the beginning of the B section (m. 352) with a change of meter (to 2/2), texture (more chordal), and, most strikingly, harmonic language. The pitch material is neither closely related to the row in the A section nor is it strictly serial. It can be reduced to the twelve-note row shown in Example 2.22; but, despite the fact that the notes are introduced in this order, the pitches do not behave as a row.

\textsuperscript{61}Conversations, 14.

\textsuperscript{62}This transition modeled on transitions in tonal music also creates a serial/non-serial/serial pattern that reverses the more prevalent tonal/serial/tonal pattern throughout the ballet.
Example 2.22: Secondary “row” of the Bransle Double

The first eight notes spell out a D-minor scale, with both the natural and raised seventh; the last four pitches contain the distinctive intervals of the Bransle Gay’s prime row, a perfect fifth, a minor third, and a perfect fourth. The B section is built on chords and short phrases that partition this secondary row in a consistent manner, 1-2-3-4, 5-6-7, 9-10, and 8-11-12. These sub-sets derived from the row almost operate like chords derived from a scale. The same pitches are always grouped together, although the order of the pitches within the phrases is not always the same, and the order of the groups is not strictly regular. Tonality is suggested in the B section by the compositional technique, but it is negated by the sound, a reversal of the Bransle Simple, where the serial composition is disguised by the music’s strongly tonal orientation.63

As in the Bransle Gay, the reprise of the Bransle Double is limited to a brief recall of the most stable section of A. A’ repeats the first half of the A section, which contains no departures from the row other than an octatonic passing segment. The coda (beginning in m. 373), layered and clearly serial, is built primarily on the second hexachord in various permutations. The combination of minor third (F-A^b) and linked minor second (A^b-G) in the final chord looks ahead to the next movement: the Pas-de-Deux is almost completely constructed out of these two intervals in alternation. This harmonic opening out of one section toward the next (setting aside the intervening Prelude or Interlude) recalls the final chord of the Triple Pas-de-Quatre, which foreshadowed the tonality of the Saraband-Step.

63This use of sets in the same fashion as triads in tonal music also foreshadows the cellular technique of the Pas-de-Deux.
The main features of the Second Pas-de-Trois are that:

(1) Stravinsky continues to take Baroque dances as his models, although the branles are less familiar to 20th-century audiences than the sarabande or galliard and traditionally have a less precisely defined character. The only overt reference to early counterparts is the rhythm of the castanet ostinato in the Bransle Gay, although a Baroque connection is strengthened in the entire grouping by the repeat of the Prelude as the Interlude, establishing a ritornello-like effect.

(2) The insertion of rests at the beginning of repetitions ranging from simple stutters (in the Bransle Simple) to whole phrases (Bransle Gay, Bransle Double) heightens the perception of the upbeat emphasis. Almost every phrase beginning and cadence in the Bransles is on an upbeat.

(3) The interplay of serialism and tonality becomes more prominent. Serialism is the main constructive principle of these movements, but the Bransle Simple is perhaps the most tonally centered dance in the entire ballet. In the Bransle Simple, the row's scalar nature, the continual stutters around D, and the cadences establish the central pitch. The Bransle Double's A section is framed by a beginning and cadence on C. The Bransle Gay shows the least tonal centering of the three branles, although the quintal trichord F-B^b-E^b may be heard to assume the role of a tonic. In the Bransle Gay and the Bransle Double, the tonal principles of the dominant and of chord structures have been translated into serial terms: in the Bransle Gay, the hexachord from the Bransle Simple reappears as a dominant-like chord just before the reprise, and in the Bransle Double, a row is partitioned into sub-sets that behave much as triads do in a tonal progression.

(4) As opposed to the dances of the First Pas-de-Trois, where the essentially binary patterns exhibited ternary tendencies, the dances of the Second Pas-de-Trois exhibit binary divisions within the larger ternary patterns; thus another inversion-like relationship is established between the two pas.
Pas-de-Deux
Interlude

When Stravinsky re-introduced it as the first Interlude, the changes in the Prelude strengthened its C-tonality and its metric ambiguity. In second Interlude more new additions balance what was added to the first: trumpets II and III in the second Interlude reinforce B♭-minor and re-assert metric steadiness, offsetting the syncopated viola/cello C-scale figure.

The added trumpet parts arpeggiate a B♭-minor chord downward, then an E♭-minor chord upward, and finally a B♭-minor chord back down. The harmonic progression compresses and inverts the larger-scale motion of the timpani and bassoon through the A section, and at one note per measure, the 3/8 bars are clearly marked out, reinforcing the binary division of the larger 3/4 measure [see Example 2.23].

Example 2.23: Opening of the second Interlude with added trumpets

95
The addition of the trumpets in the Interlude creates timbral/gestural resonances on a local level (within the Pas-de-Trois) and over the entire ballet. Locally, they echo the prominent trumpets in the Bransle Simple; globally, they look backward and forward at once to the framing music of the Pas-de-Quatre. These resonances are also picked up in the choreography, as we shall see in Chapter Four.

Pas de Deux

In the Pas-de-Deux, Stravinsky preserves the outward conventions of the classical grand pas de deux, while employing the most modem style and harmonic language in the ballet. The Pas-de-Deux exhibits the traditional choreographic pattern: Entrée (Interlude), Adagio, solo variations, and an allegro Coda. Each dancer has a variation, and the short reprise for the male dancer creates a symmetrical tripartite form among the variations [see Table 2.16].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entrée (Interlude)</th>
<th>Adagio</th>
<th>Male Variation</th>
<th>Female Variation</th>
<th>Reprise (Male)</th>
<th>Coda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 387-409</td>
<td>411-462</td>
<td>463-472</td>
<td>473-483</td>
<td>484-494</td>
<td>495-519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>layered polytonality C=G/B♭</td>
<td>cels m2/m3</td>
<td>canon M2/M3</td>
<td>canon M2/m3</td>
<td>canon M2/M3</td>
<td>symmetrical sets (m2/m3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.16: Structural pattern of the Pas-de-Deux

Stravinsky also adheres to the instrumental conventions of the classical pas de deux (string adagio with solo violin, brass for the boy's variation, flute and accompanimental strings for the girl's).

Despite following ballet tradition in the structure of the Pas-de-Deux, Stravinsky here writes the least overtly dance-like music of the ballet. Wide leaps and complex rhythms—syncopations, triplets and quintuplets against duplets of various speeds, and a profusion of grace notes—produce a wispy texture in which melodic fragments are handed off from one instrument to another, reminiscent of Klangfarbenmelodie. To an ear attuned to styles, the Pas-de-Deux would probably sound serial. In one of his most effective
misdirections, Stravinsky mimics the melodic line, texture, and timbres of the serial music of Anton Webern, but technically the movement is not serial in any thoroughgoing way. Stravinsky’s textures are generally thicker than Webern’s, and the relatively long passages in which a small number of pitches is repeated [for example, in measures 418-420] hint that this is not a 12-tone work, however strong the Webenesque musical codes of melody, rhythm, and timbre.

The music of the Pas-de-Deux mixes serial and tonal elements, but it is the movement in Agon least committed to either. It is constructed on elements associated with tonality and serialism, neither immediately obvious: small groups of notes function horizontally and vertically in a manner similar to triads in tonal language; as the Pas-de-Deux progresses, the note groupings grow longer and more linear, approaching the more conventional 12-tone serialism to be found in the final part of the ballet.

Two ordering principles are used in the Pas-de-Deux: canon in the variations; and symmetrical sets in the outer dances, sets that resemble rows but are not used strictly enough to justify that term. The opening Adagio is based mostly on four-note cells, spun into longer sets in the canons; the Coda’s substantial palindromic sets are nearly 12-tone rows, anticipating the dodecaphonic serialism of the final part of the ballet.

Except for the male variation, which alternates major seconds and major thirds, the Pas-de-Deux is based on the alternation of minor seconds and minor thirds. This pitch structure carries larger implications, as the alternation of half-steps and minor thirds foreshadows the row of the Four Duos and Four Trios.

Adagio

In the first three bars, set off from the rest of the Adagio by a rest with a fermata and a double bar, Stravinsky introduces all twelve pitches as if they were a row, but this is another misdirection. Although the tonal centering of previous movements is absent here, the musical language of the Adagio resembles tonality in some technical aspects: both
vertical and horizontal movement are controlled by an interval set (not a row), as in triadic writing. Instead of a triad, however, the predominant set is composed of four pitches constructed either as two minor thirds a half-step apart [e.g. B♭-C♭-D♭-D] or two minor thirds linked by a half-step [e.g. B♭-D♭-D-F]. One cell acts as a “tonic” [B♭-C♭-D♭-D] in that it begins and ends sections and Stravinsky often returns to it as he might return to a tonic triad in a tonal work. The linked minor thirds evoke the major/minor third present through much of the ballet, as well as the juxtaposition of seconds.

Even though the Adagio lacks a tonal center, it opens with the pitch C once again as the anomalous note, this time interpolated into the tonic cell. How does one explain the C-natural? Perhaps it is a holdover from the previous movement (the Interlude) which ends on C; perhaps it is there simply because it is needed to complete the 12-pitch complement of the introduction. In either case, C asserts its prominence through anomaly as well as in its referential relationship to other parts of the score.

Large sections of the Adagio, especially in the first part, are built on the tonic cell: for example, the passage from the beginning of the violin solo in measure 417 to the end of measure 423 is almost completely constructed from those four pitches. The measures after the second ending move further away from the tonic cell, but the cadences in measures 458 and 462 affirm it, although notated enharmonically in sharps [A♯-B-C♯-D] as a transition to the male variation, where the theme is largely constructed of the pitches B and C♯.

Variations

The canons at the basis of the male and female variations are aurally hidden by other compositional elements (as they were in the Gailliarde by soft dynamics): melodic contour in the male variation, and temporal augmentation in the female variation. In both variations the voices are a fifth or a fourth apart, suggesting a vestige of tonality. In addition to the choice of instruments (brass and piano for the male, flutes and strings for the female), the gender of the dancers is marked by melodic line (sharply disjunct for the male, sinuously
conjunct for the female), intervallic structure (major intervals for the male, minor intervals for the female), and rhythm (downbeat emphasis [comparatively] for the male, upbeat emphasis for the female).

In the male variation, the melodic contour is a spiky alternation of sevenths, octave displacements of whole steps and major thirds complementing the minor intervals which compose the rest of the movement. With a melody composed primarily of two pitches (C# and B) and with little deviation from the steady quarter-note rhythm, the canon is easier to see on paper than to hear [see Example 2.24].

Example 2.24: Canon of the male variation

In the female variation, the flute melody contains two cells. Each is composed of a minor third and a half-step, one rising (C#-E-F) and one descending (Gb-Eb-D), as if it were “half” of the movement’s primary cell (the two minor thirds a half step apart). The final pitch of the second cell, D, attaches itself to the beginning of the first cell after the first statement, giving the melody a circular shape [see Example 2.25].
Example 2.25: Canon of the female variation

The third flute enters after the first five-beat accompaniment cycle is completed. In canon to the first two flutes, which play the melody slurred and staccato simultaneously, the third flute is a fifth higher and half as fast, disguising the variation's canonic structure. The melody displays the \([a+b]+[a+a+b]\) cellular form observed elsewhere in the ballet—for example, the antiphonal chords in mm. 69-72 in the Double Pas-de-Quatre—and also reverses the pattern of its own accompaniment \([a+b]+[a+b+b]\), where the \(a\) is the quarter rest and \(b\) the quarter note). The five-beat accompaniment pattern is reminiscent of the ostinato in the Bransle Gay, seeming to ignore the 3/4 meter (as does the flute melody).

The two variations are linked by textural and harmonic overlap. The accompaniment of the female variation enters underneath the sustained D-A fifth cadence of the male variation, dovetailing the two dances. The static accompaniment chord—\(A-B^b-G-G\)—is two minor thirds a whole step apart, a compromise between the major seconds and thirds of the male variation and the minor seconds and thirds of the female variation. The
male variation returns in abbreviated form after the female variation, but cadences on a variant of the tonic sonority of the Pas-de-Deux, A♯-C♯-D♯. This tonic variant is structured like the motifs of the female variation, a minor third and a whole step (like the accompaniment figure), but with only three notes (like the melody).

Coda

The Coda is based on palindromic sets that are not used serially but rather as themes for variation, or simply as symmetrical pitch constructs. All of the sets are based on the minor second/third alternation, forming a transition to the row of the Four Duos and Four Trios, which follow the Coda without a break. Each section of the Coda is governed by a different set; the first spans a tritone, the second and third a perfect fourth [see Table 2.17].

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>B (repeated)</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 495-503</td>
<td>Doppio lento</td>
<td>Quasi stretto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>set 1</td>
<td>504-511</td>
<td>512-519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>span: tritone</td>
<td>span: fourth</td>
<td>span: fourth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.17: Structural pattern of the Coda

The first part of the Coda is constructed of variations on the first set. The variations consist of rhythmic or melodic additions (two-note stutters), or simultaneities of pitches. The short connecting fragment between the first statement of the set and the second [brass and piano, second half of measure 496] is an inversion of the first half except for the penultimate interval. Stravinsky reverses this interval, as he has more than once elsewhere in the ballet. This reversal brings the shortened set back to its initial pitch, G, linking it to the next variation [see Example 2.26].
Example 2.26: Palindromic set of the Coda [m. 495] and link [m. 496]

The Doppio lento mixes the symmetrical sets of the beginning of the Coda with the cell structure of the Adagio of the Pas de Deux. The mandolin and solo violin melody begins with an almost symmetrical set: the steady alternation of half-steps and minor thirds is preserved throughout, beginning and ending with the same four-note cell [see Example 2.27]. This cell functions in the Doppio lento as the tonic cell did in the Adagio.

Example 2.27: Set of the Doppio lento

Yet another symmetrical set appears at the Quasi stretto (m. 512), this time spanning a fourth [see Example 2.28]. This set is presented monophonically, with instrument doublings and some internal two-note stutters; the only dyad occurs at the end of m. 514, A-B♭.

Example 2.27: Palindromic set of the Quasi stretto [m. 512]
These sets in the Coda are the most extensive palindromes in the ballet thus far, both in length and in the strictness with which Stravinsky uses them. The interval of a fourth also looks ahead to the full 12-tone row of the last part of the ballet: that row, similarly constructed of minor seconds and thirds, spans a fifth and is frequently deployed in such a way that it creates a 23-note palindromic set, pivoting around the final note of one form of the row.

In orchestration, rhythm, harmony, even melody, the Quasi streto is a transition to the Four Duos. The primary instruments in the Four Duos are low strings and low brass; in the Quasi streto, these are the dominant instruments, augmented by pitched percussion, piano, and a brief appearance by the violins and trumpets. The rhythm alternates a steady quarter-note walking rhythm [mm. 512, 515-519] with a more syncopated, slightly faster rhythm [mm. 513-514], both of which are used in the Four Duos. The almost complete linearity of the set approaches the serial monophony of the Four Duos, and the wide leaps ascending then descending anticipates the melodic profile. At the end of the Quasi streto (after the statement of the symmetrical set), there is a sequence, continuing the alternation of half-steps and minor thirds, which gradually collapses the fifth between G and C. The collapse forms the a ghost of a tonal V-I cadence setting up the serial, but C-based, Four Duos movement [see Example 2.29].

Example 2.29: Collapsing fifth cadence

The Pas-de-Deux is symmetrical, with the central female variation flanked by male variations and partnered dances. It is less self-contained than the two Pas-de-Trois, however, leading forward into the final part of the ballet in its progression from cells to sets.
toward the twelve-tone row of the Four Duos and Four Trios. A tonal orientation is less evident in the Pas-de-Deux than in any other section of the ballet and its Webersnake style evokes serialism; yet the more pitch-centered Four Duos and Four Trios are actually a more thorough application of the dodecaphonic technique.

Four Duos

The Four Duos, 19 bars between the Pas-de-Deux and the finale, are scored for low strings (violas, cellos, basses), tenor and bass trombone. The strings and trombones are musically independent, setting up an alternation of textures [see Table 2.18]: the pizzicato strings move in steady quarter notes, while the trombones are frequently syncopated, more rhythmically diverse, and are supplied with a variety of attacks ranging from slurs to legato tonguing to staccato.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A mm. 520-526</th>
<th>B 526-528</th>
<th>A' 529-534</th>
<th>B' 534-536</th>
<th>A'' 536-538</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>strings</td>
<td>trombones</td>
<td>strings</td>
<td>trombones</td>
<td>str/trbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pizzicato</td>
<td>varied attacks</td>
<td>syncopation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>walking rhythm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.18: Structural pattern of the Four Duos

The Four Duos movement is the most overtly serial in the ballet, both in rigor and in style. Although all of the pitch material is derived from a 12-tone row, the construction of the movement still shows some tonal orientation. Intervals of fourths and fifths appear prominently in row construction, vertical coincidence, and the pitches on which versions of the row begin and end (C and F). The row shares a common feature with the other rows used in the ballet—the reliance on two principal intervals. While the previous two rows had been built on half and whole steps (with a fourth), this row is built on an alternation of half steps and minor thirds, ending a fifth away from where it began [see Example 2.30].

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Example 2.30: The Row of the Four Duos

The palindromes of the Pas-de-Deux's Coda are reflected in the Four Duos. The versions of the row are fused—prime to retrograde, retrograde to inversion—so that the last note of one version serves as the first note of another, creating a chain of palindromes.64

Even though the texture of the Four Duos approaches a single line, a variety of rhythm and timbre is achieved by the two groups of instruments. The movement preserves rhythmic features of the rest of the ballet—the upbeat phrase beginning and cadence, even the chiming intonation—and the transfers between strings and trombones overlap in timbral and rhythmic profile. In measure 526, the trombone's staccato note links it to the strings; in measure 528, the strings' chime-like upbeat C (slurred to a rest) matches the trombone's F, overlapping by one note. In measure 534, as the trombones begin a prime version of the row in quarter notes, they overlap the end of the strings' row by two notes, creating consecutive fifths between the two voices, C-G and B-\text{b}-F. The only vertical sonorities are these fifths—the first incidence is the primary fifth, C-F, and the last two are the other fifths that contain C [C-G] and F [B-\text{b}-F]. Only at the transition to the next movement is there more overlap between the two groups of instruments, building textural tension as the trombone sustains its pitches over the low strings into the Four Trios.

64The cellos introduce the row, with the violas and basses trading off as reinforcements; the strings immediately retrograde the row at a fourth above R5, which brings the row to an end on the starting point of the first row, C. This pitch links the strings and their row to the trombones and their inversion I0. The bass trombone finishes the retrograde row with its C, and the tenor trombone picks up with the F of the inversion. The row ends on F and the strings enter on a C against the F to begin their own prime inversion. The strings fuse an immediate retrograde inversion R15 to the concluding F.
Four Trios

The heart of the Four Trios is the recapitulation of the Pas-de-Quatre, completing the frame of the entire ballet. Before that recapitulation, however, Stravinsky wrote the ballet’s most rigorously serial and contrapuntally-derived section [see Table 2.19].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mm. 539-52</th>
<th>553-78</th>
<th>561-620</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fugal exposition and episode</td>
<td>transition</td>
<td>recap of the Pas-de-Quatre</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.19: Structural pattern of the Four Trios

The movement opens with a return to the high Baroque sense of the Saraband-Step in the form of a fugue exposition. Fugue is the most rigorous type of tonal writing, serialism the most rigorous type of atonal writing. Stravinsky combines the two in a serial fugue. The subject of the fugue is the row from the Four Duos, re-shaped into melodic cells reminiscent of the female dancer’s variation in the Pas-de-Deux (groups of three eighth notes, with a staccato upbeat leading to two slurred notes). In the opening of the Four Trios, Stravinsky carries forward fugal procedures to include a countersubject, an episode, and a re-statement of the subject.65 As in the Four Duos, a tonal resonance remains in the interval of imitation, the fourth.

65 The countersubject is derived from the row, as is the episodic material. The fugue subject is a retrograde version of the row, stated in the upper strings and answered by the lower strings at a fourth, sustaining the fourth-axis of the Four Duos. Against the lower strings, the upper strings’ countersubject is a transposition of the prime row at the fifth [P7]. The lower strings repeat the row immediately upon completion of the fugue subject, but this prime inversion is altered in an unusual and telling way. The only place where the steady alternation of half-steps and minor thirds is interrupted is at the two consecutive half-steps between pitches 8, 9 and 10. In the low strings’ inversion, there are two consecutive half-steps in the proper place, but the pitches themselves are a repetition [G-A♭ in mm. 544-545]. The row then ends with the proper interval sequence—a minor third and a half step, although the minor third is in the wrong direction. Once again, this indicates that Stravinsky regarded the identity of the row as determined more by interval than pitch.
After each group has stated the fugue subject and a second version of the row, Stravinsky derives an episode from it in much the same way that Bach might have. The episodic material is spun out of the building blocks of the subject—half-steps and minor thirds in this case, without following any section of the row.

The last six intervals of the row form a distinctive symmetrical construction, divided between the two half-steps [see Example 2.31]. For want of a better term, this interval group will be referred to here as a heptachord (since seven pitches are involved).

![Example 2.31: Second “Heptachord” of row](image)

The heptachord is stated simultaneously in the upper strings and second trumpet, and in inversion in the lower strings and trombones in measure 548, before a fortissimo unison statement of the retrograde row in the upper strings (in a new melodic/rhythmic guise). As in the return to the first theme in the Bransle Gay, where the hexachord from the Bransle Simple was interpolated, the use of this heptachord in a serial form bears a striking resemblance to the dominant in a tonal form.66

The section’s final sonority, set off from the next by a *Luspfause*, is a G♭-Major chord, over the sustained A♭ in the trombones. This sudden triadic sonority in the serial section signals a harmonic shift. The horns introduce a new rhythmic motif on a C-Major chord over an A (C-E-G-A, or two fifths a third apart). The motif is new in the movement but not in the ballet: it is the rhythm of the opening trumpet fanfare, foreshadowing a

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66 The heptachord also appears in the trumpets as two different counterlines to the row.
recapitulation of the music of the Pas-de-Quatre. As the horns recall the opening of the ballet, the low strings recall the Four Duos with their wide-leaping, walking quarter notes.

This reprise shows only small changes: a slight difference in the meter of the first two measures (a 4/8 bar with a two-beat pickup becomes two 3/8 bars), but a more important one in the trumpets. They pick up the fanfare from the horns, filling out the texture and changing the harmony. The previous F-B-C (a stack of fourths) is altered to F-A-C-E-G (a stack of thirds containing three fifths). This is an extension of the F-G-C sonority of the Pas-de-Quatre; although the sonority had functioned as a dominant in the Pas-de-Quatre, it was also the most stable of the primary sonorities, and with the additional notes, the stability is strengthened.

Conclusion

Continuities of intervallic construction, sonority, timbre, historical allusion, and rhythm combine in Agon to create a web of relationships in music that is both tonal and serial: sometimes one, sometimes the other, sometimes a hybrid of the two. These two compositional languages, often perceived as antagonistic and polarized, are brought together here along a continuum between the two poles. Table 2.20 summarizes the tonal flow of the ballet, diagramming the rough tonal/serial/tonal arch of the ballet. It should be noted that this arch regards compositional technique rather than sound, as the Bransle Simple is both serial and tonal. [Shaded areas indicate relatively strong tonal centering; the boxes indicate some tonal centering; no box or shading indicates relative lack of tonal centering.]

The merging of serialism and tonality in Agon is the ballet’s main harmonic feature. In the central movements, serialism is applied to diatonically-constructed rows; in the outer movements, the mix is of more subtle, but fundamental elements of musical language. At the beginning of the ballet, diatonic language seems to prevail, as motifs or cells are subjected to serial operations. The motifs as Stravinsky uses them are not typical serial rows:
Table 2.20: Tonal flow of *Agon*
they are not six or twelve notes long, and many of them are used simultaneously—some as
accompaniment, others as melody. By the end of the ballet, complete 12-tone rows are
deployed serially, but the grammar of his phrases is redolent of tonality—fourth and fifth
relationships, a seemingly dominant function of the second half of the row, and fugal
devices reminiscent of Bach. The large-scale symmetry of the ballet, formed by the music of
the Pas-de-Quatre, is enhanced by the diatonic/serial mix in the movements just inside the
frame. But, whether the music is diatonic or serial, the pitch C is central to Agon: the
emphasis placed on C and related keys (G, F, D, B♭) throughout the ballet gives an overall
tonal sense to the work.

The smallest level constructions carry larger-scale implications. The quintal
trichords (C-G-D, F-C-G, F-B♭-E♭, even the extended B♭-F/D-G[m] of the Bransle
Simple) are one manifestation of the symmetry at work in Agon, expanded upon by the
polytonal layers and compressed harmonic progressions. The anomalous C is akin to the
sometimes unexpected interpolations which foreshadow or recall other sections of the
ballet—the small palindromic extension in the Pas-de-Quatre which introduces the idea of
serialism, the reappearance of the Bransle Simple’s hexachord in the Bransle Gay, the
cell/set construction of the Pas-de-Deux that anticipates the 12-tone row of the Four Duos,
even the additions to the Pre¹ de in the Interludes, subtly reflecting the instrumentation,
rhythmic quality, and tonality of surrounding movements. The Prelude/Interludes also
gesturally and timbrally relate to the Pas-de-Quatre, with the call of heraldic trumpets and a
softer, agitated answer, delineating the inner sections of the ballet as well as the outer frame.

The recurrent rub of seconds is a sonority that reaches back to the composer’s
earliest music. It recalls the octatonic forms and the chiming intonations of Stravinsky’s
Russian period, devices that resonate through his neoclassical period to this, his first serial
composition. Stravinsky’s adoption of serialism, however, was not the end of his
neoclassicism. Agon is still a neoclassical work, though its sources are less specific than those
invoked in Pulcinella, The Dumbarton Oaks Concerto, or the Symphony in C. They range
over the styles of four centuries. Baroque dance provides the structural framework—binary
and ternary movements in which tonal areas are balanced by fifth relationships—into which
are woven references from the 17th-century courtly dance and the Baroque keyboard suite
through the musical clichés of 19th-century Russian classical ballet to early 20th-century
Europe (Webern and jazz). The Baroque dances are highly abstracted, some to the point
where nothing but the name remains; the traits of classical ballet are more obviously
presented, perhaps not least because the work was being written for a company and a
choreographer deeply rooted in the classical style. The Pas-de-Deux, formally and
orchestrationally, is the most obvious reference to classical ballet, but the gender-referent
instrumentation (brass for boys, flutes for girls) and the useful, almost continuous rhythmic
pulse throughout the ballet can be traced to this source as well.

The rhythmic ostinato is a multivalent sign, characteristic both of ballet (the motor
pulse) and of Stravinsky’s style. Other double references recur throughout Agon, a useful
ploy for the composer in his engagement with misdirection: the mandolin in the Gailliarde
evokes the sound of courtly dances as well as Webern; the upbeat cadential chord
containing the second/seventh sounds like an affectation of 1920s dance-hall jazz, but it
also sounds like the chiming of a bell. Other cases of misdirection involve detaching a
referent from its usual context: some of the most strictly serial sections have the strongest
tonal pull (the Bransle Simple), whereas the movement which “sounds” the most serial (the
Pas-de-Deux) is not.

In Agon, Stravinsky has woven a dense, richly patterned fabric of language,
grammar, and style. He has not only introduced a wide range of historical sources; by
dissociating elements from their familiar compositional alliances, he has widened and
deepened the pool of traits from which he can choose. Some elements usually deemed
antagonistic are fused together; some do double duty. Musical elements are shuffled and
recombined with the same thoroughness as are the dancers on the stage.
Chapter Three

The Choreography of Agon

Agon...[was] planned by Stravinsky and myself for twelve of our ablest technicians; it has no story except the dancing itself; it is less a struggle or contest than a measured construction in space, demonstrated by moving bodies set to certain patterns or sequence[s] in rhythm and melody...

—Balanchine

Choreography, as I conceive it, must realize its own form, one independent of the musical form though measured to the musical unit. Its construction will be based on whatever correspondences the choreographer may invent, but it must not seek merely to duplicate the line and beat of the music. I do not see how one can be a choreographer unless, like Balanchine, one is a musician first.

—Stravinsky

George Balanchine’s choreography is like music, constructed from motif to phrase to large-scale architecture. The musical nature of his choreography, noted repeatedly by observers of the dance, is a natural outgrowth of the choreographer’s background.

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Balanchine was born into a musical family. His father, Meliton Balanchivadze, was a composer known in his native land as the “Georgian Glinka,” and his brother Andrei became a prominent Soviet composer. Balanchine himself was an accomplished pianist and violinist, and he composed the music for some of his student choreographies. Balanchine was a student at the Conservatory in Petrograd (St. Petersburg) for three years after his graduation from the (formerly Imperial) Theatre School in 1921, and he was torn between a career in music or a career in dance for most of his youth. Finally he chose dance. Approving of this choice, Stravinsky later said, “The world is full of pretty good concert pianists but a choreographer such as Balanchine is, after all, the rarest of beings.”

At the age of twenty-one, Balanchine joined Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes in Paris as a dancer and choreographer. In the latter role, he gained the reputation of being inventive but also something of a trickster, employing acrobatic elements and other movements considered outside the classical dance vocabulary. One of Diaghilev’s last productions, Apollo (1928), was a turning point for Balanchine, who found the key to his choreographic style in Stravinsky’s music:

It was in studying Apollo that I came first to understand how gestures, like tones in music and shades in painting, have certain family relations. As groups they impose their own laws. The more conscious an artist is, the more he comes to understand these laws, and to respond to them. Since this work, I have developed my choreography inside the framework such relations suggest.  

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5Balanchine was born Georgi Balanchivadze. Diaghilev chose the name “Balanchine,” which sounds both French and Russian, as opposed to the undeniably Georgian (and difficult for Europeans to pronounce) “Balanchivadze.”

4A brief composition of Balanchine’s, a French-influenced neo-classical “Valse lente” for which I could find no date, was recently recorded by pianist Madeleine Malraux, Piano Media 7 (CD) K6171019.

5He left Russia in 1924, before his studies were complete.


Apollo, with characters from Greek myth and music influenced by the French Baroque,\(^8\) is Balanchine’s earliest surviving complete ballet, the first mature expression of his neoclassical style. This style is based on the vocabulary of classical dance with additional demands on the dancer’s flexibility, speed, and precision; for coherence it relies more upon musical and choreographic composition than upon narrative.

The formalist, non-narrative ballet is most closely associated with Balanchine, though he is not the originator of choreographic abstraction. His sources may be traced back to Isadora Duncan, who danced in Russia when he was a student. Duncan’s improvisatory, impressionistic dances made a profound impact on choreographer Mikhail Fokine.\(^9\) Fokine’s Les Sylphides (known in Russia as Chopiniana) had only the barest sketch of a story\(^10\) to music hitherto considered unfit for dancing (ironically, many based on folk dance forms): the piano works of Frédéric Chopin, which were also danced by Duncan. A more direct influence on the young Balanchine was the choreographer Feodor Lopukhov.

\(^8\)The French Baroque influence on the music of Apollo was primarily rhythmic. Stravinsky himself said “The real subject of Apollo...is versification... The basic rhythmic patterns are iambic, and the individual dances may be thought of as variations of the reversible dotted rhythm iamb idea... Apollo is a tribute to the French seventeenth century. I thought that the Frenchmen might have taken the hint for this, if not from my musical Alexandrines, at least from the décor: the chariot, the three horses, and the sun disc (the Coda) were the emblem of le roi soleil” [in Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, Dialogues and a Diary (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1959): 16-17]. Stravinsky’s testiness is evidence that not everyone understood the French quality of the ballet; interestingly, much of what Stravinsky describes as “decor” is also present in the choreography—the chariot and three “horses” are reflected by the three muses pulling Apollo as if he were driving a troika (a Russian connection), and the sun disc is echoed in a number of sunburst configurations made by the dancers.

\(^9\)Duncan’s non-narrative, “abstract” dances had a worldwide impact. In America, her influence sparked the creation of modern dance and may be traced in the works of Ruth St. Denis (who coined the term “music visualization,” basically meaning “mickey-mousing”), Ted Shawn, Doris Humphrey, Agnes de Mille, and Martha Graham. Similarly in Europe, Duncan was a tremendous influence on the German school of modern dance—among them Rudolf von Laban (inventor of the Labanotation system of dance notation), Mary Wigman, and Wigman’s student Hanya Holm (who returned to America to choreograph not only for her own company, but also for Broadway musicals).

\(^10\)Les Sylphides is related to the classical divertissement, which is a series of non-narrative dances, usually including character dances. The divertissement is typically part of a larger, multi-act narrative ballet; Les Sylphides, however, is a free-standing single act.
Lopoukhov’s philosophy, outlined in his *Path of the Ballet Master*, included as a first principle that “choreographic themes should be worked out musically on parallel principles of competition, contrast, development, rather than by inherited formulas or casual steps.”

On 7 March 1923 in the Maryinsky Theatre, Balanchine was in the cast of Lopoukhov’s *Tanzsynfonia*, set to Beethoven’s Fourth Symphony. The plotless ballet used dancers as parallels to orchestration, with individuals or groups following the strings, woodwinds, etc. *Tanzsynfonia* had no scenery and the costumes were basically rehearsal clothes that revealed the body more than did most stage costumes of the period.

In this ballet, one can clearly see the traits that were to distinguish the style of Balanchine’s ballets exemplified by *Agon*: bare stage, plainly dressed dancers, non-narrative content, music that one might more readily associate with the concert hall than the ballet orchestra pit, and strong connections of music and dance.

For Balanchine, whether the ballet be narrative or non-narrative, choreography was to be found in the music. In *Agon*, choreography and music are especially well integrated. The choreography draws on many of the same unifying threads as the music: historical reference, including popular, vernacular sources; a blending of neo-classical and modern (20th-century) techniques; sensitivity to fluctuations of texture and density of materials; fleeting motives that appear as structural markers; flexible, independent rhythms; and

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11Kirstein mistranslated the Russian word “путь“ which means way, journey, or means, as “pathos.”


13*Movement and Metaphor*, 218-19. This genre was also represented in the works of Léonide Massine, who in the 1930s choreographed several symphonies, including Brahms’s Fourth and Tchaikovsky’s fifth.

14Another influence stemming from the Diaghilev period of Balanchine’s career, was the eurhythmic method of Emile Jacques-Dalcroze. His system of fitting mime gestures to music (essentially a theory of mickey-mousing) made a great impact on Vaclav Nijinsky. Dalcroze’s student, Marie Rambert (Miriam Rambach), became part of the Diaghilev circle during the choreography of *Le Sacre du Printemps* (1913).
unconventional organizing principles that include symmetrical asymmetries. Although the musical and choreographic patterns do not always coincide, each complements the other, and the moments of structural coincidence become more significant by contrast.

**Historical Reference**

Historical reference in the choreography of *Agon* ranges through centuries of European and American dancing, from the courtly dances of the French Baroque through classical ballet and modern dance, to popular ballroom styles and show dancing. As in the music, the courtly dances are highly stylized, reminiscences of character rather than actual steps; the traditions of classical ballet are more faithfully followed in the technique as well as the structure of the ballet. Even the classical ballet tradition of demi-caractère dancing is found in *Agon* in the solo variations, the Saraband-Step, and the Bransle Gay.

As a dance style, ballet was influenced by the folk forms of Europe in much the same way as was classical music: characteristic traits are absorbed into the technique, often regularized in rhythm or meter and somewhat “tamed”—made more decorous and stylized. Demi-caractère dances depend on surface details for their character—distinctive rhythms, movements of the head and arms, and sometimes patterns of steps.

Modern dance, born near the turn of the twentieth century, resisted the strictures of ballet with its emphasis on weightlessness, on fighting gravity. In modern dance, the emphasis was frequently on “down,” of being “into the ground,” partially recapturing the “weightedness” of much folk dancing that was gradually erased during the evolution of

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15 This type of dance is sometimes called “jazz dancing,” but I have chosen to use the term “show dancing” because of the wide variety of dance and music styles involved. Ballet, modern dance, tap, ballroom, gymnastics, and slapstick comedy have all contributed to the kind of dancing presented on the stage of the American musical theatre. Although from show to show, even number to number, a particular style may prevail, anything and everything is available to the choreographer—somewhat like Balanchine’s approach to *Agon*.
ballet. Balanchine uses this contrast in the essential dance character most effectively in the Saraband-Step, even within the demi-caractère style. Modern influences may also be seen in the Pas-de-Deux with its tensile intertwining of the dancers’ bodies, or in other, more fleeting movements that isolate parts of the torso.

Balanchine also draws on American vernacular dancing in Agon—dances like the Lindy and the Jitterbug make abstracted appearances, and the soft shoe is a motivic element in several movements of the ballet. For a brief moment, the two girls in the Gailliarde are even transformed from ballet dancers to show dancers with a side-by-side step that would not be out of place in a line of Rockettes.

Balanchine’s own history, like that of Stravinsky, is woven into the fabric of Agon. The ballet is to some degree a return to the stylized French court of Apollo, although transformed by Balanchine’s experience in the intervening thirty years. During this time, he had worked with young American dancers in his School of American Ballet, in the New York City Ballet and its predecessors, and as the choreographer of a number of Broadway musicals in the 1930s and 1940s. His admiration for Fred Astaire and Ray Bolger, as well as the movements from modern dance he adopted in some of his earlier ballets, had an impact on Agon. All these elements had surfaced previously, but none of his ballets had been so inclusive of references or so intricately interconnected.

16 The physical equivalent of Barthes’s “grain of the voice”: modern dance has “weight,” while ballet is ethereal, weightless (grainless).

17 Contrary to traditional Broadway lore, Agnes de Mille’s dances in Oklahoma! (1943) were not the first plot-driven ballet on Broadway; Balanchine choreographed “Slaughter on Tenth Avenue” for Rodgers and Hart’s On Your Toes in 1936. Even Robert Alton and Gene Kelly’s “Joey’s Dream” for Pal Joey (also by Rodgers and Hart) predates Oklahoma! by almost three years.

18 One of Balanchine’s most “modern” ballets, in terms of dance vocabulary, was Orpheus. The 1948 narrative ballet completes the trilogy of Stravinsky-Balanchine “Greek ballets” which began with Apollo and culminates with Agon.
Neo-classical and modern (20th-century) techniques

The basic language of Agon’s choreography is the swift, precise neo-classical ballet style; as mentioned above, this basic language is inflected with borrowings from vernacular dancing and modern dance, and the courtly manners of seventeenth-century dance. Somewhat ironically, courtly dance is an important progenitor of both ballet and modern dance—two styles which, for most of the twentieth century, were vehemently opposed to one another. Ballet developed from courtly dancing, gradually emphasizing its aristocratic nature, virtuosity, and weightless ethereality. After its initial rebellion against ballet, modern dancing sought to define its own technique(s). One of the sources to which modern dancers turned was courtly dance—dance before the stylization of ballet. Louis Horst’s Pre-Classic Dance Forms, a book which described the musical and choreographic specifics of courtly dances and gave dancers suggested music for their performance, became a virtually indispensable handbook for many modern dancers (including Agnes de Mille and Martha Graham) and was part of the curriculum at the Juilliard School for many years.

Much of Agon’s humor (“movement fun” in Terry’s words) is derived from deflected expectations, of witty comment on traditional dance forms or decorum, or even of the music itself. The exaggerated role of porteur for the male dancer in the Pas-de-Deux is almost a parody of classical ballet; the unexpected juxtapositions of classical dancing with off-hand, casual behavior are more often found in the rehearsal hall than on the stage; an isolated movement set to a solitary pizzicato in the bass can seem humorous even—or especially—when the surrounding context is serious.

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Princeton: Dance Horizons, 1937. My thanks to Jessica Fogel for drawing my attention to this source.

Layered over the dance technique in *Agon* is yet another distinctly 20th-century movement technique—that of film. Throughout the ballet, Balanchine utilizes such cinematic techniques of jump-cuts, slow motion, and reverses. These “artificial” techniques are the same ones that Balanchine used when creating dance numbers for his then-wife Vera Zorina in musical films of the late 1930s and early 1940s (for instance, the water nymph ballet in 1937’s *The Goldwyn Follies* utilizes slow motion, reverses, and slow-motion reverses). *Agon* is perhaps his most extensive translation of these techniques to the stage.

**Density and Texture**

Stravinsky’s comment that “portions of *Agon* contain three times as much music for the same clock length as some other works of mine”\(^{21}\) is reflected in Balanchine’s choreography as well. The interweaving of elements of continuity creates a remarkable density, and the dancers must move more swiftly, more precisely, more energetically in *Agon* than in any prior ballet by Balanchine (perhaps by anyone). The spatial and temporal structures of the choreography are so complex that in his program notes, Balanchine referred to the ballet as his “IBM ballet.”

Texture is one of the principal markers of sections within the choreography of *Agon*. Musical textures—polyphony (primarily canon), melody and accompaniment, homophony, unison—may be translated to choreography. Melody and accompaniment textures have long been a part of ballet, as one or two principal dancers are foregrounded against a corps de ballet performing simpler background patterns, and the choreographic equivalents of unison and polyphony are obvious: dancers are performing the same steps at the same time (unison), the same steps at a certain time interval (canon), or different steps of equal importance at the same time (polyphony). Homophony has been adapted in the present

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analysis to refer to a variation on a unison: dancers perform the same steps at the same time, but to different directions or on different facings.

These “musical” textures are joined by more particularly choreographic textures of position and of movement. Structural divisions in the dance are frequently marked by a change of floor pattern, or by a distinction between movements that are traveling—moving across the stage—and movements that are stationary—staying within a small area. (When there is no choreographic movement at all, the dancers will be described as “still.”) Because of the three-dimensional properties of choreography, Balanchine is able to exploit two textures at once—a canon that travels, homophony that is stationary—even to use textures in a complementary fashion. For instance, in the Double Pas-de-Quatre, a starburst-diamond floor pattern is also reflected in an accompaniment pattern: pairs of girls form starbursts as they face in opposite directions, holding their arms on diagonals with the working leg in a tendu behind.

Motives

As Stravinsky returns throughout his score to the chiming intonation and the silent downbeat, Balanchine returns to a few motivic ideas throughout his dances. The two most prominent are the heel and the piqué. The heel is the subtler and more varied of the two, appearing as heel strikes to the floor or a heel drop, often initiating or punctuating a phrase. The most striking use of the heel motive is its extension in the “pushing arabesque,” so called because, instead of the normally poised and forward-pointing classical arabesque, it is an outward movement from the center of the torso, with the arms reaching out and up, the working leg thrusting backward, and the supporting foot flexing up. As the weight shifts backward, it is momentarily balanced upon the heel.

The most pervasive motive in the ballet is the piqué à terre, as a step and as a position. In the classical piqué à terre, weight is fully resting on the supporting foot and the working foot is in second (to the side) or fourth (front or back) position, the toe touching
the ground with the heel raised; therefore the knee is bent and, due to normal balletic rotation of the leg, the hip and thigh are open. In *Agon*, Balanchine also uses an “inversion” of the piqué à terre, what I have termed a “crossed piqué”—the toes of the working foot are close to the instep of the supporting foot, the bent leg turned inward and crossed over the knee of the supporting foot, closing the hip and thigh. This closed position is frequently used as a cadential or resting position, especially for the girls; but it also appears as a twisting action as the dancer alternates sides.

**Rhythm**

The score of *Agon* is driven almost throughout with a strong motor pulse, which the choreography reflects. As the meter often fluctuates, so too do the dancers’ counts. Dancers’ counts are the choreographic equivalent of meter, though their shifting groupings are more often than not independent of the score. Stravinsky’s silent downbeats are incorporated into the choreography (seen most vividly in the opening Pas-de-Quatre and the Bransle Simple for two boys), and Balanchine creates choreographic syncopations on a scale similar to Stravinsky’s musical ones, though again, he is rarely content merely to mimic what Stravinsky has already written into the music.

Balanchine also creates a choreographic analog to a higher level of structural rhythm in music. The harmonic rhythm of sections based on different central pitches is equivalent to textural sections defined by floor pattern, by contrasts of traveling or stationary choreography, and by the musical-choreographic textures of melody and accompaniment, homophony, and polyphony.

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22 Dancers’ counts do not always imply the same stress patterns as musical meter, but, perhaps because of his musical training, Balanchine’s dancers’ counts almost always do convey a pattern of accented and unaccented beats. As with musical meter, this dance meter displays varying degrees of emphasis from movement to movement.
Organizing Principles:  
Abstracted Narrative

*Agon* is a suite of dances; conventional means of organizing a large-scale work are subordinated here to the succession of individual movements, each unique in character. Yet the score contains the remnants of tonality and a series of interlocking symmetries that bind it together. Similarly, Balanchine has discarded the traditional means of providing unity to a ballet—a narrative—but the traces of a narrative (like those of tonality) remain, locked within the symmetrical structures of this so-called "abstract ballet."

In *Agon*, the dancers are no longer characters as such, but figures within a complex "dynamic machine." Their de-individualization is heightened by the setting (a plain blue cyclorama) and the costumes (regular rehearsal clothes). The girls wear black sleeveless leotards and pink tights with pink pointe shoes, and the boys wear black tights and slippers, with white T-shirts and socks. Paradoxically, this de-individualization is weakened by *Agon*’s rehearsal atmosphere. Balanchine himself mentions the warm-up style of the ballet, and there are flashes of personality, of play, even of horseplay as the dancer in the Saraband-Step saunters to the front of the stage and flourishes a cocky bow, or as the girls in the Gaillarde try out various ending positions of the arms, tongue-in-cheek. The Greek word *agon* means contest, but this choreographic contest is not really a competition between the dancers, except that kind of competition (at once mock and deadly serious) played out in a rehearsal hall.

*Agon* is not the only "abstract" Balanchine ballet that suggests a narrative. Perhaps the most famous example is *Liebeslieder Walzer*, with its hints of flirtations, affairs, a dimly

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revealed tragedy, its abstraction heightened in the second half when the girls change their ballroom clothes for tutus and pointe shoes. But the choreographer disliked the term “abstract”:

No piece of music, no dance can in itself be abstract. You hear a physical sound, humanly organized, performed by people. Or you see moving before you, dancers of flesh and blood, in a living relation to each other. What you hear and see is completely real. But the after-image that remains with the observer may have for him the quality of an abstraction.25

Even those who used the term often recognized that “abstract” did not mean merely cerebral. Typical is the statement of Jack Anderson, who observed that “the abstract ballets of George Balanchine may be as rich in emotional implications as they are in technical ingenuity, whereas an abstraction by a lesser ballet master may seem only an arrangement of classroom steps.”26 Commenting upon Agon, John Martin said that the choreography was so abstract that it came close to the margin where it might “break the sound barrier and pass out of the realm of ballet into pure mathematics.” Yet he still found that, even though it “avoided the dancer,” it did so because it was “brimming over with...elegan[ce], virtuoso beyond belief, and thoroughly entertaining.”27 Gelsey Kirkland, a dancer who felt that Balanchine stifled her creativity as an artist by reining in her desire to express herself as an individual, is unwittingly revealing in the following statement. Even as she vents her frustration at his emphasis on the technical, she underlines his sensitivity to the individuality of dancers by railing against what she sees as his insensitivity:

The interpretive stamp of a dancer threatened to mar the choreographic design of the master. ...But his ballets succeeded or failed in part because of the personal touch bestowed by individual dancers, whose passion and personality manifested itself in spite of Balanchine’s best efforts to the contrary. To his credit, he knew how to take advantage of a personality when he saw one. In designing a role, he made use of whatever characteristic traits might be suggested by a dancer’s physical appearance.

27Stravinsky and the Dance, 58.
His emphasis on form, chance, and spontaneity included the imagination of a dancer only as an unavoidable and often inadvertent contribution to his picture. As much as he tried, he could not do away with or do without the unique aspects of individual virtuosity.28

Just as some resisted the apparent emotional barrenness of a dance with no story, no clearly defined characters, others did not care for the plainness, the ordinariness of rehearsal togs as costumes. Among these (and understandably so, given her background as an artist and costume designer) was the wife of Balanchine’s collaborator:

“But why,” asked Madame [Stravinsky] in her voice which now and then suggested a flute in its lower register, “no costumes! Nothing but those athletic black and white things, like underwear. That is good for rehearsal; but that has no charm for performance—” and she made a comprehensive and very feminine gesture of lifted hand in a stem-and-flower grace, and turned her head the smallest trifle, and her body, and in a second, she created a sense of costume and illustrated such beauty of a theatrical purpose that I leaned back in my chair...29

Curiously, neither Madame Stravinsky nor the anecdote’s narrator seemed to realize that she had reinforced Balanchine’s aesthetic in her very protest—with the right gesture, one has no need of a costume to create theatricality. From his perspective as an art historian, David Michael Levin has argued through philosophy and theory what many feel instinctively—that monochrome backdrops and minimal black-and-white costumes are essential to Balanchine’s modernist, formalist aesthetic.30 The clarity (what Lincoln Kirstein termed “legibility”) of the dancer’s bodies in the simple, form-fitting clothes reveals not so much “character”—a traditional function of costumes—as “essence”—form, line and even the physical manifestations of emotion observed by Anderson and unrecognized by Kirkland. This emotion, expressed by the form of the choreography, is the reverse of the “ugliness”


of Picasso’s effort left in the paint or the dance impulse captured in Stravinsky’s music. The
drama does not produce the choreography; the choreography produces the drama.

Symmetrical Asymmetries

As does its music, Agon’s choreography displays symmetrical asymmetries. A
balance on one level (number of dancers, or style, for instance) is unbalanced at another.
The first part of the three-part arch form builds up dancers in groups of four, divided by
gender—four boys, then eight girls, then all twelve. Only at the end of the Triple Pas-de-
Quatre do the genders form pairs. In the middle section, the four couples divide up: first
two girls and a boy, then two boys and a girl, and then one male-female pair. The last
section builds the dancers up to twelve again, but in gender-mixed groups of two and three.
Thus both the first and last sections increase the number of dancers on stage to twelve in
clear, consistent groupings, but the groupings themselves are composed differently.

The choreography exhibits the same binary/ternary interaction as the music. On
the largest level, the three major parts of the ballet are also divisible into two: the first half
of the ballet—through the Second Pas-de-Trois—is composed of relatively short, discrete
dances; the second half, beginning with the Pas-de-Deux, is continuous. In the dance
score, the Finale begins with the Quasi stretto at the end of the Pas-de-Deux and continues
through without break to the end as the male-female duo of the Pas-de-Deux is multiplied
by four—the Four Duos—and then a second girl is added to each duo to create the Four
Trios. The entire ballet is framed by the Pas-de-Quatre for four boys, and the movements
just interior to the framing Pas-de-Quatre—the Double Pas-de-Quatre for eight girls, and
the Four Trios for the entire ensemble—show the highest level of textural complexity.

The two different architectural schemes are articulated by the central section: if the
Pas-de-Deux were to come between the two Pas-de-Trois, the ternary structure would be
more balanced; instead, its being moved outside links the movement to the final section.
The binary/ternary interaction works on smaller levels as well; as with the music, the
choreography of the ballet is dense and multivalent: motives, phrases, themes, and sections interlock in a complex fabric, and significant elements can be as small as a single movement, or a couple of measures of musical time, or a single gesture or pose.

In *Agon*, the number of dancers on stage is related to the structure of the dance. To some extent, this is an obvious statement: a solo dance cannot contain canons, just as a dance set on twelve dancers cannot have the same soloistic complexity as a variation set on a soloist. All the same, the distinction is worth noting.

The group dances are more about structure—spatial and temporal placement and textural contrast—than about individual steps. The opening Pas-de-Quatre for four boys is a fine example of structural choreography. A detailed examination of this movement also reveals how Balanchine is able to connect disparate choreographic elements through an overarching idea—the concept of the rehearsal. In fleeting gestures or deeply imbedded references, Balanchine evokes rehearsal behavior throughout the ballet, but appropriate to an exposition, the behavior is clearest in the Pas-de-Quatre.

**Pas-de-Quatre**

The four boys in black tights, white T-shirts, socks and shoes, who stand there alertly in the background with their backs turned to us, are so unmistakably American boys, that for a moment, one could take this for the gang rumble of *West Side Story*.

—Horst Koegler

31“[D]ie vier Jungen, die da in schwarzen Trikothosen, weißen T-Shirts, Socken und Schuhen mit uns zugewandtem Rücken im Hintergrund aufgeregt stehen, sind so unverkennbar American boys, daß man sie momentan für die Kumpel der West Side Story-Gang hält.” *Balanchine und das moderne Ballett* (Velber bei Hannover: Erhard Friedrich Verlag, 1964: 37.)
Upstage four boys are seen with their backs to the public and motionless... Lightly they stand in an intent stillness. They whirl, four at once, to face you. ...[T]he boys' steps explod[e] like pistol shots. The steps seem to come in tough, brief bursts. Dancing in canon, in unison, in and out of symmetry, the boys might be trying out their speed of waist, their strength of ankle; no lack of aggressiveness.

—Edwin Denby

The opening Pas-de-Quatre for four boys is both a warm-up session and a choreographic rondo based on the textural alternation of three sets of oppositions—stationary vs. traveling, unison/homophony vs. canon, and side-by-side vs. mirror dancing—as Balanchine's “dynamic machine” explores the possibilities of stage space. The homophonic A sections are set to floor patterns covering all areas of the stage, slowly increasing stretch in the body and ground covered; in the canonic B sections, the dancers’ ballet steps are literally and figuratively center stage. The effect is almost cinematic: two simultaneous dances intercut one other, each growing progressively more complex. [See Table 3.1 for a layout of the Pas-de-Quatre; the superscripts indicate beats within the measure indicated.]

As the curtain rises on Agon, the boys are standing four across upstage, facing the back of the stage. Initiating the dance is their unison half-turn to face the audience, and they pause momentarily in a B+ position. This pose, much used by Balanchine (his initial is the source of the “B”), serves equally well as a resting position and a springboard for action, since the dancer stands on one foot, the working toe touching the ground behind the supporting foot; the arms are normally held low and to the sides—level with the hips, but at some distance from them, curved or straight depending on the character of the choreography. Here they fall naturally at the sides.

The first steps, performed side-by-side in unison by all four dancers, are a stylized box-step, the corners marked by demi-pliés. Then the boys break a cardinal rule of stage decorum, doing something they would be perfectly free—and probably prone—to do in a rehearsal: they look down at their feet. Opening their toes into first position, they flex their heels up and down and snap their toes back together. With military sharpness, they turn toward stage left front corner (left diagonal), taking a few small steps forward, a few back, then larger steps forward until they break into large, crossing steps, arms swinging broadly as they trace an arc back toward center stage. The choreographic score indicates that the walk should be “a natural, non-dancerish walk, very big, vigorous and virile.”

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33 A bending of the knees without the heels leaving the floor. Definitions of ballet terms are given throughout for readers who may not be familiar with them; a glossary of dance terms is also provided in Appendix B.

34 Legs rotated outward, heels together, feet at 180°.

35 In the older notation, the dancers do not look down at their feet until this point. Balanchine’s 1982 version is more effective, accentuating the initial flexing by cueing the audience’s eyes downward.
The first proper balletic step—one that assumes considerable motivic importance in the Pas-de-Quatre and throughout the whole of Agon—is introduced in measure 10, the "pushing arabesque" which extends the dancers’ bodies in all directions at once: the arms carry the torso upward and forward as the working leg pushes backward, the supporting leg presses downward as the foot rocks back on the heel, and the toes angle upward in a strong flexing action. After a small turn opening into an attitude, the dancers counteract the outward motion by twisting their lower bodies right and left in the first manifestation of the crossed piqué motive.

This first section of unison dancing gradually opens up the dancers’ bodies and their immediate stage space, as in a warm-up. The next section, a canon, is a sharp contrast. A choreographic canon may seem out of place in a warm-up, but in fact, dance canons are frequent in classes, where dancers perform combinations of steps one after the other, usually progressing across the floor on the diagonal (these sections of class are sometimes called “the diagonals”) in order to allow each dancer the maximum use of space. As soon as one dancer has cleared enough space, the next will begin the combination at the next appropriate downbeat. The canons in the Pas-de-Quatre are stationary, however, with the dancers arranged laterally across the stage and never moving very far from their initial

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36 In the older notation of this phrase, the pushing arabesque appears to have been a slightly more sideways motion, but this could be a difference of notation; there are various ways of notating a movement, depending on whether the notator is stressing the motion or the position.

37 Similar to the classical arabesque, except that the working leg is bent 90° at the knee, and the upper and lower leg are both (roughly) parallel with the ground.

38 There is a distinction between a dance class and a rehearsal; a class is a series of warm-ups and combinations which strengthen and refine the dancers’ bodies and techniques; a rehearsal is a session in which choreography is set, learned, and/or practiced. Dancers will almost always begin their day with a class, and then move on to a rehearsal (perhaps a series of rehearsals), and often end the day with a performance.

39 Although these “diagonals” were familiar to me from years of participating in and observing both ballet and flamenco dance classes, I was informed by one professional dancer that she had never encountered them. Their usage is obviously common in some areas and rare in others.
positions. All the canons start with the dancer furthest stage right and proceed across to the dancer stage left.

The first two canons (B and B') are called "Petrouchka canons" in the dance score; whether this term originated with the choreographer, the dancers, the balletmistress, or the notator is unclear. As the choreography does not resemble Fokine's for Stravinsky's early ballet, the label may stem from the prominence at these points of the trumpets—the instruments closely associated with the puppet Petrouchka.40 The first Petrouchka canon is based on a fourteen-beat phrase: two groups of three (a beat of silence, a hitch step, a high developpè to the front/a step, a hitch, and a turn) are followed by two groups of four (three steps out, an outward-reaching pose/three steps back in and symmetrical inward-reaching pose). The interval of imitation is four beats, and the last two dancers' statements are compressed, eliminating the connecting steps between the two poses and breaking the front-directed sameness of the four dancers for the first time—two by two, the dancers face inward at an angle to the audience. A measure's pause separates the first A + B from the second.

The next section [A'] is called "the walks" in the score. Having explored the lateral possibilities of the stage and the extended the dancers' bodies in all directions in A, the choreography now incorporates the depth of the stage into the dance with the precision marching of a military drill in A'. Retaining the two-by-two mirror symmetry reached at the end of the first Petrouchka canon, the dancers march to the front outer corners of the stage 40

40There are also trumpets and similar music at the third canon; it is not immediately evident why this is not the "third Petrouchka canon."

41A "hitch step" is not a classical ballet step; it is a preparatory step in which the weight is briefly transferred onto the ball of the working foot then back to the supporting foot before a gesture with the working leg. It is similar to, but usually swifter and less defined than, a "ball-change" in tap dancing.

42At the tempo of this movement, the developpè is basically a kick, but developpès may be performed at any level to any direction. It is a gesture in which the leg unfurls (develops), with the knee reaching the final position before the foot.
and with a hitch step retrace their steps before angling outward and upstage. Pivoting inward, they come together, circling outward as if in a courtly dance and bowing to each other [see Figure 3.1 for floor pattern; floor patterns not to scale].

![Diagram of dance steps](image)

**Figure 3.1**: Floor pattern for "the walks", mm. 21-27

[The numbers represent the number of steps along each path]

The second Petrouchka canon is a variant of the first. The interval of imitation is shortened to three beats, and the poses at the end are no longer connected by steps but are directly juxtaposed and continue until measure 35. The second major pause occurs in measures 36-38. The dancers do not remain still in this pause; they move in place, standing on their left feet and bouncing their right toes against the floor to the side and to the back in alternation for eight beats. They are arranged on stage in a choreographic

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43 Excerpts from the Labanotation score of *Agon*, simplified by Robynn J. Stilwell and reprinted with the permission of The George Balanchine Trust and the Dance Notation Bureau.

44 P, Q, R, and S are the designations for the male dancers in the dance score. The women are a-h (lower case).
"symmetrical asymmetry": aligned laterally, they are still in two pairs, but R and S are side-by-side, while P and Q mirror each other; Q and R also mirror one another across the center of the stage [see Figure 3.2].

Figure 3.2: "Symmetrical asymmetry," beginning of measure 36

On the following three beats (mm. 37\textsuperscript{4}-38\textsuperscript{2}), they turn, assuming a symmetrical double-mirror arrangement on the stage [see Figure 3.3], and hold during a beat of silence.

Figure 3.3: Symmetrical end of measure 38
The next section may be considered a new idea [C], although the texture, as in all the other sections, is homophonic—the dancers perform the same steps at the same time, although their alternate stage facings preclude a true unison. The double-mirror configuration reached at the end of the previous section continues as the dancers perform a series of sissonnes to the side, passing through each other in a box-like pattern [see Figure 3.4; this box pattern is one of stage position, rather than the pattern traced on the floor in the opening warm-up steps]. A box arrangement (two pairs of dancers, one in front of the other) is common in the classical pas de quatre, but this brief section is its only appearance in this movement.

The dancers walk upstage and turn toward the audience before beginning the third canon. The steps in this canon are simpler than in the others, but the overall impression is one of greater complexity. Two three-beat groups (a turn/a step into a pushing arabesque) are repeated to the opposite side and imitated at the interval of three beats. By the time all four dancers have entered, dancers P and R are performing their turn, but to opposite sides, at the same time that dancers Q and S are performing their arabesque, but to opposite sides. All possible elements of the canon theme are present in any one moment.

After this choreographic climax, the denouement is swift. The dancers move upstage in two-by-two symmetry with “manly steps” and broad-reaching, upward and outward sweeps of their arms. They finish in the stage position where they began, but now they face inward in pairs as two girls enter on the final cadence, eliding the Pas-de-Quatre with the Double Pas-de-Quatre.46

45A leap from two feet to one which features a scissor-like opening and closing of the legs.
46This kind of elided entrée has precedents in classical ballet.
Figure 3.4: Sissonne box, mm. 39-41
Within the warm-up style of the Pas-de-Quatre, the rondo-like alternation of blocks provides complex contrasts of texture. The choreographic contrast between the dance steps at the center of the stage (here canonic and stationary) and the floor patterns (unison/homophonic, traveling) is extended throughout the ballet, but the sharpness of the contrast (the cinematic intercutting) is smoothed over in subsequent movements. As befits the progression of a warm-up, the walks are sprinkled with increasingly complex dance steps in the Double Pas-de-Quatre.

**Double Pas-de-Quatre**

But already two—no, eight—girls have replaced [the boys]. Rapidly they test toe power, stops on oblique lines, jetlike extensions.

—Edwin Denby

The Double Pas-de-Quatre is the peak of textural density in the arch of opening Pas-de-Quatre movements, exploiting the largest homogeneous group of dancers in the ballet. The eight girls in identical costumes are used to create interlocking contrasts of choreographic texture growing progressively simpler (polyphony, melody/accompaniment, and finally homophony) as their floor patterns grow progressively more complex (parallel lines to diagonal formations). A ternary division of traveling/stationary/traveling overlays the unfolding of these two contrasting processes. The compositional strategy, however, reverses that of the Pas-de-Quatre, where the canons were stationary and the unison/homophonic movements traveled. Further varying the movement’s texture is the exploration of bilateral symmetry, defined by the primary directions available on a stage (side-to-side, front-to-back, and diagonals) [see Table 3.2].

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47 "The Three Sides of Agon." For the last sentence to make grammatical sense, one must read “stops” as a noun (the dancers are testing stops on oblique lines).
At the beginning of the Double Pas-de-Quatre, the four boys leave the stage, two to each side, as the girls enter. The girls perform two quick dance canons to open the movement. Unlike the canons in the Pas-de-Quatre, which were side to side, the canons in the Double Pas-de-Quatre unfold from downstage to upstage (front to back for the audience).

In a striking gesture, each of the eight girls enters on the diagonal with a grand battement\(^{48}\) to the front. The canon that comprises the entree is at the interval of one beat, and the girls enter from side to side in alternation from front to back (except the last pair, who enter at the front of the stage) [see Figure 3.5; the dancers enter in alphabetical order].

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\(^{48}\)A high kick. Although the end position is the same as a developpé, in the battement, the whole leg moves straight from the hip without bending the knee.
The first brief, rapid canon is an important motivic development of a gesture introduced in the Pas-de-Quatre: the crossed piqué that appeared briefly in the twists before the first Petrouchka canon. The choreography of the first canon also explores the axes of the dancers’ bodies—front, back, side-to-side—all the while facing on the diagonal. After the initial grand battement, the dancers run in toward the center line of the stage and pose with the working leg straight behind, the pointe touching the floor. Without moving the feet, a turn to the opposite diagonal opens the body toward the front; the working leg is now in front, the knee bent as the pointe remains in place on the floor (piqué à terre). This leg (to the outside of the stage) then sweeps back and front in grand battements, and returns to its piqué position. The dancer then shifts on the diagonal again, opening piqué to the other side, and steps down on the inside foot, turning the outside knee across the supporting knee. This crossed piqué forms a closure not only physically but of the choreographic phrase [see Figure 3.6].

49These piqué movements are related to the boys’ lower-body twisting movements in the Pas-de-Quatre (mm. 13-14), but while the boys’ movement emphasizes the closing of the hip and thigh, the girls’ movement emphasizes their opening.
Figure 3.6: The choreographic theme of the first canon of the Double Pas-de-Quatre

This first canon brings the girls into two parallel lines on either side of the center line of the stage [as seen in Figure 3.5]. With the close interval of canonic imitation, the front-to-back alignment of the dancers, and the shifting diagonal facings, the visual effect is one of legs moving in all directions at once. As each girl finishes the canon, she runs upstage inside the parallel lines of dancers, and her path curves out as she takes up her position for the second canon in another set of parallel lines at the sides of the stage.\textsuperscript{50} The

\textsuperscript{50}This form of line dance, with the front pair passing between facing lines of dancers to become the back pair, is fairly common in many dances, including courtly dances, their survivals in square dancing and classical ballet (often found in choreography for the corps de ballet), and even a very popular mid-1950s rock’n’roll dance called “The Stroll.”
last pair of girls to come on stage enters in front, eliding the two choreographic phrases: their entrances are the last in the first canon, even as their position at the front of the stage somewhat masks the beginning of the position change for the second canon.

Choreographically, the two canons are related but contrasting. In the first, the dancers face on the diagonal and make large leg movements to the front and back; in the second, the dancers move horizontally across the stage and their large leg movements are to the sides. The second canon is at a two-beat interval, and instead of alternating from side to side, the girls are matched in pairs, each with the girl opposite her on stage (a and b, c and d, etc.). The dance phrase of this canon is simple: it contains, in rapid succession, a rond de jambe en l'air\(^{51}\) with the "front leg" (the leg closest to the front of the stage) as the dancer turns to face across the stage; four steps toward the center of the stage, where she repeats the rond de jambe to the other side (although the leg executing the rond de jambe is still the front leg since "front" changes in the turn);\(^{52}\) and four more steps back out (with a full turn low in the air interpolated on the third step) bring the canon to an end with a piqué arabesque\(^{53}\) facing the wings. In contrast to the first canon, where the two parallel lines at center stage were stationary and the dancers' leg movements created a starburst effect, the visual effect of the second canon is that of the lines themselves rippling from front to back. The canon theme is repeated by all eight dancers, who cadence to a B+ position.

The third section of the Double Pas-de-Quatre (the eleven bars beginning in m. 70) shifts from canon to a texture akin to melody and accompaniment in music. The front pair,

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\(^{51}\)A large, circling motion of leg. The leg is held straight from the hip and circles through 180° of movement in the air. The circle may be low (just above the floor), middle (at hip level), or high (anywhere from just above hip level to above the shoulder, depending on the demands of the choreographer and the flexibility of the dancer). If the circle is made low, with the foot brushing the floor, it is a rond de jambe par terre.

\(^{52}\)Although in the notation the two ronds de jambe are the same (the score shows both in high level; the older notation shows both in middle), on the videotape, the one performed at the side of the stage appears to be higher, at shoulder level, as opposed to the hip-level circle made near center stage.

\(^{53}\)An arabesque in which the dancer steps onto the supporting foot on pointe.
“a” and “b”, represent the melody. They run inward on a diagonal, meeting in mirrored *attitudes* at the center of the stage, then pirouette away from one another. Behind them, the accompaniment girls create an elision from the previous section: as each pair ends their part of the second canon, they take up a series of accompanimental poses behind the melody pair, reminiscent of the visual effect of the first canon. This accompaniment is composed of a series of diagonals: the dancer steps across her supporting leg, turning to the opposite diagonal with the working leg stretched back, the pointe resting on the floor; both arms are on a front diagonal, the back arm higher than the front arm, which is parallel to the floor. The opposite facings of each pair of girls in this pose create a starburst pattern of arms and legs behind the melody pair.54 The starburst forecasts in the vertical plane the diamond-starburst floor pattern in the next section.

In the third and fourth bars of the B section, the disposition of the eight dancers on stage and their complex mirror symmetries create a vivid visual pattern, a moment of rich choreographic homophony as the dancers assume a rather complex diamond-shaped pattern [see Figure 3.7]. They move into the diamond pattern with a “peg walk”55—a cross-legged walk, with the crossing foot on pointe, the other flat. Their arrival in the new floor pattern is articulated choreographically by a kick into an arabesque (accentuated by a finger snap) into a *pas de bourrée*.56 This flattened diamond pattern shifts slightly throughout rest of the section.

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54This melody/accompaniment texture may be traced back to the romantic ballet, where the *corps de ballet* often formed pretty poses and configurations behind the ballerina.

55This is the term noted in the score.

56In high level (usually pointes for female dancers), a step close behind a supporting foot, a step to the side, and a closing step in front.
After arriving in this floor pattern, the group returns to a texture of melody-accompaniment for the balance of the B section (measures 74-80). The melody dancers, “a” and “b,” perform a turning jump in which they curl their legs beneath them and to the side, and a beat later, the accompaniment dancers perform the leap. The melody dancers cross in front of each other at the front of the stage with an *enchainement* that contains a piqué arabesque, a turn, and two high développés to the front. The accompaniment figure is irregular, again on the diagonals emphasized by the positions of the arms. The dancers move back into a piqué arabesque, with a *rond de jambe par terre* into another step back. A half-beat before the melody performs its first développé, the accompaniment performs one, ending in fourth position;\(^{57}\) the accompanying group then repeats its développé a beat *after* the melody group’s second développé. The accompanying dancers repeat the peg walk, spreading out into an inverted “V” formation as “a” and “b” adjust side-by-side to form the point of the “V” at the front of the stage.

With the onset of the C section in measure 81, the dance suddenly goes into slow motion. The dancers’ movements, once again homophonic, are drawn out, softened and rounded, in contrast to the angular movements of the rest of the dance. The section begins with the dancers performing a slow, deep plié in fourth position with a *circular* *port de*  

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\(^{57}\)An open position, with one foot in front of the other at a distance of at least one foot’s length. Balanchine’s fourth positions tend to be quite wide apart.
bras, then they take a parallel second position, folding their bodies over almost as if collapsing in exhaustion before rising up and resuming a classical pose. With the slow motion effect of the choreography, the “collapse” could also be read as an exaggeration of the recovery dancers sometimes do between positions.

In their various symmetrical configurations, all of the dancers now perform a slow, high developpé to the side. The raised legs of melody dancers “a” and “b” cross at the center of the stage, and with an audible slap of the hand to the foot, these dancers push their legs down at a one beat interval. The accompaniment continues with slow port de bras as “c” and “d” join “a” and “b” as melody. The expansion of the melody to include “c” and “d” takes them out of the diamond-pattern and creates a pas de quatre box at the front of the stage; the accompaniment pattern retains a vestige of a V formation [see Figure 3.8].

Figure 3.8: Dancers “c” and “d” join “a” and “b” as melody in a pas de quatre box, separating them from the accompaniment in their diamond formation

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58 Carriage of the arms.

59 Second position is an open position, with the feet side by side, about a foot’s length apart. Normally, all ballet positions are with the legs and feet turned out 90° from the hip. Parallel means that the legs are not turned out.
In a crossing pattern, “a” takes “c”’s hand, and as “c” slides down into a split, she pulls “a” into an arabesque penché, supporting her.\textsuperscript{60} A measure later, “b” and “d” follow suit. As “c” and “d” get back to their feet, “a” and “b” straighten through retiré\textsuperscript{61} and perform a high développé to the outside, pass back through retiré as they turn inward, and extend into another arabesque penché, accentuating the diagonals with the large movements of their legs.

The final section of the movement is a series of walks on the diagonal with the front dancers’ paths passing through each other, and the dancers begin to move into two box formations on opposite sides of the stage (the realization of the double \textit{pas de quatre}, as it were). As the male dancers re-enter, taking up a box position upstage center, the two front pairs of girls once more cross paths: “a” and “b” trade sides of the stage, followed by “c” and “d.” As they pass at the center of the stage, the girls raise one arm, lightly touching each other’s hand, and turn away to take up their position in the appropriate box [see Figure 3.9].

The Double Pas-de-Quatre develops elements introduced in the Pas-de-Quatre, most prominently the alternation of canon with walks, with a distinctive homophonic section roughly at the center (the sissonne box in the Pas-de-Quatre, the slow motion port de bras in the Double Pas-de-Quatre). The piqué, barely touched upon in the first movement, is the most important choreographic motive here; the subtle diagonals of the piqué à terre and crossed piqué are balanced by a series of large, clear leg movements (grand battement, développé, rond de jambe en l’air, arabesque penché) and port de bras that emphasize the diagonals.

\footnote{An arabesque penché is one in which the dancer’s body leans forward and the working leg is stretched above the head.}

\footnote{Retiré is a position of the working leg, in which the toe is placed to the side or just behind the knee of the supporting leg. Retiré sur le cou-de-pied is a similar position, with the working toe just above the ankle. For purposes of clarity and concision, this position will be termed a “low” retiré.}

143
first and second walks

third walk

final positions

Figure 3.9: Final section of the Double Pas-de-Quatre
The Double Pas-de-Quatre also has the most complex pattern of textural variation in the first half of the ballet, with its alternations of traveling and stationary choreography, its progression of simplification from polyphony toward homophony, and the shifting axes of symmetry. The movement is visually dense, from the eight girls performing a canon at the interval of only one beat, to the individually simple port de bras and walks kaleidoscopically refracted by the alternate diagonal facings. Paradoxically, this textural richness is simplified with the addition of the boys in the Triple Pas-de-Quatre, where the contrasts are more balanced in length and block-like in their juxtapositions.

**Triple Pas-de-Quatre**

The first crowding thrust of marching boys and leaping girls has a secret of scale that is frightening. The energy of it is like that of fifty dancers.

—Edwin Denby

The Triple Pas-de-Quatre which closes the opening section of the ballet contains elements of exposition and reprise. Choreographic motives introduced in earlier movements are repeated for emphasis, imprinting them as structural elements; at the same time, as exposition, it is the first dance in which all twelve dancers participate and the first in which male-female couples appear.

The movement contains three patterns of dance texture within its block-like, four-part architecture [see Table 3.3]. The most obvious is the alternation of movement of figures—the box formations (pas de quatre boxes with four dancers marking the corners of a square) in sections A and C—with unison movements in B and D. This contrast is also reflected in the opposition of traveling with stationary floor patterns, and in the distinction between the separation and the interaction of male and female dancers. A second, subtler contrast divides the dance in half. In the first half, the main choreographic interest is the shifting of floor position, whether in boxes or pairs; in the second half, the steps themselves

62"The Three Sides of Agon."
are the primary element of choreography—such position-shifting as occurs does so very swiftly. This rapid shift of position marks the difference between C and D, the two constituents of the second half, as the dancers pair off into male-female couples or move into their final position. Superimposed on these two binary oppositions is a ternary textural pattern reminiscent of the Double Pas-de-Quatre, which grows progressively simpler, from polyphony to melody and accompaniment to unison.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A 96-101</th>
<th>B 101-108</th>
<th>C 108-114</th>
<th>D 114-121</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>traveling</td>
<td>stationary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>girls terre à terre</td>
<td>box-patterns shift</td>
<td>couples shift</td>
<td>boys march</td>
<td>partnering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boys en l'air (leaps)</td>
<td></td>
<td>unison accompaniment</td>
<td>girls accompaniment</td>
<td>V formation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>polyphony</td>
<td></td>
<td>melody &amp; accompaniment</td>
<td>canon</td>
<td>unison</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.3: Choreographic structure of the Triple Pas-de-Quatre

Following the Double Pas-de-Quatre without break, the beginning of the movement is marked by the return of the male dancers to the stage; the dancers take up positions in three pas de quatre boxes. The five-bar A section of the movement resembles a marching band drill, with the three boxes moving independently around the stage, through each other, finally assembling at the front of the stage in two parallel lines of six dancers with the four boys in the middle [see Figure 3.10].

63C may also be seen as a transition from traveling to stationary, for although the majority of the dancers (the girls) are stationary, the boys march around the stage; they are, however, continually returning to their initial position.
The boys' choreography in this first section reprises some of the most distinctive movements of their opening Pas-de-Quatre. As they move across the stage, their bounding leaps recall the sissonne box, and once they reach their position at the front of the stage (m. 98), they perform several pushing arabesques and the fast alternation of crossed piqués (the twisting motion of the lower body).

While the boys move across stage running and leaping, the girls remain terre à terre (despite Denby's "leaping girls"), with skimming glissades and turns. According to the choreographic score, the steps for the two girls' boxes are different at the beginning, though by the middle of the second measure, the two groups are performing the same steps to opposite sides. According to the videotape, however, the two girls' boxes have the same steps, but in canon at the interval of one beat.

Like the A section, B involves shifts of stage position—this time not of boxes but of individual dancers paired in couples (two of the boys [R and Q] are matched with different girls at different times). Six couples switch places, creating a series of shifting symmetries among the dancers [see Figure 3.11].

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64 A glissade is a low movement in which the leading foot brushes out and lands, with the trailing foot closing a fraction after the first.
Figure 3.11: Couples change places

As each couple switches, the other dancers perform a simple accompanimental series of diagonal movements in place, reminiscent of the accompaniment figures from the Double Pas-de-Quatre. After trading places, the dancers rejoin the unison accompaniment movement as soon as possible without looking rushed. All the dancers come back together with a pirouette at measure 108.

The seemingly clear cadence of this phrase actually elides with the next phrase, because the true unison of the pirouette is overshadowed by an apparent unison a measure earlier with a pas de chat. The last couple is changing places in the back line, barely visible to the audience. As there are several pirouettes in this section and the pas de chat is

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65 A sideways leap akin to a high glissade. The leading leg draws up through retiré and swings out to the side to launch the body in the air. In the air, the second leg is drawn up in retiré position, closing in fifth position slightly after landing.
the only leap, the apparent unison at the *pas de chat* makes a more striking statement than the true unison at the pirouette. And as we shall see in Chapter Four, there is also a compelling musical reason to interpret the *pas de chat* as the beginning of the next phrase.

In section C, the girls remain in place, performing an accompaniment to the boys’ box. The accompaniment is a canon, with pairs of girls performing simple turns on pointe with bent knees, ending with a diagonal pose in fourth position. The two-beat interval of imitation creates a criss-cross pattern of the dancers within their boxes, a reminiscence of Double Pas-de-Quatre in its canon and diagonal accompaniment pattern. Although the accompaniment pattern is technically polyphonic, it is also visually simple because each pair of dancers is finished before the next pair starts. As the girls perform their canon, the boys march upstage, downstage, and back upstage. Each of the boys’ three-step groups is marked by a turn toward the front in a fourth-position diagonal lunge, the front leg bent in an echo of the girls’ stance [see Figure 3.12].

![Figure 3.12: Positions in the third section](image)

In the last section of the movement [D], the men and women truly interact for the first time in the ballet (practicing their adagio moves after the warm-up?). The dancers assume a “V” pattern on the stage with four girls in a box at the back of the stage (an inversion of the Double Pas-de-Quatre, where the four dancers were at the front of the stage), and four male-female couples form the arms of the V [see Figure 3.13].
The boys support the girls in a single, then a double pirouette, ending with the girls leaning back against the boys’ chests, their legs in *attitude* curving back around the boys’ waists. The girls’ arms lie along the boys’, and together, first to one side and then to the other, they gradually raise their arms straight out to the sides, then at a high diagonal. Behind these couples, the remaining girls perform the same double pirouette and arm gestures, unsupported; these extra girls—and there are always extra girls in a class—have to do their “partnered” movements alone. The visual effect for the audience, however, is of unison movement, for the boys are—in true classical fashion—almost invisible behind their partners.

In the final two measures, the dancers merge the inverted “V” and the elongated diamond-pattern of the Double Pas-de-Quatre [see Figure 3.13]. The gliding steps of the dancers, with the working foot sweeping a small rond de jambe around the supporting foot on each step is evocative of the graceful, *par terre* movements of many courtly dances, although the large, diagonal movements of the arms are very much of the 20th century.

The dancers end with a slight bow of the head as their hands come to rest on their hips (a distant and informal recall of the reverence to the teacher at the end of a class). They raise their faces to the audience as they cross one arm over their bodies, lifting one hand to the opposite shoulder (as if over the heart, but a little higher, with some of the dancers crossing to the right). This final position is based on diagonals, from the dancers’

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*Figure 3.13: “V” formation and final pattern*
facings, to the turn of the head and torso toward the audience, down to the crossed position of the arm.

The Triple Pas-de-Quatre melds exposition and recapitulation, closing off the first section of the ballet. For the first time, the entire ensemble is on stage, although male and female dancers do not actually come together as partners until the very end of the dance. The most obvious reprise is of the boys' motives—pushing arabesques, sissonnes, and piqué twists. The girls combine two prominent textures of the Double Pas-de-Quatre, canon and melody/accompaniment, into an accompaniment canon as the boys dash around the stage in a box in section C. Even floor patterns are fused as the final floor plan is a figure somewhere between the inverted “V” and the diamond-starburst from the Double Pas-de-Quatre. Within the Triple Pas-de-Quatre itself, the interlocking binary and ternary divisions—the opposition of traveling floor plans with more stationary steps, the alternation of gender-separate movements with gender-mixed ones, and the simplification of texture from polyphony to melody/accompaniment to unison—create a rich, coherent architecture.

First Pas-de-Trois

Prelude

The Prelude and Interludes serve as entrees for the two Pas-de-Trois and the Pas-de-Deux. All three entrees have a similar choreographic structure: a fast opening section in which the dancers move separately with the same steps, a brief transition moving to center stage, and a slow section concentrated on supported movements of the female dancers [see Table 3.4]. This overall choreographic pattern, like that of most of the movements of Agon, is divisible into two parts or three. The durations of the fast opening plus transition and the slow section are about equal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>opening</th>
<th>transition</th>
<th>slow section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9 1/2 mm.</td>
<td>4 1/2 mm.</td>
<td>10 mm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fast individual movements</td>
<td>to center stage</td>
<td>sustained supported movements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4: Basic choreographic structure of the Prelude/Interlude movements
The first Pas-de-Trois is for two girls and a boy. The first part of their Prelude is largely based on unison movements subjected to various cinematic techniques [see Table 3.5].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>transition</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 122-131²</td>
<td>131²-135</td>
<td>136-145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fast unison steps</td>
<td>slow motion</td>
<td>boy supports both girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cinematic reverses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.5: Choreographic structure of the Prelude

At the beginning, they are in a straight line at the upstage corner, girl-boy-girl, the torso and head facing diagonally upstage. Comprising a comparatively simple selection of steps—runs, half and quarter turns, and jetés⁶⁶—the first part of the Prelude produces an angular floor pattern [see Figure 3.14]. According to the score, the “movement is big and charged with energy 122-132.” At the point where the dancers turn the corner in the floor plan, they suddenly reverse, retracing the jetés backward, even turning the corner backward; then they move forward again with the same steps. The effect is that of a film being run backward a few frames, then run forward again.

Figure 3.14: Floor plan of the first part of the Prelude

⁶⁶Here, a leap moving either forward or backward, leading with one leg, the other in the air in opposition, sometimes as extreme as a split, but usually more at 45° to the perpendicular (especially in faster leaps).
In measure 132, the dancers appear to go into slow motion in the midst of a forward developpé—this is the third movement with a slow-motion center, linking it with the Pas-de-Quatre and Double Pas-de-Quatre. As the dancers’ left legs stretch upward, their bodies lean back, and as they step forward they stretch their right arms forward, leading with the palm. This large, exaggerated step is repeated three times as the dancers move on a circular path back to the center of the stage, with the girls facing inward toward the boy.

The boy offers his right hand to the girl on his left, his left hand to the girl on his right. The girls grasp their free hands over his head, and the boy lifts his arms so that their connected hands are all at a central point overhead. With intricate arm interweaving, so typical of Balanchine, the boy circles slowly around both girls as they pass through various leg positions in mirror (foreshadowing the mirrored Gaillarde) until he comes back to the place where he started; he then turns swiftly in place, “unwinding” his arms.

On successive beats, the linked hands are lowered, then released into a bow reminiscent of the Baroque manner of “making a leg.” Although making a leg is actually a masculine bow—the torso leans forward as one leg pliés and the other stretches out in front, toe pointed against the floor (a tendu)—it is performed here by all three dancers. After the neoclassical ballet technique of one boy partnering both girls, the bow is a sudden reminder of the courtly sources of the ballet. As the boy straightens and backs up to approximately center stage, the girls exit to opposite sides.

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67 In the 1957 version, the dancers run in a circle with jetés at this point, moving into the partnering position center stage.

68 This gesture is strikingly similar to one in Apollo’s first variation in Apollo, the first of several apparent quotations in Agon from the first of the Balanchine-Stravinsky “Greek” ballets.

69 In dance iconography of the Baroque, a man is often paired with two women, one on either side of him as here. This combination was considered correct and acceptable, and not too intimate. (My thanks to Jessica Fogel for bringing this motif to my attention.)
The Prelude is the one movement that appears to have undergone a major revision from its early conception to the 1982 version preserved on the videotape (which is also the version notated in the complete choreographic score). The two versions of the Prelude are really two different dances from measure 122 to 135, although in both the dancers move in unison, with the boy flanked by the two girls in a straight line across the stage. The two versions also share a similar floor pattern, although the older version contains a circling upstage that was eliminated later, and the initial movement across the stage is a plain diagonal rather than a straight line with the torso facing on the diagonal [see Figure 3.15].

The versions are quite different. The older is much more complex, with a variety of steps including grand battements and développés, pirouettes, glissades, assemblés, and turns just off the ground. Twice the dancers strike a rather strange and inexplicable pose—after a pirouette with the working leg in a low retiré, they land in second position with their legs parallel (not turned out) and bent, their arms out to the sides and bent with their hands straight up, palms facing forward. This almost Balinese pose, while certainly striking, seems out of character with the rest of Agon.

The newer version is much simpler, and in the present writer’s opinion (without having ever seen the older choreography performed) more effective for two reasons. First and more important, it is distinctively different from the choreography of the Interlude of the Second Pas-de-Trois, which contains a number of the same steps as the older choreography of the Prelude, and connects with earlier dances in the slow-motion

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70 The older sketch was notated by Billie Mahoney during the original setting of the choreography in 1957. The sketch is marked with the initials of Todd Bolender (the original boy) and Jillana and Francia Russell, the understudies of the original two girls, Barbara Milberg and Barbara Walczak. Bolender’s understudy, Edward Villella, is also noted on some pages.

71 Mahoney’s notation does not include the final section, mm. 135-145, but the dancers have reached the same position as in the later version; presumably the rest of the dance is the same.
transition; second, the revised choreography contains some of the most inventive and explicit uses of film technique in the ballet.

Figure 3.15: A comparison of floor plans for the 1957 and 1982 versions
Saraband-Step

Then the boy, left alone, begins to walk a *Sarabande*, elaborately coiled and circumspect. It recalls court dance as much as a Cubist still life recalls a pipe or guitar. The boy’s timing looks like that of a New York Latin in a leather jacket. And the cool lift of his wrong-way-round steps and rhythms gives the nonsense so apt a turn people begin to giggle.

—Edwin Denby

The sarabande has had a long and varied reputation as a dance, from its early reputation as a fast and lascivious dance, imported to Spain from the New World, to the grave and dignified French version customary in the Baroque suite. In contrast to the sedate sarabande presented in the score, the choreography of the Saraband-Step is playful and sometimes ironic, brushed off by the dancer as if in a rehearsal hall. A note in the choreographic score says “The movement should be large and charged with energy. It should [be] difficult, as though the dancer is being taxed to the utmost of his strength and control.” Judging by Daniel Duell’s performance, however, the opposite is sometimes true: there are segments in which the dancer seems merely to be marking his part. Gestures are repeated immediately, as if for refinement, strengthening the sense of rehearsal.

The Saraband-Step is almost evenly balanced between large, clear movements with classical or courtly stances (the “Spanish” positions) and casual, playful motions—a soft-shoe, heel drops, and a saunter to the front of the stage to flourish the final bow. The choreographic phrases are of varying lengths, but all very short, fitted together in a mosaic. The only repetitions of entire blocks occur at the end, right before the bow (the blocks of

72“The Three Sides of *Agon*.”

73Todd Bolender, the original dancer, was noted for such comic roles as the Joker in *Jeu de Cartes*. His understudy, Edward Villella, assumed a number of Bolender roles around 1960 and became a major ballet star in the following decade, perhaps the most prominent American male dancer in history. Villella was a bravura dancer even more closely associated with comic roles than Bolender, from Pulcinella to a couple of Harlequins (*La Sonnambula, Harlequinade*). Daniel Duell, who dances in the videotaped version, is a small, boyish dancer who took over many Bolender and Villella roles in the late 1970s.
sailor step are only tentatively related, more obvious from the Labanotation score than in performance, and the “Spanish” petit battement and heel drops are related more through character than choreography). The blocks that are repeated are drawn from various sections of the dance; except for the cabriole, the repeated blocks come from progressively earlier in the dance, giving a faintly palindromic shape to the entire movement, with the tag of the cocky bow [see Table 3.6]. The somewhat disoriented, fractured phrasing enhances the sense of rehearsal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>m. 146</th>
<th>147</th>
<th>148-149</th>
<th>149</th>
<th>150-151</th>
<th>152-153</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>„Spanish“ petit battements</td>
<td>sailor steps “taps” (4x)</td>
<td>leaps à la seconde</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d'</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>g</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>f</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 153    | 154-155 | 156 | 157 | 158-159 | 160 |
|        |         |     |     |         |     |
| „Spanish“ heel drops (3x) |         |     |      |         |     |

| 162    | 163    |
| a      | h      |
|        |        |
|        | saunter bow | saunter bow |

Table 3.6: Choreographic structure of the Saraband-Step

The opening movement is indeed very large and “difficult,” as noted in the score, and is also repeated immediately. The dancer starts in a natural, parallel stance, then leaps up with a sweep of the arms, the legs drawing up beneath him, outturned. The right leg unfurls forward in a large développé, the legs returning to parallel as the torso leans back,

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74 In the earlier notation, the pose is even more casual, with the ball of the left foot resting on the floor slightly behind the supporting foot (a bit more parallel than a true “B+” position), and the hands on the hips.

75 The big développé echoes the similar motion initiating the “slow-motion” of the Prelude.
recovering as the dancer lands on his left foot. He then steps forward to repeat the whole motion. Landing the second time, the dancer’s right foot comes down in front on the ball, and he twists his knee and hip in and out in a variation of the twisting piqué motive.

The heel drop is a seemingly simple action that pervades the movement motivically, as an initiating movement and an accent. It is a tiny element, difficult to account for in a diagram, but appears in the sailor steps, the soft shoe, and is even traceable in the petit battements, as the heel leads the supporting foot’s motion around the supporting ankle. In its first appearance, the heel drop clearly marks the beginning of the second phrase, which is mostly walking and running and features a slow “unwinding” turn: from a position with one leg crossed behind him, the dancer turns until he is in an open fourth position.76 The choreographic phrase ends with a pose typical of classical ballet’s Spanish demi-caractère vocabulary: standing with one hand on his hip, the other curved above his head, the dancer circles his supporting ankle with his working heel in swift petit battements. The sarabande’s historical association with Spain, filtered through classical demi-caractère style, is made into a highly stylized reference with no trace of the original Spanish sarabande’s reputedly fast and lascivious character.

A heel drop again begins the next section,77 the first set of “sailor steps.” Although two sections in the score are marked “sailor steps,” they really have nothing in common but a sideways motion and a rather playful nature. The first set is also called “the taps,” a bit of hoofing composed of heel drops, toe taps, and a rocking back onto the heel similar to the leg action of the pushing arabesque.

In contrast to the “into the ground” motion of the tap steps, the movement sense of the next phrase is largely “up.” In two large leaps, the right leg unfolds in a développé

76 This is another movement apparently quoted from Apollo.

77 Both the videotape and the 1957 notation show the heel drop while the 1987 score shows what is called an “arabesque pop,” a brief half-turn in arabesque before the sideways run. This seems out of character in the phrase and in the context of this dance; the heel-drop, on the other hand, is a prominent motive in the movement.
à la seconde.\textsuperscript{78} The arms vary the Spanish pose, the right arm curved overhead, the left arm out to the side, counteracting the développé. After a contracted pose, another heel drop initiates a sideways leap à la seconde,\textsuperscript{79} the feet flexing up to emphasize the heels in the air. As the dancer lands, the working leg is in an open piqué, the ball of the foot against the floor in second position. The arms are in the Spanish demi-caractère position as before, the right arm curved overhead and the left arm held out the side, but instead of the petit battements, the dancer practices his heel drops: for six beats, the left wrist and right heel flex up and down together.

The next phrase is the second set of “sailor steps.” The steps start off with vigor and clarity of execution, then trail off as if the hornpipe were suddenly transformed into a soft shoe, or the dancer decided that four times at full energy were enough and he could mark the second four. The step is marked by heel drags (which often occur in Spanish demi-caractère dances)\textsuperscript{80} and strong, clear arm movements based on the Spanish position. Again counteracting the “down” of the sailor steps with an “up”—a high cabriole follows, and the boy moves upstage with large, sweeping backward steps.

An enchainement typically associated with bravura male variations in classical ballet is a circle of double (even triple) \textit{tours en l'air}\textsuperscript{81} and pirouettes. The boy in the Saraband-Step performs his circle with half-turns à la seconde and simple \textit{chainés},\textsuperscript{82} as if he were practicing position but not putting his entire effort into the steps—dancing \textit{sotto voce}. The

\textsuperscript{78}À la seconde means that the working leg is out to the side, forming a 90° angle with the supporting leg. If the working leg is in second position but without taking weight, it is \textit{à la seconde par terre}.

\textsuperscript{79}The dancer’s legs are in a split at the peak of the leap.

\textsuperscript{80}This section is also called the “drags” in the annotated score.

\textsuperscript{81}Literally turns in the air. The dancer may assume any number of exciting positions in the air.

\textsuperscript{82}A \textit{chainé} is a “chain” of turns, with the legs together. A half-turn is performed on one foot, then the weight is transferred to the other foot for the second half-turn, making one full turn. Often, \textit{chainés} are performed in a sequence, lengthening the chain.
circle ends with a repetition of the Spanish pose with the petit battements, and is followed immediately by a repeat of the cabriole, backing upstage. The boy then repeats the opening développé leaps, but instead of the twisting piqué, he simply walks forward casually and takes a rather cocky bow at the front of the stage. Bernard Taper may have been thinking about the Saraband-Step when he wrote that Agon “employ[s] for effect in places a typically American kind of understatement, like that of the astronaut saying, as he emerged from the capsule after orbiting the world, ‘Boy, what a ride!’”

The dancer in the Saraband-Step is by turns playful and diligent, reckless and refined. He practices his steps carefully, but performs the “fun” movements with all his might; he is flamboyant, but he is also careful of his body—his livelihood and his art—aware that too much horseplay in the circle could land him on the floor, conscious that even small movements like the wrist flexing and the heel drops need practice. The hammy final bow is the sort of bow one might give to one’s watching friends—part tongue-in-cheek, part genuine showing off. The fragmented choreography, the tiny internal repetitions, and the witty juxtaposition of big, flashy movements with those seemingly performed at half-effort give the strong overall sense of a rehearsal.

The Saraband-Step is a cubist’s rendering of a dance, juxtaposing different points along a time line—in a non-naturalistic fashion. With its subtle deconstruction of the rehearsal process, the Saraband-Step also anticipates the post-modernist notion of exposing process, privileging creation over object.

83Taper, 255.
Gailliarde

One is watching a girls’ duet in the air, like flying twins (*haute danse*).

—Edwin Denby

Despite its delicacy and undeniable femininity, the choreography of the Gailliarde for two girls is sharp and angular, with a ballonné character accentuated by the pointe work. The steps in the Gailliarde are limited and simple. A young dancer fairly steady on her pointes could execute the steps—arabesques, attitudes, single pirouettes, *entrechats quatre*, *échappés*, *coupés* battements of all varieties, and simple pointe work. The difficulty lies in the speed and amplitude of execution, and in the two dancers having to keep together through the subtle syncopations of the dance rhythms.

Although the choreography has a continuous, flowing character, the dance has a clear structure, *ABB'C* [see Table 3.7].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>B'</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 164-170</td>
<td>mirror</td>
<td>side-by-side</td>
<td>mirror</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mirror</td>
<td>on the diagonal</td>
<td>starts with repeat of m.</td>
<td>on the diagonal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>small path</td>
<td>then goes back to</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>large, crossing/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>diagonals</td>
<td>circular path</td>
<td>zigzag path</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>turning path in place</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.7: Choreographic structure of the Gailliarde

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84 "The Three Sides of Agon."

85 Springy, bouncy.

86 A leap in place from fifth position—the primary classical position, with the feet fitted together so that the toes of one foot presses against the heel of the other. The dancer jumps up and changes the front foot, then changes back, landing in the same position that s/he started in.

87 An *échappé* is an “escape” step, springing from a closed position in plié to an open one on half-toe or pointe. Most *échappés* are performed from fifth to second.

88 A *coupé* is a step in which weight is transferred from one foot to the other in the same place—the working foot “cuts” under the supporting foot to take support.

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Like the constant mirroring of the dancers’ bodies in performance, the movement itself has a mirror-like form, articulated by an obvious repetition at the beginning of B and a shift to side-by-side dancing. The two similar B sections contain the only “curves” in the movement: in B a series of steps turn the dancers in a circle in place; B’ has a true circular path, circling from downstage right to upstage center. In contrast, sections A and C have diagonal paths: A remains within a few steps back and forth, continually retracing the same steps; C has an extensive path, with the dancers actually crossing and re-crossing each other for the first time, and going forward in a diminishing zigzag pattern.

The angularity of the arm and leg movements highlights both the mirror aspect and the continual oblique facing angles of the dancers.89 Articulating the center of the movement and its shift to side-by-side dancing is the one obvious choreographic repeat. This distinctive step, when performed in mirror, is a remarkable choreographic composition of syncopated rhythms and diagonal lines in a sharply defined neoclassical style, and when performed side by side, is reminiscent of a chorus line’s kick step: beginning in plié with the working leg in low retiré, the dancer springs up onto pointe, extending her working leg to the side in a développé (to the inside, toward the center line of the stage); she brings the leg into retiré, then pliés in fifth position, springing back up and pausing on pointe with the working leg in retiré. The dance rhythm is an additive 3+2, with the plié marking downbeats (literally).

The side-by-side section B’ contains the one passage that might be construed as a stylization of the 17th-century galliard. The basic step of the galliard was called a grue, in which the dancer hops onto the ball of one foot while kicking the other foot forward90—a

89 The diagonal facings and multiple small turns, changing the dancers’ facings from center front to outside corner and back almost every measure, are not reflected in the earlier sketch by Ann Hutchinson Guest, who has informed me that these turnings were omitted during early sessions as a time-saving device (personal communication, 13 November 1993).

step somewhat resembling the modern *coupé dessous*. It is a vigorous step, lending itself to the sort of beats and high jumps the male galliard dancer used in an effort to “impress his mate,” as described by de Lauze. The girls in Balanchine’s Gailliarde are more decorous, performing simple steps onto pointe with the free pointe brought up against the supporting calf (low retiré). The working foot comes down on *demi-pointe*⁹¹ behind the supporting foot, swinging the new working foot out into the next step. The mechanics of the *grue* and of Balanchine’s steps are almost identical, except for the slight shift from a direct *coupé* in the former to a simple step behind in the latter. In the *grue*, however, the accent falls on the simultaneous change of weight and the kick forward of the free leg, whereas the accent in the ballet falls on the balance on pointe (the static part of the step). This may be read as a syncopation, a displacement of dance meter in much the same way that Stravinsky displaces the musical meter.

Connections with the 17th-century galliard are strengthened by the shape of the phrase. A synonym for the galliard was the *cinque-pas*, for the four *grues* and a *saut*, or leap. The six-beat measure was filled out with a pose. In *Agon*, the dancers perform their stylized *grues* five times, gently clapping on the 3rd, 4th, and 5th steps to recall the social-dance nature of the traditional galliard. There is no *saut*, but the phrase ends on an *attitude*, a stylized substitute for the pose.

In the next bar (177⁸), the dancers perform an entrechat quatre, and as they land, they perform an échappé into fourth position, taking up their mirror positions as before. The phrase is closed by an inward turn and a pose in which the crossed legs and strong diagonal lines of the arms emphasize their return to mirror symmetry.

The closing section of the Gailliarde is composed of the simplest steps in the entire dance. Moving their arms in diagonal opposition to their steps, the dancers move forward on pointe, crossing in front of each other; then they retrace their steps backwards, a

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⁹¹Half-toe, or the ball of the foot.
cinematic reverse that might easily be overlooked if not for a similar, more obvious occurrence in the Prelude. The dance is completed by repeating a simple *enchainement* consisting of an attitude and connecting steps on the zig-zag path.

The end of the Gailliarde is the one place where Stravinsky is known to have taken an active part in creating the choreography. Balanchine originally had the dancers mark out nine beats with movements of their arms. At a dress rehearsal, Stravinsky found the end of the Gailliarde “beautiful but dangerous” due to the complicated 9-beat arm movements. “I’m afraid I don’t know how long nine is,” said the composer.  

Balanchine simplified the movements to one per beat in alternating groups of gestures: the girls put the inside arm out to the side, palm up, elbow bent, then the opposite arm repeats the gesture; in the same alternating pattern, they put their hands on their hips, then repeat the palm-up gesture, and finally stretch their arms out, acknowledging each other with a sort of Alphonse and Gaston “after-you” expression. They end on beat 9 on one knee, arms out to the sides. After the applause, the girls get to their feet and turn to walk upstage center to meet the boy, who takes up a position between them.

The relatively simple steps of the Gailliarde outline subtly shifting dance accents (discussed in more detail in Chapter Four), and the mirrored position of the two dancers draws attention to the precision of their movements—not only their ensemble, but the lines of their arms and legs, even the tilt of their heads. The diagonal facings create a more vivid image than frontal facings would, and make the change to side-by-side all the more

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92 Quote from Taper, 265. Hutchinson Guest’s notation here appears to be the original version, before Stravinsky made his recommendation. Not only are there complex arm motions in the sketch notation, but also steps and turns that are omitted in the later version. The movement ends with a step back and tendu forward, similar to “making a leg,” the bow which closed the Pas-de-Trois’s Prelude. The head gesture is almost illegible, but appears to be a bow. This would be the only change which Balanchine made from the original conception which weakens rather than strengthens the motivic integrity of the ballet.

93 The difficulty of ensemble in the Gailliarde was highlighted by the 1992 Wharton Center performance: the two dancers were so out of synchronization that throughout most of the movement, they looked as if they were dancing in canon, not in mirrored-unison.
effective. The subtle echo of a chorus line is balanced by a more recognizable, if still stylized, reference to courtly dancing in the phrase that follows. Cinematic technique seen fleetingly throughout the ballet is distantly recalled in a reverse near the end, and the humorous coda reinforces the sense of rehearsal evoked by the mirror-dancing—are they two dancers practicing the same steps, or one dancer rehearsing in front of a mirror?

Coda

In triple canon the dancers do idiotic slenderizing exercises, theoretically derived from court gesture...

—Edwin Denby

John Martin commented about Agon that “only in an arsenal could you find more canon” and the Coda of the First Pas-de-Trois is a canonic highlight in the ballet, not only because its dance texture is largely spun of canon, but also because it is the first time in the second part of the ballet that we have seen canon. In the context of Agon, that is a long absence.

The Coda is also the first movement with a regularly recurring structure since the opening Pas-de-Quatre. In fact, it has the largest amount of repeated material of any movement of the ballet [see Table 3.8]. Almost the entire movement is choreographically polyphonic, some of it in canon. Except in the final few bars, the dancers retain their girl-boy-girl lateral placement throughout.

94“The Three Sides of Agon.”

Much of the Coda’s choreography reinforces the sense of rehearsal. The dancers seem to be in high spirits, leaping about energetically, imitating one another, even slouching. Despite the loose steps and fragmentary architecture, the choreography is also a reprise of much of the Pas-de-Trois, highlighted by the pairing of the two girls and the relative independence of the boy’s choreography. Only at the very end of the movement do they come together to dance as partners.

The opening choreographic phrase (A) is a brief canon at a four-beat (two-bar) interval. Reminiscent of the Saraband-Step, the boy in the center begins with jumping-jack leaps: the legs are brought up beneath the body, the soles of the feet making brief contact with each other; as a result, the legs make a diamond-shaped pattern, not unlike a pas de chat, at the top of the leap. As the dancer lands in fifth position (alternating front feet), he moves slightly forward. After two measures of leaps, he begins to skip backward,

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96This “jumping jack” is not the calisthenic exercise, in which the legs and arms are spreadeagled; it is the toy, common in the southern United States, that has a wooden figure on a stick. When a string is pulled, the figure “jumps” up the stick, its legs drawn up with the feet together, the legs forming a diamond shape as in this leap.

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his straight arms moving in diagonals. The next two measures are marked “like a soft shoe,” and the body stance and arm positions are noticeably more relaxed. The shift between the two-bar phrases (the jumping-jack leaps/the backward skips) coincides with a two-bar interval of imitation as the girls perform the canon as a pair.

The next section (B) has been labeled a “pseudo-canon” because it gives the visual impression of being a canon. It is, however, composed of four two-bar phrases, traded off between the boy and the two girls in alternation. The girls begin with a variation of the soft-shoe step in which they move backward on a curved path. At the same time, the boy is performing a variation of the piqué leg-twist. Then the dancers switch parts (a choreographic version of voice-exchange). A similar switching of choreographic blocks follows with a repeat of the soft-shoe and two pirouettes en attitude. Table 3.9 briefly diagrams the basic elements of this section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Twist</td>
<td>back circle</td>
<td>twist</td>
<td>soft shoe</td>
<td>pirouettes en attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circle</td>
<td></td>
<td>twist</td>
<td></td>
<td>soft shoe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.9: B Section

C is the movement’s first true canon, with the girls moving individually for the first time. As in the opening Pas-de-Quatre, the dancers are in the middle of the stage and the canon proceeds from left to right at the interval of one beat. The choreography is well-designed to accentuate the canon, as it is composed of large, clear movements (entrechat six, a high rond de jambe en l’air, attitudes), with several facing changes on the diagonal. The dancers come back together with a little glissade into rocking steps on the diagonal. B

His torso tilts with the lower arm (the same side as the skipping foot) and his head twists in the same direction.

Instead of skipping backward, the girls step back on pointe, the working leg passing through retiré.

Like an entrechat quatre, but with an extra beat. The dancer lands in fifth position with the opposite foot front.
and C are repeated in their entirety, cadencing once more with a glissade, although the second transition is based on the twisting movement. The third canon is a variation on C, which contains a reminiscence of the Double Pas-de-Quatre. As occurred when the girls in the box at the front of the stage crossed their raised legs, a développé to the front is slapped down audibly.

With the final section D, the dancers return to the double-partnering seen at the end of the Prelude. Playfully, they move closer together and touch shoulders—the boy offers his shoulders as if they were his hands, first to one girl and then the other, and they sink down, bending forward in stages. All three dancers straighten swiftly as if to say, “Come on now, we’re classical dancers,” and the boy supports first one girl then the other in a double pirouette. The girls switch position rapidly, finishing each pirouette with an arabesque as the other girl steps in front of the boy. The section is reminiscent of classes in which boys (usually outnumbered at least two to one by girls) have to partner more than one girl, but here the suggestion is exaggerated by the swiftness of the changes between girls. Each girl performs three pirouettes and the dancers cadence in fifth position in a small diagonal row. Almost as an afterthought, they bow to close the movement.

The Coda of the First Pas-de-Trois is a summation of the entire pas, reinforcing the boy as a soloist and the girls as a pair, yet allowing them to interact—albeit playfully—at the end. The Coda also reprises a number of prominent elements, especially the buoyant leaps, the soft shoe, and the twisting piqué, from the Saraband-Step. The reprises from the Gailliarde are more subtle, but then the actual steps of the Gailliarde are less distinctive, as the accent in that movement is on texture, continuity, and rhythmic subtlety. The rounding effect even extends back to the opening Pas-de-Quatre (a stationary left-to-right canon [C]) and Double Pas-de-Quatre (the ankle-slap in the développé). Despite the independence of

100 This section is marked “cha-cha” in the annotated score, but the step is actually far closer to the Twist. However, Agon was choreographed in 1957, and the popular dance, the Twist, did not appear until 1960.
the various movements of the ballet and the hierarchical structure of groupings within the entire suite, Balanchine draws together threads of continuity throughout.

**Second Pas-de-Trois**

**Interlude**

Like the Prelude, the Interlude of the Second Pas-de-Trois is in two main parts—a fast section which the dancers perform individually and a slow section of supported movements for the girl—connected by a transition [see Table 3.10].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A (mm. 254-263)</th>
<th>transition (263-267)</th>
<th>B (268-277)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>very fast unison steps (brief quote from Prelude)/ canon</td>
<td>to center stage</td>
<td>girl supported by both boys</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3.10: Choreographic structure of the Interlude**

While the Prelude’s floor plan had been almost pentagonal, with the dancers aligned laterally, that of the Interlude is far simpler, composed of two downstage diagonals with the dancers in a triangular arrangement for the first diagonal and moving into a diagonal line themselves for the second [see Figure 3.16]. The significance of this alteration is not readily apparent in this movement (and indeed, not even in the last Interlude), but the floor plan of the opening part of the Prelude/Interludes gradually grows simpler as the steps themselves grow more complex—similar to textural patterns observed in the Double and Triple Pas-de-Quatre.
The opening section of the Interlude is, if anything, even faster than the first section of the Prelude. The dancers skim over the ground with almost frantic steps, although always balletic in character. The dancers constantly race to catch up with the music and with one another, an all but inevitable effect since much of the choreography is canonic. Beginning upstage left in a triangular pattern, with the girl in front as the "point" of the triangle, they race along the first diagonal, hopping and running in unison with fast leg gestures. The second measure (a swift 3/8 among 3/4 bars) is almost exactly the same as in the Prelude—all on the toe (pointes for the girl) a step behind, a step into second, and closing in front.

The canon, which creates the second diagonal, is composed of only two steps: a flat-footed full and three-quarter turn on the left foot, with the right toe crossed over the turning foot, dragging the ground; and a hop into fourth position, back onto the right diagonal. As the canon continues, the triangular formation gradually straightens into a diagonal line, and the canon ends in a B+ position. As each dancer finishes, he or she looks to the dancer to the right and takes the dancer's hand as he or she reaches the B+ position.
Hands linked, with the girl in the middle, the dancers move upstage\textsuperscript{101} to the center of the stage for the adagio section, an inversion of the first Pas-de-Trois where one boy partnered two girls. Hands still linked, they raise their arms above their heads. The girl maintains a balance on a single pointe as the boys circle around her, supporting her in various precarious positions. At times, they release their hands briefly to switch facings, and once even for the boys to switch sides. At the end, the boys angle in toward the girl, then release her hands and perform a swift full turn to the knee.\textsuperscript{102} The girl bends forward, extending her working leg high behind her in a deep arabesque penché, and her hands fall against the outstretched hands of the boys on either side.

In the older version of the notation, the timing of the adagio is slightly different (on average, the steps occur about a measure earlier than in the newer version), and the ending is also different. With the “extra measure” gained by having everything a measure ahead, the boys rise from their knees into a B+, the girl in fifth position on pointe, their arms held up high. This cadence is perhaps more “closed” than the later version, which has a fairly high degree of instability (the girl cannot sustain an arabesque penché on pointe for very long), but it certainly does not have the same visual impact, and, as shall be addressed in Chapter Four, the musical impression is weaker as well.

The Interlude is a counterbalance to the Prelude in the First Pas-de-Trois with its inversion of the boy-girl numbers. It retains the basic structure of the Prelude, but the first part is intensified by its faster tempo and canonic texture. The canon contains a distinctive step—the turn with the working toe crossed over the supporting foot and dragging the floor. The position of the working leg in this turn is distantly related to the crossed piqué, and the accent on the toe will be especially strong in the girl’s variation in the upcoming Pas-de-Trois; an inversion of the turn will even appear in the coda of the pas, the Bransle

\textsuperscript{101}In the older notation, the dancers retain their triangular formation throughout the canon and have to move downstage to the center of the stage.

\textsuperscript{102}Lowering in plié through the turn, ending on one knee.
Double. The rehearsal element is invoked by the canon, and at least in one version, the interaction of the dancers: in the 1982 performance, the boys watch the girl run offstage with a look that almost suggests they can’t wait until she gets out of the way—they are ready to get on with the competition of the Bransle Simple, even if what they are competing for is her attention.

Bransle Simple

The duets within the two Pas-de-Trois—the Gailliarde for two girls and the Bransle Simple for two boys—stand (predictably) between the group dances and the solo dances in complexity of choreography and architecture. The Gailliarde is built on contrasts of mirror and side-by-side dancing, the Bransle Simple on the contrast of canon and unison.

The Bransle Simple is an ABA', diagrammed in Table 3.11. The divisions between the sections are articulated not only by the difference in texture, but also by clear cadences, doubled for additional (and comedic) emphasis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>A'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 278-287</td>
<td>288-298</td>
<td>299-309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>canon</td>
<td>unison</td>
<td>canon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ends w/handshake</td>
<td>on the diagonal</td>
<td>ends w/linked elbows</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.11: Choreographic structure of the Bransle Simple

The opening canon brings to mind Bernard Taper’s comment about the “danger” of Agon. While the danger may be more apparent to the audience than real for the dancers, there is a definite sense of the “high-wire act” as the two boys seem constantly to be just missing each other with flying legs. Arranged center stage on a small diagonal [see Figure 3.17], the dancers perform a canon at the interval of a quarter note, which is the steady pulse of the dance’s rhythm.

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103Taper, 255.
The dance begins with what the dancers called a "fake 1," a choreographic upbeat. They move from a B+ position to a right tendu\textsuperscript{104} forward, with the supporting leg in plié. This springboard position launches the canon theme, starting with the boy in back. The canon theme is bouncing and athletic, composed of swift running steps punctuated by large movements of straight legs, similar to the first part of the Interlude. The phrase contains a pushing arabesque, a pas de chat, and some quick tendus faintly reminiscent of tap steps; there are also some un-classical turns—turns within a pas de chat\textsuperscript{105} and one that starts low (leg bent) and gradually rises to high (on the toe, leg straight).\textsuperscript{106} The most distinctive section of the canon combines the large leg movements with a turn: two complete turns in promenade. A promenade is a flat-footed turn in arabesque\textsuperscript{107} performed either with small lifts of the heel or, as here, little hops in place. This promenade takes six hops, three on each feet, and the first three hops (1 1/8 turn of the double turn) generate momentum with

\textsuperscript{104}A tendu is a motion or position of the leg. The result is a straight leg with the toe touching the floor.

\textsuperscript{105}In the older version, this is a simple tour en l'air, and a variation on the pas de chat turn occurs in the next measure. Perhaps two fast turns into the promenades made the dancers dizzy enough that they \textit{did} collide.

\textsuperscript{106}In the older version, this is a simple pirouette.

\textsuperscript{107}This promenade is performed in arabesque, but they may also be performed in attitude or à la seconde.
the sweeping of the working leg from a forward position around into arabesque. The
dancers switch feet for the completion of the double turn, the working leg immediately
going into arabesque. These promenade turns are the peak of the “danger” level in the
canon, as each dancer’s working leg seems to pass perilously close to his partner’s teeth.
Two swift full turns lead to an apparent cadence: the dancer is on his knee, one hand at the
juncture of hip and thigh, the other arm curved overhead (an echo of the boy’s Spanish arm
positions in the Saraband-Step). But the real cadence of the canon occurs as the two
dancers rise and turn to face one another (still on the diagonal) and grasp hands. They do
not actually shake hands, but the gesture has a definite flavor of “Well done, mate,” with
just a touch of “My grip is stronger than yours.”

In the B section, the dancers move in opposite directions on the diagonal. As they
move away from one another, they have a little four-beat canon of cabrioles; as they move
toward one another, their unison movements are comprised primarily of turning leaps and
lunging positions, reminiscent of the movements with which the boys’ box moved around
the stage during the Triple Pas-de-Quatre. Although their steps are in unison, the opposite
facing and diagonal floor plan makes the symmetry richer. At the end of the section, the
dancers assume what appears to be their initial position, but they are actually reversed.
Suddenly, as if they have realized a mistake, they switch places, and the A canon is repeated
exactly.

The cadence of the canon is different the second time. After the dancers rise from
their knees, they adjust their position so that they are abreast of one another, and they fold
their arms in front of them in a position reminiscent of a cartoon genie: with the arms bent
at right angles, the upper arms are held straight forward from the shoulders, the forearms
one on top of the other across the body. Again, this apparent cadence is followed by a
second, more emphatic one as the dancers suddenly angle toward one another and link
arms, one in a lunging position, one in plié with his working leg curved in an attitude
devant. 108 This last position has a courtly air, but it is also reminiscent of a "freeze-frame," a position one is more likely to see in action, not repose. Additionally, as it seems that the position of the boy in the attitude is more feminine than masculine 109—a sharp contrast to the "manly" handshake at the end of the first canon—the position carries a hint of the tongue-in-cheek armplay of the girls at the end of the Gailliarde.

The Bransle Simple is one of the clearest structures in the ballet, with its ABA' format, punctuated by doubled cadences—at the end of each section, an apparent cadence is given an added accent, an exclamation point of a second cadence. Each time, too, the second cadence has a humorous bent—the handshakes at the end of A, the switching of places at the end of B, or the freeze-frame pose at the end of the movement. These cadences are part of its rehearsal atmosphere (as are the competitive canons), though not new in the ballet—both the Saraband-Step and the Gailliarde ended with similar gestures.

The Bransle Simple forms an architectural balance with the more continuous structure of the last duet, the Gailliarde. Its strong motor pulse and large, bold, "into the ground" movements are a sharp contrast to the syncopations and delicate, ballonné movements of the Gailliarde. The two duets are both based on major textural oppositions in the ballet, but very different ones: the Bransle Simple on the musically-derived textures of canon vs. unison, the Gailliarde on the floor pattern-derived textures of mirrored vs. side-by-side dancing.

Bransle Gay

The Bransle Gay, a solo variation for the girl in the second Pas-de-Trois, is likewise an effective balance to the Saraband-Step in the first Pas-de-Trois, not only in gender, but

108 An attitude with the bent leg in front.
109 His arm is linked through that of the other dancer, his supporting leg in a plié. The positions of his limbs are softer, and he appears to be partnered or escorted by the other boy.
also in structure and style. Like the Saraband-Step, the Bransle Gay is a more continuous choreographic fabric than the other dances thus far in Agon, with a complex pattern of internal repetitions; and like the Saraband-Step, the Bransle Gay has a Spanish demi-caractère, though it is more obvious here. In the Saraband, the Spanish character was apparently derived from the dance's history; in the Bransle Gay, it comes from a prominent musical element, the castanet ostinato (which will be discussed further in Chapter Four).

The Spanish character of the choreography resides primarily in the flamenco-like expressiveness of the arms and a few audible stamps of the pointes against the floor. Muriel Topaz noted in 1959 that the "style of movement is sharp and crisp," but the 1987 score bears no such style indication. The difference may stem from a difference in dancers: the dance was originally set on Melissa Hayden, a dancer with sharp attack and an aggressive style. Had the dance been taken over by someone like Merrill Ashley, a brilliant technical dancer who has been both praised and criticized for the clarity and sharpness of her attack, the character might well have remained the same. Instead, the role was assumed by Maria Calegari (who dances it in the 1982 videotape), one of the most versatile of the later Balanchine dancers. Comparing the performances of Hayden and Calegari, Arlene Croce wrote that "In Spanish-dance terms, [Calegari] might be Argentinita, whereas Hayden was closer to Carmen Amaya."110 Thus the Spanish character of the dance does not hamper the dancer in finding her own style of expression.

More than its opposite number, the Saraband-Step, the Bransle Gay has a regular choreographic architecture (at least in the first half) and a rounded form [see Table 3.12]. Unlike the textural contrasts of the group movements, however, this solo variation is tightly woven out of small motives, grouped and regrouped in growing phrases, more organic than the block-cell nature of the Saraband-Step. While the arm movements of the Bransle Gay

110"Signs and Portents," Sight Lines (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987): 139. Argentinita was an elegant and fluid flamenco dancer, whereas Carmen Amaya was fiery and almost violent.
are fluid and curved (at least in the performance by Calegari), the leg movements are clearly defined, almost angular. The movement also exploits a very feminine aspect of ballet, the extreme range from plié to pointe.

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<tr>
<td>relevé</td>
<td>332-34</td>
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<tr>
<td>reverse</td>
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Table 3.12: Choreographic structure of the Bransle Gay

In the 1959 notation by Muriel Topaz, the boys leave the stage at the end of the Bransle Simple. In the more recent versions, they remain onstage, and throughout the girl’s dance, they softly clap the rhythm of the castanet ostinato; their presence and participation reinforces the court or social nature of the dance. The girl enters upstage, passing between the boys as they move back toward the rear corners of the stage to take up their positions for the duration of the dance. She starts at center stage, and the path of her dance never moves very far, continually returning to the initial position.

The first steps in the dance are simple: the dancer steps onto the diagonal first to the left, then the right; with each step, she performs a tendu to the back and makes an inward, rounding motion of her wrist and hands with her arms curved down at her sides. After the introductory steps, the relevé—a step that starts in plié and rises until the leg is straight and the support is on the pointe—comes into play, with relevé steps in which the working leg assumes various retiré positions. After a series of steps recalling the “peg walk” of the Double Pas-de-Quatre—a step out on pointe, the leg bending as the next step crosses

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111 As has been noted in several movements, the older notation indicates far fewer actual turns than the 1987 score; here, this may merely be a notational difference, as the turns are implied by torso twists in the 1959 notation.

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behind on a flat foot—the first phrase ends with a reverse of the introductory steps, the arms curving under as the dancer steps back.

The relevé motif is extended in the second phrase, with slightly longer sequences of steps and larger leg movements. Instead of retiré, the working leg is in arabesque or attitudes or performing développé. The cadential pose is a less severe version of the crossed piqué, with the working knee only partially crossed over the supporting leg (a pose that will return in both this variation and the girl’s variation of the Pas-de-Deux). In the rhythm of the ostinato, the dancer moves her arms, curved low in front of her, in opposition, the up and down movement led by the wrists (m. 320). On the final beat, the dancer stretches up, straightening her leg and curving her arm over her head.\textsuperscript{112}

The first two phrases, articulated by the introductory steps, their reversal, and the wrist movements, have a crystalline effect, constantly reforming the same small gestures—a relevé and the angular positions of the legs—in tiny fragments that build into larger sections that build in turn into still larger sections. After this section, at once disjunct and fluid, the next shows us—literally—another side of the dancer.

Up to this point, except for a couple of swift full turns, the dancer’s facings have ranged from stage right to stage left. The next phrase, composed of the same steps performed four times, turns the dancer from right to left facing the back of the stage rather than the audience. The sequence is made up of an outward pushing motion (a demure version of the pushing arabesque?)—the working toe sliding back along the floor as the palm pushes forward—a series of piqué quarter turns,\textsuperscript{113} and a brief pose with the working toe audibly stamping the floor as it comes in beside the supporting foot, which is on half-toe. This pose is yet another variant of the crossed piqué.

\textsuperscript{112}In the 1959 notation, the rhythm of the arms is long, short-short, long, rather than short-short, long, long.

\textsuperscript{113}In the older version, there is a single full turn instead of two quarter-turns in this phrase.
The next phrase is also composed of a repeated sequence—a piqué half-turn to the right diagonal and a little pas de chat turn (a motive from the Bransle Simple) to the left diagonal. The phrase elides with another phrase that returns to the relevés, but includes a sort of “reverse” relevé: springing into an échappé on pointe, the dancer pliés (still on pointe), then straightens her legs, rolling down through the foot until it rests flat on the floor.\footnote{In the older version, there are more repeats than in the present notation (which is also preserved on the videotape). There is, however, some additional notation added to the older score with the remark “new version Mar. 3, 1960, changed for Violette [Verdy]” which is much closer to the present version. It contains basically the same steps as the present version, although the timing is slightly different.}

The final phrase is a choreographic accelerando, both rhythmically and motivically. Although the actual pulse (the eighth-note) remains the same, the dance activity increases, and the phrase is composed of three of the movement’s primary motives: a relevé, a piqué turn, and an arabesque. The left leg sweeps forward, remaining in place in a low arabesque as the dancer performs a relevé half-turn onto pointe (what will be termed here a “swing-arabesque”); stepping back into a half turn, she then performs a full pirouette with a relevé onto pointe. These three swift turns are repeated four times and the movement ends with a repetition of the arm movements from measure 320.\footnote{In the older version, the rhythm is marked out by finger snaps rather than wrist movements in this measure. The repetition of the previous motive makes for a stronger symmetry and sense of closure.}

The choreography of the Bransle Gay is complex, with small gestures constantly building to make larger shapes, eliding with other shapes to produce an almost kaleidoscopic effect. The movement contains interlocking symmetries, from the first phrase, framed by the introductory step with curving arms and its reversal, to the Spanish arm movements articulating the two main sections of the dance. The first section of the movement [A] is a tiny rondo, the fragmentary motives of the relevé steps growing longer from b to b'. The second section [B] is composed of more discrete sections of longer

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[114]In the older version, there are more repeats than in the present notation (which is also preserved on the videotape). There is, however, some additional notation added to the older score with the remark “new version Mar. 3, 1960, changed for Violette [Verdy]” which is much closer to the present version. It contains basically the same steps as the present version, although the timing is slightly different.
\item[115]In the older version, the rhythm is marked out by finger snaps rather than wrist movements in this measure. The repetition of the previous motive makes for a stronger symmetry and sense of closure.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
enchâllements, made separate by their blocks of repeats: but the last two—the echappé with its reverse relevé and the accelerando turns fusing the movement’s primary choreographic motives into one swift step—draw upon previous parts of the movement, providing not only the rounding effect accentuated by the repeat of the Spanish arm movements but a choreographic crescendo toward the end.

Bransle Double [de Poitou]

The coda to the Second Pas-de-Trois, the Bransle Double (Stravinsky also referred to it as the Bransle de Poitou), is the only non-solo dance in Agon that could be said to be choreographically through-composed. There are three main sections, each divisible into several smaller ones [see Table 3.13]. Although the choreography contains no literal repeats, the partnering at either end frames the central variation for the girl. The sections between the partnering and the girl’s variation are for the three dancers together, though dancing as individuals, and both describe an arc stage right.

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<td>variation on Interlude</td>
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Table 3.13: Choreographic structure of the Bransle Double

The Bransle Double encapsulates the entire Pas-de-Trois. The girl’s variation is not only a structural reprise but also recalls motives from the Bransle Gay and—more unexpectedly—the pushing arabesque, a very important motive so far associated only with boys (in the Bransle Simple and the Pas-de-Quatre). The section that closes the entire Pas-de-Trois, C of the Bransle Double, is also a variation on the Interlude which served as an entrée for the dancers, creating a frame for the whole pas.
The dancers start the movement in the stage left rear corner. The girl stands in front of the boy on stage left, and as the music starts, he lifts her in an entrechat six, passing her to the boy on his right, who sets her down. As she performs two of the swinging relevé arabesques from the Bransle Gay, the boys line up behind her.

The following canon (b) is performed at a one-beat interval and starts with the girl, then the boy directly behind her, then the boy in back. Another entrechat six starts the canon, and diagonal turns and arm movements gives the line of dancers a rippling effect from the audience’s viewpoint, similar to the second canon of the Double Pas-de-Quatre.

The dancers then form a straight horizontal line with the girl in the middle, and perform a series of running steps, turns and little jumps, sweeping around to upstage left. (This section [c] is called “the scoots” in the score.) As they turn toward center stage, the boys grasp the girl under her arms, one on each side, and lift her as she extends her legs in a split. They carry her to center stage and lower her to the floor in the split, then raise her back up into the diagonal crossed piqué pose from the Bransle Gay.

In the girl’s variation, she is the melody to the boys’ accompaniment pattern of small diagonal steps with diagonal arms, aligned behind her (again reminiscent of the Double Pas-de-Quatre). The girl’s “melody” is composed primarily of turns, but the variation ends with a series of pushing arabesques—the first time this step has been performed by a girl (although she had tested out the basic movement in the Bransle Gay). The now-familiar step is given extra emphasis by the fact that the girl is rolling down from on pointe through her entire foot before flexing up onto the heel.

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116 In Muriel Topaz’s 1959 notation, the dance is performed center stage.

117 As noted previously, the 1/8 turns to the diagonal are not present in the older notation, again probably as an expedient to notation.

118 In the older version, there is no carry in the split (the dancers are already center stage, so there is really no need for it).
At the end of the variation, the dancers take up the triangular position they had held at the beginning of the Interlude, and the phrase that carries them in an arc toward center stage resembles the Interlude’s opening canon without being a literal repeat. It is composed of low, swift steps with “little kicks” in the direction of the steps, and turns in which the working toe is dragged along the floor—although the turns are inverted from the Interlude, moving outward rather than inward, with the toe sweeping forward rather than lagging behind.

Heightening the resemblance to the Interlude, both boys support the girl in the Bransle Double’s final section. As her working leg passes through various high positions, the boys circle around her, turning and supporting her. Their hands are linked in a circular pattern, and as they constantly change position, their arms create a series of shifting patterns. At times their arms appear to tangle and then, as if by magic, untangle as one dancer turns or moves aside, forecasting the intense intertwining of bodies in the Pas-de-Deux. At the very end of the movement, in an echo of the entrechat six that opened it, one boy passes the girl to the other boy, who captures her around the waist and one leg. The final image, like that of the Bransle Simple, is a freeze-frame—the girl appears to be stopped, mid-flight, in a jeté.

The Bransle Double, like the Coda of the First Pas-de-Trois, creates a solid conclusion for the pas. There is a strong sense of recapitulation on several different levels. A distinctive step (the relevé swing-arabesque) and pose (the diagonal crossed piqué) are reprised from the Bransle Gay, and reaching further back, the pushing arabesque returns from the opening of the ballet. The shape of the Bransle Double echoes the shape of the entire Second Pas-de-Trois, with the central girl’s variation and the final section which recalls the Interlude. Throughout, the formal patterns of the movements in the Second Pas-de-Trois are much clearer than their counterparts in the First. This strong division articulates an otherwise unemphatic central point of the ballet, and also sets off the following Pas-de-Deux.
Pas-de-Deux

Historically, a pas de deux is a culminating movement in a ballet, the chance for the principal dancers—especially the ballerina—to shine. The Pas-de-Deux in *Agon* is a distillation of the classical *grand pas de deux*; its structure adheres closely to tradition, with the Interlude serving as entrée, and the choreographic conventions are observed, even exaggerated. In the classical adagio, the presence of the male dancer allows the female dancer to extend her technique—to do more and faster turns, to do higher and longer leaps; he becomes her almost invisible support. Here, the choreography develops that relationship almost to the point of caricature. The boy helps the girl not only to pirouette and leap but also to touch her foot to her head and even to put her foot on the ground. At one point, he lies down on the floor to support her in a turn, becoming almost literally invisible to the audience.

In a traditional narrative ballet, the pas de deux is also the moment at which the principal characters come together; in most cases, it is the balletic equivalent of the cinematic love scene, depicting the main characters falling in love (the “White Swan” adagio from Act II of *Swan Lake*, for example) or a seduction (the “Black Swan” pas de deux). *Agon* has no such explicit narrative, but the Pas-de-Deux introduces a quality of emotion not sustained in any other movement in the ballet. Part of this emotional quality is culturally derived, for when we see a woman and a man dancing together, a romantic relationship is assumed. But here the emotion, at least in part, is a result of Balanchine’s choreography, recalling Jack Anderson’s observation that “the abstract ballets of George Balanchine may be as rich in emotional implications as they are in technical ingenuity.”

No story is presented, but the steps themselves seem to hold meaning.

The Pas-de-Deux was the key to the ballet for Balanchine. He began working on it even while Stravinsky was finishing the score; new music was mailed in from California,

regulating the speed at which the normally swift choreographer could work. But the lack of a score was not the only factor slowing Balanchine's work. He told his dancers: "This is the longest it's ever taken me to do a pas de deux. But this has got to be absolutely right." One of the dancers said, "[T]hat's one of the few, or the only, time I've ever seen him take things and throw them out. Usually, it just flows, but here he experimented, he took out, he changed." 121

More than the usual artistic considerations seem to have been at work here. The movement was set on Diana Adams, a tall, pale-skinned ballerina, and Arthur Mitchell, the first black man to become a first-rank classical dancer. Mitchell reports, "There was a definite use of the skin tones in terms of Diana being so pale and me being so dark, so that even the placing of the hands or the arms provided a color structure integrated into the choreographic one..." 122

The Pas-de-Deux caused some controversy in its early years. Some saw it as an emblem of progress. Melissa Hayden, who originated the Bransle Gay, said:

[T]he first time you saw Diana Adams and Arthur Mitchell doing the pas de deux it was really awesome to see a black hand touch a white skin. That's where we were coming from in the fifties. It was marvelous what Balanchine did. 123

Others interpreted it as a black man manipulating a white woman with great intimacy—she seemed to be his puppet. When, in 1962, the New York City Ballet toured the Soviet Union with Agon, some Soviet critics saw it as symbolic of the continued enslavement of the


122 In Mason, 395.

123 In Mason, 359.
black man—a completely opposite interpretation. Even the original dancers had differing approaches to the choreography, though these were not opposed and, in fact, had a “less-is-more” philosophy in common:

Arthur Mitchell: The one thing Balanchine kept saying was, “The girl is like a doll, you’re manipulating her, you must lead her. It’s one long, long, long, long breath.” And so I always explained to a new partner, “The secret of this is the less you do the better off we’re going to be.”

Diana Adams: I tried not to analyze, because then I might give too much significance to a gesture, like when I put my hand on Arthur’s wrist. I knew it wasn’t meant to be a sentimental gesture. It had to do with part of a movement and I would spoil it if I started to think about it. In Agon the movements were so intricate that you really didn’t think in terms of whose limb was attached to some other limb. You were just trying to negotiate your bodies. In the Pas de Deux what seems to be terribly intimate is simply one movement evolving from another. It was scientific.

Given the testimony of Adams and Mitchell, and Balanchine’s general distrust in the ability of ballet to convey a plot (he referred to what he called the “mother-in-law” problem—how do you dance that relationship?), one feels constrained from reading much more into the Pas-de-Deux than the patterns of two contrasting bodies. Yet one cannot completely separate the dance from its cultural connotations. The movements carry an erotic element, and there is an emotional quality in the way in which the bodies relate to one another. However, it does seem unlikely that Balanchine was trying to make some statement on racial relationships. Had that been his intent, he surely could have made a more explicit one.


125In Reynolds, 183.

Interlude

In the choreographic score, the Interlude introducing the Pas-de-Deux is marked “Very aggressive, angry.”\textsuperscript{127} The dancers start upstage left and race one another across the stage on a long downstage diagonal, their paths crossing, as they execute a canon on the simplest floor pattern of all the Prelude/Interlude movements. The dance starts with as a silent upbeat, an $1/8$ turn (eighth-note duration) from front to right diagonal by the girl, and the boy follows at a quarter-note interval with large steps in which the working leg sweeps around in a rond de jambe just off the floor; the arms move in large, soft diagonals. High front développés lead into low, fast turns, and the dancers move straight across to center stage. The canon ends abruptly as the girl performs her last full turn and leans forward, whipping her right leg back around the shoulders of the boy lunging in a wide fourth position behind her. This dangerous-looking pose has become an emblem of \textit{Agon}, even of the New York City Ballet Company—it adorns NYCB merchandise from posters to coffee mugs and beach towels—and it is used again later in the Pas-de-Deux.

The last section of the Interlude is the closest approach in \textit{Agon} to a true Baroque court dance, though even here the reference is abstract. The dancers assume the position of a pair of courtly dancers: side-by-side, arms held gracefully out to the sides, her hand resting lightly on top of his. They take low, gliding steps—stepping into plié and rising up to a normal stance—with the working leg beating petit battements around the ankle of the supporting foot. They take three such steps forward and three back; unlike previous sections, however, this does not seem to be a cinematic reverse but simply part of the pattern of this minimal, unrecognizable court dance. A second stylized step—a small dégagé leap—is repeated, again performed three times: the dancer springs up, with one leg gesturing at a low angle to the side. As the gesturing leg comes back beneath the dancer,

\textsuperscript{127}I have as yet been unable to determine whose words these are, the choreographer's or the notator's.
the other leg swings out and the dancer lands on the first leg; the second leg closes in front. In contrast to the steady rhythm of the gliding steps with their even, duple beats, the degagé step has the feel of a dotted rhythm.

In natural, metrically unmeasured steps, the two trace a circular path upstage, with him circling outside of her as he guides her to the new position. In their final pose, the dancers mirror each other, and in fact the position is the same as the opening of the Gailliarde: the dancers face each other at center stage with the weight on the upstage leg, the torso angled toward the audience. The working leg is stretched out straight behind, turned out, toe to the floor; the arms are at a low angle to the sides. The only difference between the pose in the Gailliarde and this one is that here the dancers are closer together and holding hands. This mirror position would throw into relief the contrasts of the original dancers: Adams and Mitchell were almost of equal height, and in the costume of Agon, they would be opposite images of each other—her black leotard against his white T-shirt, her pale legs against his black ones, her white arms against his dark ones.

After the entée of the Interlude, the Pas-de-Deux follows a mirror-arch form: a slow-motion adagio, duet, male variation, female variation, male variation ("refrain"), duet, and slow-motion adagio to close. The exaggeration of the traditional pas de deux borders on parody, and there is humor and wit in some of the dance movements. Yet much of the Pas-de-Deux is abstract and formalistic, with steps designed to highlight the contrasting bodies of the original dancers. In the midst of a ballet that exploits form over narrative, it seems to be the apex of physical construction. On the other hand, it is also the only movement that seems to evoke a story. After the "angry, aggressive" Interlude (a lover’s argument?), the Adagio does not seem like a joyous reconciliation. The intimacy conveyed

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128 This, at least, is the final pose in the videotaped version. There is no earlier notation for any of the Pas-de-Deux, and the 1987 score shows a slightly less angular position which does not seem as clear and effective.

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by the twining choreography suggests anguish as well as passion. These are not lovers who have just met; they seem to have had a long, difficult history. He manipulates, she comforts. He may be a 1950s male, the “dominant partner” in the relationship, but he is also the nearly invisible porteur. Nor is she completely submissive; in her flexibility is resilience and strength—literally, she bends but does not break. The implicit balance of power between the two of them constantly shifts.

Even though the emotional implications are engraved in the choreography, different dancers bring different qualities to the Pas-de-Deux. When performed by two white—or two black—dancers, one of the unique qualities of the dance is lost. Even if the girl were black and the boy white, the patterns would not hold the same symmetry, as the costumes would be wrong. The personality and body language of the dancers change significantly the affect of the dance. Kirstein reports that in Moscow, “Mitchell’s pantherine sinuosity tended to swing the combination into approximately a star turn,”129 while his partner (at that time Allegra Kent) was not mentioned. More often, however, the ballerina—as typical of ballet through history—is the focal point. Mitchell himself spoke of Diana Adams’s “nervous intensity,”130 and Olivier Merlin called Suzanne Farrell a “femme-serpent.”131 Of more recent ballerinas, Heather Watts has a taut body and seems uneasily flexible, giving the dance a quality of effort and calculation—one can almost see her figuring trajectories and stress factors as she dances; Helene Alexopoulos, on the other hand, is sinuously flexible and brings a powerful sensuality to the role, recalling the Siren from Balanchine’s 1928 Prokofiev ballet Prodigal Son. She dominates her partner not through power or position, but through charisma. In his attempts to manipulate her, she slips away and forms her own image, seeming to force him to respond to her will.

129Thirty Tears, 171.
130In Reynolds, 183.
Adagio

...the pas de deux where, on the arm of a black dancer (Arthur Mitchell), an irresistibly beautiful young girl (Suzanne Farrell) executes a woman-serpent number; not for a second are the distortions, the hip movements, the contortions, the ellipses to which she submits, obscene.

—Olivier Merlin\textsuperscript{132}

The pas de deux is like seeing live sculpture. Before your eyes, the dancers move from one fantastic pose to another, but you don’t know how they got there... [I]t’s not so much the difficulty of the steps or how flexible you are, it’s the precariousness.

—Arthur Mitchell\textsuperscript{133}

The Adagio is the most extended section of \textit{Agon} to exploit cinematic technique. Most of the Adagio appears to take place in slow motion. The dancers twine together in intricate patterns designed to exploit the unique contrast of the original dancers. With the sort of continuity and inevitability admired by Elliott Carter, the movements of the Adagio almost seem to be transitions, constantly moving from one striking pattern of contrast to another.

One of the most striking of those patterns occurs near the beginning. Standing side by side in mirrored B+, they clasp hands with their outside arms, their inside arms linked at the elbow. As they reach over [see Frontispiece], they grasp their own wrists with their inside hands, forming an image of arms braided together. Although the geometry of this complex arm pattern is beautiful in itself, the pattern is most intense when the arms are of different colors.

Although the material of the movement is spun out of continuous movements—Mitchell’s “long, long, long, long breath”—there are two small repetitions, both of them

\textsuperscript{132}...le pas de deux où, au bras d’un danseur noir (Arthur Mitchell), une jeune fille irrésistiblement belle (Suzanne Farrell) exécute un numéro de femme-serpent qui, pas une seconde, dans les distorsions, les hanchements, les déboitements, les ellipses auxquels elle se soumet, n’est obscene. [“Musiques pour la danse du temps présent,” 114-15.]

\textsuperscript{133}Quoted in Reynolds, 183.
mirroring the original statements. In m. 418-19, as he turns her away from the audience, her leg describes a large arc in the air until she is almost in splits on the floor, suspended by his arms around her waist. Swinging her back leg around to the front, she arches back in his arms [m. 419]; after he raises her to her feet, she walks around him and he lowers her into the arched position again, this time facing the audience [m. 421]. This is followed by a recall from the Interlude—in a swift movement, he spins her under his arm into the famous position with her leg wrapped back around his shoulders; this time, however, it is to the other side.

The story element surfaces in the next sequence; the choreography is simple, but that simplicity emphasizes the symbolism of the movements. Facing him on the diagonal, she seems to want to go forward, but his arm across her chest guides her back until she ducks under it and runs forward. He runs after her, and in slow motion their bodies intertwine, going down to the floor and rising back up. Although this intertwining may be shaded with eroticism, she seems to be resisting and evading him through many of the movements: when he runs after her, he catches her by the waist, lifting her above his head; as he lifts her, her legs stretch out and apart, as if she were fighting to get free of him; she slides down his body, then rolls back through his legs on the floor.

There is a high degree of tension in their bodies and in the way that they relate to each other, now leaning together, now pulling away. At one point, her body is arched intensely backward in his arms, her toe touching her head. One commentator has even postulated that this sequence may have been influenced by an important part of Balanchine’s life in 1956 and 1957—his wife, ballerina Tanaquil LeClerq, had contracted polio, and Balanchine helped her daily with physical therapy.\(^{134}\) The stretching, the tension in the two bodies, the moments in which the male dancer seems to be pushing her beyond her physical capabilities, or viewing his handiwork with pleasure—makes this interpretation

tenable, though it is not necessary to fix a specific story to the emotions evoked between the dancers. Even if one did not know about Balanchine’s personal situation, the movements still suggest both tenderness and pain; sorrow seems to hang over the couple. After the sustained, slow-motion movements of the Adagio, the dance suddenly seems to snap into “real time” at the A tempo (m. 452) as the girl turns almost violently into supported splits. She seems to be throwing herself into his arms in despair, and he brings her up each time as they angle backward and forward at center stage in a series of cinematic reverses. Finally, he lifts her up and backs away to take up the position for his variation.

Variations

In the classical pas de deux, the ballerina and her cavalier typically alternate variations, which sometimes evolves into a cutting contest of sorts, each return becoming faster and more brilliant. In keeping with the distilled character of this Pas-de-Deux, the variations are tiny, no more than a few measures each, and relatively restrained. The boy’s variation comes first, then the girl’s, and the boy has an abbreviated second variation (called the refrain in the musical score).

The male variation recalls particularly the choreography for the boy in the First Pas-de-Trois. From the Prelude, there is a slow, high développé; from the Saraband-Step, piqué twists and a two-footed “unwinding” turn similar to the boy’s turn in the Saraband-Step (itself reminiscent of a motive in Apollo); and from the Coda, a jumping-jack leap. This leap is literally labeled a “funny step” in the score: the leg action resembles a pas de chat (another motive associated primarily with the male dancers in this ballet), although the step does not travel, and the arms move down and up in opposition, giving the movements an almost awkward, marionette-like look. The variation ends with two leaps across the stage, a jeté en arabesque, then a leap à la seconde with a delay on the rising of the following leg. These leaps, especially the last, are also reminiscent of movements from the Saraband-Step, recalling the last time a boy danced alone.
The girl's variation also reprises motives associated with female dancers, primarily from the Bransle Gay. The dance is composed of piqué steps and turns that come in little bursts separated by beats of rests. Each little group of steps alternates between piqué on straight legs and piqué in plié (a motive also seen in the Triple Pas-de-Quatre). At the end of the variation, she performs a series of small turns, stamping her pointes to the floor in a little flamenco flourish. Like the boy's variation, the girl's ends with a leap, a grand jeté, cadencing to a solo version of the opening stance.

Throughout the girl's variation, the boy has been moving surreptitiously upstage, stepping back with a rond de jambe par terre into a B+. As she settles into her final position, he turns onto the diagonal toward her (she is now standing at the downstage right corner). He runs toward her on his toes with bending knees, an echo of her piqué/plié steps, then contracts inward, taking little hitch steps backward along a semi-circular path, recalling a similar step from the Coda of the First Pas-de-Trois. Straightening, he faces her once more and cadences his "refrain" with a grand jeté—which had been her cadence. He runs forward to take her hand, pausing before the Coda. The ending position is almost an inversion of the beginning of the Adagio: the stance is the same, but instead of being in mirror, they are side-by-side. These two poses carry a small echo of the Gailliarde, with its similar beginning position and alternations of mirror and side-by-side.

Coda

From the point of repose at the end of the refrain, the Coda begins almost violently. As at the A tempo of the Adagio, the girl's motions are wild and the boy anchors her. Whereas in the Adagio, however, she seemed to be throwing herself into his arms in despair, in the Coda, she seems to be trying to escape him. Like the Adagio, the beginning of the Coda is marked by repetitions within the sublimated narrative flow.

The girl turns around the boy and leaps away from him, but she is held by his hand and he catches her around her waist. She leaps back, but he catches her by her other hand.

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Gripping both hands, he “throws” her a half-turn, her legs flying up one after the other as if in a butterfly leap, and she lands in an arabesque. Turning her with her arm over her head, he supports her in an arabesque penché.

The next phrase is a variant of the first. She performs two pirouettes, and this time she leaps back from him before he catches her hand, and they repeat the butterfly throw. He turns her with her arm over her head again, but instead of the arabesque penché, they release hands and together perform a jazz step, half-twisting, half-soft shoe, another reminiscence of the Coda of the First Pas-de-Trois.

They stop suddenly in the middle of the twists, and the dance goes into slow motion again as they move toward one another symmetrically, his left toe and her right sliding along the floor. Their motion is almost a sideways version of the pushing step that the girl performed in the Bransle Gay. He goes down to one knee, and she steps behind him, her arms sliding along his outstretched ones, supporting her in a high arabesque. As he turns toward the audience onto both knees, she also turns and, with great tenderness, guides his arms in a port de bras. She turns around him, and he grasps her leg beneath his arm.

They pull slowly apart, their bodies arching away from one another with great tension, and finally, he stretches out on the stage, pulling her into an extremely deep arabesque penché, her legs in a split, her head nearly touching her knee. As she comes back up, her working leg curves against the supporting leg, the pointe resting against the floor in the gently crossed piqué pose. He rises back up to his knee, then falls across her thigh as if exhausted, his arm curling around her legs as she folds down over his back.

The Pas-de-Deux appears to trace the course of a lovers’ argument. The angry, aggressive Interlude leads to the taut, tentative Adagio, in which she seems to be giving him the silent treatment. Their bodies are tense throughout in a delicate balance of resistance and support; and her body, though not distorted, is pushed to the limits of flexibility. She tries to evade him, but then is caught and submits to his “arguments”—the contortions to which he subjects her body. At the A tempo, she throws herself desperately in his arms, and
he calms her. The variations are like exchanges of words. He sets forth his side (using "arguments" or motives associated with the men in the ballet), and she similarly sets forth hers. As she "speaks," he moves backward (a submissive stage posture); when it is his turn to speak again, he absorbs some of her motives—perhaps he is coming around to her way of thinking, or at least giving in to her for the time being. At first in the Coda, she is having none of it—she tries to get away. But gradually, they come together, and her tenderness makes him seem vulnerable. At the end, it seems that their coming together is less reconciliation than exhaustion, both physical and emotional. In the rehearsal evoked by the ballet overall, the placement of this lovers' argument is ambiguous; different performers and performances bring out different qualities. The dancers may be troubled lovers rehearsing an abstract pas de deux, or uninvolved dancers cautiously rehearsing a passionate pas de deux; or perhaps it is after the rehearsal, and they have stayed behind.

Finale
Quasi stretto

After their curtain call, the couple from the Pas-de-Deux walk upstage and turn back toward the audience to begin the Finale. Another couple enters (the boy from downstage right, the girl from upstage left), and finally two more couples (one dancer from each of the four corners of the stage). The present formation is quite symmetrical and orderly; a sketch in Billie Mahoney's hand, apparently made during the initial choreography in 1957, shows a similar, more direct, but less symmetrical pattern of entries [see Figure 3.18].

135 The other six dancers in the Four Duos are those from the two Pas-de-Trois.

136 Some of Mahoney's other notations in the collection of movements in the DNB library are dated 1957, and these appear to date from the same time, especially as there are several places that are scratched out or re-notated, as though the choreography had changed.
With canonic half-turns and step-lunge patterns, the dancers gradually, two by two, form a circle, crouching center stage. Then, reaching across the circle (not necessarily directly across), the dancers "choose their partners" by joining hands and run into position across the center of the stage for the Four Duos—four couples in a straight line [see Figure 3.19; in reality, the dancers are never all facing inward at one time].

Rather than a dignified courtly dance, this sudden shuffle seems more reminiscent of a boisterous square dance—which is, after all, a rustic version of court dances that developed from refinements of rustic dances in the first place. Or perhaps it is just the shuffle of dancers at a class, picking out the partners with whom they will perform an adagio.
Four Duos

The Four Duos continues the impression of a class in adagio. This brief movement of unison partnering proceeds with a rigorous pulse—all that is missing is the dance master/mistress, keeping time with a cane on the floor. Though the Four Duos is only 19 measures long, it does display a discernible rondo tendency. The dancers are almost always in pairs, but move apart on the diagonal for few measures, providing textural contrast. They also separate, almost imperceptibly, for a couple of measures toward the end [see Table 3.14].

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<tr>
<td><strong>A</strong></td>
<td><strong>B</strong></td>
<td><strong>A'</strong></td>
<td><strong>B'</strong></td>
<td><strong>A</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 520-526¹</td>
<td>526²-528</td>
<td>529-534²</td>
<td>534³-536⁴</td>
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<tr>
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<td>boy/girl split on diagonal</td>
<td>partners</td>
<td>slight separation</td>
<td>partners (trios)</td>
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Table 3.14: Choreographic structure of the Four Duos

In the A section, the girls are almost always on pointe, supported, stepping into relevé arabesques, their working legs passing through retiré, extending, then coming back in to retiré. In the first part, the dancers’ arms cross overhead in typical Balanchinian partnering fashion; at the end of the phrase, the boys go down on their knees to support the girls at the waist.

The duos split apart in measure 526 [B], the girls moving downstage on the diagonal, opposite of the boys. Their steps are jazzy running steps, leaps and lunges, recalling not only the Triple Pas-de-Quatre, but also the middle section of the Bransle Simple, where the two boys similarly moved apart on the diagonal.

The partners come back together [A'] in an echo of the Bransle Double. After supporting the girls in a piqué attitude, the boys lift them in an entrechat six. The girls perform the lower-body twists, repeating them from the retiré position. The girls come down into a B+ position for four beats in an unexpected order, a small-scale symmetrical asymmetry [m. 534; see Figure 3.20].

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Figure 3.20: The girls come down from retiré into B+
in a symmetrical asymmetrical order

B' is little more than a break in the partnering as the girls step out to perform a large
rond de jambe en l'air; the boys take hold of their waists again [A''] to support them in
pirouettes. At the cadence, the couples join hands, and the four “extra” girls enter. They
stop just to the left of the boys, resting their hands on the boys’ left shoulders [see Figure
3.21].

Figure 3.21: Position at end of Four Duos

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Four Trios

Symmetry, the basis of composition for centuries, focuses on stage center. The new asymmetry broke up the balance of right and left, distributing blocks into shifting cells employing stage periphery equally with a center. New attacks on temporal measure involved new conquest of space...

—Lincoln Kirstein

The Four Trios is the most complex structure in the ballet, the longest group movement for the largest group of dancers [see Table 3.15]. Comparable to the closing ballabile in a classical ballet, the movement also contains reprises of elements from the rest of the ballet. The basic shape of the dance is a rondo, alternating trios (a boy with two girls) with other formations: divided genders, four couples with single girls, two groups composed of six dancers (four girls, two boys)—in short, Balanchine creates groupings in the combinations available with four boys and eight girls. The final part of the dance recapitulates the opening movement, the Pas-de-Quatre for four boys only. The reprise, however, is not merely tacked onto the end of the rondo: rondo and reprise begin to dissolve into one another in the middle, with the Petrouchka canons returning before the girls leave the stage.

In the opening sections, the dancers move as trios, but the trios themselves are paired: the two trios on the left side of the stage move independently of the two trios on the right. Not only do the pairs of trios have different steps, but they move in alternation, first one side of the stage and then the other. The left trios retain a sense of partnering, while the right trios have unison individual movements.

\footnote{137 \textit{Movement and Metaphor}, 242.}
Four Trios

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<thead>
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<th></th>
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<th>B</th>
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<td>564-569</td>
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<td>589-594</td>
<td>595-603</td>
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<td>4 Trios</td>
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<td>girls rise and</td>
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<td>Petrouchka</td>
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<td>mirror</td>
<td>canon</td>
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<tr>
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<td>bow and</td>
<td>prance</td>
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<td>canon</td>
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Recap of Pas-de-Quatre

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<tr>
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<td>613²-620</td>
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<td>manly steps</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>w/big arms</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>arabesque</td>
<td>double mirror</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>symmetry</td>
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Table 3.15: Choreographic structure of the Four Trios

The left trios move first, with the girls traveling forward in piqué arabesques. As the left trios rest, the right trios step into a swing-arabesque. In the left trios, the front girls move forward on the left diagonal as the back girls move backward, causing the boys to have to turn to keep in line with them. These left trios change arm positions as the right trios move forward with a peg walk punctuated by grand battements, forming a long diagonal line that accentuates the symmetrical asymmetry of the dancers [see Figure 3.22].
In the left trios, the symmetry is further fragmented as the girls perform the swing arabesque, first the leftmost trio, then the rightmost two beats later: before now, the pairing has been front girls and back girls. The same fragmentation occurs in the right trios as the front trio steps back into a bow (similar to “making a leg” seen in the Prelude); the back trio bows two beats later. They rise up in the same order as the left trios move in a peg walk to a different symmetrical asymmetrical position [see Figure 3.23].

At the beginning of measure 549 [B], the texture shifts. Although the imitations between trios continue, the pairings cross the center line of the stage for the first time. The alternation is still left and right, but the same steps are echoed from side to side, and the split is now along gender lines as the dancers gradually move into a “V” formation.

The transition to the V formation passes through a symmetrical position of offset boxes divided by gender [see Figure 3.24]. This transition employs two motives: the leaps
and lunges usually associated with the boys are used by all the dancers to move into the new position; “twists” are used to adjust positions.

Figure 3.24: Symmetrical position [end m. 555], transition to V formation

Now the girls are divided into outer and inner fours. The outer girls on the right perform a piqué turn on a bent leg (a girls’ motive from the Triple Pas-de-Quatre, the Bransle Gay, and the Pas-de-Deux), followed two beats later by the outer girls on the left. Both sides then repeat the turn, and the pairs of girls link arms around each other’s waists.

The boys, taking large, lunging steps, circle through the grouping of girls and into the V formation [m. 556; see Figure 3.25]. In a crossing pattern of pairs (front right, back left, back right, front left), the girls perform grand battements reminiscent of the entrée canon of the Double Pas-de-Quatre, and the boys lunge outward, creating a more pronounced V formation. Moving slightly backward, the girls alternate feet in piqué poses (they look almost like prancing horses) as the boys perform a variation of the heel-drop step from the Saraband-Step.

Figure 3.25: V formation
Initiating a new section [A'] in the V formation, the girls perform a soft-shoe style step in place with twisting piqués, while the boys move inside to form trios once more. The trios link hands and move forward into a new trio formation with a prancing walk—the working leg pricks the floor with a piqué à terre on each step [see Figure 3.26].

![Figure 3.26: Trio formation](image)

In each trio, the boy and the "extra" girl support the primary girl in a promenade, then the trios divide into four couples with the extra girls moving away from the couples into a circular formation [C], somewhat like the flattened diamond shape of the Double Pas-de-Quatre [see Figure 3.27]. The back duos perform a soft-shoe step with heel-drops moving side to side as the two couples in front do a sedate version of the Jitterbug or the Lindy—linked by one hand, she turns underneath his arm as he steps past her, then they repeat to the other side.

![Figure 3.27: Circular formation](image)
The girls in the front couples perform a piqué turn in arabesque then move in front of their partners for a supported pirouette. Simultaneous with their pirouette, all the other dancers (with the obvious exception of their partners) do a pirouette, and a canon begins, progressing from the front of the stage backward and somewhat inside out [see Figure 3.28; canon order ab, QR, ecPS, hgdf]. At a two-beat interval, the dancers do a high kick (develope), a double turn, and come to rest in fourth position. Following the canon, the dancers perform one of the most obviously humorous steps of the ballet, a peg walk into a new position [see Figure 3.28] with their elbows pulled in close to their sides, their hands flipping down, seeming to mime, “Well, you don’t say!”

![Figure 3.28: Canon position and end of peg walk](image)

After taking a bow (first the front trios then the back trios), the dancers in each trio join hands and move backwards into another position [A*; see Figure 3.29], where the girls perform another set of prancing steps before moving into yet another position [see Figure 3.30].
The canon is repeated [D], again moving both front to back and inside to outside (ab, QR, ecPS, dhgf), but this time at the end, the dancers turn toward the back, then swiftly around to the front right diagonal, crouching on one knee, one arm curved over their heads. The dancers are still for a moment, then the girls rise up and piqué toward the wings, leaving the stage with a jeté [E].

As the girls exit, the boys move from the crouch almost to a fetal ball on hands and knees. Rising up, they move sideways into the four-abreast position from the opening, and they repeat the most complex canon of the Pas-de-Quatre, the turn into the pushing arabesque [F]. Sweeping toward the back of the stage with big arm movements (“manly steps”) [G], they further split the symmetry: whereas in the Pas-de-Quatre, the symmetry was two-by-two, this time it is in double mirror. They end as two pairs facing each other [see Figure 3.31]. The double mirror symmetry somehow seems more final than the simple
symmetry of the end of the Pas-de-Quatre. In a beat of silence, they turn their backs to the audience to end the ballet as it began.

![Figure 3.31: Final position](image)

The earlier notation for the Finale is somewhat sketchy, probably written down during setting of the choreography, but it is obvious that the Four Trios have been reworked since the initial stages. Some of the changes are simple and typical of those seen throughout the ballet: an entrechat six was an entrechat quatre; a double pirouette was a single, or vice versa; and once again, there are fewer turns toward the diagonals, with angled steps or implied torso twists in their place. But the most significant change lies in the complex floor patterns of the movement: the old floor plans are not only more symmetrical but more square, with fewer diagonals in them, and the symmetrical asymmetry of the split stage is not present—the two sides of the stage perform the same steps. Typical of Balanchine's adjustments to his work, the changes deepen and enrich the ballet [see Figure 3.32].

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Figure 3.32: A comparison of original floor plans with newer versions

Conclusion

Just as Stravinsky’s score for Agon melds serialism, neo-classicism, jazz and Renaissance dance forms, Balanchine’s choreography melds classical ballet technique with modern dance, tap, show-dancing, and social dance forms. The referents do not always coincide exactly, but the fascination with eclecticism is the same. The unstated narrative of
a dancer's daily routine—warm-up, class, rehearsal—intersects with this eclecticism, as the humor and wit found throughout the choreography is most often the product of lightning-swift changes, with dancers instantaneously transforming from serious artists to playful youths.

At one level, the architecture of the ballet is simple: *Agon* is a suite of dances, each unique in the configuration of dancers. Even in the continuous second half, Balanchine marks the individual dances by personnel changes. Within movements, Balanchine uses different textures to build patterns of contrast, continuity, and development in the choreography. The most obvious textures are derived from music: polyphony, including canon; melody and accompaniment; unison; and an extension of the unison principle, homophony, in which dancers perform the same steps at the same time, but to different directions or on different facings. But Balanchine also makes inventive and subtle use of the contrasts of traveling vs. stationary choreographic phrases. One movement, the Pas-de-Quatre, is based entirely on the alternation of traveling and stationary movements, overlaid by a simultaneous alternation of canon and unison; the Double Pas-de-Quatre develops this contrast, but here these dualities are no longer block-like but rather off-set, creating an architecture of interlocking contrasts on a higher level. Floor patterns are also structural, sometimes a product of the textures, sometimes graphically motivic in their own right: the V formation with a box of four dancers at the point appears in all of the large ensemble movements; the flattened diamond-shaped floor plan with diagonal facings in the Double Pas-de-Quatre is prefigured in another dimension by pairs of dancers creating starburst patterns with their diagonally-held straight limbs.

Although each dance is self-contained, Balanchine weaves threads of continuity among them. Two motives, the heel and the piqué, pervade the entire ballet.\textsuperscript{138} To some

\textsuperscript{138}One could argue that these motives are so basic that they appear in the neo-classical choreography in the same way that triads appear in tonal music; however, Balanchine was an extremely inventive choreographer. Relevant to this issue is his comment that Stravinsky's score to *Apollo* taught him "that I could dare not to use everything, that I, too,
extent, these are gender-linked motives—the boys have the pushing arabesque and the heel drops, the girls the open piqué movement (Double Pas-de-Quatre, prancing steps in the Four Trios) and especially the closed piqué position. But everyone shares in the twisting piqué movement, in which the working knee is crossed over the supporting leg, often in alternation. There are brief, distinctive moments of “gender-crossing” motives—the girl in the Bransle Double has a pushing arabesque; the boy in the Pas-de-Deux runs on his toes with bent knees in an echo of the girl’s piqué/plié steps. The relevés in the Bransle Gay mediate between the heel and the pointe, accentuating the pointe in the classical relevé, but accentuating the heel in its inversion, the “reverse relevé.”

Motives are especially important in the solo movements, where floor patterns and musical-choreographic textures are impossible. In those movements, Balanchine uses small ideas to build larger structures—motives are varied, spinning into gradually larger phrases. Juxtapositions to other phrases built on different motives create contrasts, and finally an architecture that spans multiple dances. On a larger level, this is how Balanchine creates the entire ballet, constantly gathering in previous motives and spinning them into new ideas.

The motives build from dance to dance. The opening Pas-de-Quatre movements serve as an exposition for the ballet, introducing motives and textural patterns. However, even by the Third Pas-de-Quatre, Balanchine consolidates the overall structure of the ballet with elements of reprise. Throughout the ballet, the Codas of the various pas are particularly prominent points of recapitulation of details of the dances in the pas and also of all that has gone before in the ballet.

Aiding the tight weave of motives to unite the ballet is the shadow of a narrative. The ballet is not narrative in any traditional sense, but neither can it be called abstract; it recalls the routine of a dancer’s day. The warm-up of the Pas-de-Quatre cues the concept;

could eliminate. ...I could clarify, by limiting, by reducing what seemed to be multiple possibilities to the one that is inevitable” [“The Dance Element in Stravinsky’s Music,” 79].

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the girls join them and class ensues, including adagio practice (the end of the Triple Pas-de-Quatre). The choreography even hints at the traditional bows to the teacher at the end of class (the reverences). The central part of the ballet—the two Pas-de-Trois and the Pas-de-Deux—seem like glimpses into rehearsals. Playful touches in the choreography—the “breaking of character” as these classical dancers slouch or do a soft-shoe or even shake hands—hint at competition and play. Most of these glimpses behind the façade are humorous, but the repetitions in the Saraband-Step and the mirror-dancing in the Gailliarde represent diligent work. The Pas-de-Deux is more serious, but the sense of rehearsal is not necessarily negated. The movements, for all their intensity, are tentative and uncertain, qualities of rehearsal at least as common as horseplay. At the beginning of the Four Trios, various groups seem to be rehearsing different parts (or different ballets) at the same time, but gradually coherence starts to surface, and at the end, the girls leave the stage. The boys take their places upstage, waiting for the performance to begin. This is where we came in.

With Agon, George Balanchine created a choreographic equivalent, not a copy, of Stravinsky’s score. The music and the choreography share a common density of materials, a refined sensitivity to texture and contrast, and complex interlocking structures that create increasingly larger orders of form. Along the curve of the ballet, all the possibilities lie readily at hand. But on the highest level, both separately and together, the music and the dance describe a large curve like a sine wave which begins and ends at the same place (a neo-classical plane), yet in the middle dips into the past (the Renaissance) before surging forward to the modern (the Pas-de-Deux).
Chapter Four
The Relationship of the Music and Dance in Agon

Whatever music Balanchine uses, the ballet is just another melodic line. Other critics have said it. It's really obvious that it's not on the music, it's not with the music, it has nothing to do with a story, it takes the music, and writes another melodic line or tempo or whatever, and sometimes, it's in total disagreement with the music. ...[I]t's terribly interesting.

—John Clifford

...[T]he movements are not only extensions of sound into physical substance but they also comment upon the score, occasionally tease it, race with it, rest with it, play with it.

—Walter Terry

Stravinsky's lean and muscular music and Balanchine's lightly intricate choreography are not so much matched as fused.

—London Times

You know, when I hear Agon, I feel like I'm only getting half the piece.

—Edward Villella

These quotations are typical descriptions of the relationship between music and dance in Balanchine ballets. The first two indicate an independence of the two arts; the


4Conversation with the present writer (23 April 1992).
second two imply a synesthesia so complete as to make the separation of one art from the other impossible. Despite their inherent contradictions, all these statements would likely ring true to anyone who has seen a Balanchine ballet. Walter Terry's comment comes closest to reconciling the apparent paradox between independence and interdependence, but even his statement is vague. Though they capture the essence of Balanchine's choreography, not one of these observers—dancer, choreographer, or critic—actually says anything concrete.

In the past, there has been no substantial effort to define or analyze the musical-choreographic relationship at the heart of a ballet. Now that we have examined both the music and the dance—each separately but with an eye to the other—we are in a position to examine their relationship in detail.

Balanchine’s approach to choreography was rooted in musical analysis:

You have to analyze in advance what this music is all about, what kind of a sound it is, why it's written this way, what it represents. Somebody has to analyze this; in this case, I did.5

I must try to find some visual equivalent which is a complement, not an illustration. Such music as Stravinsky's cannot be illustrated. _Agon_ was invented for dancing, but it is hard to invent dances of a comparable density, quality, metrical consistency, variety, formal mastery, symmetrical asymmetry. ...[A] ballet-carpenter must find a dominant quality of gesture, a strain or palette of consistent movement, an active scale of flowing patterns which reveals to the eye what Stravinsky tells the sensitized ear. 6

Even if Balanchine had never made these statements, his method would still be apparent in the results. His choreography is acutely sensitive to the music without resorting to simple mimicry of musical rhythms and melody. While Balanchine concedes the difficulty of attempting such mimicry in _Agon_, his understanding of the music goes deeper than matching gesture for gesture. He constructs not a parallel but an analog of the music—a separate but similar entity.

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5George Balanchine interview, WNET-TV (1964), quoted in Reynolds, 183.

As we have seen in Chapters Two and Three, the basic elements of continuity in the music and the choreography are the same: historical reference; a blending of neo-classical and modern technique; swift shifts of style; unusual density of materials in a predominantly light texture (in the dance, sometimes a single body); complex rhythms; and symmetrical asymmetries on levels from the local gesture to the overall architecture. The units of construction in the ballet are brief, self-contained movements, each typically built up of even smaller blocks. These blocks, and the movements themselves, are differentiated by the balance of the elements; one or more may predominate at any one time, but the threads of continuity, appearing and reappearing in the weave of the ballet, hold the diverse blocks together.

*Agon*'s structure brings to mind an analogy the choreographer made in his program notes. Balanchine likened a ballet to a cabinet, himself to a cabinetmaker: “There is the skeleton frame; there is the division into panels or drawers; then there is the inlay work which is so invested into the structure that it is never merely decorative or rhetorical.”\(^7\) This is a solid, practical image and one that is easy to understand when viewing *Agon*—the music as well as the choreography—with its outer repetitions of the Pas-de-Quatre (its “skeleton frame”), its logically ordered groups of dances (its “division into panels or drawers”), and its consistent yet unpredictable use of the various elements of continuity (its “inlay work”).

The music did precede the choreography in *Agon*, although the two collaborators had agreed on the large-scale architecture before Stravinsky went to work. But in his choreography, Balanchine created a flexible analog. His responses to elements in the score are not automatic, sometimes ignoring the most prominent cues in favor of subtler ones, or shifting responses to the music away from their direct referents, creating choreographic syncopations. As with the choreography alone, how the choreography relates to the music is determined in part by the number of dancers on stage. The solo movements are

\(^7\) *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents*, 429-30.
choreographically dense, encompassing the complexity of the musical texture in one dancer’s body; their virtuosity is not only technical but musical, as different parts of the body are often responding to different musical elements and must articulate them differently—as when staccato leg movements are combined with soft arm movements (the Bransle Gay), for example. The movements with many dancers may portray polyphonic textures graphically, but they are also more likely to be independent of the music. This independence may at times be only apparent, as Balanchine abstracts compositional techniques of the music and applies them choreographically—the syncopations in the Gailliarde, or the textural rondo of the Pas-de-Quatre.

Sometimes the choreographer’s response to the music is perceivably and satisfactorily literal—he places a dance canon against a musical canon, even if not perfectly aligned, or creates a dance movement that elegantly traces a musical gesture in space. Sometimes the relationship can be perceived more by feeling than intellect: the choreography of the Saraband-Step approaches direct physical imitation of the music, but the instrument followed is the tenor trombone, in a line not prominent to the ear. In some places it is possible to account for every movement down to a finger gesture in the music, but the notes to which the movements are set are distributed among the lines, both melody and accompaniment. And sometimes, the choreography has no immediate connection to the music, but proceeds according to its own logic.

Direct correspondences of musical and choreographic gesture are relatively rare in Agon. Such connections do occur, but they tend to be brief, striking moments—sometimes no more than a single musical note’s duration. They almost function as punctuation, a comma or, more frequently, an exclamation point. The more sophisticated levels of musical-choreographic relationship (the polyphonic solo variation and the abstracted choreographic analog of musical technique) can create the most satisfying correspondences of dance and music—close enough to be perceived, if only on a subconscious level, yet non-literal enough not to become repetitious and flat.
Pas-de-Quatre

They whirl, four at once, to face you. The soundless whirl is a downbeat that starts the action. On the upbeat, a fanfare begins, like cars honking a block away; the sound drops lower, changed into a pulse... The music sounds confident. Meanwhile the boys' steps have been exploding like pistol shots.⁸

Edwin Denby's description captures the speed, the energy, even the indefinable but unmistakable urban urgency of the opening of Balanchine's choreography for Agon. The choreography of the Pas-de-Quatre is an exploration of physical space, a rondo that alternates floor patterns traced on the stage with the movement of the dancers in canon. Balanchine sets the physical space of the stage against the textural space of the music.

The music and the dance are both strophic, but the strophes do not coincide [see Table 4.1]. The music is built of several small, recurring blocks; the choreography is a larger alternation of two sets of blocks—unison/homophony vs. canon and stationary vs. traveling steps, gradually encompassing larger areas of space and growing more complex. In the first half, the choreography helps hold together the small sub-sections of the musical strophes. In the second half, the matching of choreographic gesture to musical gesture is closer and builds momentum with its increasing complexity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mm. 1-6</th>
<th>7-9</th>
<th>10-13</th>
<th>14-19</th>
<th>19-22</th>
<th>23-25</th>
<th>26-29</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Music:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Strophe 1</strong></td>
<td><strong>Strophe 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>a'</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>ext</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dance:</strong></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>(pause)</td>
<td>A'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>30-35</th>
<th>35-38</th>
<th>39-46</th>
<th>46-53</th>
<th>54-60</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strophe 3</strong></td>
<td><strong>Strophe 4</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>a''</td>
<td>b'</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>a'''</td>
<td>d'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B'</td>
<td>pause</td>
<td>A''/C</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A''</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1: Musico-choreographic structure of the Pas-de-Quatre

Denby’s “soundless whirl” fills the sixteenth rest that opens the Pas-de-Quatre. If in performance the whirl is not strictly in the rhythm of the silent upbeat, the silent downbeat is nonetheless made visual by the dancers’ unison turn. The music starts on the second half of a 4/8 bar, but the dance starts on its own downbeat—thus the dancers’ downbeat falls on the music’s silent upbeat. The dancers’ counts (the approximate equivalent of meter in music) are complex, constantly shifting throughout the movement, ranging from 2 to 21 and frequently having little to do with the musical meter. As the music shifts between measures of 4/8 and 3/8, the dancers’ counts alternate 8s and 6s, but the music and dance groupings do not coincide [see Table 4.2].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4/8</th>
<th>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 1 2 (feet)</th>
<th>3/8</th>
<th>3 4 5 6 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Table 4.2: Comparison of the musical meter with the dancers’ counts, opening of Pas-de-Quatre

The relatively close, narrow texture of the opening musical canon is set with steps that barely move the dancers away from their places. The beginning of the dance is in 8 (4s), but the two sections that introduce new elements into the choreography—the foot exercises and the sweeping steps which circle away from the starting position—increase the dancers’ counts from 4s to 6s. These new dance sections are coordinated with the sections of the music that open up the musical profile—the first move away from C in the trumpet canon [see Example 4.1], and its rumbling answer in the low strings. The musical/choreographic space is also relative—the heel flexes in place are set against the narrow musical turn in the canon theme; and the sweeping curve that returns to the same spot is set against the chiming chord in the upper winds and the harmonically static rumble in the low strings. Both the circular floor plan and the widely spaced musical texture

9Anthony Dowell, who danced Agon with the Royal Ballet under George Balanchine’s supervision, said that unlike other dances, which would eventually become natural and not need to be counted strictly, the Pas-de-Quatre required him to count throughout the movement each time he performed it (personal communication, 13 March 1993).
suddenly and radically expand the range of movement in their respective media, but both also “go nowhere.”

Up to this point (bar 10), the dance moves horizontally across the stage in a manner analogous to the linear orientation of the music; even the dancers’ bodies are (subtly) restricted to the horizontal—the dancers perform in a natural stance with slightly bending knees, and even when they begin to swing their arms with some exaggeration (as they circle back around to their beginning place), the arms are in a horizontal plane with the shoulders. At the moment the music becomes more chordal, Balanchine extends the dancers’ bodies upward and outward with the “pushing” arabesque—the arms carry the torso up and outward, the working leg pushes backward, and the weight is forced down into the floor as the supporting foot rocks back on the heel, the toes flexing up. This arabesque occurs on the second beat of measure 10—the downbeat of the dancers’ 14 count and the upbeat of the musical phrase that introduces the chordal texture. With the narrow, circling melodic profile of the music in mm. 10-13, the dancers perform their first real turn and twist their bodies in place in a choreographic analogy.

The dance canons of the Pas-de-Quatre are more strict than the musical ones; Stravinsky’s canons tend to have irregular intervals of entry, but Balanchine’s are exactly regular—in each canon, the dancers enter at the same interval. In the first Petrouchka

Example 4.1: The opening of the Pas-de-Quatre
canon, the interval is four beats. As the melodic content of the fanfare-canon is varied upon each return, the steps of the dance canon are varied and the interval of entry altered. The pause in the dance at the end of the first Petrouchka canon (m. 18) allows the musical cadence to be heard in visual “silence”—the dancers are still. On the chiming chord that opens the b section of the second strophe, the dancers perform a double pirouette (another choreographic analogy—spinning in place to the ringing vibration of the bell sound), and then embark on “the walks” on the downbeat of the low strings’ rumbling.

When the second Petrouchka canon occurs, the corresponding musical texture has been inverted, and at the end of the canon the dancers assume their first asymmetrical symmetrical configuration [refer to Figure 3.2, p. 132], bouncing their toes against floor to the accompaniment of the rumbling low strings. In an inversion of the musico-choreographic complement at measure 18, the dance cadence in measure 38 (a pas de bourrée turning into a symmetrical double-mirror position) takes place in musical silence.

The sissonne box in measures 39-42 is the closest alignment of dance and musical gesture in the movement. The dancers’ surging leaps match the music’s slurred chords with their hairpinned dynamics, although the regularly-spaced sissones actually create another layer of syncopation against the irregularly spaced chords [see Example 4.2].

10Strictly speaking, they are two beats apart, but the first two beats are preparatory; the visual result is an apparent four-beat interval.

11In the older notation, this is a triple pirouette, but was probably revised due to the difficulty of finding dancers who can do clean triple pirouettes to the left. In fact, in the full choreographic score, there is a notation that if the dancers on the left cannot execute a clean double pirouette to the left, all the dancers should do a single pirouette.
Example 4.2: The syncopations of the sissonne box, mm. 39-42
The third canon in the Pas-de-Quatre reaches the peak of visual complexity in measures 50-52, where the piling up of two simple steps (a turn and the pushing arabesque) to opposite sides is an analog to the music: the music reaches the peak of harmonic complexity as the fanfare sounds simultaneously in three trumpets on a cluster of $D^b$-E-F. As the musical texture suddenly clears into the final cadence, the rhythms of the fanfare are augmented—twice as slow—and the dancers move upstage in two-by-two symmetry with “manly steps” and broad-sweeping arm gestures. The two girls enter on the final chord, taking up their opening positions with the pizzicato upbeat stinger in measure 60.

The alternation of blocks of varying length in the music and the dance of the Pas-de-Quatre creates an interlocking structure; the increasing complexity of the choreography (more space, more complex steps) gives a continuity and progression to the movement only suggested by the slightly altered musical repetitions. The sissonne box imparts energy to the sudden half-time sensation of the music at the climax of the movement. The musical denouement is perhaps more satisfying than the choreographic one, for the late entry of the girls demands continuation.

**Double Pas-de-Quatre**

They hang in the air like a swarm of girl-size bees, while the music darts and eddies beneath them. It has become complex and abstract.

—Edwin Denby

On the largest scale, the choreography of the Double Pas-de-Quatre is keyed to the binary stylistic contrast of the music—the presence of a rhythmic ostinato in the first section (mm. 61-80) and its virtual disappearance in the second section (mm. 81-95) [see Table 4.3]. This division is also marked by a change of meter at measure 81; the Double Pas-de-Quatre is one of only two movements (the other is the Gailliarde) in which the dancers’ counts coincide entirely with the meter—perhaps not surprisingly, as it is also a movement

12“The Three Sides of *Agon*.”
with a strong, steady rhythmic pulse, and a movement in which eight dancers must perform together. The meter changes from 4/8 in the first part to 5/8 in the second. These musical changes are matched by a shift of choreographic character: with the loss of the motor rhythm and the change of melodic motion from sixteenth notes to eighths and quarters, the angular movement across the stage changes to rounded, slow-motion movements in place.

![Table 4.3: Musico-choreographic structure of the Double Pas-de-Quatre](image)

The buzz-like string ostinato, the narrow, busy chromatic melody in the double reeds, and the visual complexity of the first canon as the long-legged dancers cluster at the center of the stage bring to mind Stravinsky's description (like Denby's) of Balanchine's dancers as "bee-like." Their busy movements in place are analogous to the melodic motion in the score, a dance motive which constantly returns to the same position, just as the musical motive returns to the same note; even the details of the motives themselves are

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related to the music. The musical ostinato combines an octave leap with a half-step neighbor note sounded simultaneously; in the dance canon against this ostinato, grand battements (large, clear movements of the entire leg, analogous to the octave) are performed simultaneously with the subtler, small motion of the piqué positions which emphasize the opening of the hip more than the moving of the leg—the choreographic neighbor note, as it were. As the melodic motives lengthen into slurred, circular phrases (m. 66), the choreography moves on to the second canon, marked with the sweeping, circular leg movements of the ronds de jambe en l’air [see Example 4.3].

The second canon elides with a major musical change at measure 69—the canon continues as the antiphonal flutter-tongued chords begin in the winds. As the musical phrase builds in intensity, the canon ends and the choreography begins to match the music. The choreographic texture changes to melody and accompaniment: the angular piqué movements and diagonal arms of the accompanying dancers return to the ostinato figure while the slurred leaps of the chords are set with a piqué attitude and a pirouette for the melody dancers “a” and “b” [see Example 4.4 for these gestures and the following measures].

In a striking correlation of musical and choreographic texture, the dancers come to a unison with the downbeat of measure 73, the slur to the downbeat in the winds accompanying a high développé to the side by all the dancers. The sudden drop to the ostinato alone is matched by the sudden unison of the péd de bourrée, the snap and kick falling in the silent downbeat of measure 74. The three beats of unaccompanied ostinato in that measure are set with a classic three-beat step—the pas de bourrée—which serves not only as a cadence but as a preparation, bringing the dancers to a fifth position on pointe [see Example 4.4]. Like the musical gesture, this dance gesture holds a great deal of potential energy—it is but a momentary point of rest: the musical echo in bar 74 is not satisfying as a cadence, and the dancers cannot stay stranded on pointe indefinitely.
Example 4.3: Leg movements are matched to melodic configurations in opening dance canons, mm. 61-66
The next steps emphasize what has been altered in the musical repetition that begins here in m. 75—the pizzicato strings. The melody dancers perform a leap on the chiming pizzicato of the upper strings, while the accompaniment dancers leap a beat later with the bass “echo” [see Example 4.4]. In the following measures (mm. 76-79), the accompaniment dancers move, like the ostinato, mostly in place but shifting at uneven intervals; the ostinato and the accompaniment do not necessarily coincide, but the concept of irregularity is similar. As the melody is curtailed in narrow phrases “trapped” between C and F with an emphasis on D, the melody dancers cross in front of each other several times, “trapped” within the same stage space and ending in the same locations where they started.
Measure 80, a bar of ostinato with a silent downbeat, is a literal repetition of both the music and the choreography of m. 73^2-4, the peg walk against the ostinato. The silent beat is marked with a kick, like the silent downbeat of measure 74. This makes 80^1-4 a retrograde of 73^2-74^1, creating a frame for this section, a short, static but important articulation of the first movement's center. Compositionally, Balanchine's choreography of the Double Pas-de-Quatre echoes a gestural strategy of Stravinsky's in the first two strophes of the Pas-de-Quatre—a fast, busy opening section followed by a slower, smoother chordal section, separated by a static but agitated transition [see Table 4.4]. There is a slight break between the canons and the section of the Double Pas-de-Quatre's choreography set off by the retrograde measures, but this framed section is aligned with the return of the a' in the nested aba' in the music.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>fast, busy</th>
<th>static, agitated</th>
<th>slow, smooth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pas-de-Quatre</strong></td>
<td>mm. 1-6, 14-19</td>
<td>low strings rumble,</td>
<td>slower, chordal section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>music: Strophes 1 &amp; 2</td>
<td>trumpet fanfare</td>
<td>winds sustained</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mm. 61-69</td>
<td>melody &amp;</td>
<td>slow motion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Double Pas-de-Quatre</strong></td>
<td>fast canons</td>
<td>accompaniment</td>
<td>port de bras</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>choreography</td>
<td>mm. 73-80</td>
<td>traveling but &quot;trapped&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prelude/Interludes</strong></td>
<td>9 1/2 mm.</td>
<td>4 1/2 mm.</td>
<td>10 mm. supported movements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>both</td>
<td>unison (Prelude)</td>
<td>to center stage</td>
<td>sustained supported movements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>canon (Interludes)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4: Recurring gestural pattern

The music and the dance introduce this recurring gestural pattern separately in this first part of the ballet, but they will come together in the Prelude/Interlude movements that articulate the various pas in the middle part of the ballet. In the Prelude/Interludes, the gestural pattern encompasses the entire movement.

In the second part of the Double Pas-de-Quatre (starting m. 81) the dancers seem to go into slow motion. The choreography responds to the slower apparent tempo, smoother melodic profile, and the change in compositional technique. Stravinsky shifts from a neoclassical tonal style to serial techniques applied to diatonic sets, and Balanchine
shifts from steps that emphasize movement across the stage to variations on a stationary architectural pattern, the inverted “V.” The loss of the rhythmic ostinato in the music coincides with the loss of movement in the floor pattern.

Throughout this final section, the dancers’ sustained, curved motions float serenely over the subtly agitated musical texture, with its fragmentary, wide-leaping melodies and muted rat-a-tat trumpets playing triplets so fast that they are essentially flutter-tongues. A fleeting, but striking coincidence of choreographic to musical gesture occurs on beat two of measure 82, where the dancers “collapse” with the downward glissando in the strings. As mentioned in Chapter Three, this sudden folding over of the dancers’ bodies in a parallel stance suggests exhaustion (or perhaps a back-stretching exercise); or it may be read as a slow-motion exaggeration of the brief release and adjustment that dancers will make when moving from one position to another. Not until the end of the movement will the choreography synchronize with the musical line again: with the two chiming chords that cadence the movement, the two front pairs of girls touch hands and turn to take up their positions for the opening of the Triple Pas-de-Quatre.

**Triple Pas-de-Quatre**

The Triple Pas-de-Quatre is the final section of the opening part of the ballet, fused to the end of the Double Pas-de-Quatre. It is the first movement in which all the dancers participate, and Balanchine shuffles them like cards, trying out different combinations, mixing genders for the first time at the end of the movement with the first appearance of classical partnering. Musically and choreographically, the Triple Pas-de-Quatre is a reprise of major elements from the foregoing movements. The music is a superimposition of elements from the two main sections of the Double Pas-de-Quatre—the diatonic sets from the second part fused with the creeping chromatic melody line and ostinato from the first part. The choreography recalls a larger span of the ballet, reaching back to the first Pas-de-Quatre. Motives associated with the boys (the pushing arabesque, the lower body piqué
twists) are combined with the diagonal accompanying movements of the girls in a new choreographic texture.

The musical texture of the Triple Pas-de-Quatre is unusually consistent, against which Balanchine constructs an interlocking binary/ternary/binary architecture [see Table 4.5]. The alternation of gender-divided and gender-mixed movements and the second, larger alternation of traveling and stationary floor patterns are tied together by a ternary pattern of gradually simpler texture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dance: A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>96-101¹</td>
<td>101²-108²</td>
<td>108³-114¹</td>
<td>114²-121²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>traveling</td>
<td>stationary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>girls terre à terre</td>
<td>couples trade places</td>
<td>boys march</td>
<td>partnering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boys en l’air (leaps)</td>
<td>“Augenchoreographie”</td>
<td>girls accompaniment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>polyphony</td>
<td>melody &amp; accompaniment</td>
<td></td>
<td>unison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>a/c</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(elements from Double Pas-de-Quatre)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ostinato/chromatic line</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>serial/diatonic sets</td>
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</table>

Table 4.5: Musico-choreographic structure of the Triple Pas-de-Quatre

Despite the relative homogeneity of the musical texture, the music and choreography are nevertheless closely related. At the beginning, the contrapuntal texture is matched by the independent movements of the gender groups: the girls’ close, fast, small movements mimic the ostinato (as in the Double Pas-de-Quatre) and the winding chromatic line in the strings, while the boys’ leaps follow the wide leaps in the woodwinds. This is especially obvious in measures 98-99, where they perform a jeté with the accented leap on 98², and pushing arabesques with the high Gᵇs [see Example 4.5].
Example 4.5: The boys’ choreography matches the flute line

In measures 102-103, a connection immediately strikes the eye when looking at the musical score—a bit of “Augenchoreographie” as Balanchine responds to a subtle shift in the music. The dancers have formed the double parallel lines across the front of the stage and couples begin to trade places just at the point where the music flattens out—texturally, as the octave strings and the trumpet/horn duo together play only two lines; and harmonically, as the strings wind chromatically, obsessively around the minor third C-E♭ and the brass arpeggiate B♭-D-A. While there is constant activity, neither musical line goes anywhere; the dancers remain in two lines, even though there is constant change within the lines themselves [see Example 4.6].

The most striking coincidence of musical and choreographic gesture in the movement is obvious and very brief. It occurs on the second beat of measure 107, at the end of the couples’ switching places. As the dancers resume their unison, they come back together on a pas de chat which falls with the forte pizzicato entry of the basses [the last couple is actually still switching places, but they are in the back row and not immediately visible; see Example 4.6]. This coincidence is quite a compelling gesture, stronger in both visual and musical terms than the true unison pirouette a measure later. The pirouette also occurs on a pizzicato bass note, but on the third note of the phrase, and the pas de chat is a much more distinctive step than the pirouette in the choreographic phrase—the only leap in an enchaînement composed mostly of turns. The pas de chat is also a clearly defined “down” movement, landing on the floor with a literal “down”-beat, whereas the pirouette
emphasizes “up” (the rise onto the ball of the foot or the pointe) and a suspension of weight in the spinning. The distinctiveness of the pas de chat and its “downbeat” quality creates a stronger articulation of the end of the place-switching, and the unison pirouette becomes an upbeat to the third section, in which the girls perform a simple accompaniment canon as the boys (in box formation) march up- and downstage on the diagonal.

![Diagram](image)

1st and 2nd couples change places

3rd and 4th couples change places

![Diagram](image)

5th and 6th couples change places

final positions

![Example 4.6: Thin texture and narrow compass analogous to the choreographic floor plans](image)
The girls' canon is in counts of 8, while the boys' march is in 3s. Although the meter is in four throughout the movement, at the point the boys begin their walk on 108⁴, the low strings have a pizzicato walking bassline that moves in groups of three [see Example 4.7].

Example 4.7: The beginning of the third section with dancers' counts; the boys' counts are cued to the bassline

The final section of the choreography, the classical partnering, follows the motor rhythm of the music (a distant foreshadowing of the Four Duos?), although the re-entry of the chiming intonation in 118² is marked by a unison double pirouette for all the girls. The final position is reached on the last chime (which is also the final chord of the movement), and the energy of this intonation, analogous to the reverberation of a bell, is reflected by the continuation of the dance gesture: the dancers put their hands on their hips and bow their heads, then raise their heads as they cross their arms over their hearts.

The Triple Pas-de-Quatre forms a solid conclusion to the first part of Agon. The musical fusion of the two-part Double Pas-de-Quatre in the Triple Pas-de-Quatre is matched and extended across all three movements by the fusion of the boys' and girls' choreography. One can almost imagine the three Pas-de-Quatre as a miniature ballet, sufficient unto itself, with its introduction of choreographic elements and musico-choreographic relationships, however, it also serves admirably as the exposition of a large-scale work.
First Pas-de-Trois
Prelude

The Prelude and the two Interludes that serve as entrées for the two Pas-de-Trois and the Pas-de-Deux are musically similar, with more material added upon each recurrence. It is the largest, clearest expression of the recurring busy-agitated-slow gestural pattern seen in the first two strophes of the music in the Pas-de-Quatre and in the choreography of the Double Pas-de-Quatre, but this is the first time that music and dance have the pattern simultaneously [see Table 4.6]. The two-part choreography of the Prelude/Interludes exactly matches the two-part musical form, articulated by the transitional measures. In the Interludes, these transitional musical measures are used as a transition from the individual movement to partnering.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dance: A</th>
<th>transition</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 122-131²</td>
<td>mm. 131²-135</td>
<td>mm. 136-145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fast unison steps cinematic reverses</td>
<td>slow motion</td>
<td>boy supports both girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music: flute/cello scales trumpet fanfare</td>
<td>bass harmonics timpani</td>
<td>abstracted courtly dance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.6: Musico-choreographic structure of the Prelude

The melodic content of the Prelude/Interludes is not very distinctive, based on harmonically static rhythmicizations of polytonal layers—in the first section (mm. 122-131²), the scale figures in the flutes and cellos, the pedal point in the trumpets, and the arpeggios in the bassoon and timpani; there is a lot of activity, but no strong sense of forward progress. The transition (mm. 131²-135²) suspends the harmonic movement with an erosion of the previous rhythms. The last section, the pickup to the Meno mosso (mm. 136) to the end, is a sketch of a stately court dance, emphasizing the essential musical

14As was pointed out in Chapter Three, there are two almost completely different choreographies for this movement. The later version of the choreography of the Prelude has been selected because it was Balanchine’s final version of the dance and as such should be respected, and because it is more harmonious with the choreography of the rest of the ballet.
gestures—cadences and phrase structure are more recognizable than any melody. This quality allows Balanchine greater freedom to reinterpret the music each time it returns; if the musical lines were more distinctive, it would be more difficult to create three sets of choreography that each reflected the music but were different from each other.  

In the Prelude, the racing, almost frenetic character of the first part, with its sweeping gapped-scale figures, is matched by the dancers’ fast unison movements, based primarily on running. The “monochromatic” choreography matches well the energetic music, and the cinematic reverses are neither linked to nor disruptive of its essentially static character. In the middle of measure 131, with the basses’ harmonic \(6_4\) chord, the dancers go suddenly into slow motion, mid-gesture. Their exaggerated stretching steps, as they push upward and forward with their palms, carry them around in a circle to the center of the stage into their partnering position. The slow, extended motions of the partnering heighten the musical sense of going into half-time, and the twining of the dancers’ arms in a static grip is subtly reminiscent of the narrow, circling melody with its series of pedal points, both sustained and implied. The boy’s turn to unwind his arms starts with the initial cadence, reached on the upbeat to measure 143, and the dance cadence (the last pair of arms down, releasing into the “leg” bow) occurs with the upbeat cadence at 144.  

Exact musical-choreographic gestures in the Prelude do not occur until the very end, with the boys’ turn accompanying the musical turn at the cadence and the bow on the  

15This is not to imply that Balanchine, with his facility of invention, could not have done so, simply that the rudimentary nature of the melody forms a “whiter” canvas on which to paint. In an earlier collaboration, *Jeu de Cartes* (1937), Balanchine created three different fan-like formations ("deals") for the dancers, who were portraying playing cards; Stravinsky told him to repeat the same one three times, because the audience “won’t see it the first, nor applaud till the third” [quoted by Lincoln Kirstein, “Ballet Music,” *Ballet: Bias and Belief* (New York: Dance Horizons, 1983): 423]. Stravinsky holds to his own advice in *Agon*, with three essentially identical “deals” as entrées; Balanchine’s constructions are variations on the same idea, but, as Kirstein says, “If some absolute consistency was forced equating entries and reentries, restatements, variations and reversals, the visual part might collapse from the pressure of the aural.”  

16The older notation shows the dancers running with jetés around in curved paths to the center partnering position, which would mean that the “slow motion” (assuming the second part is the same in the older version) does not start until the partnering.
upbeat final chord. On the larger scale, however, the dance reflects, even accentuates, the musical character of the movement. The more modern choreographic style of running steps and the technology-derived reverses are set against the urgent, urban modern music of the first part; the framework of a courtly dance in the second part elicits more classical behavior, with the boy partnering both girls. In this first Prelude, this character shift also articulates a larger style shift; the Prelude is a little encapsulation of the change from the essentially modern music and choreography of the three Pas-de-Quatre to the courtly dances in the first two Pas-de-Trois.

**Saraband-Step**

Whereas the relationship of choreography to music in the group dances tends to be architectural, punctuated by striking moments of coincidence between musical gesture and dance gesture, the musical-choreographic relationship is much more closely coordinated in the solo dances. These dances come closest to mimicking the score, but what Balanchine constructs is more intricate than mere choreographic imitation of the music.

In the Saraband-Step, the musical-choreographic coordination is almost exact, but the choreography does not follow any one line of the musical texture. Instead, Balanchine leads it through the musical texture like a superimposed line of counterpoint—a sort of choreographic *Klangfarbenmelodie*. The choreography primarily follows the line of the tenor trombone—a middle voice that is not particularly prominent to the ear. Responding to distinctive gestures in other lines, however, the choreography occasionally shifts to focus on them. Balanchine’s choice of an internal line as the basis for his choreography allows him to weave the dance tightly into the music, accentuating the movement’s dense texture, while still allowing the dance to counterpoint the melody.

The musical form of the Saraband-Step is an almost textbook binary dance pattern; the choreography is neither through-composed nor a rondo, but has features of both. The first repetition of any sort (and it is a variant at some remove) is the second set of sailor steps
(the “drags”); the two sets of steps really have little in common, other than their playful nature and the fact that each step is performed four times [see Table 4.7].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mm 146</th>
<th>147</th>
<th>148-149</th>
<th>149</th>
<th>150-151</th>
<th>152-153</th>
<th>153</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dance:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>d'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>developp</td>
<td>twists</td>
<td>unwind</td>
<td>&quot;Spanish&quot;</td>
<td>sailor steps</td>
<td>leaps à la seconde</td>
<td>heel drops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th battements</td>
<td>(4x)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mm 154-155</th>
<th>156</th>
<th>157</th>
<th>158-160</th>
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<th>161</th>
<th>162</th>
<th>163</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Music:</strong></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>g</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>h</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sailor steps</td>
<td>&quot;drags&quot; (4x)</td>
<td>soft shoe cabriole circle &quot;Spanish&quot; cabriole developp</td>
<td>cocky bow</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>back up to center</td>
<td>leaps to center</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.7: Musico-choreographic structure of the Saraband-Step**

This basic triple nature of the meter (the dance is counted in eighth notes, making 6 beats to every 3/4 measure) is retained throughout the first half of the binary form, but there are two large sections of syncopation in the second half: the sailor step "drags" that start off the section, and the circle of chainés and leaps à la seconde. Both of these enchainements are counted as three 4s, grouping two measures of 3/4 into one hyperbar.

The four-beat sailor step drags and the following "soft-shoe“ (mm. 154-156) well illustrate of several characteristic traits of Balanchine’s choreography: the weaving of a choreographic line into the musical texture, his sensitivity to the subtle hemiola Stravinsky has composed, and the intelligent use of musical imitation in the choreography [see Example 4.8].

The choreography skips down from the tenor trombone in 154^{1-2} to the bass trombone in 154^{3-4} and back up to the tenor trombone, following the eighth-note movement. The hemiola in the music is accentuated by this choice, especially by the use of the arms moving in contrary motion to the musical line (as the trombones’ eighth-note pattern descends, the boy’s arm moves from curved low in front of him to curved over his
Example 4.8: Sailor steps

...then move up to the more prominent violin line.

Solo Violin

Xylophone

arms moving in contrary motion to the trombones

Ten. Trombone

Bass Trombone

soft shoe sailor steps follow here...
Example 4.9: Syncopation of développé leaps, beginning and end of Saraband-Step
head). The little soft-shoe steps start mimicking the rhythm in the trombones in m. 156, which is then picked up by the violin. The rising line of the violin leads to a cabriole at the peak, on a relatively long note on the downbeat of measure 157.

The three steps that are repeated at the end of the movement—the cabriole backing up to the center of the stage, the opening développé leaps, and the pose with petit battements at the ankle—are not associated with musical repetition, although the choreography fits the music at the points of repetition. The one exception is the opening développé leaps, set to a variation of the opening music. The leaps at the end are syncopated, however. In the first presentation, the dancer lands on the downbeat; in the second, he lands on a beat of silence before the phrase begins—a choreographic adaptation of Stravinsky’s tendency to shift phrase repetitions to begin on the upbeat [see Example 4.9].

Gailliarde

Phrase by phrase, the dancers make a counterrhythm to the rhythm of the music… The Balanchinean buoyancy of impetus keeps one open to the vividly changeable Stravinskyan pressure of pulse and to its momentum.

—Edwin Denby

The Gailliarde is a movement spun out of a two-voiced canon and set on two dancers. The obvious choreographic response would have been a complementary canonic choreography. But Agon contains a number of musical canons, giving the choreographer ample opportunity to make them visual. (Balanchine does, for example, set the canonic Bransle Simple as a canon for two male dancers.) In the Gailliarde, however, he avoids the obvious, perhaps taking his cue instead from the formal pattern of the movement. Reflecting the mirror-like symmetry of the AB(B)A' structure, the two female dancers of the Gailliarde perform the same steps in mirror fashion. This symmetry between the dancers is

17"The Three Sides of Agon."
broken only once, during the repeat of the B section when the dancers perform side by side. The musical repetition is highlighted by the only direct repetition of a dance phrase in the movement, leading to an overall dance structure of ABB'C [see Table 4.8].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>B'</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mm. 164-170</td>
<td>171-178</td>
<td>171\textsuperscript{R},178\textsuperscript{R}</td>
<td>179-184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance:</td>
<td>mirror</td>
<td>mirror</td>
<td>side-by-side repeat of kick step</td>
<td>mirror</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music:</td>
<td>C/G</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>G/D ⇒ A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.8: Musico-choreographic structure of the Gailliarde

The Gailliarde also shows one musical feature that the other dances lack in such degree—the continual tension between written and perceived meter. Note values and melodic phrasing often contradict the meter (and Stravinsky’s dotted-line subdivisions). The dancers’ counts actually follow the indicated meter exactly, moving continually at the beat of the quarter note, a subdivision of the half-note pulse of the music. As in the music, however, the stress patterns of the steps just as often ignore any pattern that might be implied from the dancers’ counts; frequently they ignore the accents of the syncopated music as well [see Table 4.9].

With the sharp, quick, clean movements that symbolize Balanchine’s neoclassical style, the dancers articulate the rhythms of Stravinsky’s Gailliarde, at times by adhering to them, at times by willfully contradicting them. Nowhere in the ballet is the rhythmic counterpoint between dance and music more prominent than here. Not only is the music devoted to a rhythmic interplay of meter and accent, but the simplicity of the vocabulary of steps the dancers employ—like the relative simplicity of harmony in the music—allows the greater emphasis to fall on when the dancers move rather than what steps they are executing.

In the entire first phrase (a), the dance marks out the musical accents faithfully, while introducing the basic vocabulary of steps and the sharp, ballonné character of execution to be used in the dance. The second phrase (a') is in the dance, as in the music, a
Table 4.9.1: Metric structure of the Gailliarde—A Section
Table 4.9.2: Metric structure of the Gaillarde—first B section
### B' Side-by-Side

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>171(R)</th>
<th>172</th>
<th>173</th>
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<td>▲ • • ▲ • • • • • • • • •</td>
<td>▲ • • ▲ • • • • • •</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>implied</td>
<td>▲ • • ▲ • • • • • • • • • • •</td>
<td>▲ • • ▲ • • • • • • • • • •</td>
<td>▲ • • ▲ • • • • • • • • •</td>
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</table>

(cross-rhythms)

dance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>5th retiré demi-plié</th>
<th>5th deve- retiré demi-plié</th>
<th>5th retiré demi-plié</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(bold) entre- (land) chat plié relevé</td>
<td>5th entre- (land) chat plié relevé</td>
<td>turn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<th>175</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>indicated</td>
<td>▲ • • • • • • • • • • • • • •</td>
<td>▲ • • • • • • • • • • • • • •</td>
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<td>implied</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>turn full turn</th>
<th>step plié full turn</th>
<th>step plié full turn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>alt:</td>
<td>step step turning</td>
<td>step plié full turn</td>
<td>step plié full turn</td>
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<th>step plié full turn</th>
<th>plié full turn</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>5th entre- (land) chat plié cinq retiré into mirror</th>
<th>inward turn</th>
<th>croisé pose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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**Table 4.9.3:** Metric structure of the Gaillarde—second B section
### Table 4.9.4: Metric structure of the Gaillarde—A' section

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<tr>
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<th>180</th>
<th>181</th>
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<tr>
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<td>implied: 4 ▲</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 ▲</td>
<td>4 ▲</td>
<td>4 ▲</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>piqué piqué piqué tendu front</td>
<td>piqué piqué piqué tendu front</td>
<td>attitude step step attitude step step</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arms croisé moving forward</td>
<td>arms croisé moving backward</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>182</th>
<th>183</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>▲</td>
<td>▲</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attitude step step attitude step step</td>
<td>attitude step step attitude step step</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<th>184</th>
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<tr>
<td>▲</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▲</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▲</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(sustain) inside out outside out inside to hip outside to hop inside out outside further out outside further out both down dancers to knees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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variation of phrase a. But in the second measure, a subtle syncopation occurs between the
dance and the music, shifting the accents of a repeated dance phrase one quarter note “to
the right,” just as the canon shifts to the other side of the accompaniment at the beginning
of the phrase. This syncopation in the dance results in a third level of rhythmic activity laid
over the score [compare the two phrases in Table 4.9.1].

Phrase a’ ends on a hybrid C/G chord, sounding as a half-cadence, and phrase B
begins with a G downbeat, progressing without modulation to a tonitization of A. This
musical disjunction is smoothed over in the dance with an elision. The repeated phrase,
which had ended with a three-beat step on its first statement, only has two beats in which to
cadence the second time. The third beat had been a rest on the first statement, but on the
repeat, the dancers close into a demi-plié fifth position—both a cadencing step and a
springboard for the battement retiré which begins the next dance phrase.

Rhythmically, the music in B is simpler than in A; but for a slight syncopation at
the beginning, the musical stresses follow the metric indications in the score. Against this
conformity Balanchine’s choreography is at its most rhythmically independent. The dance
step is shaped for the first time by the visualization of a melodic curve—not the main
melody, but the flute’s counterpoint, which is derived from an augmentation of a fragment
of the melody. The line traced in the air by the dancers’ pointes as they perform a
symmetrical enchâinement of battement retiré, grand battement retiré, battement retiré
follows the shape of the first flute’s melody [see Example 4.10].

Pursuing its own line of stresses, the dance is syncopated against the music for the
next two measures of the B section, falling in with the music at the moment when conflict
returns in the score—m. 174 [see Table 4.9.2]. The dancers mark the sudden 3+3 division
of the bar with battements degagé, which suddenly slow their rhythmic activity from the
quarter note to the dotted half. The quarter-note pulse is recovered in the next bar, and in
the remainder of the B phrase, the dance adheres to the indicated meter.
Example 4.10: The dancers' pointes follow the line of the flute counterline
The choreography in the fifth measure (mm. 175) of B is a simple enchainement which encapsulates the sharp, bouncing character of the entire dance. Connected by demi-pliés in fifth position on the downbeats, the steps are an échappé to second (with a demi-plié), and battements retiré on opposite legs. The first time, the enchainement is performed in an outward circle, and on its repetition in the next bar, the steps move toward the front outward corners of the stage. The front cabrioles on the first three beats of the 5/4 bar carry them to their furthest forward positions, and on the tenuto chords of the cadence, they move back together. Their peg walk marks not only the downbeats (with pointe steps), but also the off-beats of the harp and piano (with flat-footed steps), resulting in a sort of limp imitating the syncopation of the cadence.

The repetition of B creates the lowest level of musical tension in the entire dance—it is a closed structure with regular phrasing, ending in a tonic cadence, with the metric tension at its lowest ebb. Balanchine counters this potential loss of impetus by a simple but powerful means: the two dancers, who have been dancing in mirror throughout, switch to side-by-side. Continuity is established through the repetition of the opening dance phrase—the chorus-line kick step—from the first statement of B. This striking, if brief, connection of music and dance is the one structural repetition which occurs in the Gailliarde, marking the center point of the movement.

The following two measures (mm. 172-173), as in B, are syncopated against the music in the dance, but in B', the rhythmic pattern is different. The first time through, the triple simple meter is offset by a half-beat; the second time, the divisions are basically 3+3. The dancers perform the same enchainement twice—an entrechat quatre, and an échappé into second position on pointe, demi-plié on pointe, then on straight legs to finish. Obscuring the basic simplicity of the 3+3 phrasing in these two bars are their relationships to the bars on either side. The downbeat of the first measure is a rest held over from the previous phrase, compressing the entrechat into two beats. On the repetition, the entrechat fills its natural 3-beat structure, but the last step elides into the next syncopated phrase. The

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dancers are already turning in the first of two 2-beat turns as they rise on pointe. A three-beat pirouette brings them back into rhythm with the music on the second half of the fourth bar (m. 174R).

The relative rhythmic clarity of the music in the last three bars of the movement does not satisfactorily resolve the rhythmic displacement. The dance works to dispel the rhythmic tension by lengthening the short phrases and continuing motion through the sustained final chord. Counter to Stravinsky's clear 3+3+3, Balanchine divides the 9/4 bars before the cadence into 4+5. On the long final note, Balanchine has the dancers mark out nine beats with movements of their arms in groups of two, with a bow to the knee on the release.

The Gailliarde of Agon is deceptive in the music and in the dance. It seems much simpler than any of the other movements—the music is readily pleasant to the ear, and the dance has none of the complex polyphony of other dances. Upon close inspection, however, it becomes evident that neither the music nor the dance is at all simple, but the two engage in a rhythmic interplay which provides flexibility and flow in the separate elements and a driving tension in their friction.

Coda

The music and dance in the Coda would seem to be diametrically opposed—the first twelve-tone movement is set with some of the loosest, most playful choreography in the entire ballet. It is true that the choreography only occasionally emulates the musical gestures, but, like most movements, the music of the Coda still provides a framework for the choreography on three levels: as an architecture, as a pulse, and in its character.

The rondo-like shape of the Coda's choreography is derived in part from the music, but the dance also accentuates the subdivisions of the overall large AA'B [see Table 4.10]. The exact repeats in the dance in B and C are aligned with almost exact repeats in the
music; there is, however, a slight elision in measure 208, where the dance finishes a canon as the music begins a repetition of the opening material.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Music</th>
<th>A mm. 185-207</th>
<th>A' 208-228</th>
<th>B 229-253</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12-tone row</td>
<td>retrograde of row</td>
<td>fragmented row</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C/G pedal</td>
<td>F/C pedal</td>
<td>Bb pedals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance:</td>
<td>A 185-193</td>
<td>trans 209-212</td>
<td>trans 229-233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B 193-201</td>
<td>213-221</td>
<td>234-241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C 201-208</td>
<td>221-228</td>
<td>241-253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st canon</td>
<td>pseudo-canon</td>
<td>rocking steps</td>
<td>twists/cha-cha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2nd canon</td>
<td>pseudo-canon</td>
<td>2nd shoulder partners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.10: Musico-choreographic structure of the Coda of the First Pas-de-Trois

In almost every measure of the Coda (starting in m. 191, after the introduction), the 12-tone row is clearly and steadily set out, providing a walking beat as a background; correspondingly, the choreographic rhythm of the movement is unusually steady. With few exceptions, the steps move at the dotted quarter, the pulse of the 6/8 music. Variety is provided more by the character of the steps—sharp or curved, classical or casual—than by rhythmic variation. In fact, one apparent source of rhythmic conflict between the meter and the dancers’ counts (the B and C sections are set across the barlines) is actually cued by the music: the first beat of the 12-tone row’s “walking bassline” is on the second beat of m. 193—the beginning of the first B section. The only real counterrhythm occurs on the “cha-cha” twisting steps of the transition to the final part of the dance: the musical hemiola in m. 231 is imitated in the choreography in m. 232 [see Example 4.11].

The third level of musical connection is that of character. The musical complexity of the Coda is intellectual, not auditory, easier perceived on the page than by the ear. The canonic texture of the choreography is set against the comparatively simple musical texture, creating a certain equilibrium: if the dance were as simple as the texture, the result could be
static and uninteresting; and if the music were as full of canons as the dance, the whole could be too busy and confusing, and possibly equally uninteresting. 18

Example 4.11: Cha-cha twists and imitation of hemiola

One of the very few explicit gestural connections between music and dance is made immediately at the beginning by the matching of the first “jumping jack” leap to the major-seventh glissando in the solo cello. The loose body position and casual nature of the soft-shoe sections are suggested by the jaunty, jazzy solo violin line, and indeed the backward arc path is somewhat similar to the additive musical phrase, which gradually adds lower notes on its way to its high peak [see Example 4.12].

Example 4.12: Violin line “backs” into its high point

18Pertinent here, too, is Kirstein’s comment about the dangers of too-close imitation of the music by the dance (see note 14).
The supported pirouettes at the end of the movement are set to a series of sustained notes, and the almost rushed switching of partners helps counteract any possible loss of energy. The sudden, final bow comes with the upbeat stinger in the music.

The music and the choreography of the Coda reinforce each other. The smaller-scale repetitions in the choreography accentuate the large musical repetition, but also provide contrast because of the alternations of character within the repetitions, all tied together by the steady motor pulse. The various levels of correspondence between the music and the choreography—architecture, pulse, and character—create an interlocking structure that supports the weight of the movement, sufficient to create an effective closure for the Pas-de-Trois.

**Second Pas-de-Trois Interlude**

Unlike the Prelude, which encapsulates the large-scale shift between "modern" and "classical" choreography (and music) between the Pas-de-Quatre movements and the courtly Pas-de-Trois, the Interlude is a reminiscence: of the "modern" Pas-de-Quatre, and more strongly, of the Prelude itself. This Interlude is more intense than the preceding Prelude, as the music adds another layer of rhythmic activity that is half as fast as the previously presented music. Balanchine takes the concept of metric layering as a point of departure for the choreography.

The swift, visually busy texture of the choreography of the Interlude corresponds in a broad stylistic parallel to the rushing, urgent nature of the music. The first part begins with fast unison steps, followed by a canon made of a $1\frac{3}{4}$ turn and a hop into fourth position. The dance canon begins with the intensification of the musical texture in m. 258, adding yet another level of rhythmic pulse [see example 4.13\(^\text{19}\)].

\(^{19}\)Because of technical limitations, the example has been made in 3/8 (Stravinsky's subdivided bars), rather than the 3/4 in the score.
Example 4.13: Beginning of the canon

The dance canon takes a bar and a half, but the interval of imitation is a beat and a half (half a measure). Thus not only are the triple measures divided into duple ones by the dance canon's entries, which reinforces the 3/8 subdivisions of the bar (Stravinsky's dotted
barlines), but it takes three measures to reach a common downbeat between the
choreography and the music. The overlapping sweep of the music is echoed by the
overlapping sweep of the dance.

The canon stops at bar 263 with the last dancer taking the girl’s hand as he steps
into his B+ pose. This event occurs on the trumpets’ stinger note as the basses take up their
\( G^6_4 \) chord in harmonics, beginning the transition. The sudden musical tranquillity serves as
a backdrop as the dancers simply walk upstage for the Meno mosso.

As in the Prelude, the near-stasis of the Meno mosso, harmonically and melodically,
complements the sustained supporting movements of the dancers. The regular up and
down movement of the melody is more or less matched by the slight front-back motion of
the boys on either side of the girl as they move from one supporting position to another.
Only at the end are there more literal musical-choreographic connections. These
connections exist in both notated versions of the score and in the videotaped performance,
but Balanchine’s revision again works to strengthen the musicality of the phrase.

Three striking musical events occur in the last four measures of the Interlude:
a cadential turn in the woodwinds on 274\(^2\); a sighing figure in the low strings on 275\(^2\)
(from F-C passing through G-D to E-C, or the bare bones of a IV-V-I cadence); and an
augmented inversion of the cadential turn in 276\(^1\)-\(^2\), ending the movement with the typical
upbeat cadence [see Example 4.14]. The choreography of these final measures has been
much revised; all three source versions are different while retaining the same steps—the
boys’ switching of sides, their turn to the knee, and an arabesque penché for the girl.

In both notated versions, the boys’ switching of sides occurs in measure 274, but in
the older version it was on beats 1 and 2, while in the revised version, it was on beats 2 and
3—beginning with the cadential turn. In the 1982 performance, the switch takes place at a
third place—the sigh in m. 275, with the girl extending her leg into an arabesque at that
point. In the 1959 notation, the girl’s arabesque penché occurs on the sighing motive,
while in the 1982 performance, it occurs on the augmented cadential turn; in 1987
notation, it occurs on the release of the final chord in m. 277. As the arabesque penché is moved around, so is the boys’ turn to the knee: in the 1959 notation, it is actually *after* the arabesque penché, a full pirouette in retiré on the augmented cadential turn (the girl leans lower as the boys go to their knees); in the 1987 notation it is on the upbeat cadence and is a much faster turn, with no indicated leg position; in the 1982 performance, the turn is with the augmented cadential figure.

Example 4.14: Various versions of the end of the Interlude

All three versions are backed by musical logic. In the oldest, the arabesque penché mimics the sighing motive in the lower strings, and the boys’ turn to the knee coincides *nicely* with the augmented cadential figure. In the 1987 version, the switch goes with the first cadential turn and the boys’ turn accentuates the upbeat cadence. In the 1982 videotaped version, however, the dancers hold a pose in measure 274, framing the initial
cadential figure with visual silence; the switch occurs with the harmonic shift of the sighing motive; the turn to the knee is matched to the augmented cadential turn, and the arabesque penché falls with the upbeat cadence. This version—the latest version we know to have had Balanchine’s approval—seems to be the strongest musically.

Bransle Simple

The Bransle Simple, with its bright trumpet canons and humorous, athletic competition between male dancers, is one of the most readily enjoyable movements in the entire ballet. It is also perhaps the movement with the closest ties between music and choreography. On the architectural level, the phrases of the music (each of which comprises an entire section) and choreography exactly coincide: A, canonic; B linear; A' canonic with an altered cadence [see Table 4.11]. The character of the musical sections is also reflected by the character of the choreography.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>A'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>278-284</td>
<td>285-287</td>
<td>288-293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music:</td>
<td>canon D</td>
<td>layered cadence D/Bb Gm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance:</td>
<td>canon</td>
<td>unison on the diagonal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.11: Musico-choreographic structure of the Bransle Simple

Throughout the ballet, tempi are adjusted downward in the choreographic score from Stravinsky’s indications in the music. The Bransle Simple is a striking exception, as Stravinsky’s notated tempo (\(J = 84\)) is almost doubled (\(J = 144\)). The fast, driving quarter note pulse of the music, with its bright, brassy, machine-like effect is matched by the

\[20\text{In Robert Craft’s recent recording of Agon [American Stravinsky: The Composer, Volume IV MusicMasters Classics CD 67113-2 (1991/2)], the Bransle Simple is even slightly faster than the recording by Robert Irving and the New York City Ballet Orchestra [A Balanchine Album Nonesuch CD 79135-2 (1986)].}\]
steady pulse of the dance, made more striking by the large, clear movements of straight legs in black tights.

The dancers' upbeat, the "fake 1," makes visual Stravinsky's silent downbeat: the first sounded note, on the upbeat quarter note to measure 279, is articulated by the first dancer's tendu forward to start the canon; but while the musical canon is at a two-beat interval, the choreographic canon is at a one-beat interval. Therefore the second dancer's tendu falls on the second trumpet's rest. The tendu is not merely a preparatory step—the leg has to come around from a B+ and swing back into an arabesque in two swift beats (it would have been easier to leave out the tendu). Thus the second boy's tendu makes the rest, rather than the following D, the beginning of the phrase. In retrospect then, the silent downbeat in the first trumpet is truly a "fake 1"—in that voice, choreographically, the D is the real 1.

Example 4.15: "Fake 1" makes the silent downbeat visible

In an arresting example of choreography imitating a musical line, the promenade turns fall in measures 283-85, coinciding with the repeated notes in the trumpets' canon [see Example 4.16]. The rise up to the F# is matched by the sweep of the working leg around to generate the turn, while the change of foot occurs at the start of the descent. This descent begins a retrograde inversion of the hexachord that formed the ascent; thus the change of foot also highlights Stravinsky's palindromic use of the hexachord. Most
literally, the repeated notes are mimicked by the hopping, and the up-and-down motion of the melody, returning almost to its initial point, approximates circular motion.

Example 4.16: Promenade turns

The dancers turn down to their knees with the conjunct lines in the harp and clarinets in mm. 286-87, and the upbeat cadence is matched with a sudden rise to the feet and handshake [see Example 4.17].

The smoother B section, with its short, slurred musical phrases, is choreographed with short phrases of leaps and lunges set primarily to the pizzicato interjections. As the music stalls momentarily in measure 293, the dancers circle around each other, and Stravinsky’s stutter extension at the cadence is matched with a repetition of a choreographic phrase (a turn and a tendu) which, by not going anywhere, also stutters. The repetition and augmentation of the cadential chord at the end of the B section give the dancers time to switch places for the canon’s repetition [see Example 4.18].

At the end of A’, where the cadence is again extended with a stutter, the dancers come abreast of each other, and at the tonal first cadence, they fold their arms, genie-fashion. With the sudden slide to the serial cadence—one that seems “tacked on” tonally—the dancers link arms—a gesture that seems tacked on choreographically.

In texture, character, and local gesture, the Bransle Simple exhibits close connections of music and choreography. The double cadences in the music are accentuated by the humorous double cadences in the choreography, and the literal imitation of musical
line in the choreography heightens awareness of some of Stravinsky’s most prominent technical thumbprints in the movement: the silent downbeat, the repeated note, the symmetrical use of the hexachord, and the stutter extension at cadences.

Example 4.17: Double cadence of A section
Example 4.18: Choreographic connections to the music of B (mm. 290-299)
Bransle Gay

As in the Bransle Simple, the choreographic structure of the Bransle Gay takes the musical structure as its point of departure, although the two are not the same. The two-part choreographic plan corresponds to the three-part musical plan in the first section, and ties together the disparate sections of the musical B and A'. The accelerando which ends the second section removes some of the hollowness of the literal yet incomplete musical repetition of A [see Table 4.12].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dance:</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>intro</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>321-24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>curved</td>
<td>311-14</td>
<td>325-27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>steps</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>328-312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reverse</td>
<td>316-19</td>
<td>331-34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>releve'</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>3314-34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>steps</td>
<td>321-19</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>325-27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arms</td>
<td>328-312</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>turns</td>
<td>331-34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>a+b</td>
<td>a+b+b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>castanets</td>
<td>castanets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b'</td>
<td>castanets</td>
<td>castanets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>linear row</td>
<td>serial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ab</td>
<td>&quot;V&quot;</td>
<td>a+b+b</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.12: Musico-choreographic structure of the Bransle Gay

The musical articulations marked by the solo castanet bars are expanded into larger-scale divisions by the choreography. The first two castanet bars frame the first phrase—the choreographic exposition—with a step and its retrograde (the gliding steps on the diagonal with curving arms); the third castanet bar introduces a new dance motive (the Spanish arm movements), related to the introductory motive but even more visually

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21 Apparently, Stravinsky's sketches show that at two points in the Bransle Gay during the solo castanet bars, the ballerina is supposed to turn her head towards each of the two male dancers in turn [Eric Walter White, Stravinsky: The Composer and His Works, 2nd ed. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979: 455). To which two of the four solo castanet bars this refers is not stated.
prominent; and the final castanet bar at the end of the movement returns to the Spanish arm movements, rounding the two halves of the choreographic plan.22

The movement’s musical character is also matched by the choreography. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the castanets probably cued the Spanish demi-caractère style, but more exactly and more subtly, the low, close-to-the-ground movement corresponds to the narrow melodic compass as the preponderance of relevé steps corresponds to the bouncing short-long articulations of the woodwinds. That this correspondence may have been in Balanchine’s mind, at least subliminally, is suggested by measures 314 and especially 317, where the melodic motion opens up and the choreography does likewise [see Example 4.19].

Perhaps the most intriguing musical-choreographic connection of this dance lies in phrase construction. In the first section, music and choreography are built up of tiny variations on a single, simple idea, regrouped and reordered, never moving far from the starting point, melodically or physically. As the music moves to a more linear, serial construction with a wider, more fluid melodic compass in the B section, the choreography moves to longer phrases and more regular patterns of repetition that move across the stage. The final, shortened musical A' is also a choreographic recapitulation, but compressed and distilled to its essence: the relevé, the turn, the angular leg movement. All these elements are fused into one tiny dance phrase, the accelerando swing-arabesques. These turns build intensity to the close of the movement in a choreographic crescendo toward the reprise of the Spanish arm movements that articulate the two halves of the binary dance structure.

22The rounding effect is highlighted by the fact that at some point Balanchine changed the final measure from finger snaps to a repetition of the Spanish arms.
Example 4.19.1: The leg movements in mm. 314 and 317 open up with the musical profile.

[Due to space constraints, the arm movements have been simplified, and the torso movements and ostinato (the castanets and the boys' clapping) have been omitted. Note, however, that the dancers' counts (to the left of the staff) are steadier than the meter.]
Example 4.19.2. The Bransle Gay, continued.
Bransle Double

In the Coda of the First Pas-de-Trois, the relationship between music and dance is tenuous, but in the Bransle Double that serves as coda to the Second Pas-de-Trois, the relationship is even less clear. The music and choreography of the Bransle Double occupy the same time but have almost no real connections. After the intimately related Bransle Simple and Bransle Gay, the music and the dance in the Bransle Double create a sort of friction, especially as the hexachords of those previous movements have joined to create the row of this Coda to the pas.

The musical form is a clear ABA' with coda; the dance is a little pas within the larger Pas-de-Trois of which it serves as coda. The choreography’s through-composed character disregards musical divisions until the A' and coda (mm. 365-86) form the musical basis for a reminiscence of the Interlude. There are no direct choreographic equivalents of the musical techniques, and few of the fleeting musical-choreographic connections with the music as seen in all the other movements. Even the dancers’ counts are at odds with the musical meter in almost every section [see Table 4.13].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dance:</th>
<th>A introduction</th>
<th>B girl’s variation</th>
<th>C variation on Interlude</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>336-338</td>
<td>d 347-348</td>
<td>f 365-382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>339-342</td>
<td>c 349-364</td>
<td>g 373-386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>343-346</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>partnering</td>
<td></td>
<td>supported</td>
<td>extended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>canoe</td>
<td>split</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>scoots</td>
<td>upstage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>sweep</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3s</th>
<th>4s</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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Music:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>336-351</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>352-364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A'</td>
<td>365-372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda</td>
<td>373-386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>linear row</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chordal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>linear row</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>half time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/2</td>
<td>2/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/2</td>
<td>2/2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.13: Musico-choreographic structure of the Bransle Double
Two doublings of the dance pulse occur for no musical reason; the music is merely an organizing framework or pulse behind the choreography. Only in the outer sections of the dance does the choreography seem to respond to the music, and then rather distantly.

In the choreographic A section, a few of the brief gestural connections appear, most of them tied to the large, emphatic dotted-rhythm leaps in the melody. The downward seventh leap at the beginning of the movement is echoed by the girl's supported entrechat six as she is passed from one boy to the other. The entrechat does not match the music exactly, lagging slightly behind.\(^{23}\) Her sharp turn from à la seconde to arabesque (fouetté turn) in m. 338 matches a similar leap in the melody, and a couple of other brief coincidences occur in the opening sequence, but the only sustained series of coordinated musical and choreographic gestures occur in mm. 344-46 in connection with the counterline in the low strings. Jetés match large leaps in the low strings, and a turn into a forward développé matches two linked leaps in the counterline (end m. 345) [see Example 4.20].

In the B section (the girl's variation), the boys move their feet in their accompaniment pattern, sometimes with the rhythm of the music, but these coincidences seem more accidental here than in any other place in the ballet. In the C section, the variation on the Interlude, the links are more distant, cued to the musical similarity between the music and that of the Interlude. The musical A' is set off by a half-measure rest as the dancers turn into their arc of "little kicks," and A' and the coda have the same general relationship as the two parts of the Interlude (without the transition): A' is fast and rhythmic, while the coda changes meter and suddenly halves its level of rhythmic activity. The slow, sustained coda is set with an intensification of the partnering from the Interlude, with the boys not only circling the girl, but circling each other, passing through one another, all without releasing their linked hands.

\(^{23}\) The entrechat six is actually notated so that it is slightly behind; like the boys' whirl at the beginning, the concept seems the same, but it is difficult to execute the movement in exact musical rhythm.
Example 4.20: Coordination of steps with low strings' counterline
The relative independence of music and choreography in the Bransle Double lends a certain weight to the movement as a closure. Musical and choreographic forms are being resolved at once. The entire 12-tone row divided into separate hexachords in the Bransle Simple and the Bransle Gay is presented as a whole for the first time; and the girl's variation and the reminiscence of the Interlude at the end of the Bransle Double rounds the Second Pas-de-Trois as a whole. After the heightened abstraction of the Bransle Double, the intimacy of the Pas-de-Deux with its implied "story" will be a sharp contrast.

**Pas-de-Deux**
**Interlude**

In the first Interlude, Stravinsky's addition of rhythmically layered C-centered material in the music prompted Balanchine to add choreographic cross-rhythms. In this Interlude, Stravinsky adds B♭ arpeggios in the trumpets that re-balance the bitonal layers of the music. Balanchine does not respond directly to the added music, but responds instead to the additional urgency suggested by the flutter-tongued arpeggios.

As in the previous Interlude, the rushing, urgent music of the first part of the Interlude is set with a fast unison introduction and a rapid, turning choreographic canon, but the cadence of the canon here is especially accentuated as the girl whips her leg back around the boy's shoulders at the very point in measure 396 where the trumpets break off and the delicate contrabass harmonics take over. Again, the musical transition serves as a backdrop for the adjustment of the dancers into position for the final section.

In this Interlude, the abstraction of courtly dance in the Meno mosso is treated as just that, rather than a pretext for extended balletic partnering. The latter will come in the Adagio. The dancers' gliding steps move with the stately, simple melodic line, and in the only instance of musical-choreographic concurrence in any of the Prelude/Interlude movements, the degagé steps with their dotted rhythms fall with the first dotted rhythms in the music (measures 404-405). The degagé steps, or "uneven walk" as noted in the annotated score, accentuate the hyperbar metric structure of the section, fusing the two
measures into a large three-beat unit [see Example 4.21, where the “hyperbars” are
indicated by the brackets]. The dégagé hyperbar, however, elides with the established
pattern of hyperbars, creating a large syncopation as well. The final mirror pose is taken up
with the chiming final chord.  

Example 4.21: The hyperbar structure of the Meno mosso

The opening of the Interlude is marked “very aggressive, angry,” and in the rapid,
spinning movements of the canon, the girl seems constantly to be racing away from her
partner; the violent whipping of her leg back around his shoulders is almost a blow. But
the violence evoked by this opening is suppressed by a quiet dignity in the courtly Meno
mosso. The emotional quality of the Pas-de-Deux is only suggested by this Interlude, more
obvious than in the Prelude and previous Interlude perhaps merely because a man and a
woman are dancing together as a duet for the first time in the ballet.

24 In the choreographic score, the last pose occurs on the downbeat of measure 409, but on
the videotape, it is on the final chord—musically a more logical choice.

265
Adagio

...[T]he brief, strategically placed silence, alternating with movements of paper-thin mandolin accompaniment that last only seconds in clock time, which in sequence with inset movement, frame action or designed inertia in arresting and disconcerting duration. Concentrated semi-silences permit no rest or relaxation; indeed, dancers often move on silence, as sometimes they stay quiet on focuses of sound. Motivation from aural discontinuity in a metrical structure pinpoints movement, clearing our often blurred or inattentive eyes from familiar or expected combinations. Miniature shocks, like small short circuits, clear the eye and ear, demanding closer viewing.

—Lincoln Kirstein

[T]he mutual first tremor of an uncertain supported balance is so isolated musically it becomes a dance movement.

—Edwin Denby

Kirstein, with his characteristic efflorescent prose, and Denby, with his characteristic evocative poetry, each capture the essence of the Adagio of the Pas-de-Deux: the terse sparseness of the musical texture, the tense, tentative nature of the choreography. Against the thin wisps of string gestures, the dancers create a long span of continuously developing movement, with isolated gestures brushing into contact with the music.

The Adagio has no dancer counts; not surprisingly, as it also lacks a regular pulse—finding a count would be almost impossible, imposing an unnecessary concern for the dancers. The two move in close physical contact, so ensemble is not the problem it would be in, say, the Double Pas-de-Quatre. In the absence of dancer counts, the movements are cued to the score. The first page of the Adagio in the annotated score is covered with choreographic cues, complicated by the fact that part of the music is repeated, requiring two sets of cues [see Figure 4.1].

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26 “The Three Sides of *Agon.*”
Figure 4.1: First page of the Adagio from the annotated score

Although the dance movements are cued to the music, choreographic imitations of the music are incidental—momentary flashes of coincidence. The rhythmically complex, pulseless music is a backdrop for the sustained slow-motion movements of the dancers.
There are some moments, however, where movement and music come together, usually when the music thins to one line: in measure 424, the dancers unwind from each other with resolute movements against the four steady eighth notes in the violin and cellos; in m. 429, as she slides down his body into a spreadeagled position, her toes touch down in a beat of silence, and she lowers her heels with the beginning of the viola solo [see Example 4.22]. She rolls back between his legs as he kneels and she circles her legs outward with the double-stopped minor ninths. He reaches back and grabs her hands, pulling her up into an arabesque penché with a wide leap in the cellos.

Example 4.22: Measure 429-433 in Adagio

In several places, low notes form the anchor for position changes or small, accented movements—as he stands with her foot on his shoulder, they turn to face upstage on 421\(^2\)(R) with a pizzicato note in the cellos; as she folds her body down through his arms, her working foot comes down on 424\(^3\)(R), the lowest note in the violin/cello line; after he bends her back, touching her foot to her head, he releases her foot to hit the floor with the pizzicato cello note in 441\(^2\) (a repeat of measure 421); when she grabs her foot to pull it above her head, stretching in a vertical split, she does so with a low note in the strings on 444\(^2\). His tiny steps as he turns her from the floor are set against a tremolo in the violins in m. 448, and as she pulls him up, guiding him around in a circle to the opening position, her
head bows with an eleventh fall from A to G\# in harmonics in the low strings. The sudden change to apparent "real-time" dancing occurs at the \textit{a tempo} in measure 452; her falls into splits seem to mimic the wide leaps of the music.

\textbf{Variations}

The variations are the only sections of the \textit{Pas-de-Deux} that have a steady motor pulse, and the choreography plays to that difference. The variations are driven by that pulse, forming the framework for dances that are given character by the melodic line.

The music of the male variation is angular and spiky, and so is the dance. The dancer begins with the deliberate quarter-note pulse, and his movements, while not really "mickey-mousing," follow the subtle fluctuations of the music with great sensitivity [see Example 4.23].

As in the \textit{Saraband-Step}, the choreography winds through the lines of the instruments, picking up distinctive moments from among them. A rond de jambe on the first high note leads into a small fall back and clearly defined back steps with pivots on the following three quarter notes, picking up the canon entry in the piano. The second large movement, a developpé, occurs with the syncopated note in measure 465, and the "funny step" falls with an isolated piano note in the next measure. The bounces in measure 467 are set to the first eighth-note motion in the music, continuing with piqué twists, and the unwinding turn (the Apollo quote) falls with long, syncopated note in measure 469. The syncopation in m. 470 is set with a jeté, and the augmentation in the next measure with another leap, a delayed leap à la seconde.
Example 4.23: The boy's variation

As the boy's variation recalled the Saraband-Step, the girl's variation recalls the last solo for girl, the Bransle Gay. And as in the boy's variation, the reminiscence is more subtle than merely quoting steps. The two female variations have one musical feature in common—a rhythmic ostinato which contradicts the barline; and the two choreographies also share a trait—although driven by the ostinato, the character of movement is derived from the melody, creating a polyphonic texture in the body of one dancer.
The music of the male and female variations in the Pas-de-Deux overlaps by two 3/4 bars, or five beats if one counts the entire 5-beat ostinato pattern that begins with a beat of rest. The girl actually starts to move with the entry of the ostinato [see Example 4.23] with a flourish of her arms and a little leap forward into B+, and the boy moves backward in an unobtrusive five-beat figure that coincides with the ostinato. Her clearly defined movements (built on piqué steps) are set to the ostinato, but the movements themselves curve and turn sinuously like the melody. The mickey-mousing is less exact here than in the male variation, but if anything, the choreography feels closer to the music because of the clearer musical lines.

Choreographically, the male dancer’s refrain absorbs some of the female variation’s character and steps (most prominently, the steps onto the toe with bent knees), but the more detailed musical-choreographic connections return, most strikingly at the end [see Example 4.24]. He stretches up on his toes, arching his back with a sustained high note in the first horn in m. 489, and a jeté comes with a similar note a fifth lower in the third horn in the next measure. He takes her hand with the upbeat cadence of the variation, and the dancers are still during the fermata measure of silence before the coda.
Example 4.24: End of boy's refrain

Coda

The Coda is a return to the pulseless, rather nervous musical character of the Adagio—an appropriate symmetry—though the tempo is faster, as are most codas in classical ballet. The relationship of the dance to the music is similar as well—brief coincidences of musical gesture with prominent notes in the sparse musical texture. The girl's first arabesque penché occurs on an isolated leap of a major seventh (B\textsubscript{b}-A) at the end of m. 497; her two pirouettes in m. 499 match a burst of sixteenth note elevenths in the violin and its echo in the viola; she leans over the boy's shoulder coincident with a low G in
the harp in m. 510 [first ending]; and the final pose is set to the final upbeat pizzicato cello note in m. 511 [second ending].

Other musical-choreographic connections are more subtle. The repeat of the butterfly throw falls in m. 500, where the piano begins its phrase with the same three notes as the string phrase at the beginning of the movement. The melodic profile of the Coda is constant and palindromic, without structural repeat; this one slight repeat then becomes the source of the only choreographic repetition. The alteration of the end of the repeat—the substitution of a tap-like “jazz” step for the arabesque penché—is set against a singular occurrence in the harp, a syncopated bass figure. The step stops as if freeze-framed on the pizzicato upbeat note which ends the figure in the cello and timpani (similar to the cadential “freeze-frames” in the second Pas-de-Trois). And, not surprisingly, the switch to slow motion (like the snap into real-time in the Adagio) is cued by a tempo change, the Doppio lento in m. 504, and the prominent reentry of the mandolin with its tremolo melody.

According to the testimony of Diana Adams and Arthur Mitchell, the Pas-de-Deux was the key point of the ballet for Balanchine. Its importance is both contradicted and borne out by its uniqueness in Agon. In music and choreography, the movement is both the closest approach to classical ballet—its architecture adheres to the traditional outlines of the classical grand pas de deux (entrée, adagio, variations, coda)—and at the furthest remove from classical ballet—the Webernesque style of the music and the sustained, almost contortionistic movements of the Adagio and Coda. The connections of music and choreography are at extremes—the aforementioned architecture on the highest level, and the note-to-note coordination of musical and choreographic gesture at the most detailed. There is no middle ground in the partnered sections of the Pas-de-Deux; perhaps in these stretched, continuous movements, just occasionally touching upon isolated notes of the score, Balanchine found the best representation of the tense, suspended nature of this sparse, nervous musical texture. Those brief moments of coincidence are even faintly
reminiscent of Stravinsky’s musical strategy: there is a fundamental connection of his musical construction to traditional tonality, the intervalic unit, although his choice of unit is not the expected triad, but a four-note cell of his own devising.

In the central variations, the connections to the rest of the ballet are stronger. The polyphonic use of a single body, as well as motives, refer to other movements. The absorption of the girl’s dance character into the boy’s refrain is a constructive device of development and recapitulation, but is also a narrative one: in the lovers’ argument evoked by the Pas-de-Deux, the variations are like exchanges of words; as he takes on some of the character of her dance, he may be coming around to her point of view or making concessions.

The rehearsal aspect of the ballet is usually represented in brief flashes of humor and play. In the Pas-de-Deux, it manifests itself as personal conflict and vulnerability. The classical pas de deux is an abstract construction, an island of almost pure dance in the narrative flow; the Pas-de-Deux in \textit{Agon} is the opposite, an island of narrative cohesion within a series of more abstract dances.

\textbf{Finale}

\textit{Quasi Stretto}

Unlike the previous two \textit{pas}, and unlike the first main section of the ballet, the Pas-de-Deux is not a close-ended structure. It continues without a break—in fact, with an elision—into the finale.\textsuperscript{27} The choreographic finale begins before the musical one, starting in m. 512 with the \textit{Quasi stretto} at the end of the Pas-de-Deux. As the musical texture thins to one line, dancers appear from all corners of the stage to form a circle with the rising of the melodic profile toward its peak. They crouch down as the line begins to descend once more [m. 515]. They choose partners and form a straight line as the music collapses chromatically from a fifth toward the tonic pitch C.

\textsuperscript{27} On the videotape and in the score, there is a break here for the couple’s curtain call. This, however, contradicts Stravinsky’s score, which shows only a double bar.
Four Duos

Musically, the primarily monophonic Four Duos has two melodic/rhythmic/timbral profiles—steady pizzicato quarter notes with wide leaps in the low strings, and syncopated, varied rhythmic figures with predominantly stepwise motion in the trombones. Likewise, it has two dance textures: unison partnering in male-female duos at the center of the stage, and separate, gender-divided movement [see Table 4.14].

| A | mm. 520-526<sup>1</sup> | B | 526<sup>2</sup>-528 | A'<sup>1</sup> | 529-534<sup>2</sup> | B' | 534<sup>3</sup>-536<sup>4</sup> | A'' | 536<sup>4</sup>-538 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Music: | strings | trombones | strings | trombones | str/trbs |
| Dance: | partners | boy/girl split on diagonal | partners | slight separation | partners (trios) |

Table 4.14: Textural pattern of music and dance in the Four Duos

In addition to matching the textural shifts, the character of the choreography also reflects the character of the music. The almost mechanical partnering (the “adagio class”) is set against the steady (rigid) quarter-note pulse of the strings, and the soft-shoe-like steps of the separations against the syncopated brass with their timbral and rhythmic connotations of jazz. The two brief measures of slight separation toward the end would be almost imperceptible—the boys just seem to be stepping back to allow the girls a free movement—if not for highlighting effect of the musical change.

The most crucial textural change is the last, beginning with final beat of measure 536 where the two musical textures overlap for the first time. At this point, the extra girls come on stage and take up their positions behind the other couples, eliding the Four Duos with the Four Trios.

Four Trios

Musically and choreographically, the final movement of Agon reprises the opening movement, the Pas-de-Quatre. The movement begins with new material and moves to the reprise: musically, the new material is brief and the recapitulation is of the entire
movement; choreographically, the new material is extensive and the exact recapitulation rather brief (only the last two sections of the Pas-de-Quatre), but the new and the old interpenetrate one another through much of the movement's middle part [see Table 4.15].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Four Trios</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dance:</strong> A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>539-548</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Trios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>symmetrical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>asymmetry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Music:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>539-552</th>
<th>553-560</th>
<th>561-73</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fugal exposition</td>
<td>transition (reprise of Four Duos, foreshadows Pas-de-Quatre)</td>
<td>recap begins</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two forms interpenetrate:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C</th>
<th>A&quot;</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>570-579</td>
<td>580-588</td>
<td>589-594</td>
<td>595-605</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 couples w/ single girls circle formation &quot;jitterbug&quot;/ 1st Petrouchka canon</td>
<td>4 Trios symmetry lateral/double mirror bow and prance</td>
<td>symmetrical 6s 2nd Petrouchka canon</td>
<td>girls rise and leave the stage boys up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>574-579</th>
<th>580-591</th>
<th>592-595</th>
<th>599-605</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>same music as 1st Petrouchka canon</td>
<td>(exact musical repetition of Pas-de-Quatre continues)</td>
<td>same music as 2nd Petrouchka canon</td>
<td>hairpin chords</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recap of Pas-de-Quatre:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>F</th>
<th>G</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>606-613</td>
<td>613²-620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>repeat of canon turn/pushing arabesque</td>
<td>mainly steps w/big arms double mirror symmetry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.15: Musico-choreographic structure of the Four Trios

A choreographic recapitulation on the scale of the musical one would have been ill-suited in two important respects. First, the eye retains more easily than the ear, thus an extensive reprise would seem redundant; and second, it would lack the choreographic
weight to end such a complex work, as it is relatively simple and (more importantly) concerns only the boys. By bringing in reminiscences of the most memorable feature of the Pas-de-Quatre—the Petrouchka canons—at the same points in the music but filling in around them with new choreography, Balanchine extends the recapitulation back beyond the literal reprise of the end.

As in the Pas-de-Quatre, the choreography also binds the music to it by eliding the various sections. As indicated in Table 4.15, few of the musical and choreographic divisions line up exactly except for the final canon and big arm sweeps of the boys’ ending section. Even the Petrouchka canons are slightly offset to the music. In the first canon, the two front couples are doing a sedate jitterbug step for the first two measures of the fanfare; in the second, the dancers move into a new formation during the first two measures.

Even though this movement’s complex architecture and rich variety of choreographic textures and floor patterns would seem to overshadow individual steps, there are moments of coincidence between musical and choreographic gesture. In the opening measures, the girls’ legs frequently rise to prominent high notes in the strings—for example, a high rond de jambe en l’air at the beginning of m. 542 coincides with a leap of a minor 11th in the violas and cellos, and the grand battement in the next measure with a similar leap in the violins. Likewise, the girls begin to jeté outward into a new position with a high fortissimo unison in the strings [m. 549]. In fact, this musical transition [mm. 549-52] also becomes a choreographic one as the dancers move from the four trios into a gender-divided “V” formation with the girls in the middle and the boys at the wings. The girls’ adjusting motions (piqué twists28) match the steady low string pizzicato notes that recall the Four Duos [mm. 553-60]. The beginning of the musical recapitulation is marked by an entrechat quatre, a choreographic exclamation point. Perhaps the most satisfying coincidence is the supported promenade against the sustained chime in mm. 567-569. This is the first time that sonority has been allowed to “ring” choreographically for its full

28And heel strikes to the floor in the videotaped version.
length, but it obviously it takes a supported movement to last that long. The following mandolin/harp/strings section, with its narrow melodic motion and 4-beat circling phrases match the fours of the jitterbug step. The girls rise up and leave the stage with the surging, hairpinned chords in mm. 598-602 and jeté into the wings at the same moment the boys curl up into a fetal ball on the stage—at the isolated brass interjection in measure 602.

The boys stand and form a line, and from that point (m. 606), the musical and choreographic recapitulations are aligned and exact. The only alteration is in the double mirror alignment of the boys as they sweep back upstage, as opposed to the 2x2 mirror symmetry of the Pas-de-Quatre. This recapitulation with its strengthened ending anchors the ballet as a real end and as the closing of a circle.

Conclusion

Like the music and choreography separately, the relationship of music and dance in Agon combines techniques on a series of interlocking levels. At the most detailed level, isolated musical gestures that are set off in silence coincide with isolated movements that are set off in space; on the next level higher, musical gestures are set with analogous gestures in space. These two levels of musical-choreographic coordination are fused in the solo dances, creating a polyphonic texture in a single body. In the group movements, the textural possibilities are expanded with the addition of bodies. While the complexity of individual steps must be reduced to accommodate the different technical abilities of the dancers, the problems of ensemble, and the limits of the spectators’ visual perception, the polyphonic texture of the music may be more literally transcribed into spatial relationships.

It has often been said of Balanchine that the choreography becomes another line of counterpoint to the music. Now, however, we are able to show concretely how the choreography accomplishes this. The polyphonic solo variations, with their winding of musico-choreographic connections through the musical texture, display the most literal kind of counterpoint, though almost mind-boggling in its intricacy. But this kind of
counterpoint is still anchored in the score. Balanchine also abstracts musical qualities in setting the choreography against the music. Musical and dance canons are sometimes simultaneous if not exactly aligned, but sometimes choreographic canons are set to simple musical textures or canons in the music are ignored in the choreography. In ignoring the canon in the Gailliarde, Balanchine picks up on a different quality of the music, the syncopation, and overlays a syncopation of his own. Structural repetitions are selectively highlighted, sometimes emphasizing major musical divisions, sometimes drawing attention to repetitions that might not be easily perceived by the ear, and sometimes smoothing over disparate small sections into larger ones.

The sophisticated musico-choreographic connections in Agon are typical of Balanchine, but the ballet is also distinctive. Though essentially non-narrative, it leaves impressions of a rehearsal by turns playful and serious, an athletic and abstract neo-classical ballet, and an accidental eavesdropping on a lover’s quarrel—qualities that can be discerned in the incidental jazz elements, the stylized early Baroque dances, and the Webernesque Pas-de-Deux of the score. Balanchine’s choreography elucidates Stravinsky’s music from isolated notes to the entire score, but it is not merely a mirror. The music and the dance each support the other, and together they form a whole.
Chapter Five
The Stravinsky-Balanchine Collaboration

Agon is a marvelously complex work, woven out of a variety of elements in music and dance, some with equivalents in both arts: historical reference, fusions of neo-classical and 20th-century techniques and styles, unusual density of means within transparent textures, upbeat rhythmic emphasis and syncopation, and wit. Both the music and the choreography display radical shifts of style and technique, although the shifts are just as likely as not to coincide. Both return often to tiny motives that might seem incidental in any one movement but span the entire ballet (the silent downbeat and the chiming intonation in the music; the heel and the piqué in the dance). But its very richness makes finding a simple overall shape for the ballet a challenge.

A number of different schemes have been proposed. Stravinsky and Balanchine decided on a three-part form, outlined by Robert Craft in an early article, but Lawrence Morton divined a four-part form that was convincing enough to influence the formal schemes of a generation of scholars. Alone among music scholars in the first thirty years of the ballet’s existence, Sabine Jahnke addressed the formal ambiguity, proposing several formal schemes dependent on different elements: time (evidently the relative duration of the three main sections) (1:3:1), music (abba), and dance (five-part form: standing/two group dances/3+3+5 solo dances/two group dances/standing).1 Finally, she calls it “concentric form.”2

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1 This structure relates to the formal structure of an act of a classical ballet, such as those created by Marius Petipa in late 19th-century Russia. An act typically (though not invariably) begins with a ballabile, or a general dance for a large group or the corps de
While accurate, none of these schemes captures the full complexity of the ballet. Stravinsky and Balanchine created their three-part projection before they began to work, and thus could not be expected to take the final result into account in all particulars. Among musical analysts, only Sabine Jahnke has taken the dance into consideration at all. When dealing with the music alone, Stephen Walsh was moved to arcane geometry to describe the ballet: "In the Escher sense, *Agon* describes a strange loop, which comes back on itself just when it seems to have traveled farthest from its starting-point." Most analysts use ratios or linear or architectural models; Walsh resorted to the optical illusions of the graphic artist M.C. Escher, whose *Waterfall* is an example of a loop suddenly and unexpectedly returning to its starting point after a traveling its farthest distance [see Figure 5.1]. If it is so difficult to come to grips with just the music, how much more difficult then to settle on a form for the complete work.

Part of the problem in finding a satisfying formal analogy for *Agon* is that so many of the elements in the ballet have non-coincident patterns. Take, for example, two features of musical composition generally considered to be mutually exclusive, tonal centering and serialism. Over the course of *Agon*, Stravinsky's use of each generally describes a curve that resembles a sine wave [see Figures 5.2 and 5.3; distance above the line indicates strength of adherence, distance below the line indicates distance from stated feature].

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Figure 5.1: *Waterfall* (M.C. Escher, 1961)
Figure 5.2: Adherence to tonal centering in *Agon*

There is a gradual strengthening of tonal centering through the first part of the ballet, peaking in the Gailliarde and Bransle Simple, with a slight dip in the Coda of the First Pas-de-Trois where a double pedal point on a fifth is sustained over the introduction of the ballet’s first twelve-tone row. The sharp change at the Bransle Gay is not a complete negation of tonal centering—there is a faint sense of a B♭ tonic, but it is very faint. Likewise, the Pas-de-Deux has an interval set that serves as a “home base” much the way a tonic triad would in a truly tonal work, but this is not clearly evident to the ear.

In conjunction—not opposition, as might be expected—with the rise of tonal centering at the beginning of the ballet, is the exposition of serial tendencies. With the Saraband-Step and Gailliarde of First Pas-de-Trois, however, the serial aspects are subordinated to a neo-classical (neo-Baroque) tonality. The introduction of the first twelve-tone row in the Coda of that pas is as abrupt a shift as the sudden negation of tonality at the Bransle Gay. The shape of the wave is also a reminder the Pas-de-Deux is less serial in technique than its Webernesque style would indicate [see Figure 5.3].
One may note a certain similarity in these diagrams. Both show a sharp break near the middle, but otherwise they reveal a wave-like alternation of adherence to the respective principles. The two almost seem to be the same wave out of phase. Although the beginnings of the waves are in opposition, there is a noticeable alignment at the end of the ballet [see Figure 5.4].

The superimposition of these waves also highlights the detachment of style and technique in the ballet. The Bransle Simple for example, one of the most pervasively serial movements, also has a strong tonal center. The Pas-de-Deux, in contrast, has no real tonal centering,
yet neither is it really serial. Their placement on the two curves effectively balances each other.

Some features one would normally employ to determine the structure of a work are in conflict in Agon, not only tonal centering and serialism in the music, but style and form in the dance. In the dance, the fluctuations between classical and more modern styles roughly follow the same curve as that of tonal centering [see Figure 5.5].

Figure 5.5: The fluctuations of classical and modern styles in the choreography

The number of people on stage does influence the dance style (even if only coincidentally). The movements with the most dancers are roughly balanced in the fusion of classical and modern style; the interior movements, which have fewer dancers, are more decided in style—more classical in the two Pas-de-Trois, more modern in the Pas-de-Deux. Even though the style of the dancing in the Pas-de-Deux is the least classical, the formal structure of the pas follows that of the classical grand pas de deux. Of course, the external structure does not impinge on the dancers' individual actions, and so the formal structure is the easiest element of classicism to retain when the steps are in a modern style. It seems that musical style prompted the correspondence to dance style. Balanchine had some of the world's most highly trained and versatile dancers in his company—had he wanted to do a clearly modern-style Pas-de-Quatre or Four Trios, he surely could have done so.
Abstracting the ballet (music and dance) to the highest level, we arrive at something similar to Walsh's Escher loop: a sine wave that dips into the past with a complementary curve into the modern, beginning and ending with the neoclassical—a fusion of the old and the new [see Figure 5.6].

![Figure 5.6: The basic curve of Agon](image)

As clear a picture as this may make, it still fails to do justice to the complexity of *Agon*. Too much of the richness of the work is smoothed over, including the surprising alignment of tonal centering and serialism, the sense of rehearsal that pervades the ballet, and the symmetrical asymmetries. Balanchine's cabinet analogy\(^4\) provides a more satisfying level at which to include these elements [see Table 5.1].

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<td>8 girls (4 + 8)</td>
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<td>binary w/ternary elements</td>
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<td>Saraband-Step: repetition/marking</td>
<td>Bransle Simple: competition canons</td>
<td>Bransle Gay: boys clapping</td>
<td>Emotional resonance, stretching</td>
<td>4 Duos: adagio class 4 Trios: complexity</td>
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<td>Gaillarde: mirroring Coda: casual style</td>
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Table 5.1: "Cabinet" structure of Agon
The outer box of this ballet-cabinet is formed by the Pas-de-Quatre that appears at the beginning and the end; the division into compartments is formed by the Interludes which share the same gestural pattern as the strophes of the Pas-de-Quatre, along with some readily audible musical traits—a fast, busy opening with trumpet pedal points; a transition of a sustained sonority over an agitated rumbling; and a smooth, slower ending. This striking succession of gestures creates the framework—the external and internal supports of the ballet.

The compartments nearest the outer frame (the Double and Triple Pas-de-Quatre/the Four Duos and Four Trios) and the center one (the Second Pas-de-Trois) are the most dense in the mixing of tonal and serial techniques and in the visual complexity of the choreography. The symmetrical asymmetry of the music—the primarily tonal Double and Triple Pas-de-Quatre with some serial elements balancing the primarily serial Four Duos and Four Trios with some tonal elements—is complemented by a symmetrical asymmetry in the dance. The gender-separate buildup of choreographic forces in the Pas-de-Quatre movements balances the multiplication of a male-female duo by four, and the addition of a second girl to each duo to form the Four Trios. The emotional center of the ballet is the Pas-de-Deux with the most sustained evocation of a narrative, an intense encounter between two lovers (whether the lovers be the dancers themselves, or the characters whom the dancers are rehearsing). Its structural center, however, lies in the Second Pas-de-Trois: the three interior compartments form a symmetrical arch both musically and choreographically—the First Pas-de-Trois is neo-Baroque in style, the Pas-de-Deux is modern, and the Second Pas-de-Trois in the architectural center of the ballet is a combination of both.

The hint of narrative running through all the movements of Agon in some degree is the sense of rehearsal. This quality of "rehearsalness" also traces a sine wave. In the outer movements, rehearsal is evoked by the steps that the dancers perform: warm-up maneuvers are followed by canons and port de bras in the Pas-de-Quatre movements; an adagio class is
periodically interrupted by a jazz class in the Four Duos, and the almost overwhelming complexity of the Four Trios seems like the last frantic rehearsal before a performance, with different groups practicing different elements at the same time, yet somehow, miraculously, it all comes together for the evening's performance.

In the interior sections, the dancers' implied behavior provides the sense of rehearsal. In the two Pas-de-Trois, this behavior is mostly humorous. In the cadences of the Saraband-Step, the Gailliarde, and the Bransle Simple, the dancers seem to step out of character, and horseplay wins out over decorum. But rehearsal is also suggested by the immediate repetitions and the apparent "marking" of some of the more flamboyant movements in the Saraband-Step; in the mirrored dancing of the Gailliarde; in the loose, playful movements of the Coda; and in the canons of the Bransle Simple, where the boys seem to be competing with one another to be faster and more energetic. In the Bransle Gay, the girl performs to the accompaniment of her two cavaliers' clapping; in a flamenco rehearsal (suggested by the castanets, her fluid arm movements and audible pointe-stamps), sometimes the only accompaniment is the clapping of the other dancers. In the Pas-de-Deux, the introverted mien of the dancers is an inversion of the extroverted, playful behavior of most of the rest of the ballet. Their movements are tentative and precarious; they seem directed inward, unaware of the audience, as if rehearsing still-unfamiliar movements, or even improvising. The girl's flexibility is pushed to the extreme in the Adagio, but in testing and stretching, not in a flamboyant display. The individual movements of the two dancers are often spectacular, but the Pas-de-Deux is remarkably muted in its overall effect.

The various motives of the dance become part of what Balanchine called the inlay work, which spans the entire ballet—the heel, the piqué; even a less distinctive step, the développé, is important in every movement. These tiny elements, like Stravinsky's chiming intonation, provide a delicate but fundamental thread of continuity through the complex,
layered hierarchical structure of the ballet, the horizontal line that anchors the various waves of style and technique.

After intense scrutiny of the music, the dance, and the combination of the two, we may now return to the questions that brought about this entire investigation. How do music and dance relate in Agon? Does one dominate, or do they together form a whole greater than its parts?

The first question can be answered in many ways. Stravinsky’s music was written with full knowledge of ballet’s traditions—the architecture of a classical ballet, the traditional timbral connections of gender, and even textural and orchestrational clichés such as the string orchestra with solo violin in the Adagio of the Pas-de-Deux, and the flutes over a rhythmic string accompaniment in the girl’s variation. The two Pas-de-Trois embrace the courtly dances that form the birthplace of ballet, especially reflecting rhythmic traits of these dances.

The music preceded the dance. Therefore, Balanchine was necessarily influenced by its structures, rhythms and melodies. But in no way is the choreography subordinate to the music. Balanchine elucidates Stravinsky’s music with sophisticated means of imitation and complements it with related but independent structures of his own.

The choreography relates to the music on a wide variety of levels, from the incidental to the detailed to the abstract. At the beginning of the Four Trios, for instance, the dancers’ movements coincide only incidentally with features of the music; the girls’ développés sometimes (but not always) occur with high notes. In the Saraband-Step almost every movement is directly imitative of the music, but the choreography is woven deep into the dense contrapuntal texture. Balanchine’s frequent use of counterlines for unsophisticated choreographic mimicry, or “mickey-mousing,” gives him freedom to imitate the music without fusing his choreography to a too-obvious surface element.
Other music-dance relationships are more abstracted. The “Augenchoreographie” in the Triple Pas-de-Quatre—where the dancers form parallel lines as the music narrows to two lines—is an exact imitation, but perceptible only if one is looking at the score. The choreographic syncopations of the Gailliarde are similar quality to the musical ones, but the two are often in conflict. The relevé in the Bransle Gay is derived from short-long articulations of the woodwinds. In the Pas-de-Deux, the relationship between music and dance is one of character; the tenuous music is complemented by precarious, tentative movements that, despite the fact that they are all cued to events in the music, only incidentally imitate those events.

Balanchine responds to the textures of Stravinsky’s music with great sensitivity. In one of the most satisfying of his visualizations of the score, the gradual expansion of dance space in the Pas-de-Quatre is directly related to the expansion of musical texture in the music. Other responses are more unexpected, such as the polyphonic density compressed into one body in the solo variations, or the complex polyphonic Coda to the First Pas-de-Trois, which has one of the most uncomplicated and transparent musical textures in the entire ballet. The Triple Pas-de-Quatre is one of the longest expanses of relatively continuous musical texture, but the choreographic texture comprises a interlocking hierarchical pattern of contrasts that divide the movement in two, three, and four parts.

Stravinsky’s score is the primary source for Balanchine’s choreography; Balanchine’s choreography illuminates Stravinsky’s score. The music and the dance are intimately intertwined, even when they seem to be proceeding independently. Each separately is a complex and striking composition; but their combination of congruent and complementary elements creates a synthetic art work of great strength, wit and beauty.

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It is ironic that *Agon*, considered emblematic of both the New York City Ballet as a company and American ballet in general, was created by two Russians (or one Russian and one Georgian). But the New York City Ballet is itself an American version of an old-world institution. Balanchine established a dance school to serve his company—to train dancers in appropriate technique, style, and repertoire—as the theatre school had served the Maryinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg where he himself was trained. Balanchine also relied heavily on patronage, though his patrons were not nobility, but businessmen and corporations.

The impetus for this American ballet originated not with Balanchine, but with a wealthy young American, Lincoln Kirstein. The Harvard-educated Kirstein was a prolific polemicist on dance as well as co-founder and editor of the literary quarterly *The Hound and Horn*. His passionate love of ballet (and his access to money) convinced Balanchine to come to America. The choreographer did not start by building a company, however; his famous words were “But first, a school.”

On 1 January 1934, he opened the School of American Ballet with the support of Kirstein and several of Kirstein’s friends. Among the first scholarship students in 1941 was a long-legged nine-year-old named Tanaquil LeClerq, who would become the first great American ballerina trained entirely by Balanchine (and his last wife). Other graduates included two of the greatest male dancers America has yet produced, Jacques d’Amboise and Edward Villella. In 1963, the Ford Foundation made a grant of $7,756,750 to ballet, almost all of it to the School of American Ballet and its affiliates. This distribution aroused a great furor in the dance world, as if “City Ballet had stolen the money rather than been given it,” in the words of critic Clive Barnes. As it turned out, the Ford Foundation’s gift

5Two of d’Amboise’s children, Christopher and Charlotte, also graduated from the school; Christopher joined the New York City Ballet, and Charlotte has worked on Broadway.
and the successful manner in which it was administrated by the Balanchine enterprise spurred other foundations to fund performing-arts institutions.6

According to British dance critic Clement Crisp, the School of American Ballet and the New York City Ballet are the truest repository of twentieth-century classic dance. This has been achieved at no sacrifice of essentials—save that essential for certain audiences: the stellar paraphernalia of the "great" dancer... Balanchine, as teacher and choreographer, retained for himself the dominant role in the realization of an ensemble greater than the sum of its parts (even its starriest parts), wherein the identity of the troupe came from choreographic wealth rather than temperament or narrative device. Yet it is not without significance that there have resulted several generations of leading New York City Ballet dancers—I hesitate to call them ballerine and premiers danseurs—whose performances have been quite as starry, quite as thrilling in their effects, as any of the most incandescent of public favorites.

Their luster has sprung from a source very different from that of temperament, or that personality cult which seems to say "Look at me dancing." The New York City Ballet's artists propose, simply, cleanly: "Look at this dance."7

The nature of this dancing was forged from a traditional art in new surroundings. Numerous observers have expressed the opinion that the choreographer was profoundly influenced by his new country, among them Rudolf Nureyev,8 Clement Crisp,9 and Joseph Mazo.10 Many mention the architecture of New York, its density and its skyscrapers. But its buildings were not the only influence America had on Balanchine's classical training:


7"Foreword," In Merrill Ashley with Larry Kaplan, Dancing for Balanchine, photographs by Jack Vartoogian (New York: E.P. Dutton, Inc., 1984): x-xi. At least one Balanchine-trained dancer regretted the demise of the star system. On this subject, Gelsey Kirkland wrote: "Even in his choreography that retained plot and character, the drama was distilled and the passion of the dancers quelled. Those were his instructions. There were not supposed to be any stars in his theatre who might detract or steal thunder from his choreography." Gelsey Kirkland with Greg Lawrence, Dancing On My Grave (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1986): 45.


9"Foreword," x-xi.

10Dance is a Contact Sport (New York: Da Capo, 1974): 170.
...the rapid tempo of American life, together with its frantic adulation of streamlined and athletic young womanhood, has naturally affected his work. The flowing patterns and irresistible impetus of his compositions remain as powerful as ever, but the emotional stress, such as there is, is essentially a product of the New World. ...Balanchine brought the classical idiom into touch with contemporary life in a development of style which can truly but inexplicably be described as American. ...Balanchine freed the traditional classical technique of its remoteness as well as its grandeur, transforming it into a more personal style, with a new and youthful dynamic appropriate to the character and individualism of young women whose aim on stage was not to appear sexless and saintly, but feminine and approachable. 11

Only half-joking, it seems, was Balanchine’s comment that he would dearly love to go to a country that produced girls as wonderful as Ginger Rogers.12 Physically, Rogers can be seen as the prototype of the American dancers Balanchine chose and created—long-legged, extremely slender, many of them blonde with large eyes, like Allegra Kent and Suzanne Farrell. Ballet had always been an athletic endeavor, but, as Franks and others13 have alluded, Balanchine stripped away the remoteness and grandeur of the classical ballet and let the dancers be athletes. Horst Koegler captures this athleticism in his description of the opening of Agon:

These are easy American athletes, racy, tough, thoroughly trained. The movements that they perform in place to the trumpet triplets are the movements of athletes... One could almost think that this is a rugby team in training. Femininity takes part, but it is an American kind of femininity, cool and delicate... This is neoclassical American ballet.14

12Taper, 151.
13Another typical example: “Balanchine, whether consciously or not, devised a streamlined neo-classical style suited to athletic Americans and to his new ballets in which expression was subordinated to the invention of a visual parallel with music...” Richard Buckle, In the Wake of Diaghilev (Holt, Rinehart and Winston: New York, 1982): 275.
14Dies sind amerikanische Leichtathleten, rassig, zäh, durchtrainiert. Ihre Bewegungen, die sie zu den Trompetentripletten auf der Stelle ausführen, sind die Bewegungen von Sportlern... Fast Könnte man meinen, daß man es mit einem Rugby-Team zu tun hat, das sich eintrainiert. Femininität teilt sich mit, eine amerikanische Spielart des Femininen, kühl und zart... Dies ist neoklassizistisches amerikanisches Ballett [Balanchine und das moderne Ballett (Velber bei Hannover: Erhard Friedrich Verlag, 1964): 37].
But an element mentioned by practically all of those speaking to Balanchine's
American quality is rhythm—an American sense of time. Kirstein wrote:

[O]ur sense of Time...is often speedier than moderate. The best trained
Americans move faster, fill in more steps in a minute to more elaborate and
concentrated music than most other Western performers. Also, the
dominant American repertory uses music impelling dancers to a more
attentive eye and ear than previous gentler numbers. The American sense of
Time is not static; time does not pass; we pass through it, but we impose
on it an active analysis; we break it up for our fun and games, a sometimes
insolent imposition on a fourth or fifth dimension. 15

Kirstein’s comments about the American sense of time strongly recall the words of
American composers Aaron Copland and Roy Harris:

The European is taught to think of rhythm as applying to always a phrase of
music—as the articulation of that phrase. We, on the contrary, are not
averse to thinking of rhythm as disembodied, so to speak, as if it were a
frame to which certain tones might be added as an afterthought. 16 This is,
of course, not meant to be taken as literally true, but merely indicates a
tendency on our part to think of rhythms as separately pulsating quarter or
eighth or sixteenth notes—what Roy Harris means when he says we feel at
ease with rhythm’s “smallest units.” 17

That Kirstein might have been following Copland and Harris in this is not at all speculative,
for Kirstein had done even more for American ballet than bring Balanchine to America; he
commissioned the ballet *Billy the Kid* (1938), Copland’s first major work to explore an
American musical landscape.

In 1935, barely a year after Balanchine had arrived in America and three years before
*Billy the Kid*, New York Times critic John Martin voiced a question that was the subject of

York: Dance Horizons, [reprinted from 1959] 1983): 414. This sense of time was not
without its drawbacks. At the same time as *Agon*, Balanchine choreographed a Gounod
symphony diametrically opposed to the musical style of the Stravinsky piece, and Kirstein
describes the contrast: “The fast and sharp music gave the dancers no trouble, but the
tender, transparent and gentle modulations of the Gounod symphony were not mastered by
his own dancers whom he had over-instructed in a fast percussive beat. He did not have
time enough to teach them to dance slowly” [415].

16Compare this with Arthur Mitchell’s comment quoted in Chapter 1 that Balanchine set
rhythms before he set steps.

86-87.
much debate at the time: what is an American ballet? “The problem resolves itself into one fundamental decision: is the organization [the American Ballet] to attempt the fulfillment of its original policy of developing an American ballet, or is it to follow the direction of its present season and go on being merely ‘Les Ballets Americains’?” Almost twenty years later, Anatole Chujoy wrote:

The question of what is American ballet is still a lively topic of discussion. Is it, as Ted Shawn would have it, ballet staged by American choreographers to music by American composers in settings designed by American painters and danced by American dancers? And if so, who is and who is not an American in this conception? Or is that ballet American which reflects the spirit and life of America in the manner of creation, in the style of dancing, in the freedom from conventions, in the mixture of races and creeds, countries of origin, language of forefathers, and all the other characteristics that made this country great?

Today, the latter definition is the more widely accepted, and George Balanchine is a chief representative of this abstracted style of American ballet. The proof of the resolution of Chujoy’s dichotomy is the fact that such Balanchinian Americana as Western Symphony (to Western folk tunes orchestrated by Hershy Kay [1954]) and Stars and Stripes (to John Philip Sousa marches [1958, choreographed at the same time as Agon]) are considered merely entertaining, not artistically significant. These ballets are occupy a conflicted position in terms of Balanchine’s output. Partially, they are audience-pleasing extravaganzas; but, too, they are expressions of Balanchine’s genuine affection for his adopted country. This affection was not only expressed in his admiration of glamorous American girls like Ginger Rogers: he frequently wore western-style shirts and string ties; his first American wife was Maria Tallchief, a half-Osage Oklahoman. On a trip across country, Balanchine’s train passed a reservation in Oklahoma, and Balanchine proudly told

18The American Ballet was an early company formed of some dancers who had come with Balanchine from the Ballets Russes, some dancers trained in America, and some students from the school.


20The New York City Ballet, 49.
his traveling companion Nicholas Nabokov, “Look, those are my new relatives!” before regaling him for hours with Native American folklore (in Russian). Balanchine’s Americana is also undercut by an American insecurity about “high art”; *Stars and Stripes* and *Western Symphony* are both light-hearted, and therefore not taken as “serious” in either sense of the word. Additionally, the music for both ballets is not generally considered very highly, even though Sousa wrote brilliant marches.

Perhaps the work that most effectively fuses the two strands of “Americanness” is *Who Cares?* (1970), a non-narrative ballet on George Gershwin tunes, with costumes reminiscent of those in the Astaire-Rogers movies of the 1930s. It is difficult to say that the choreography of *Stars and Stripes* or *Western Symphony* is intrinsically of lesser quality than that of *Who Cares?*, but the music of Gershwin is widely considered among America’s best. *Square Dance*, a ballet which was premiered only six days before *Agon* (on 21 November 1957), was choreographed to the music of Arcangelo Corelli and Antonio Vivaldi. In its first incarnation, *Square Dance* was a piece of Americana, with an on-stage square-dance caller; after the caller was removed, *Square Dance* became a prime example of Balanchine’s abstract, neoclassic American style.

Few would deny that Balanchine was the most important and influential choreographer of this century. His only real rival is perhaps Martha Graham, but at the end of the century, even choreographers in a modern style are looking to Balanchine for structure and musical sense.

Balanchine himself said that Stravinsky’s music was key to the formation of his choreographic style. Stravinsky thus helped to define Balanchine, and Balanchine helped define the dance of this century. Choreographers as diverse as Gene Kelly, Twyla Tharp,   

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22 Balanchine’s apparent complete silence on Gene Kelly is intriguing in the context of an American ballet. While Fred Astaire and Ray Bolger (both of whom Balanchine admired
Bob Fosse, Paul Taylor, Jiří Kylian, and Mark Morris have been influenced by him, specifically by his musicality—both in the manner of his composition and in the relation of movement to music. Inside the perceptual framework generated by his study of Stravinsky’s music, Balanchine melded Russian classical ballet, circus acrobatics, and American hoofing to create a unique and uniquely American style: technically rigorous, dynamic, fast, and intricate, but clear and precise.

Upon his arrival in Moscow in 1962 with the New York City Ballet for a Soviet-tour, an interviewer for Radio Moscow greeted Balanchine with the words, “Welcome to Moscow, home of the classic ballet!” Balanchine replied, “I beg your pardon. Russia is the home of romantic ballet. The home of classic ballet is now America.”

As a ballet, Agon is a recognized masterpiece, performed all over the world; although it has been choreographed by others from time to time, it is the Balanchine creation which is recognized as “Agon.” The music and dance have become inextricably intertwined; just as the dance is dependent on the music for life, so is the music dependent in large part for its life on the dance.

Even before the ballet was premiered, Stravinsky was aware that the music was not going to be easily received. In a letter of 17 November 1957, the composer wrote to Ernst greatly) were essentially vernacular dancers, Kelly was essentially a ballet dancer who went even further than Balanchine in stripping ballet of its grandeur. Kelly also revolutionized a new form of dance at mid-century: film dance, as opposed to filmed dance. In the movies that Balanchine choreographed for then-wife Vera Zorina, such as The Goldwyn Follies (1937) and I Married an Adventuress (1942), he, like Astaire, set his dances in a relatively confined space, often circular or oval-shaped, like a courtyard or a pool. This “stage” was filmed from one side, usually at the center, but not moving more to the side than one could sit in front of a real stage; the possibilities of film were exploited in the form of trick photography—jump cuts, slow motion, and reverses, which almost certainly had an effect on the cinematic techniques in Agon. In opposition to these obviously artificial manipulations, Kelly took advantage of the mobility of the camera to create dance which moved easily through spaces that could never be contained in a real theatre—along streets and piers, around corners, into the rafters of buildings—with constant but natural-looking changes of “front.”

23Taper, 278.
Roth of Boosey & Hawkes of his reservations about a planned program: “The combination of *Agon* with *Perséphone* and *Petrushka* in La Scala is certainly not a very good one because the difficult young *Agon* cannot yet compete with the success of such well-known compositions as *Petrushka* and *Perséphone*.” 24 Fifteen years later, he acknowledged that the music’s life as a ballet had had a significant influence on its reception: “I know that [Balanchine] had joined the score to my other music faster than it could ever get there by way of the concert hall.” 25 Hugo Fiorato, long the principal conductor of the New York City Ballet orchestra, was a bit more frank:

Who would listen to *Movements* of Stravinsky by itself? Not many people. But when you hear *Movements* and you see *Movements* through Balanchine’s eyes and what he has added to the score, it becomes an exciting work. Or *Agon*. *Agon* is fabulous to hear when you watch his choreography. 26

Because of the same admiration for Stravinsky’s music that inspired his choreography, Balanchine felt a certain sense of mission to get it heard, through whatever means. The synaesthesia of sight and sound to which ballet aspired was such a means:


26 In Mason, 308.
...One must [be able to] listen to his music. Stravinsky composed so much. It is the most fantastic music of our epoch...and it is played so little. Evidently, it is difficult to listen to, very difficult. One must have the ears and the will. The desire for music, the love for music. But when the audience is a little lazy, the ears are not enough. They sleep. They sleep even to Beethoven (they pretend that they're thinking, in closing their eyes... no, they sleep! Stravinsky said it). I had had the idea, for the people who don't sleep, that I must show them the music. It is necessary to see the music!27

Labanotation is a method of recording movement similar to musical notation. Although it takes a great deal of study to understand Labanotation fully, rhythms and general patterns of movement can be discerned with a knowledge of a few basic elements.

Like musical notation, Labanotation is written on a staff. Measures are marked out by barlines, subdivisions by smaller tickmarks. Unlike musical notation, however, the staff runs vertically on a page, from bottom to top. The dancer is imagined to be standing at the center of the bottom of the staff facing forward: the center line represents the center of the body and the columns that radiate out from the center line represent various parts of the body. Symbols placed in the columns indicate duration, direction, and level of the body part. A number of other symbols modify these primary symbols in order to refine the quality of movement.

Symbols immediately on either side of the center line indicate the direction and level of support, which refers to the feet unless otherwise indicated. Figure A.1 illustrates the staff and indicates which columns represent which parts of the body. The empty columns are used as auxiliaries if the movement is too complex to be notated in one column; if less than the whole body part is moving, the symbol is preceded by an auxiliary symbol, called a "pre-sign" which indicates what is moving—the lower leg or the pelvis, for example.
The same basic symbol is used to indicate level, direction and duration of the movement, whether it is a step or a gesture. The levels for a step or a support depend on the flex in the leg: low is with the knees bent (a black symbol), middle is a natural stance (a white symbol with a black dot in the middle), and high is on the toes (a striped symbol). In a gesture, level refers to the relative height of the free end to the fixed end of a body part—for example, for the arm, above the shoulder is "high," at the shoulder is "middle," and below the shoulder is "low." The point on the symbol is the direction of movement; duration is indicated by the length of the symbol. A brief example will clarify [see Figure A.2].

The first notated measure begins with a step forward onto the left foot with the knee bent; a step right to the right foot onto the toe; and a step back onto the left foot with the foot flat on the floor and the knee straight. These symbols are all the same length, which means that the duration of each movement is the same (each a quarter note, as indicated by the key). The little circle above the third symbol means that the weight is held on the left foot. The symbol in the right outer column indicates that the right leg is gesturing forward low (just above the floor).
In the next measure, the rhythms are less even. In eighth-note rhythm, the right foot then the left take right-diagonal steps on the toes; the steps are diagonal, but the body remains facing forward, since no turn has been indicated. The pin beside the second symbol

Figure A.2: Labanotation sample
indicates that the left foot closes behind the right foot. The symbol in the left leg gesture column on the second half of the second beat is called a "butterfly" and means that the gesturing leg is bent: the knee points to the side middle (the thigh and hip are at a 90° angle), and the foot points back toward the supporting leg at a low angle from the knee, the toes near the knee (retire). The symbols in the arm columns in measure two mean that the arms are held out to the sides; the little x's indicate that they are slightly bent. The symbols to the left of the staff in measure two show that the torso tilts a little to the right on beat three, then straightens up on beat four. The small diamond-shaped symbols in the arm columns in beat three are space-holds, indicating that the arms retain their position in space, not moving, as the torso tilts; if the space-holds were round body-holds, the arms would retain their position in relation to the body (out to the sides) as the torso tilts. (This, of course, would be awkward to perform, disrupting the body's balance). Also on beat four, the head tilts forward, as indicated by the symbol in the far right column, preceded by the presign for the head, "c."

In addition to the notated staff, a score will contain floor plans which indicate the path traveled on the floor by the dancer. The three-sided box represents the stage, with the audience sitting in front of the open end. Dancers are represented by pins; the dancer stands at the head of the pin and faces in the direction of the point. White pins are used for female dancers, black pins for male dancers; if more than one dancer is involved, they are assigned letters.
Appendix B

A Glossary of Dance Terms

À la seconde: a modifier applied to poses, leaps and turns in which the working leg is out to the side, forming a 90° angle with the supporting leg. If the foot is stretched in second position on the floor but without taking weight, it is à la seconde par terre.

Accompaniment: adapted by the present author from musical terminology, movements by dancers (most probably the corps de ballet) which form a background for a foreground “melody” dancer (or dancers).

Adagio: the first section of a classical grand pas de deux. As the name implies, it is usually in a slow tempo. The ballerina is the focus of the adagio and is frequently supported by her partner in order to extend her technique. The partner’s support allows her to turn faster, leap higher and longer, and to sustain pointes.

Arabesque: a position in which the dancer stands on one foot, extending the other leg straight behind, parallel with the floor. Although there are any number of possible arm positions, one arm (the upstage arm, away from the audience) is normally extended forward at a slight upward angle; the two most common positions for the downstage arm are straight ahead, or behind so that it forms a straight line with the forward arm.

Arabesque penché: an arabesque in which the dancer’s torso is bent forward and the working leg extended above the head.

Assemblé: a leap that lands with both feet together. In classical technique, the working foot disengages from the floor with a brush in the direction of the leap, and the feet come together in fifth position slightly before landing.

Attitude: a position similar to the classical arabesque, except that the working leg is bent 90° at the knee, and the upper and lower leg are both (roughly) parallel with the ground. Most often, the arm on the same side as the bent leg is curved overhead and the other arm extended out the side; not only does this echo the position of the legs in another plane, it is useful in holding balance.

Attitude devant: an attitude with the bent leg in front.

B+ position: A position much used by Balanchine (whose initial prompted the designation “B”). This position, which serves equally well as a resting position and a springboard for action, has the dancer standing on one foot, the working toe touching the ground behind the supporting foot. The arms are normally held low and to the sides—level with the hips, but at some distance from them, curved or straight depending on the character of the choreography.

Ballabile: a general dance, or large group dance, that opens and/or concludes an act of a classical ballet.
Ballerina: the leading female dancer in a ballet.

Ballon: a quality of bounciness or springiness.

Battement: a beating action of the leg.

Bravura: a quality associated with male dancers; physical brilliance, with great amplitude, spring and strength in performance.

Butterfly leap: a leap most commonly associated with acrobatic dancing, somewhat similar to a cartwheel without the support of the hands. The dancer leaps sideways, throwing the legs upward, one after the other, as the torso dips forward; the body rights itself as first one, then the other leg touches down. This leap is also performed in pairs: the dancers link hands and perform the leap alternately. The non-leaping partner pulls against the leaper in order to impart greater height and distance to the leap.

Cabriole: a leap in which the dancer beats the straight legs together in the air before landing. May be performed to the front, sides or back, but most commonly to a forward angle.

Canon: a type of polyphony in which dancers or groups of dancers perform the same steps, offset by a fixed time interval.

Cavaliere: the classical male dancer as a partner to the ballerina. Most commonly portraying an aristocrat, the cavaliere has a noble bearing.

Cecchetti method: a school of ballet training developed by Enrico Cecchetti, who held many posts, including that of balletmaster with the Imperial ballet in St. Petersburg and Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes. His method combines techniques of the Italian, French and Russian schools of ballet.

Chainé: a “chain” of turns, with the legs together. A half-turn is performed on one foot, then the weight is transferred to the other foot for the second half-turn, making one full turn. Often, chainés are performed in a sequence.

Classical ballet: a traditional academic technique (danse d’ecole); or a ballet which adheres to traditions established in the nineteenth century. These traditions include not only the steps and techniques of the danse d’ecole, but also formal organization of a narrative plot into acts which combine pantomime with structured dance segments (pas). Representative ballets are Swan Lake, The Nutcracker, Sleeping Beauty, La Bayadère.

Coda: the concluding section of a pas in which all the dancers perform. In a classical grand pas de deux, the Coda is typically in an allegro tempo; there is less emphasis on partnering in the Coda than in the Adagio.

Contraction: a modern dance movement in which the dancer contracts a body part. Most noticeable is a contraction of the torso, in which the shoulders and hips are drawn together, bending the torso into a C-shape.
Corps de ballet: (1) a rank in a classical ballet company; (2) a group of dancers which performs chorally. Often, the corps de ballet creates background patterns for the foregrounded soloist(s). The corps de ballet in a Balanchine ballet is usually quite small, and the technical demands on the dancers are almost as great as on a soloist (compounded by the difficulty of ensemble).

Coupé: a step in which weight is transferred from one foot to the other in the same place—the working foot “cuts” under the supporting foot to take support.

Crossed piqué: a designation of the present author for a common position motive in Agon. It is based on a piqué à terre, but with the working leg bent across the supporting leg, closing the hip, with the pointe resting near the arch of the supporting foot.

Dégagé: the working foot, fully pointed with an arched instep, moves into an open position. Similar to a tendu.

Demi-caractère: a style of dance which is composed of classical steps but with surface details which suggest a national or folk character, or imitate the motions of an activity.

Demi-plié: bending the knees without the heels leaving the floor.

Demi-pointe: on half-toe, or the ball of the foot.

Derrière: behind.

Devant: in front.

Développé: a gesture in which the leg unfurls (develops), with the knee reaching the final position before the foot. Développés may be performed at any level to any direction.

Divertissement: a series of non-narrative dances (often comprising character dances) in classical ballet; almost always part of a larger, multi-act narrative ballet. Typical and well-known examples are “Aurora’s Wedding” from the last act of Sleeping Beauty, and the dances of the various candies (the national dances) in the second act of Nutcracker.

Échappé: an “escape” step, springing from a closed position in plié to an open one on half-toe or pointe. Most échappés are performed from fifth to second.

En dedans: inward.

En dehors: outward.

En l’air: literally, in the air. May be used to modify many movements; for instance, a tour en l’air is a turn in the air.

Enchaînement: a sequence of steps, proximate to a phrase in music.

Entrechat quatre: a leap in place from fifth position. The dancer jumps up and beats the straight legs, changing the front foot twice and landing in the same position that s/he started in.
Entrechat cinq: like an entrechat quatre, but landing on one foot.

Entrechat six: like an entrechat quatre, but with an extra beat. The dancer lands in fifth position with the opposite foot front.

Expansion: the opposite of a contraction. Depending on the emphasis in the movement, an expansion of the torso could also be seen as a contraction over the back.

Fifth position: the most frequently used of the five primary classical positions. The dancers stands with the feet fitted together so that the toes of one foot presses against the heel of the other.

First position: the legs are rotated outward, heels together, feet at 180°.

Floor pattern: the pattern traced on the floor of the stage by dance steps.

Fouetté: “whipped”; a sharp whipping movement of the working foot around the supporting foot; or the whipping of the body from one facing to another.

Fourth position: an open position in which one foot is in front of the other; there are three different types of fourth position, depending on the relative horizontal position of the feet. One may imagine the feet opening from first position (ouverte), third or fifth position (croisé).

Glissade: a low sideways leap in which the leading foot brushes out and lands, with the trailing foot closing a fraction after the first. The movement begins and ends in demi-plié; in the air, both legs are straight and the feet are pointed.

Grand battement: the leg moves straight from the hip to the front, side, or back. In a grand battement to the front or side, the foot generally reaches above the head; anatomy constrains the height of a battement derrière.

Grand pas de deux: a classical ballet duet composed of an adagio, variations, and a coda. The male and female dancers will each have at least one variation, and they often alternate variations, each variation growing progressively shorter and increasing in brilliance and tempo.

Hitch step: a non-classical preparatory step. The working foot briefly takes the weight on the ball of the foot beside the supporting foot. The transfer of weight is very quick, and the working leg generally goes on to perform some large gesture, such as a high kick.

Homophony: adapted by the present author from musical terminology, choreographic homophony is when a group of dancers perform the same steps in the same rhythm, but to opposite sides or facing different directions.

Hoofing: a slang term for American dancing which includes tap dancing, but extends to all sorts of show dancing.

Jeté: a leap from one foot to the other. The working leg brushes the floor before take-off.

Making a leg: a masculine bow of the Baroque period. The torso leans forward as one leg pliés and the other stretches out in front, toe pointed against the floor (a tendu).
Melody: adapted by the present author from musical terminology, the steps of one dancer (perhaps more moving in unison or homophony) which carry more interest than the movements of other dancers (probably the corps de ballet performing an accompaniment).

Mickey-mousing: a term used by dancers, choreographers, and film editors which refers to the slavish imitation of line and rhythm in music by movement.

Par terre: on the ground.

Parallel: with the legs unrotated, facing forward. In classical ballet, the legs are understood to be rotated out 180° from the hip unless otherwise indicated.

Pas: (1) literally, a step; (2) a classical set piece for a certain number of dancers, generally composed of an entrée for all the dancers, variations for individual dancers and/or dances for smaller groupings, and a coda in which all the dancers participate.

Pas de bourrée: in high level (usually pointes for female dancers), a step close behind a supporting foot, a step to the side, and a closing step in front.

Pas de chat: a sideways leap akin to a high glissade. The leading leg draws up through retiré and swings out to the side to launch the body in the air. In the air, the second leg is drawn up in retiré position, closing in fifth position slightly after landing.

Pas de deux: a dance for two dancers, assumed to be a male and female.

Pas de quatre: a dance for four dancers, any gender or combination.

Pas de trois: a dance for three dancers, any gender or combination.

Passé: the working foot is drawn up beneath the body before continuing its motion in the direction of the next step. There are basically two passé positions: low, corresponding to retiré sur le cou-de-pied; and high, corresponding to retiré, with the toe at knee level.

Peg walk: a designation from the choreographic notes of Agon indicating a cross-legged walk, with the crossing foot on pointe, the other flat.

Petit battements: any small beating movement of the leg. Typically, the dancer circles the supporting ankle with the working heel in swift movements.

Piqué à terre: same as pointe tendu. The foot is stretched with only the pointe touching the ground, taking no weight. In Agon, most of the piqué à terre positions are on the front diagonal, with the knee bent.

Piqué: a modifier indicating that the motion is done on pointe.

Piqué arabesque: the dancer steps into an arabesque on pointe.

Piqué turn: the dancer steps on pointe into a turn. Similar in visual effect to a pirouette, but usually travels.
Pirouette: a complete turn in place on one foot. The turn may be performed *en dedans* (inward toward the supporting leg) or *en dehors* (outward away from the supporting leg, which is more difficult). Most commonly, the working leg is in retiré.

Pirouette *en attitude*: a pirouette with the working leg in an attitude.

Plié: a bending of the knees with a controlled descent of the center of gravity.

Pointe: the blocked tip of a pointe shoe, the shoe worn by female ballet dancers. The dancer may perform almost any step on pointe, extending the line of her leg and increasing the precision of placement.

Polyphony: a term taken by the present author from musical terminology. A choreographic texture in which dancers or groups of dancers perform different steps which have equal importance.

Port de bras: carriage of the arms.

Porteur: a male dancer whose sole function is to support the ballerina.

Promenade (*tour en*): a flat-footed turn in arabesque, attitude or à la seconde, performed either with small lifts of the heel or little hops in place.

Relevé: a step that starts in plié and rises until the leg is straight and the support is on the pointe.

Retiré: a position of the working leg, in which the toe is placed to the side of or just behind the knee of the supporting leg. Retiré sur le cou-de-pied is a similar position, with the working toe just above the ankle. For purposes of clarity and concision, this position is termed a “low” retiré in this analysis.

Romantic ballet: ballet of the second quarter of the nineteenth century, usually setting a dark, dream-like mood and dealing with the supernatural. *Giselle* and *La Sylphide* are typical examples of a Romantic ballet.

Rond de jambe: a circling motion of the leg. The rond de jambe may be *en l'air* or *par terre*. In a rond de jambe *en l'air*, the leg is held straight from the hip and circles through 180° of movement in the air. The circle may be low (just above the floor), middle (at hip level), or high (anywhere from just above hip level to above the shoulder, depending on the demands of the choreographer and the flexibility of the dancer). If the circle is made low, with the foot brushing the floor, it is a rond de jambe *par terre*.

Second position: an open position, with the feet side by side, about a foot’s length apart.

Sissonne: a leap from both feet to one.

Stationary: in the present analysis, dancing that remains “on station,” in one small area of the floor.

Still: in the present analysis, complete lack of choreographic motion.
Supported: a movement in which one dancer (usually male) supports the weight of another (usually female) in order to allow the second dancer greater range and amplitude of movement.

Supporting leg: the leg which supports the dancer's weight.

Swing-arabesque: a term used by the present author to indicate an arabesque in which the working leg swings forward as the dancer pivots on the supporting foot. The working leg remains in place, which results in an arabesque after the pivot. Similar to a classical arabesque en tournant, but with greater emphasis on the swinging of the working leg.

Tendu: short for battement tendu, in which the working foot is pointed, with the toe touching the floor. Same as a piqué à terre.

Terre à terre: a series of steps performed on the ground or just off it.

Third position: a position halfway between first and fifth, with the heel of the front foot pressed against the arch of the back foot, the toes of the back foot against the side of the front foot.

Tour: a turn.

Tournant: turning.

Unison: steps performed at the same time to the same direction.

Variation: a solo dance in classical ballet. In most pas, each dancer will have a variation.

Working leg: the leg which gestures.
The three main sources for the choreography are the videotaped performance \([V]\) from the 1982 Stravinsky Festival of the New York City Ballet, originally broadcast as part of the Public Television series *Dance in America*; the 1987 Labanotation score \([S]\) notated by Virginia Doris with Sara ("Sally") Leland as balletmistress; and a collection of sketches of individual movements \([O]\) notated by various people in the late 1950s, during and just after the original notation. As the last version of the ballet supervised by Balanchine, the videotaped performance is taken as the primary source. Variants are noted below.

**Pas-de-Quatre**

m. 5 \([S, V]\) the boys look down at their feet as they turn their feet out into first position, looking back up in m. 7 when they snap their toes back together

\([O]\) the boys do not look down at their feet until m. 7

m. 10 \([S, V]\) pushing arabesque extends in all directions

\([O]\) slightly more sideways emphasis; may be notational difference

**Double Pas-de-Quatre**

mm. 66-69 \([S, O]\) ronds de jambe same level (\([S]\) high, \([O]\) middle); \([V]\) ronds de jambe different—the one performed near the wings is high, while the one near the center of the stage is middle

**Triple Pas-de-Quatre**

mm. 96-97 \([S]\) the choreography for the two girls' boxes is different at the beginning, though by the middle of the second measure, the two groups are performing the same steps to the opposite side; \([V]\) the two girls' boxes have the same steps, but at a one-beat canon; \([O]\) is mostly illegible, but appears to be close to \([S]\)
First Pas-de-Trois
Interlude

mm. 122-135 in [S,V] and [O] are different; both versions are described in the text of
Chapter Three

Saraband-Step

opening stance [S,V] natural, parallel stance, arms at sides; [O] weight on right foot, ball of
the left foot resting on the floor slightly behind the supporting foot (not quite a
B+), hands on hips

m. 149 downbeat [V,O] heel drop; [S] "arabesque pop," a fast half-turn in arabesque

Gailliarde

In general, the diagonal facings and multiple small (eighth and quarter) turns which change
the dancers' facings from center front to outside corner and back almost every
measure are not found in [O]; Ann Hutchinson Guest informs me that these were
left out as an expedient to notation during the choreography (personal
communication, 13 November 1993)

m. 184 (end of Gailliarde) [O] has much more complex arm motions, as well as steps and
turns that are omitted in [S,V], apparently at Stravinsky's suggestion. In [O], the
movement ends with a step back and tendu forward, similar to "making a leg." The
head gesture is almost illegible, but appears to be a bow.

Coda

In [O] the timing of the adagio is slightly different from [S,V], averaging about a measure
ahead of the timing of the newer version, and the ending is different. With the
"extra measure" gained by having everything a measure ahead, the boys rise from
their knees into a B+, the girl in fifth position on pointe, their arms held up high

Second Pas-de-Trois
Interlude

m. 254 [S,V] working leg moves naturally from back middle to front middle to back middle
(the leg is basically straight, but may flex slightly); [O] the working leg passes
through low retiré

m. 257 [S,V] swift steps to the right, working leg in low passé; [O] hops from foot to foot
in place, working leg in low retiré
mm. 258-263 [S,V] dancers move from triangular position to a diagonal line upstage through the canon; [O] the dancers retain triangular position and move upstage, then downstage at the end of the canon

Bransle Simple

opening [O] the steps have less amplitude than [S,V], possibly notational variation
m. 281 (canon) [S,V] a 7/8 turn starts low and finishes high; [O] simple pirouette
m. 282 (canon) [S,V] turning pas de chat; [O] simple tour en l’air
m. 283 (canon) [S,V] hops from foot to foot with working leg in low retiré; [O] turning pas de chat
m. 286 (canon) [S,V] 1 1/8 pirouette in low retiré ending on right diagonal; [O] dancers face forward
mm. 288-289 (canon) [S,V] front cabriole, half-turn, back cabriole; [O] hop, half-turn, hop
mm. 290-291 [S,V] contraction, expansion; [O] no expansion
mm. 293-294 [S,V] dancers circle backward around each other; [O] dancer back toward one another on an angular path
m. 297 [S,V] entrechat six; [O] double tour en l’air

Bransle Gay

In general, [O] lacks far fewer actual diagonal facing turns than [S]; see note under Gailliarde

[O] the boys leave the stage at the end of the Bransle Simple; [S,V] the boys remain onstage, softly clapping the rhythm of the castanet ostinato
m. 320 [S,V] rhythm of arm movements is short-short, long, long (\(\overline{\overline{\overline{\text{---}}}}\)) ; [O] rhythm of arm movements is long, short-short, long (\(\overline{\overline{\text{---}}\text{---}}\))
m. 321 (repeated) [S,V] two quarter-turns; [O] single full turn

mm. 321-331 [O] has more exact repeats than [S,V]; addition to [O] dated 3 March 1960 is very close to [S,V], with slight rhythmic differences; additional notation has remark “changed for Violette [Verdy]”
m. 335 [S,V] repeat of arm movements from m. 320; [O] finger snaps in same rhythm as arm movements in [S,V]
Bransle Double

In general, [O] lacks 1/8 turns notated in [S,V]; see note under Gailliarde

In [S,V] dancers start stage left rear corner; [O] dance is performed center stage

mm. 347-348 [S,V] boys lift girl in splits, carrying her to center stage; [O] boys lift girl in splits, no carry (dancers are already center stage)

mm. 384-385 [S,V] girl has a supported double pirouette; [O] girl has a supported triple pirouette

Pas-de-Deux

no [O] for this section

m. 410 [V] is a more symmetrical construction than [S] (see Chapter Three)

Four Trios

[O] sketchy; considerable difference in floor patterns (see Chapter Three, Figure 31)

mm. 553-560 [V] girls have heel strikes to the floor as well as tendus piqué

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