

**Sarah Gutsche-Miller. *Parisian Music-Hall Ballet, 1871–1913*.  
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Sarah Gutsche-Miller. *Parisian Music-Hall Ballet, 1871–1913*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2015. 373 pages. ISBN 978-1-58046-442-0.

The received chronology of music history contains many gaps and omissions—histories of marginalized peoples, genres, styles and cultures that have for a variety of reasons been excluded from the musicological canon. Sarah Gutsche-Miller’s monograph, *Parisian Music-Hall Ballet, 1871–1913*, seeks to fill one of these gaps: the history of ballet and ballet music in Paris during the last decades of the 1800s. As Gutsche-Miller explains in her Introduction: “This project came about because I did not believe that Sergei Diaghilev could have found such a large and receptive audience for ballet in 1909 if Parisians had not had an established creative ballet culture of their own” (p. ix). What she uncovered was that rather than having gone through a dark period or a decline at the end of the nineteenth century, as standard histories of concert dance claim, ballet simply changed venues, flourishing as a popular genre in the context of Paris’s fashionable if somewhat salacious music-halls. At the Folies-Bergère, Olympia, and Casino de Paris, the short, entertaining divertissement ballet sequences from the 1870s evolved by the 1890s into full-scale pantomime ballets as spectacular as those at the sophisticated Paris Opéra. In an impressively detailed study that mines a limited archive for musical scores, libretti and playbills, with additional contextual and choreographic information gleaned from contemporary novels, plays, images, and newspaper reviews, Gutsche-Miller explores what she describes as “a unique repertoire that combined the conventional structures of high art with the popular idioms of mass entertainment” (p. 205).

Gutsche-Miller is to be commended for undertaking a study that links dance history with music history, as these two closely related performing arts are often approached as discrete disciplines with their own journals, conferences, and academic departments. *Parisian Music-Hall Ballet 1871–1913* is, however, largely a work of positivist musicology rather than cultural history or dance studies. Gutsche-Miller fills the historical gap she has identified through extensive and detailed archival work and score analysis, only occasionally stepping back to reflect on or engage with contemporary socio-political issues. The extensiveness and density of the data are thus simultaneously the book’s great strength and its weakness. While I by and large found the content fascinating and informative, I was struck by a number of missed opportunities to show how this type of in-depth study can reach beyond its specialized subject matter and add its voice to the broader field of cultural history. The book’s historical compass, subsequently dubbed *La Belle Époque*, was not only a period of revolutionary change in all the arts, but also a time of immense economic and social disparity during which conventional morals were challenged, gender roles

were disrupted, and European colonialism reached a height. This is the Paris of Toulouse-Lautrec, Claude Debussy, Gertrude Stein, and the 1889 Exposition Universelle. Gutsche-Miller's very convincing argument regarding the centrality and substance of music-hall culture during these decades cries out for connections that go beyond the archive to explore this larger context.

This is not to claim that positivism has no place in current musicology or that the author is not the skilled researcher she clearly is. I would, however, have been interested to hear her subject voice in the introduction, explaining her own background in ballet and how her musicological training intersects with her interest in dance. More importantly, it would have been useful for her to clarify her methodological choices and explain why she decided not to write a work more in dialogue with current criticism. Gutsche-Miller is clearly aware of secondary literature on gender, queer theory, orientalism in music, and intersections of high and low culture, but includes this material only in the endnotes rather than engaging with it as part of her analysis. Interestingly, she does from time to time start to grapple with the socio-cultural connections her material gives rise to, only to retreat from the insights she seems on the verge of communicating. One of the book's most recurrent topics, for example, is the atmosphere of sexual licence permeating the music-halls' environment in both their on-stage presentations and the social spaces provided by their lobbies and *promenoirs*. Gutsche-Miller does at one point confess that: "To some extent, ballets that presented libertine women reflected the real societal changes that took place in the last years of the nineteenth century" (p. 164), but she then abandons the topic, emphasizing that the ballets were concerned above all with titillation and spectacle.

If one sets these concerns aside, *Parisian Music-Hall Ballet 1871–1913* is without a doubt a well-written and impeccably researched work of scholarship. The Introduction begins with a summary of the book's findings, then outlines the contents and organization. The author's conclusion is set out unambiguously from the beginning: far from being a time of "decline and decadence" (p. 2) the period between the 1870s and early 1900s saw a flourishing ballet culture in Paris. The book then presents its evidence in a type of spiral structure that revisits prior points and examples many times. Although this does result in some redundancy, this organizational choice also functions to build layer upon layer of evidence strengthening Gutsche-Miller's argument. Three sections, each containing three chapters, lead the reader through extensive examples of ballets, composers, directors, choreographers, and theatre journals creating a comprehensive account of this fascinating genre.

The first section, which comprises "The Venues and the Shows," "Music-Halls for *Tout Paris*" and "Creative Artists: Authors, Composers, Choreographers" is intended to explore "the context in which music-hall ballet was created and performed" (p. 5). The three principal music-halls, the Folies-Bergère, Olympia, and Casino de Paris, are introduced in Chapter 1, then expanded on in the subsequent chapters through short histories presenting information about their décor, music directors, audiences, and artists. Rather than compare these venues and their ballets to more bohemian Parisian settings or

English music-hall productions, Gutsche-Miller chooses the “academic” ballet produced at the Paris Opéra as the most appropriate equivalent. She then illustrates this key relationship with evidence showing that the contemporary writers, composers and choreographers in Paris produced works for both classical and popular venues. The second section focuses on the formal aspects of the performances themselves. Divided into chapters on “The Ballet-Diversissement,” “Real Pantomime Ballets: The Choreographic Conventions of 1890s Music-Hall Ballet,” and “Music and Storyteller: The Musical Conventions of 1890s Music-Hall Ballet,” this central part of the book shows Gutsche-Miller’s skill as a musicologist and archival historian to excellent advantage. Her analysis, illustrated with numerous examples from long-forgotten performances, libretti, and music scores, inarguably proves her point that the Parisian music-halls supported a thriving ballet culture. The ballets produced in the music-halls, moreover, “were fundamentally the same as ballets created for the national opera house” (p. 131), and Gutsche-Miller proves this through careful harmonic, melodic, and formal analysis of extant scores.

The formal comparison of ballet in the academic setting of the Paris Opéra and the vernacular context of the music-halls leads smoothly into the final section which seeks to “explore the musical, narrative, and visual attributes that characterize 1890s music-hall ballet as a ‘popular’ genre” (p. 5). I found these three final chapters the most intriguing of the volume, but also in some ways the most unsatisfying. Chapter 7, “As Pleasing to the Ear as to the Eye: A Popular Musical Style,” offers yet more score analysis but seems to undermine slightly the earlier assertions regarding the fundamental similarities of popular and serious ballet. Moreover, although the author does offer some comparisons to Berlioz and Wagner, she does not make the more relevant connection between the “hints of a whole tone scale” in the 1894 music-hall ballet *Merveilleuses et gigolettes* (p. 143) with Debussy’s *Prélude à l’après midi d’un faune* from the same year. Chapter 8, “The Stories of Music-Hall Ballet: Romance, Flirtations, and Other Pleasures,” hovers on the brink of substantial socio-cultural connections not only in its discussions of libertine heroines mentioned above, but also in its examination of plots including “irony or critical perspective” (p. 169). Yet, after a number of apt and illustrative examples, the discussion closes once again with the assertion that “music-hall ballet was intended as escapist entertainment, and its stories promoted sensuous hedonism above all else” (p. 175). Finally, “A Delight to Behold: Glitter, Glamour, and Girls” returns a final time to the sex appeal of the female performers and their tight-fitting and revealing costumes. Sub-sections in this last chapter include “Travesty,” which describes the very popular convention of female dancers playing male roles in masculine garb and “The *Danseur*,” an investigation of the simultaneous decline of the male dancer. This fascinating material begs for analysis in dialogue with literature on gender and queer theory, but Gutsche-Miller seems somewhat reluctant to discuss connections to late nineteenth-century lesbian culture in Paris. She confesses that “at least one poster suggests that homoeroticism did contribute to music-hall ballet’s appeal,” describing the close embrace of two female dancers (p. 186), but then leaves the topic to a sole endnote directing the

reader interested in “sapphism” to Peter Stoneley’s *A Queer History of the Ballet* (p. 328, note 40).

Perhaps even more key, however, than connections to queer and gender scholarship is the missed opportunity to end the book with an in-depth examination of the intersections of “light” and “serious” art in music-hall ballet and fin-de-siècle music and concert dance in Paris. The performance culture that Gutsche-Miller has uncovered and presented so meticulously is arguably a pivotal link between romantic ballet, emergent musical theatre, “exotic” dance, and the modern and popular genres that would subsequently dominate the twentieth century. Nevertheless, although I yearned for discussion that would move convincingly beyond the archive, Gutsche-Miller’s comprehensive summary and positivist analysis of this material needs to be praised due to its very depth. Given the limited number of extant scores and the paucity of information about choreography and choreographers, the level of detail is impressive. She has indeed filled in the lacuna she set out to address, and perhaps further connections are the responsibility of other scholars. I shall certainly be referring to *Parisian Music-Hall Ballet 1871–1913* in my future work.

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#### REFERENCE

Stoneley, Peter. 2006. *A Queer History of the Ballet*. London: Routledge.

#### BIOGRAPHIE

Dr. Margaret E. Walker is a graduate of the University of Toronto (Musicology/Ethnomusicology) and the Royal Conservatory of Music Professional School (Piano Performance and Pedagogy) and she joined the School of Music at Queen’s in 2006. Her teaching and research cross disciplinary boundaries, and include ethnomusicology, historical musicology, historiography, music teaching and learning, and dance studies.