Tell Me More—Mars and Venus

by Graham Christian

One of the more intriguing entries in the fourth volume of the Fallibroome series is a dance from 1726 called "Mars and Venus" to a striking tune in E minor with a suspiciously "professional" rather than folk or ballad sound. It is not hard to find English dances that evoke the Classical world—"Daphne" and "Zephyrs and Flora" spring to mind—but it is tempting to think that this dance pays tribute to the diligence and pioneering spirit of dancer, dancing master, and historian John Weaver (1673-1760).

As a dancer, Weaver seems to have excelled in comic and traditional dances, including a solo version of Roger de Coverley, which was a part of his professional repertoire at the turn of the eighteenth century. As a scholar of dance, however, he nursed much greater ambitions: in 1706 alone, he published a translation of Raoul Feuillet's *Choregraphie*, as well as transcriptions of Mr. Isaac's dances for the royal court, and his own short treatise on time in dance.

He went on to write a well-informed anatomy and physiology guide for dancers, as well as a history of dance—in which he commends country dance as a "pleasant and innocent Diversion"—but his aim was no less than to revive the noble mimed dance of the ancients, and to this end, he staged The Loves of Mars and Venus at Lincoln's Inn Fields on March 2, 1717, which attempted to tell the old story of adultery and reconciliation among the Olympian gods through dance and gesture alone, without the assistance of verse or song. As such, it is one of the most important ancestors of later story-ballets such as Swan Lake or Petrouchka. Weaver's own description of the mime survives, with its fascinating ways to show Admiration, Anger, Triumphing, and more; we even know that a Mr. Symonds provided the "Symphonies" that accompanied the dancers—but no music survives. It is tempting to think that in "Mars and Venus" we hear a little of Mr. Symonds' lost score, and see a country dance tribute to the "grand dance" of gods that closed the mime.

"Mars and Venus" helps us to recall the passionate advocacy of one of dance's most eloquent defenders: "Why," Weaver said in *The Spectator* in 1712, "should dancing, an art celebrated by the ancients in so extraordinary a manner, be totally neglected by the moderns...?...It is for the advancement of the

pleasure we receive in being agreeable to each other in ordinary life, that one would wish dancing were generally understood as conducive to as it really is to a proper deportment in matters that appear the most remote from it."

Some years ago, Kalia Kliban asked me for a version of "Mars and Venus," and some dancers may want to consider this as an alternative to Bentley's fairly free adaptation of the 1726 dance.

Mars and Venus

Longways duple minor

- A1 Ones cross and go below (twos moving up) and half-figure *down* through the next twos; ones two-hand turn halfway.
- A2 Twos the same. All home improper.

В1

- Ones cross down into second place and turn single down and away (man right, woman left) as the twos cast up and change places right shoulder.
- 5-8 Four changes of rights and lefts (but you may wish to substitute a circle four once around, since you'll get rights and lefts at the end of the B in a second).
- 9-12 Ones lead down through the next twos and cast back to progressed places.
- Ones and the next two dance four changes of rights and lefts with hands.

The tune notation for "Mars and Venus" will be on our website when this article is added to the Newsletter Archives (see below). In the meanwhile, you can see it in Peter Barnes' book, English Country Dance Tunes (Volume 1, page 73).

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