Music, Dance, and Meaning in the Early Nineteenth Century

Lawrence M. Zbikowski
University of Chicago, Department of Music

[This is a draft of an invited article currently in press for The Journal of Musicological Research]

Among the hundreds—if not thousands—of waltzes written during the early nineteenth century, one of the most remarkable is the one inserted into the first act of Carl Maria von Weber’s Der Freischütz, the score for which is given in Example 1. The waltz begins as does many of the period, with strong, on-beat strokes from the violins setting the basic temporal framework for the dance. This briefest of introductions is followed by the waltz proper, the melody of which is set out in repeating four-measure units, the harmonies for which involve only tonic and dominant. For the second section of the waltz, beginning in the second half of measure 12, Weber simply transposed the melody of the first section up a fifth, moving it and its harmonies into the key of the dominant. And then, in the second half of measure 20, the first section returns, and it is with this music that the waltz eventually concludes.

As a piece of music, Weber’s waltz is remarkable not only for its evocation of a particular notion of das deutsche Volk,¹ but also for the way it captures the essential features of what became arguably the most prominent social dance of the nineteenth century. Its success in this regard led A. B. Marx to use the Freischütz waltz as the signature example of his section on composing dance music in the first edition of his Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition. Preparatory to his discussion of the example Marx describes the basic steps of the dance: “The waltz has two movements: first each pair of dancers turns itself in a circle around its own center; second the pair progresses with these continuous turns in a greater circumference until it reaches its starting place and the circle is closed. Each little circle is performed in two-times-three steps and is, as it were, the motive of the dance.”² With this


². “Der Walzer hat zweierlei Bewegungen: erstens dreht sich jedes Paar der Tanzenden im Kreise um seinen eignen Mittelpunkt; zweitens bewegt es sich mit solchen fortgesetzten Wendungen in einer grössern Kreislinie
Example 1: Carl Maria von Weber, measures 1–24 of the Walzer from Act 1, Scene 3 of Der Freischütz, arranged for piano

image of swirling movement and musical accompaniment in place Marx then introduces his example: “This well-known waltz from Weber’s Freischütz . . . shows us a genuine waltz motive. [In such pieces we see] auxiliary tones placed before the chord tones in the melody in order to set the first step in relief; every other melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic sharpening—the assistance of a forzato, an accented first note in the bass, and so forth—serves the same purpose. To this fundamental content is joined as simple an accompaniment as possible, which marks the beat.”

For Marx, Weber’s composition embodied everything that was essential to the waltz. It did so, however, at a price: beholden as it was to the demands of a dramatic work, Weber’s waltz lacked the delicately balanced symmetry proper to the dance. Marx comments:

Indeed, because this sort of thing can’t be felt in the haste of the waltz from Der Freischütz, the piece appears more common, as was the composer’s intent. For he wanted to portray an uncultivated group giving itself to pure pleasure in waltzing, recklessly; thus he had nothing sound out except the pure waltz figure. More various and more noble feelings of social, tender, or aroused desire can appear in the motion of the dance and bestow on the music manifold lovely melodies.

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4. “Eben, weil dergleichen in der Hast jenes Freischützwalzers nicht fühlbarer werden, erscheint er gemeiner, und zwar in richtiger Absicht des Komponisten, der hier eine ungebildete Menge sich der blossen Walzlust
In Marx’s view, Weber’s waltz was a caricature of the rustic form of the dance, one that revealed its basic impulse but that fell far short of its highest expression.

Weber clearly knew how to write a waltz to which one could dance. But Weber also knew how to write a waltz that was not intended for dancing. I am thinking here of Weber’s 1819 *Aufforderung zum Tanz*. Written around the same time as he was laying the compositional groundwork for *Der Freischütz*, the *Aufforderung zum Tanz* was conceived of as a musical evocation of a romantic encounter played out on a ballroom floor. Make no mistake, large sections of this composition, excerpted from the whole, make for perfectly serviceable dance music. Nonetheless, the composition is marked as a work for listening rather than dancing. Take, for instance, the introduction, given in Example 2. In place of music that calls the dancers to order—either through a march or with the rhythmic skeletons of the waltz motive that marked the beginning of the *Freischütz* waltz—we have a tentative beginning made up of disparate fragments that only gradually coalesce into anything like Marx’s waltz motive. Weber’s intent here, as supported by the account of the opening he later gave to his wife, is to suggest through musical materials a social encounter that culminates in waltzing: a gentleman makes an approach to a lady on the dance floor (measures 1–5), and is given a less than encouraging reply (measures 5–9); he presses his claim further (measures 9–13), and the lady accepts his proposal (measures 13–16); and so on. There are, however, other signs that Weber’s composition is meant to refer to, rather than to accompany, the dance: his tempo indication for the waltzes that follow the introduction is Allegro vivace, rather quick for the time, and at the start of the second main section—which would correspond to the second dance in a chain of waltzes, and which is shown in Example 3—he thoroughly obscures the waltz motive with sweeping virtuosic figures. Through both the treatment and organization of musical materials Weber makes clear that he wants not to set the scene for waltzing, but to enable a remembrance and imagining of waltzing as a crucial aspect of a signal social encounter.

Both of these compositions bear witness to the lively dance culture of early nineteenth-century Europe, one that in many respects was a continuation of that of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. During this period dance was an essential part of celebration and recreation in both city and country, and of the rich social and cultural context within which music was performed. As has often

5. Joseph Lanner took advantage of this potential by using the opening waltz of Weber’s *Aufforderung zum Tanz* (mm. 35–58) and a contrasting section (mm. 95–126) as the basis for the first waltz and trio of his op. 7 set of waltzes, published in 1827. Joseph Lanner, *Sämtliche Werke für Klavier* (New York: Broude Bros., 1973), 1:2–3.


7. Indeed, it is just this section that Lanner leaves out in his adaptation of Weber’s music for the waltz and trio of his op. 7 waltzes.

been noted, however, the cultural practices of early nineteenth-century Europe underwent a number of profound changes, some surprisingly rapid, and the practices surrounding music and dance were no exception. In the years before 1800 there was more often than not a clear distinction between dance music that was for a privileged few and dance music that was for everyone else: the former was typified by complex dances which required careful instruction and took a significant amount of time to learn, and which were often set to specially-composed music; the latter was based on a few simple steps which correlated with equally simple music.  

9. One prominent exception was the contredanse, which, rather than being based around couples, was performed with paired lines of dancers, in the round, or in square formations, and which involved relatively simple steps. See Patri J. Pugliese, “Country Dance,” in The International Encyclopedia of Dance: A Project of Dance Perspectives Foundation, Inc., ed. Selma Jeanne Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 2: 254–58. As
circumstances began to change, and by the time of Weber’s compositions the line between dance for the few and dance for the many had blurred or, in many cases—and the waltz certainly represented one of them—all but disappeared.

As a consequence of this change, the meaning to which dance music gave rise in the early nineteenth century also changed: dance music might be for a literal dance (as in the case of the *Freischütz* waltz) or it might be for a quasi-dramatic evocation of the dance (as in the case of the *Aufforderung zum Tanz*), but its role as a way to structure musical discourse—that is, the resource it offered as a musical topic—became decidedly attenuated.10

In what follows, I should like to explore this change in more detail, beginning with dance topics of the eighteenth century and then offering an account, based on recent research in cognitive science, for why such topics were as effective as they proved to be. I shall then return to the early nineteenth century to consider why the meaning of dance music in general, and dance topics in particular, changed so significantly in the early nineteenth century. In the musical universe consequent to this change there was music to accompany the whirl and press of ballroom dance, music that called forth memories of the whirl and press of ballroom dance, and little else in between.

**Embodying Dance**

It was, of course, Leonard Ratner who first proposed that composers of the late eighteenth century made use of a body of widely-shared and relatively specific musical figures to shape their compositional discourse—that is, musical topics.11 Ratner’s proposal was persuasive to a number of scholars, not least because it provided a way to draw together the diverse influences evident in the music of Haydn, Mozart, and their contemporaries—influences that ranged across national styles as well as the various uses to which music had been put—and to explain how a uniquely pellucid species of musical meaning was engendered.12 On the understanding developed by topic theorists, the

Richard Leppert has noted, however, the contredanse of the seventeenth and eighteenth century did little to break down class distinctions, since those who performed the dance were invariably all of the same status; see Richard Leppert, *Music and Image: Domesticity, Ideology and Socio-Cultural Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 97.

10. The distinction I draw here could also be conceived of in terms of public venue: literal dances were typically found in ballroom settings of the sort described by Alice M. Hanson, where the audience was seated so that they could attend to the dance floor; see Musical Life in Biedermeier Vienna, Cambridge Studies in Music (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 150–68 as well as Eric McKee, *Decorum of the Minuet, Delirium of the Waltz: A Study of Dance-Music Relations in 3/4 Time*, Musical Meaning and Interpretation (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 95–106; quasi-dramatic evocations of the dance were typically found in the concert hall, in which the audience was seated so that they could attend to the musicians; see Isabel Maathes, “Der Raum des Paradieses: Gesellige Erfahrung und musikalisiche Wahrheit im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert,” in *Le concert et son public: mutations de la vie musicale en Europe de 1780 à 1914* (France, Allemagne, Angleterre), ed. Hans Erich Bödeker, Patrice Veit, and Michael Werner (Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l’homme, 2002), 289–99.


vocabulary of topics was shared by both composers and listeners, and formed a basis for musical communication beyond the ordering principles of tonality and meter. The specificity of the figures was not limited to the configurations of pitches and rhythms that distinguished one topic from another, but extended to the network of cultural associations activated by each topic.

Among the most important contributions to topic theory was that of Wendy Allanbrook, who explored the resources that various dance topics provided for shaping musical rhythm (with rhythm here conceived as comprising aspects of meter and tonal organization).\(^{13}\) As Allanbrook saw it, dance topics not only summoned the social and cultural circumstances proper to each dance but also activated knowledge about the movements specific to the dance, and the affectual states correlated with such movements. Employing a bourrée topic, as Mozart does with Figaro’s music in the opening duet of *Le nozze di Figaro* (which is shown in Example 4a), activates knowledge about the physical movements characteristic of the dance.\(^{14}\) These include steps whose central feature is a lift onto the first beat of the measure.\(^{15}\) Employing a gavotte topic, as Mozart does with Susanna’s music in this same duet (and which is shown in Example 4b), activates knowledge about a contrasting set of physical movements which begin on the third beat of the measure, and then pass through the first beat to conclude on the second. As is quite apparent, neither of these examples is a dance proper, but each gains meaning from the dances to which they make reference.

This last point bears a bit of emphasis, as it shall become important when we consider why dance topics all but disappeared during the nineteenth century. Allanbrook made use of the notion of dance topics to describe aspects of the organization of instrumental and dramatic works; the topics with which she was concerned were typically of limited extent, and gained significance through their juxtaposition with other topics, or the overall progress of musical and dramatic events. There is thus a distinction between writing a gavotte and using the characteristic rhythmic and melodic features of a gavotte—that is, a gavotte topic—to shape musical discourse.

Given what we know of musical life in the late eighteenth century, a life which included a richly embodied knowledge about many different forms of dance, Allanbrook’s account of musical topics is a persuasive one. It remains to be explained, however, why music should be so effective in this regard—why it is, for instance, that hearing a particular dance form should not only activate a network of conceptual knowledge about the dance, but also *move* us in a particular way. Although many writers have remarked on the kinaesthetic character of music—Allanbrook notes that such observations go back at least as far as Aristotle\(^{16}\)—accounts of the basis for this character have rarely risen above the level of anecdote. There have been, however, recent advances in our understanding of the motor system of primates—and, in particular, on what have come to be called mirror neurons—that can help us understand how even *observing* movement can shape our thought processes. In what follows, I would like to review recent research on mirror neurons and, by putting this together with research on analogy and my own work on musical grammar, offer an explanation for why dance topics are as effective as they are and, somewhat paradoxically, why they fell out of use during the course of the nineteenth century.

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Research on Mirror Neurons

For much of the twentieth century the neurological structures through which motor movements are controlled, which are collectively called the motor system, were assumed to be relatively passive: commands which originated elsewhere in the brain told the motor system what to do, and it did it. Beginning in the late 1980s, however, it became evident that the design of the motor system was not quite as simple as this. As Giacomo Rizzolatti and Corrado Sinigaglia have noted, research done during that time showed that the motor system is made up of a complex web of cortical areas that are anatomically and functionally different, and in which clear distinctions between perceptual information and motor action are blurred.17 Three striking discoveries contributed to this view, all of which came out of research on macaque monkeys and which focused on an area within the monkey brain called F5, long known to be associated with motor actions. First, neurons within the motor system are associated with specific motor tasks: the neurons involved in grasping, for instance, are different from those involved in tearing.18


Second, a portion of the neurons in F5 respond to the visual presentation of an object, and these are again differentiated: those that fire when the monkey views a ring are, in most cases, different from those that fire when the monkey views a sphere. Researchers came to call these neurons ‘canonical neurons,’ to distinguish them from the neurons involved in specific motor actions. Francesca Garbarini and Mauro Adenzato, in a review of this research, observed,

The most interesting aspect of canonical neurons is that the same neuron fires not only in response to the same object, but also in response to a group of objects that have the same characteristics, in terms of the type of interaction they allow. At this level of description, an object can be codified “on relational terms,” i.e., it can be identified and represented in relation to the type of action that it affords an interacting subject. This means that the type of interaction that is established with an object is a constitutive part of the representation of the object itself.

The third, and perhaps most remarkable, discovery was of a further set of neurons that became active both when the monkey executed a motor act and when it observed an experimenter doing the same motor act; these have come to be called mirror neurons. Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia characterize the unique properties of mirror neurons in this way:

The motor properties of the mirror neurons are identical to those of other F5 neurons in that they discharge selectively during specific motor tasks, but their visual properties differ significantly. Unlike the canonical neurons, mirror neurons do not discharge at the sight of food or other three-dimensional objects, nor does their behaviour appear to be influenced by the size of the visual stimuli. In fact, their activation depends on the observation of specific motor acts in which a body part (such as a hand or the mouth) interacts with an object (Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia 2008, 80; translation adapted).

Further research has demonstrated that a portion of F5 mirror neurons respond to hand actions even when the final part of the action—for instance, the grasping of an object—is hidden from the monkey.

It should be noted that most of the research on canonical and mirror neurons has been conducted on monkeys, using invasive techniques of a sort not suitable for human subjects. That said, there is evidence both from brain-imaging studies and from single-neuron studies that similar structures are a feature of the human brain. These include a recent fMRI study by Valeria Gazzola


and her associates that showed similar patterns of brain activation when subjects performed a motor action (such as tearing a sheet of paper) and when they heard a recording of the motor action being performed.\(^{23}\) Taken together with other brain imaging work demonstrating a strong correlation between hearing musical sounds and performing motor actions,\(^{24}\) a good case can be made that our understanding of musical sound is, in neurological terms, a thoroughly embodied one.

The notion that simply listening to music activates portions of the motor cortex is quite suggestive, but research on the mirror neuron system is still at a relatively early stage and the application of this research to human behavior remains a matter of considerable debate.\(^ {25}\) This is all the more so with complex cultural practices such as those associated with music and dance. For instance, Beatriz Calvo-Merino and her colleagues recently showed that when expert dancers observed dance actions that were in their personal motor repertoire the motor areas in their brains showed more activity than when they observed kinematically comparable dance actions that were not in their repertoire.\(^ {26}\) One inference from this study is that hearing the music of a well-known dance would result in more activity in the listener’s motor cortex than hearing the music of a completely novel dance. It should also be noted that, while research on the activation of mirror neurons through sound is certainly tantalizing for a musician, most of the evidence only connects the sound of specific physical movements (such as that made by tearing a sheet of paper) with the discharge of motor neurons involved in making those movements. The best evidence that we have for a connection between sound sequences that are not tied to specific physical movements and neuronal activity comes from a set of brain-imaging studies by Steven Brown and his associates, which show a correlation between listening to periodic rhythms and the activation of portions of the motor cortex associated with dance movements.\(^ {27}\)

Research on Analogy

On reflection, it seems doubtful that the activation of mirror neurons can, by itself, explain the effectiveness of dance topics: this sort of activation appears to be widely shared among primates and is most likely in evidence across the animal kingdom, but humans appear to be the only species to make connections between patterned non-linguistic sound and patterned movement—that is, between music and dance. One way to account for such connections is through the capacity to make analogies. Analogies begin with similarities between two phenomena—for instance, between a physical gesture

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and a succession of musical pitches—but then expand to embrace structural features as a means to build knowledge.28

As an example, consider the analogy I just drew between gesture and music. For the sake of illustration, let’s say that the gesture is a movement of the arm, and the music is a passage from an electronic composition.29 For the analogy to be productive, correlations (such as those shown in Figure 1) need to be made between the initiation, trajectory, and end point of the physical gesture and the onset, continuation, and conclusion of the musical passage; further, a correlation needs to be made between the continuous energy that unites the elements of the physical gesture and the continuous energy (reckoned as average amplitude) that connects the elements of the musical passage. Once an analogy like this is in place it can be used to reason about situations beyond those encompassed by the original correlation: novel successions of pitches can be conceived in terms of novel—perhaps even impossible—gestures, and the dynamic process of all sorts of events can be correlated with various musical materials (as happened in the golden age of cartoon animation).30

Figure 1: Analogical mappings between an arm gesture and a musical passage from an electronic composition

Analogies such as the one between gesture and music seem effortless; indeed, research has shown that children as young as ten months are able to solve problems by analogy,31 and that by the

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age of three years analogical abilities are quite robust. This ability to make connections between disparate domains also lies at the heart of correlations between the movements of a dance and sequences of musical events of the sort drawn by Marx in his description of a musical waltz motive. Again, making a connection between a pattern of relatively soundless movement and a pattern of sonic events seems a simple thing, but current evidence suggests that it is beyond the cognitive capacities of other species.

**Sonic Analogs for Dynamic Processes**

The final part of my explanation for why dance topics are as effective as they are is somewhat more speculative, and comes out of my recent work on a cognitive grammar for music. This work is guided by the idea that the grammar of music is rather different from the grammar of language. Language, for its part, is quite good at picking out objects and relations but it is not very good at representing, through its grammatical organization, dynamic processes. Music, by contrast, is not very good at picking out objects and relations but is unparalleled in its ability to represent dynamic processes. The dynamic processes music can represent are quite varied, and include the movements of physical bodies through space, the sequences of physiological and psychological events associated with emotions, and the steps of dance. The way music represents such dynamic processes is not through abstract symbols (of the sort that are basic to language) but through sonic analogs—that is, through musical materials whose central features are analogous to the central features of the dynamic process at hand. As but one example, the musical materials of Marx’s waltz motive are a sonic analog for the dynamic process associated with the steps and movement of the dance.

On this view, a dance topic provides a sonic analog for dynamic processes associated with a particular dance, processes which encompass not only the steps of the dance but the affectual milieu of which they are a part. In her discussion of the opening duet from *Le nozze di Figaro*, Allanbrook notes that the gavotte and bourrée topics used by Mozart satisfy our expectations about the comic roles of Susanna and Figaro: “the swaggering, cocksure bridegroom and his pert bride-to-be celebrate their coming marriage right in character.”

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through sequences of movement, facial gestures, and general comportment—have their source in the specific features of the dance topics used by Mozart, which provide sonic analogs for each.36

Summary

Let me now put these three components together and review the explanation they can provide for the effectiveness of dance topics, working my way backwards from the perspective on musical grammar I have just introduced. From that perspective, the musical materials for a dance serve as sonic analogs for the movements and attitudes specific to the dance. Composers of the eighteenth century could draw on these materials to activate knowledge about the movements and attitudes associated with a dance, which then contributed to the species of meaning they created through their musical discourse.37 As I have proposed, creating meaning in this fashion is possible because humans have the capacity to make analogical connections between patterned non-linguistic sound and patterned movement. Perhaps most crucially, research on mirror neurons provides evidence that both the sight and sound of movements made by others activate a portion of the neurons in the motor system that would be active were we ourselves to make those movements. As a consequence, hearing the music for a dance with whose steps we are familiar can lead to part of the brain doing the dance: the knowledge activated by dance topics is, in a very real way, embodied knowledge.38

Dance Topics and the Dancing Body in the Early Nineteenth Century

Allanbrook’s ideas about the rhythmic and gestural aspect of musical topics were not, of course, limited to dance topics—indeed, in her introductory analysis of the topics Mozart employed in the first movement of his piano sonata in F major, K. 332, hardly any dance topics are mentioned39—but I would argue that it is in dance topics that rhythmic and gestural features are most immediate. Given the efficacy of dance topics for musical communication, why did they disappear during the nineteenth century? Part of the answer has to do with the waning of court life during the second half of the eighteenth century. As Allanbrook noted, most of the dances upon which Mozart’s vocabulary of rhythmic gestures was based were already old-fashioned in his own time.40 But the reduction in the number of dance types drawn from court life can hardly be the whole answer, for newer dance forms proliferated during the nineteenth century, including the galop, waltz, polka, schottische, mazurka, and polonaise. And as the century progressed some of these dances split into any number of subtypes: during the first quarter of the century, for instance, Thomas Wilson described four basic forms of the waltz; writing from the perspective of the last quarter, Friedrich Albert Zorn described no fewer than ten.41 While the cultural practices of eighteenth-century courtly life may have

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37. I describe this process of meaning construction in some detail in my analysis of the Finale of Franz Joseph Haydn’s string quartet op. 76 no. 4 in “Dance Topoi, Sonic Analogues, and Musical Grammar,” 299–305.

38. For more on this perspective on embodiment, see Raymond W. Gibbs, Jr., *Embodiment and Cognitive Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).


all but vanished in the nineteenth century, the number and type of dances in circulation continued to expand.

Perhaps more important than the number or variety of dance forms, however, was dance practice itself. Much of eighteenth-century dance practice focused on a single pair of dancers, but with the emergence of the contredanse the dance hall rather than private chambers became the preferred site for dancing. Nineteenth-century dances were, with few exceptions, social dances for relatively heterogeneous populations, and the dance hall was a site where individuals could meet—as did Weber’s imaginary couple—for a publicly-sanctioned form of physical intercourse. The fundamentally social nature of nineteenth-century dance and its wide circulation may have also reduced the value of waltzes, polkas, and the like as topics: the rhythmic gestures specific to these dances were not part of a shared vocabulary of musical figures but were instead indices for a shared cultural practice. Indeed, a case could be made that the immediacy and omnipresence of social dances told against their utility as musical topics.

Another factor in the disappearance of dance topics was a change, beginning in the late eighteenth century, in the conception of music and the cultural work it performed, one that has been described by Lydia Goehr among others. I will not rehearse her arguments here, but I would like to point out that two things specific to the social dance of the nineteenth century—its associations with the bourgeoisie, and its manifest physicality—placed it outside the pantheon of musical works deemed worthy of sustained attention. For instance, Robert Schumann, in an essay on dance music from 1836, ridicules the unimaginative harmonic language typical of dance forms but spares Franz Schubert’s *Deutsche Tänze* op. 33 by transforming them into prompts for an imaginary carnival played out for the elite of the Davidsbündler and narrated by Florestan. What began life as an ornament to bourgeois life is thus appropriated and adapted for the consumption of the intelligentsia. Some twenty years later Eduard Hanslick saw fit to dismiss dance music entirely. After rejecting the notion that a physical response to music can give us any insights into its true power, he equated the effect of dance music with that of drinking wine:

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*Art of Dancing Theoretical and Practical: Lessons in the Arts of Dancing and Dance Writing (Choregraphy) with Drawings, Musical Examples, Choregraphic Symbols, and Special Musical Scores*, ed. Alfonson Josephs Sheafe, trans. Benjamin P. Coates, reprint, 1905 (Brooklyn, New York: Dance Horizons, 1976). Wilson distinguishes between the slow waltz, the sauteuse waltz, the quick sauteuse waltz, and the German waltz. Zorn lists the galop waltz, the waltz (*La Valse*), the two-syllable waltz (*La Valse à Danc Tempo*), the three or six step waltz (*La Valse à Trois ou à Six Temps*), the reverse waltz (*La Valse à l’Envers*), the hop-waltz (*Valse Sautillée*), the balance waltz (*Valse Balancée*), the 5-4 waltz (*Valse en Cinq Temps*), the mazurka-waltz (*Valse de Mazourka*), and the Hungarian waltz (*Valse Hongroise*).


Music loosens the feet or the heart as wine the tongue. Such conquests tell us only about the vulnerability of the vanquished. To undergo unmotivated, aimless, and casual emotional disturbances through a power that is not en rapport with our willing and thinking is unworthy of the human spirit. When people surrender themselves so completely to the elemental in an art that they are not in control of themselves, then it seems to us that this is not to the credit of that art and is still less to the credit of those people. Thus the very basis for the effectiveness of dance music—the thoroughly embodied knowledge with which dance is associated—dooms it to a subhuman status.

It is worth noting that Hanslick’s battle against the corporeal was in part a battle against Richard Wagner, who argued for a kind of participation of the body in the apprehension of art. This body was, however, an idealized body, one suffused with spirit rather than one involved with the mechanics and actualities of daily life. I would argue that it is this disembodied and transcendent body, a body divorced from the puerile realities of middle-class life, that is the subject of Weber’s Afforderung zum Tanz and that survives as a ghost in Chopin’s dance music. But whether embodied knowledge was dismissed outright, as it was by Hanslick, or absorbed into a free-floating ideal, as it was by Weber, Wagner, and other transcendentalists, the result was the same: knowledge of the body and the ways it shaped musical practice was expunged from the appreciation of music. The very thing that made dance topics vital—their activation of embodied knowledge—excluded them from most nineteenth-century constructions of musical knowledge.

Conclusion
In the 1661 decree through which Louis XIV established the Académie Royale de Danse, he wrote:

In that the Art of Dance has always been recognized as one of the most honorable and necessary methods to train the body, and furthermore as the primary and most natural basis for all sorts of Exercises, including that of bearing arms, consequently it is one of the most advantageous and useful to our Nobility, as well as to others who have the honor of approaching Us, not only in time of War for our Armies, but even in Peacetime while we enjoy the diversion of our court Ballets.

45. Eduard Hanslick, On the Musically Beautiful: A Contribution Towards the Revision of the Aesthetics of Music, trans. Geoffrey Payzant (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1986), 57 Note that Marx distinguished between ‘common’ waltzes and those which could prompt ‘more various and more noble feelings of social, tender, or aroused desire’, something that does not seem to be countenanced by Hanslick’s critique.


Louis’s decree points to one of the important functions of dance within seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe, which was to provide training through which the nobility could refine the physical disposition with which they distinguished themselves from those whom they ruled. As Georgia Cowart has noted, during the ancien régime dance also provided an opportunity for the nobility to give corporeal presence to the aesthetic of galanterie. Although galanterie changed its meaning over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to the extent that it was construed as a desirable attribute it was an intensely social one, the essence of which was to gain distinction by bringing pleasure to others. Dancing well and effortlessly among one’s peers—who, by definition, were equally familiar with the steps and challenges of the dance—was one way to gain this distinction.

One consequence of the changes in society and culture that occurred as the eighteenth century gave way to the nineteenth was the erosion of this means of distinguishing oneself: the nobility were just as likely to be found dancing the waltz as were the bourgeoisie. While all of the elements of the empirically-grounded account of the effectiveness of dance topics that I have offered here would have remained unchanged, the cultural context which shaped the reception of musical representations of the dance had changed: the body that one imagined on hearing a strains of a waltz might be that of a social equal, but it might also be of someone of no distinction whatever. The corporeality summoned by dance topics became suspect rather than celebrated as the distinguishing mark of proper physical comportment became lost amidst the blurred swirl of the ballroom floor.

As demonstrated by Weber’s Auforderung zum Tanz and its countless imitators and successors, instrumental evocations of the waltz hardly disappeared during the nineteenth century. The success of these evocations rested, however, on the consistency with which they employed Marx’s ‘motive of the waltz’. In consequence, composers did not tend to juxtapose the waltz topic with other dance topics or bring it into dialogue with the overall progress of musical or dramatic events. The same appears to be true for other forms of dance during the early nineteenth century: as dance came to serve as an index of a cultural practice that was broadly shared across social strata, dance topics lost their value as part of a shared vocabulary of musical figures through which musical discourse was shaped. And, beyond this, there was at the same time a growing sense that music’s proper domain was not amidst the social whirl of the dance floor, but in an elysian realm devoid of corporeal realities.

Although critics like Schumann and Hanslick were all too eager to dismiss any hint of the body from their conceptions of music, research in cognitive science suggests that the activation of the motor system and our familiarity with a range of dynamic processes, including those which involve our bodies, are part and parcel of the experience of music. To be sure, these come to the fore in music for dance and certain dramatic forms, but there is growing evidence that they are an essential part of


50. In offering this analysis I differ from Janice Dickensheets and Kofi Agawu, each of whom regards the waltz as a topic within nineteenth-century musical practice. The examples that Dickensheets provides, however, are of complete works which are either proper waltzes (as in the case of Weber’s Freischütz waltz) or impressions of waltzes (as in the case of the second movement of Hector Berlioz’s Symphonie fantastique); she does not cite examples comparable to those offered by Allanbrook. See Janice Dickensheets, “Nineteenth-Century Topical Analysis: A Lexicon of Romantic Topoi,” The Pendragon Review 2, no. 1 (2003): 5–19 and Agawu, Music as Discourse, 41–50.
musical knowledge. And so, while in one sense the meaning of dance music changed significantly in the early nineteenth century, in another sense—in the sense that music is an expression of the cultural practices of humans possessed of very real bodies living in a very real world—the meaning of dance music has changed hardly at all.