Cambridge Opera Journal, **17,** 1, 37–58 © 2005 Cambridge University Press
doi:10.1017/S095458670500193X

Variations on the Dance of the Seven Veils

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Abstract: Early twentieth-century Paris saw an embarrassment of half-naked women dancing with seven veils and papier-mâché heads: 'Salomania' had gripped the capital. By 1913 Salome was a regular feature on music hall show-bills, besides the balletic and operatic stage. This study focuses on three variations on Salome's notorious Dance of the Seven Veils, performed by Loie Fuller (1907), Ida Rubinstein (1909) and Maud Allan (from 1906) on music by Florent Schmitt, Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov and Richard Strauss respectively. Such an investigation provides a peculiar line through the cultural and aesthetic determinants of early twentieth-century theatrical dance. In this context music takes on new narrative significance, offering ways of configuring the Dance above and beyond its mere visual surface.

This article revisits a familiar chapter in cultural history: the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fascination with the figure of Salome. From Gustave Moreau to J.-K. Huysmans, from Oscar Wilde to Richard Strauss, Salome's vampish attire and dangerous sexuality formed a contemporary fetish. Less familiar, however, is the significant popular dimension of this fascination, which rested in particular on Salome's famous strip-tease, the Dance of the Seven Veils. Performed across Europe and the United States, the Dance triggered a craze of its own. In 1907 a 'school for Salomes' opened on the roof of the New York Theatre, training dancers – complete with jewelled breast plates and papier-mâché heads – for the vaudeville circuit. In England and the United States several one-reel films, variously entitled *The Salome Dance Music*, *Salome Mad, Salome; or, The Dance of the Seven Veils* and *Salome Craze*, presented cinematic versions of the Dance, some sending up the fad itself. But Paris's 'Salomania' flared hotter than most. As the capital for art and entertainment of turn-of-the-century Europe, Paris was the main stopover for touring Salomes seeking to share in the choreographed bloodlust. Before the outbreak of World War I, variations on the Dance had appeared at the Théâtre du Châtelet, the Comédie-Parisienne, the Théâtre des Arts, even the Moulin Rouge. Every vaudeville show seemed to include a Dance of the Seven Veils; every hootchy-kootchy dancer wiggling without underwear in some vaguely Eastern outfit was a Salome in spirit.[1]

There is, of course, some distance between vaudeville 'vendors of love', who supplemented their earnings by stripping off stage as well as on, and the virtuoso stars of opera and ballet who donned diaphanous veils: how Salome managed to cross the border is startling. Besides the durability of the seven-layer principle, the

I am grateful to Kerry Murphy and Michael Christoforidis for giving me the opportunity to present an early version of this piece at the Symposium on Music in France: 1830–1940, University of Melbourne, July 2004. Thanks to Sai Man Liu for his assistance with musical examples, and, above all, to Roger Parker for his tireless support and encouragement.

[1] On Salome's career as a dancer, see Richard Bizot, 'The Turn-of-the-Century Salome Era: High- and Pop-Culture Variations on the Dance of the Seven Veils', *Choreography and Dance*, 2 (1992), 71–87; William Tydeman and Steven Price, *Wilde: Salome* (Cambridge, 1996), 136–51; and Toni Bentley, *Sisters of Salome* (New Haven, 2002).

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presence of a notable literary intertext – Wilde's play had been championed in Paris since its première on 11 February 1896 – was clearly advantageous, helping resituate strip-tease for upper-class audiences.[2] Not long before, cabaret dancing had been considered brazen, lascivious exhibitionism: 'Inspectors of Dancing' were stationed inside venues to prevent improper behaviour both on and off stage.[3] With Salome's head-hunting, nudity acquired artistic pretensions: variations on the Dance of the Seven Veils were thought less flagrantly sexual than daringly creative. More significant, however, was the intersection of two strains of cultural discourse and a trend towards a new style of dance. The first strain, Orientalism, was essentially hedonistic, a retreat from the realities and restraints of the contemporary world into an exotic and mostly imaginary Other. Salome emerged as a leading Orientalist figure, an archetype of the sybaritic, bodily and sexual.[4] In this respect, however, she was also a vehicle for appropriation by a second cultural force, feminism. An Eastern vamp whose sexuality lures men into unthinkable schemes, Salome was a powerful symbol in the age of the *femme nouvelle* (the new, bourgeois she-man), when women sought to reject their role as the anchor of bourgeois domesticity and assume a male prerogative.[5] Indeed, the coincidence of the rise of feminism and the increasing prominence of the femme fatale in painting, literature and dance has been thought by many to betray a mutually dependent relation.

Meanwhile, dance was having its own renaissance. A group of American solo dancers, led by Ruth St Denis and Isadora Duncan, migrated to Paris to develop what is now known as modern dance, a quasi-improvisatory style lacking traditional postures and pantomimic forms. Fusing contemporary ideas of middle-class female gentility and the newborn *hommesse* while at the same time encouraging freedom from domesticity's bodily and imaginative constraints, modern dance provided an attractive forum for many women. Late-comers to dance, dilettantes with big ideas, ex-performance artists, ladies of high society: all dabbled in this new world of the

[2] Legitimating low-brow entertainment with reference to intertexts in high-brow culture was common during this period. In 1913, for example, the American cinema industry began showing feature film adaptations of novels and stage melodramas in lavish inner-city movie theatres. These films not only attracted a higher class of patron (familiar with the original texts and at home in the surroundings), but helped Hollywood attain a cultural standing previously reserved for the literary and pictorial arts and opera. See Sumiko Higashi, *Cecil B. DeMille and American Culture: The Silent Era* (Berkeley, 1994).

[3] See Richard Wortley, *A Pictorial History of Striptease: 100 Years of Undressing to Music* (London, 1976), 13–15. In the early 1900s male voyeurism assumed a significant artistic status: besides the development of the dance-strip as artistic medium, erotic writing, photography, painting and pornography flourished.

[4] On Salome and Orientalism, see Gaylyn Studlar, '"Out-Salomeing Salome": Dance, the New Woman, and Fan-Magazine Orientalism', *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 34 (1995), 487–510.

[5] Jane Marcus, *Art and Anger: Reading Like A Woman* (Columbus, 1988), 3–19, claims that Salome is 'Oscar Wilde's "New Woman" ' (12), and that the play can be read 'as a parable of the woman artist's struggle to break free of being the stereotype of sex object' (10). On the rise of the *femme nouvelle* in *fin-de-siècle* France, see Debora L. Silverman, '*Amazone, Femme Nouvelle*, and the Threat to the Bourgeois Family', in her *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (Berkeley, 1989), 63–74. As Silverman notes, in a period of conspicuous political anxiety over socialist assault, the *femme nouvelle* posed a further challenge: threatening the structure of bourgeois family life by overturning traditional sexual and domestic roles, she was met with an active campaign to consign her to the home.

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flesh and began peddling their dances to European audiences. Barefoot and un-corseted, Salome was a prime vehicle for self-expression, associated with just the sensual movement and ambiguous, transformative power the dancers sought. Moreover, her Judean identity encouraged the connection between Orientalism and modern dance that would later influence not only the development of the style, but also fan-magazine and Hollywood iconography.[6]

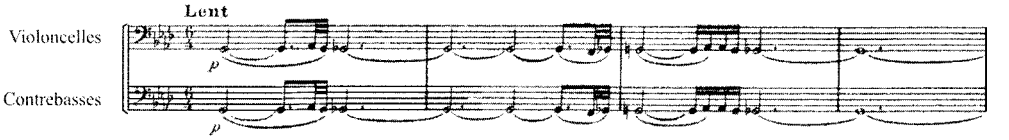
Orientalism, feminism and modern dance found a curious yet compelling personification in three Parisian Salomes. They were roughly contemporaneous: the American Loie Fuller, of silk drapes and flashing lights; the enterprising Ida Rubinstein, a kind of *fin-de-siècle* Russian Cher; and the Canadian Maud Allan, supposed sex fiend. One of the ideas I will explore here is how contemporary concerns and trends might have shaped the form and content of their variations on Salome's Dance: in other words, the socio-cultural contingency of performance. However, my focus is on the Dance as choreographic spectacle: how costume, design, characterisation and gesture join forces in pushing the codes for which the moving body is emblem towards a certain result. More important still, I will suggest ways in which music and image are here rejoined as meaning; how the play of music and flesh is variously reworked. Such an idea invokes audio-visual theory, not to mention a recent musicological concern to embrace the moving body and its complex if ephemeral signification.[7] How music helps dance to move beyond gymnastics and begin to 'speak' is becoming well-covered terrain. In Salome's case, however, the idea might extend to the Dance's narrative significance, encouraging us to ask new questions of its purpose and effect in the scenario. In this way, the idea of *spectacle* seems particularly appropriate: Salome as performer; Herod (and the audience) as voyeur; music oscillating somewhere in between.

My approach, then, is essentially interpretative, suggesting ways of imagining or configuring the Dance. These 'imaginings' will be supported by historical detail: the relationship between Salome and her avatars, as well as contemporary responses to performance, provide a useful backdrop for exploring the functions and aesthetics of music and dance. Historical anecdote, however, will remind us of something else: that to discuss variations on the Dance of the Seven Veils is in part to understand Salome's allure, her appeal to those unveiled besides those who attended the unveiling. Indeed, performers' testimony, journalistic criticism and public response can reveal as much about the Dance as they do about Salome herself – the Judean princess variably sixteen and forty-five, innocent and wicked, virgin and vamp. To discuss the Dance might also be to succumb to that allure oneself, to reminisce on

[6] For an introduction to the debates surrounding modern dance and its association with feminine desire and Orientalist fantasy, see Studlar, '"Out-Salomeing Salome"'.

[7] Michel Chion has developed a comprehensive theory of cinematic audio-vision, outlining various relationships between the moving image and sound; see his *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, ed. and trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York, 1994). Recently published musicological studies of music and movement/gesture include Marian Smith, *Ballet and Opera in the Age of 'Giselle'* (Princeton, 2000), and her article 'About the House', in *Reading Critics Reading: Opera and Ballet Criticism in France from the Revolution to 1848*, ed. Roger Parker and Mary Ann Smart (Oxford, 2001), 215–36; and Smart, *Mimomania: Music and Gesture in Nineteenth-Century Opera* (Berkeley, 2004).

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Ex. 1: Florent Schmitt, *La Tragédie de Salomé*, opening theme.

Salome's original diegetic scrutiny: the eagle-eyed Herod, fixing his gaze on her moving, tempting figure. I am, for the instant, one of Herod's entourage, with a wide-angled view of the stage.

Loie Fuller, unfortunate acrobat

My first port of call is the Théâtre des Arts, November 1907, where director Robert d'Humières' *La Tragédie de Salomé* is under way. French composer Florent Schmitt had been commissioned to write the musical accompaniment some months previously, with instructions that the music 'comment on the demonic phantasmagoria' unveiling on stage.[8] 'Demonic' it may be: despite the small number of players (Schmitt had only twenty instruments at his disposal, owing to the size of the theatre), the score dazzled with *fortissimos*, jarring themes, scalic runs, harp arpeggiations, trills and turns. 'Phantasmagorical' certainly: consider the opening theme, a low, sustained mumble in the cellos and basses. Hovering around one pitch, comprising a succession of long notes strung together by unexpected mordents and blurry-eyed suspensions, the theme seems to suspend dramatic time (see Ex. 1). The overriding impression is of a sort of vibratory stasis, anticipation and excitement, as if waiting for the next flourish, the next bedazzlement.

Dancing to this music in a costume of 4,500 feathers, on a stage requiring 650 lamps and fifteen projectors of 320 amperes (totalling 10,240 candlepower) was Loie Fuller. At forty-five, Fuller was a somewhat senior Salome, nearing the end of a career that had taken her from her hometown of Fullersburg, near Chicago, to the Folies Bergère, where she captivated audiences for thirty years with her own brand of modern dance, a mix of unusual costumes, yards of silk drapery and electric lights.[9] It was after success in the music hall that she embarked on this, her second Salome sketch. The first, billed as a 'pantomime lyrique en deux actes' and premièred at the Comédie-Parisienne on 19 March 1895, long before 'Salomania' broke out, had been a letdown. Her benign Salome, owing more to biblical sources than to Wilde's femme fatale, failed to inspire.[10] When 'La Loïe' returned to the

[8] See Jann Pasler, 'Florent Schmitt', in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell, 2nd edn (London, 2001), XXII, 543.

[9] For an account of Fuller's life and art, see Arsène Alexandre, 'Le Théâtre de la Loïe Fuller', *Le Théâtre*, 11 August 1900, 23–4; Loie Fuller, *Fifteen Years of a Dancer's Life, with Some Account of Her Distinguished Friends* (London, 1913); Sally Sommer, 'Loïe Fuller', *The Drama Review*, 19 (1975), 53–67; and Richard Nelson Current and Marcia Ewing Current, *Loie Fuller, Goddess of Light* (Boston, 1997).

[10] In Fuller's first production as in biblical sources, Salome appears as her mother's naïve, unsuspecting agent.

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Salome theme thirteen years later, it was with a different idea. The act still comprised a series of dances arranged according to a loose plot with emphasis on pantomime; and it preserved some of the original lighting effects, including representations of a storm and the Dead Sea. But the differences were more significant: a new book by the director accompanied the production; and there was the score by Schmitt.[11] Moreover, appearing 'proud, haughty and scornful' in the Peacock Dance, 'a witch in green shining scales' in the Snake Dance, Fuller's second Salome was as Wildean as ever.[12]

The production, however, was not the success Fuller had hoped for. Although critics enjoyed the special effects – the thunder claps and flashes of lightning that illuminated the stage – and the brief glimpse of Fuller's naked body, reviews of her as a mime were unflattering (as had been those of her first Salome sketch).[13] Fuller-in-character, gesticulating in theatrical sign-language, was not something with which Parisians were familiar. With the help of billowing silk drapes and washes of coloured light, she had made her name in abstract dances, where she took the form of a butterfly, a lily, fire or the sun.[14] Such scenes were enormously popular: many who had seldom, if ever, visited a similar establishment – particularly women and children – flocked to see her; the Louvre and Bon Marché began selling 'La Loïe' hats, scarves, ribbons, shoes, skirts and petticoats. What is more, Fuller's magnetism extended to the upper reaches of society.[15] A respected member of the French artistic and cultural community, she was considered by adherents of the Symbolist movement to be the living emblem of the new aesthetic, art nouveau; her dances were thought to represent the Image of art in the modern world. The writings of Stéphane Mallarmé are perhaps the most familiar in this respect: his meditations on Fuller's dancing, in particular her 'inhumanity' (she is 'dead, yet flesh and bone'), betray some of the principal tenets of contemporary Symbolism: a defiance of definition; impersonality; the dynamism of the Vortex and Ideogram.[16] These ideas were embraced by contemporary critics. Reviewing one of Fuller's performances, *Le Figaro* described an 'impalpable, intangible, ethereal, supernatural essence':

[11] The music accompanying Fuller's first Salome sketch was composed by organist Gabriel Pierné.

[12] A. V., 'Une Tête à cent expressions', *Femina*, 15 (1907), 507; a *Daily Telegraph* notice: both quoted in Bizot, 'The Turn-of-the-Century Salome Era', 77.

[13] For an account of some of *Salomé*'s special effects, see a review in the *New York Morning Telegraph*, 17 November 1907.

[14] Fuller conceptualised her moving image by the precise manipulation of silk and light. As she tossed silk drapes around her body to create changing forms and shapes, the silk was variously illuminated. Light, colour, body and movement converged to form a single visual image.

[15] That the audience at Fuller's performances included scholars, sculptors, writers and ambassadors, not to mention painters, reveals the cultural and aesthetic status of her art. She was represented by some of the most notable artists of Paris, including Auguste Rodin and Toulouse-Lautrec, whose lithograph is well known.

[16] For more on this subject, see Frank Kermode, 'The Dancer', in his *Romantic Image* (1957; rpt. London, 2002), 59–110, and his 'Poet and Dancer Before Diaghilev', *Partisan Review*, 28 (1961), 48–75; and Felicia McCarren, 'Stéphane Mallarmé, Loie Fuller, and the Theater of Femininity', in *Bodies of the Text: Dance as Theory, Literature as Dance*, ed. Ellen W. Goellner and Jacqueline Shea Murphy (New Brunswick, 1995), 217–30.

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according to one admirer, she had the appearance of 'an apparition, not a woman of flesh and blood'.[17]

Here may lie the root of the problem. Salome was all flesh and hungry for blood, a woman – not a butterfly or the sun – in close-up, in the here-and-now. She was, in the mime sequences at least, too 'real': not in the sense in which the Symbolists evoked the term (as something authentic, archaic, more real than the reality of the contemporary world); but earthly, material, mundane, even gross. Commenting on Fuller as mime, critic Jean Lorrain wrote: 'The unfortunate acrobat is neither a mime nor a dancer: heavy, awkward, sweating and with her makeup gone after ten minutes of little exercises, she plies her veils and her heap of material like a washerwoman running amok with her paddle. [. . .] With the gestures of an English boxer and the physique of Mr Oscar Wilde, this is a Salome for Yankee drunkards'.[18] Gone are the tributes to her grace, beauty and fluidity of motion; the terminology is now from the everyday world, the picture ugly. Consider Figure 1, photographs of Fuller as Salome from the English periodical *The Sketch*, 27 November 1907. These posed, static shots might function similarly to Lorrain's critique, reminding us not of Fuller's (lack of) mimetic talent, but of something more basic: the essential narrativity of the performance. Particularly striking is the emphasis on Fuller's head, her facial expressions off-set against different hairpieces and styles, with each photograph labelled according to its place in the drama. Might we assume that to a readership or audience accustomed to the image of Fuller's moving body swathed in luminous drapes, such photographs – and the production they promoted – were peculiar?

Aware of public preference and her own inadequacies, Fuller reverted to type, performing her usual non-narrative, 'mystical' dances and depending more on her dance company (founded around 1909) and optical effects. Her new dances – 'Lost', 'The River of Death', 'Ave Maria', 'The Land of Visions' – grew increasingly abstract, as their names imply. In one, a ballet called 'Ombres gigantiques', a huge shadow hand looms over the crouching dancers, then a foot descends to crush them. In another, to music from Debussy's *La Mer*, the dancers are hidden under immense swaths of silk. The latter example highlights a further way in which *La Tragédie de Salomé* differed from Fuller's standard output. She normally danced to familiar music, known for its affective qualities: a 'Pastoral' by Mendelssohn, Debussy's *Nocturnes* and *Children's Corner*, Grieg's *Peer Gynt*, Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries*.[19] Such works provided ready-made associations that could be 'corporealised' through dance; Fuller was famously keen to explore how the qualities of sound might relate to colour, movement and mood (ideas in vogue at the time). In this context, the choice in *Salomé* of a commissioned score by the relatively unknown Schmitt seems strange, doubly so given that Jules Massenet, an ardent Loïe fan, had

[17] *Le Figaro*, 17 November 1892; *L'Illustration*, 14 January 1893; quoted in Current, *Loie Fuller*, 52, 62.

[18] Jean Lorrain, *Poussières de Paris* (Paris, 1899), 143–44; quoted and translated in Bizot, 'The Turn-of-the-Century Salome Era', 73.

[19] See Claude Roger-Marx, 'Loïe Fuller et son Ecole'; Noel Migennes, 'Loïe Fuller et son Ecole de danses': newspaper clippings, Theatre Museum, London.

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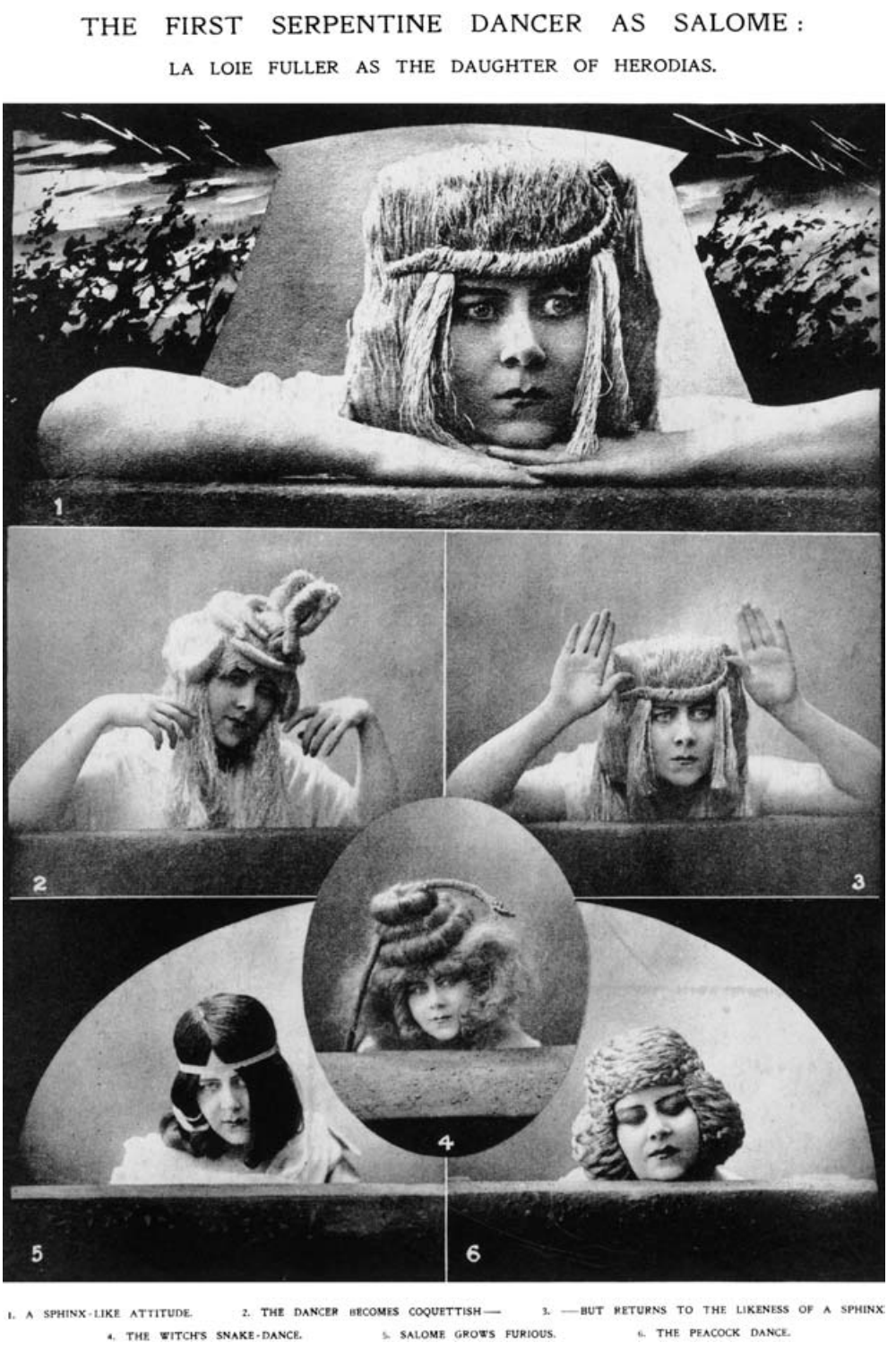


Fig. 1: Loie Fuller, 'The First Serpentine Dancer as Salome' (courtesy of V&A Images/ Victoria and Albert Museum).

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offered unrestricted performing rights to all his music without royalty.[20] Perhaps a commissioned score was thought more appropriate for a narrative-driven work: dancer and composer could collaborate, each exerting influence over the music's tone, style and timbre.

Given the lack of a choreographic score, moment-by-moment comparison of music and movement is impossible. But such a method might even be inappropriate: modern dance, of which Fuller was advocate, was dependent less on the precise synchronisation of postures to music, more on improvisation, a freedom of movement that became the style's principal drawing card. Let us, then, start out with something more tangible – as tangible, even, as 'La Loïe' herself. Recall Schmitt's opening theme: there is something about those long notes, mordents and legato phrases, the outright sensationalism and theatricality of many passages, that seem deliberately to 'intonate' the scenario. The turns might rival those of Salome herself, providing a sonic impression of her undulating body; the dilation of time, owing in part to the ambiguous metric pulse, seems to license diegetic scrutiny.[21] This line is worth pursuing. After its première with Fuller, Schmitt's score was used to accompany a number of Salome dancers, including Natalie Trouhanova, Olga Spessivtzeva, Lycette Darsonval and Colette Marchand. Clearly, besides being popular, the score was thought appropriate, the right level and intonation for Salome's Dance. Its recycling betrays its perceived suitability and functionality in the scenario.

Without labouring questions of composerly intention (whether Schmitt deliberately exploited a musical topic or developed a pre-existing vocabulary of exotic women), can we further identify this 'functionality'? A more airy perspective might reveal, perhaps paradoxically, a more specific coupling of music and movement, a coupling not only effective but local: that is, of tangible, material significance. A second dance expands on this hypothesis, whilst offering a particularly 'Oriental' variation on Salome's strip-tease. Two years after Fuller's *La Tragédie de Salomé* premièred in Paris, the Judean princess reappeared as the queen of Egypt; silk drapes swapped for mummy bandages, bare feet for toe slippers; and twelve veils instead of seven.

Ida Rubinstein, thin woman

The audience at the newly renovated Théâtre du Châtelet on 4 June 1909, attending the première of the Ballets Russes's *Cléopâtre*, witnessed the 'extraordinary artistic happening' rumoured since the *répétition génerale*: the unveiling of an unknown Russian dancer, Ida Rubinstein.[22] Although a version of the ballet, entitled *Une Nuit*

[20] See Kermode, 'Poet and Dancer Before Diaghilev', 64.

[21] Lawrence Kramer suggests something similar with respect to the monologue scene of Strauss's *Salome*; see his 'Cultural and Musical Hermeneutics: The Salome Complex', *this journal*, 2 (1990), 269–94.

[22] See Michael de Cossart, *Ida Rubinstein (1885–1960): A Theatrical Life* (Liverpool, 1987), 16. As de Cossart notes, designer Alexandre Benois maintained that the ballet's success owed nothing to any 'suggestive qualities'; see Benois, *Reminiscences of the Russian Ballet*, trans. Mary Britnieva (London, 1941), 295–6.

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d'Egypte, had been premièred in St Petersburg on 21 March 1908, few could have known what to expect. The title had been changed to the more striking *Cléopâtre*, the scenario – in which Amoun rejects his once beloved Ta-hor and offers himself to Cléopâtre – milked for all its decadence, and, most significantly, the protagonist recast.[23] Designer Léon Bakst and choreographer Michel Fokine suggested the young Rubinstein for the role, having worked on her debut production, Sophocles's *Antigone* (1905), in Russia. In attendance at the committee meeting, Prince Peter Lieven noted:

> Bakst and the choreographer whispered to each other a great deal behind the backs of the others [. . .] [about] one of Fokine's private pupils – a handsome, talented, and rich young girl, Ida Rubinstein. Bakst [. . .] was loud in her praises. 'She is a goddess', he would shout, and Fokine, too, spoke highly of her. The friends discussed the possibilities of giving her the part of Cléopâtre.[24]

As several sources chronicle, despite some objections (Rubinstein was neither a Classical dancer nor a member of the elite company), Diaghilev was convinced: he had seen Rubinstein's performance in *Antigone* and was impressed by her stage presence. Moreover, Rubinstein's wealth encouraged the short-of-funds impresario to assume that she would work for free.[25]

From her entrance, encased in a sarcophagus-like gold and ebony chest held up by six slaves, through the unwinding of her twelve brilliantly coloured bandages, Rubinstein created a sensation. This was all the more remarkable since not only was she Classically untrained and unknown to audiences and members of the ballet company (Fokine had prepared her privately), but her role was essentially static. Performing in mime, Rubinstein impressed with a series of set poses rather than virtuosic display; she even overshadowed the prima ballerina, Anna Pavlova.[26] Her statuesque body, according to the young Cocteau, was 'penetratingly beautiful, like the pungent perfume of some exotic essence'. It seemed somehow to ensnare the spectator's gaze, captivating the 'spell-bound' audience.[27] Prince Lieven described a different effect, focusing instead on Rubinstein's physicality: 'Her long, youthfully slender, peculiarly angular body seemed to have just descended from an Egyptian bas-relief'.[28] Note the 'peculiar': with her great height, small breasts, slim hips and long legs, Rubinstein presented a startling visual image (see Fig. 2). Towering over

[23] Ludmilla Barach, the original Cléopâtre, had not lived up to expectations.
[24] Prince Peter Lieven, *The Birth of the Ballets-Russes*, trans. L. Zarine (London, 1936), 53.
[25] See de Cossart, *Ida Rubinstein*, 15–16; and Elaine Brody, 'The Legacy of Ida Rubinstein: Mata Hari of the Ballets Russes', *Journal of Musicology*, 4 (1985–86), 491–506.
[26] See Alexandre Benois, *Memoirs*, vol. II, trans. Moura Budberg (London, 1964), 241. Benois writes: 'Of all the press notices, the one that pleased me most was the one by Robert de Montesquiou. He did not miss a single performance. But he showed even greater admiration for Ida Rubinstein, who drove all Paris crazy and put even Pavlova in the shade. The latter, so it was said, was so vexed that she refused to take part in Diaghilev's next season. It was not, however, to her dancing that Ida owed her triumph; she did not dance, in fact she walked. But *how* she walked, with what a regal bearing, with what beauty of movement!'
[27] See Jean Cocteau, 'Notes on the Ballets', trans. Harry Melvill, in Arsène Alexandre, *The Decorative Art of Léon Bakst* (1913; rpt. New York, 1972), 30.
[28] Lieven, *The Birth of the Ballets-Russes*, 97.

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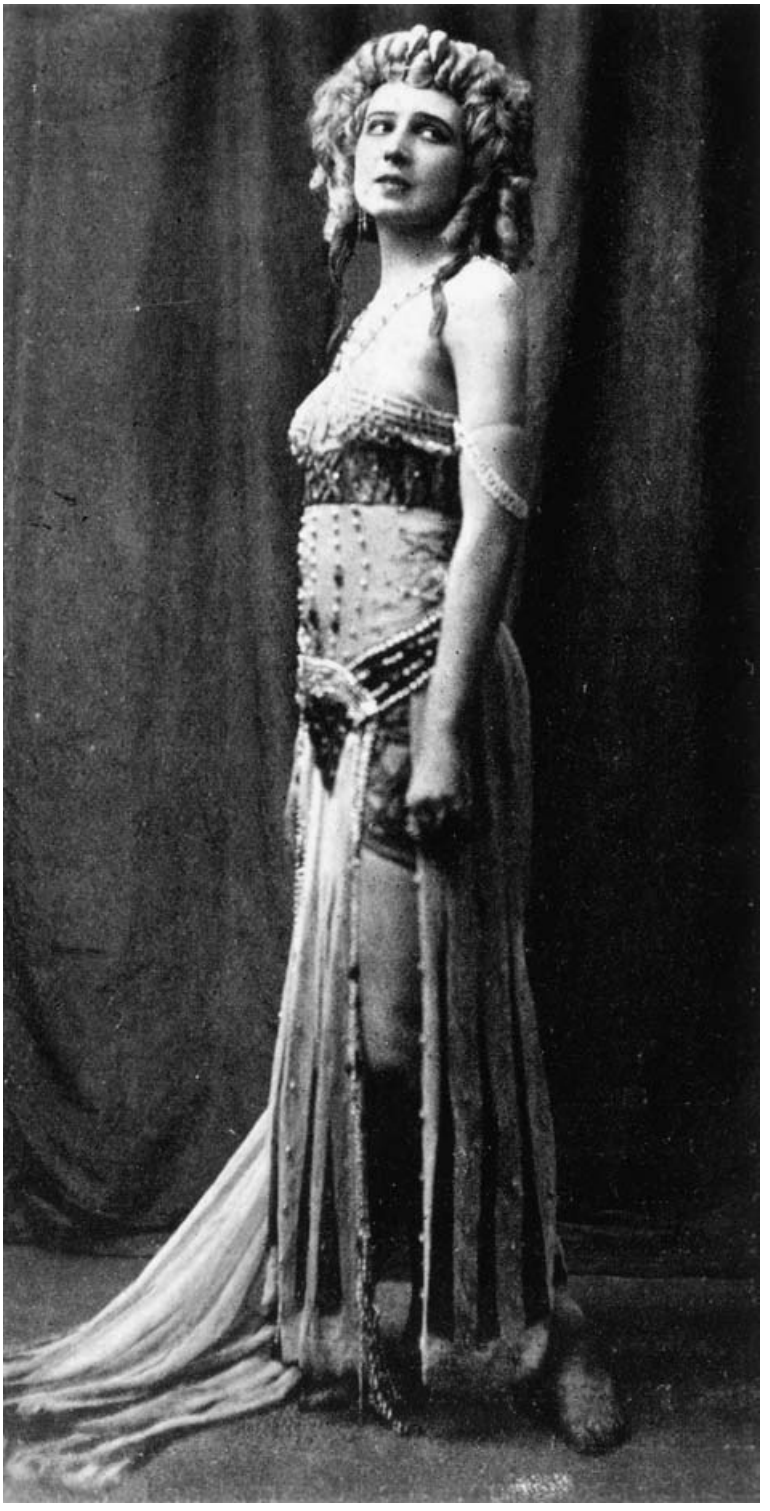


Fig. 2: Ida Rubinstein as Cléopâtre (courtesy of V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum).

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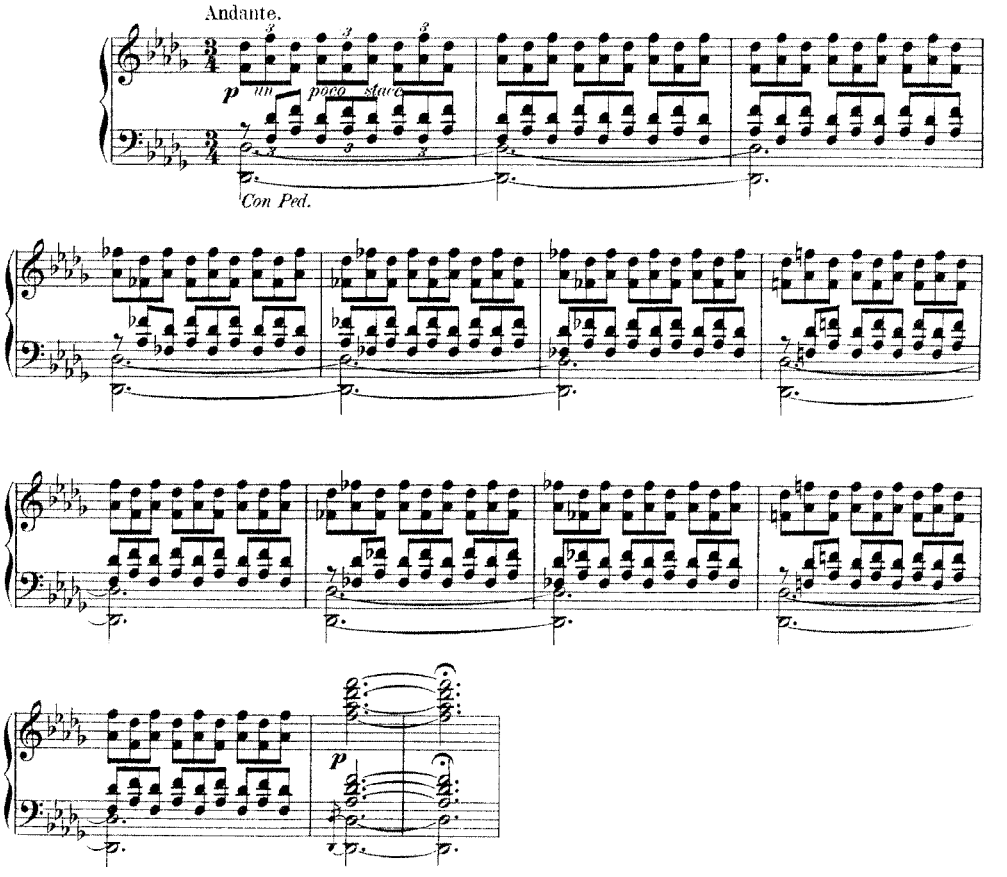
her male co-stars, she seemed to flout conventions of female iconography. As Benois described, 'here was not a pretty artiste appearing in frank *deshabillé*'.[29] In light of contemporary cultural tendencies, however, Rubinstein's image was also opportune. Advocates of the *femme nouvelle*, that symbol of bourgeois womanhood mentioned earlier, saw in her androgynous features a visual representation of the qualities they were trying to usurp. In other words, as women sought to appropriate powers considered a man's prerogative, Rubinstein assumed his look. This look was thereafter revered; to quote Sir Osbert Sitwell, an English author best known for his World War I memoirs: 'The thin woman had hardly aspired to be a femme fatale until Léon Bakst introduced her as a paragon into Western Europe'.[30]

What helped designers to redefine the image of the female body and her 'essential' identity was a scenography of the Orient. Although Orientalism had been a familiar trope of French visual culture throughout the nineteenth century, it was given new impetus by the appearance in 1899 of J. C. Madrus's translation of *The Thousand and One Nights*. As the novel appeared in consecutive volumes over the next five years, published in the symbolist journal *La Revue blanche*, the Oriental look came to dictate fashion and the decorative arts.[31] Thanks in part to the scenario, the public began to perceive this imagined 'Other' land as a place of fantasy displaced from the body politic of the West – an arena of free, absolutist, erotic constructions. With its veils, mummies, pyramids and tales of uninhibited sexuality, *Cléopâtre* provided a typical Orientalist narrative: the protagonist, scenery and costumes substituted the archetypal, placid world of nineteenth-century Romantic ballet with the colours, opulence and appetite of an imagined East.[32]

In light of the proliferation of orientalia on Diaghilev's stage, it may come as no surprise that the musical setting seems to have been determined solely on the merits of 'Oriental-ness'. Rubinstein's unveiling, recalls Alexandre Benois, took place to a passage from Rimsky-Korsakov's 'opéra-ballet feérique' *Mlada*.[33] A score by Anton Arensky had accompanied the St Petersburg production, but was dropped in favour of what one critic dubs 'suitably oriental-sounding passages' from music by Rimsky, Taneyev, Glazunov and Musorgsky, as well as a newly commissioned finale by Tcherepnin.[34] Although details of the exact location of the *Mlada* extract are lacking, Benois implies that it was from Act III, scene 4, a sequence of solo and ensemble dances entitled 'The Apparition of Queen Cléopâtre'.[35] This seems likely: at this point Cléopâtre's ghost appears surrounded by slaves and dancing girls, hoping to seduce the hero Jaromir. Although clothes remain on, the scene plays on moods and sensations similar to those of the strip scenario: sexual exhibitionism, temptation and provocation.

[29] Benois, *Reminiscences of the Russian Ballet*, 296.
[30] Quoted in Alison Settle, 'The Birth of Couture: 1900–1910', in *Paris Fashion: The Great Designers and Their Creations*, ed. Ruth Lynam (London, 1972), 50–74, here 68.
[31] See Peter Wollen, 'Fashion/Orientalism/the Body', *New Formations*, 1 (1987), 5–33.
[32] Many commented on Rubinstein's 'Eastern' features, particularly her almond-shaped eyes.
[33] Benois, *Reminiscences of the Russian Ballet*, 296.
[34] See de Cossart, *Ida Rubinstein*, 15.
[35] Benois, *Reminiscences of the Russian Ballet*, 295.

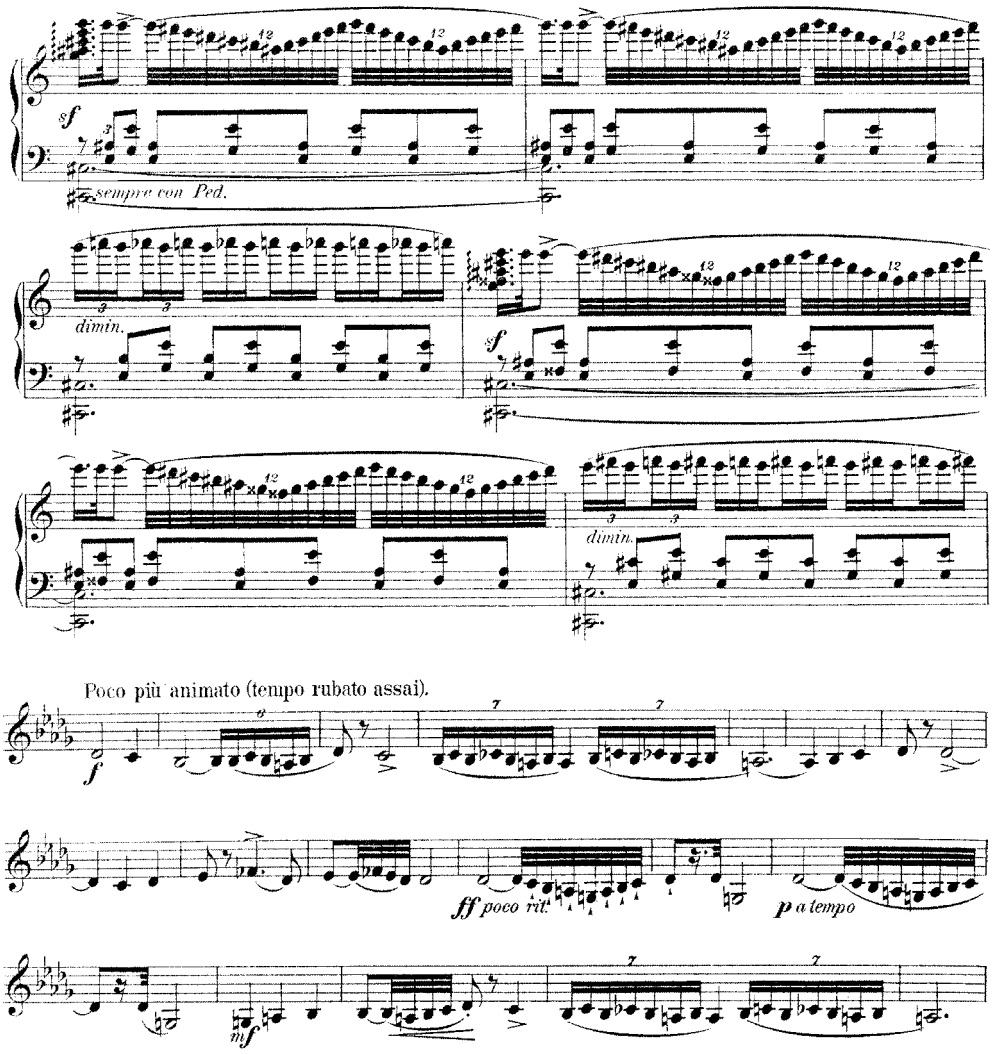
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Ex. 2: (a) Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov, *Mlada*, Act III, scene 4, opening.

From the beginning, the music entertains its own brand of 'tease': an oscillating triplet figure in the clarinets and a tonic pedal in the low strings obscure the metrical pulse; the interval between the rocking triplets shifts from a major to a minor third unexpectedly (see Ex. 2a). Lacking teleological steering, the opening music seems suspended in time; its persistent pulsations freeze the dramatic moment. This effect, emphasised by the slow crotchet pulse, is pervasive: a subsequent passage of rapid figuration and general hyperactivity (now accompanied by the triplet figure) sustains a similar sort of oscillatory halo (see Ex. 2b); even the principal theme seems to hover, moving mainly by step around one pitch (see Ex. 2c). Given Rubinstein's relative immobility on stage, such moments of musical 'freezing' seem dramatically and physiologically apt. It is easy, then, to envisage a kind of musical reflexology: music as a responsive screen or mirror on which diegetic rhythm and pacing are projected. A further example may offer something similar. Accompanying a second statement of the principal theme on the woodwinds is a timpano piccolo ostinato (see Ex. 2d). The ostinato has a throbbing, driving feel not previously experienced – we anticipate some accompanying visual event, the entry of characters or their

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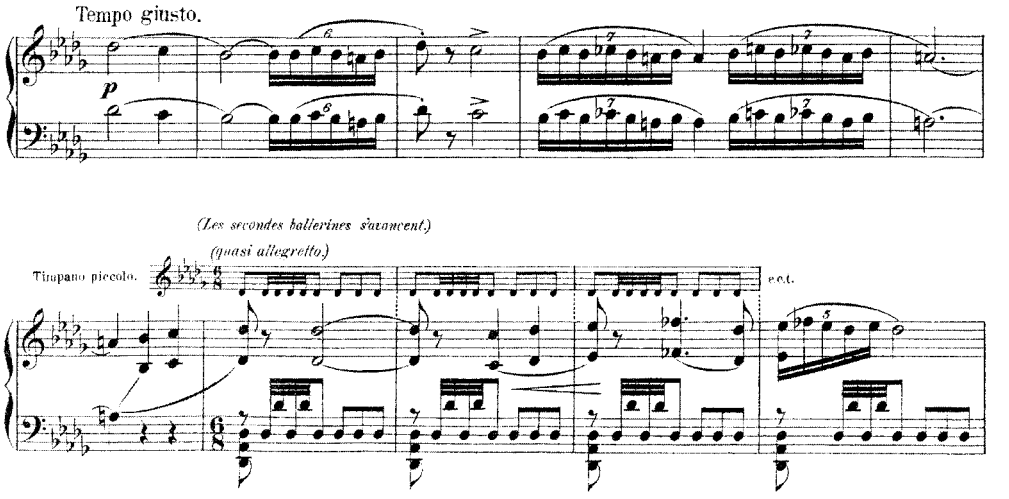


Ex. 2: (b) *Mlada*, Act III, scene 4.
(c) *Mlada*, Act III, scene 4, principal theme.

movement on stage. Notes written in Rimsky's *Mlada* score confirm our presumption: above the ostinato is a stage direction for the second ballerinas to advance. Physical motion on stage coincides with musical animation: a further synchrony of audio-visual parameters is observed.

Throughout the scene, Rimsky writes further above-stave notes detailing his ideas for performance. Besides the usual '*lento*' and '*accel.*', we find other, more graphic terms: '*passionné*', '*frénétique*', '*impétueux*', '*langoureux*'. At first glance, one might think these terms orchestral performance directions: '*impétueux*' corresponding to an undulating demi-semiquaver flourish, for example; '*frénétique*' to a shrieking piccolo counter-melody. But their font and type-setting suggest that these terms direct the dancing: the unwinding of Cléopâtre's veils, her enticement of Amoun, the

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Ex. 2: (d) *Mlada*, Act III, scene 4.

ensemble of ballerinas. Here perhaps lies a lesson in the interaction between dance and music. Again, a correlation between musical and visual parameters seems clear. Consider, then, that Rubinstein's unveiling occurred, in the words of Benois, 'slowly, in accordance with the complicated court ritual';[36] she alone was unveiled, her movements, according to Cocteau, 'sweeping' and 'circular'.[37] The principal musical theme, homophonic and mainly legato, is to be played at a fairly slow tempo (although the crotchet pulse is a little quicker than that of the previous section), with much rubato (see Ex. 2c). Moreover, might it be appropriate that the theme accompanying the unveiling of the androgynous Rubinstein occupies a low tessitura for all instruments concerned? Juxtaposed with passages of screeching upper-winds, the theme conjures a much deeper sound domain. The aural effect is velvety but guttural.

This shared intertextual ground proposes something more specific than a reflective screen, suggesting instead a coalition of music and body. The gazed-upon body is made sonorous, musical sounds corporealised through on-stage movement.[38] These terms for thinking about how music and body might commingle are of course Abbatean. In her seminal essay 'Opera; or, the Envoicing of Women', Carolyn Abbate transforms the idea of a visual and auditory alliance into a blurring of the senses, describing how an invisible voice is corporealised whilst a silent body is made sonorous.[39] I need hardly add that the subject of her paper is Strauss's *Salome*, the voice and body those of Jochanaan. It might seem fitting, then, that an Egyptian sister of the Judean princess is embroiled in the present case.

[36] Benois, 296.
[37] Cocteau, 'Notes on the Ballets', 30.
[38] The implied textual correspondence between music and body may, to some extent, depend on music's capacity for visual translation: note how the flourish figure, an undulating line of musical note-heads, provides a visual representation of an imagined undulating body.
[39] Carolyn Abbate, 'Opera; or, the Envoicing of Women', in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley, 1993), 225–58.

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There is something distinct, however, about a choreographed unveiling that might elude broader, metaphysical concerns: rewinding to my introduction, its function as spectacle, its *raison d'être*. Envisaging music as a moving body, gesticulating in imitation of a dancer, might offer suggestive ways of configuring the Dance, brilliantly suggestive ways if one's concern is to amplify the movements themselves. Such an envisaging might even be expected: it is a cliché of audio-visual theory that music mirrors the form, design and mood of the image in rational, decipherable ways. But the idea relies on a communication model between dancer/music and audience not only fixed but reductive, foregrounding the transmission of sentiment, signification, effect and suchlike in one direction – from the action on stage towards the audience – whilst skirting off-stage interference. In the context of the veil dance, such interference is pertinent: the self-consciously moulded *écriture corporelle* of the dancer intends to provoke, arouse and insinuate – the essence of strip-*tease*. There is an inevitable flow of *re*action (sentiment, signification, effect and suchlike) from the audience towards the performer on stage. Any notion of music's role in the spectacle might, then, depend on the principles of dialogism, contact, interaction and exchange – a communication model more fluid, perhaps even collaborative. It is such a model that I would like to consider in relation to a final variation on Salome's Dance.

Maud Allan, touring gypsy

During the International Dance Conference that took place in Berlin in 1908, two years after Maud Allan had begun her European tour in *The Vision of Salome*, the following story was reported by *The New York Times*:

> It seems that Miss Allan's Salome Dance has so fired the imagination of London society women that one of the great hostesses of the metropolis [. . .] issued invitations to twenty or thirty ladies whose names figure in Court and other fashionable lists, to attend a 'Maud Allan' dinner dance, which would be undesecrated by the presence of any man, and at which the guests were bidden to appear in Salome costumes. [. . .] Each of the ladies proceeded to outvie her sisters in providing herself with [. . .] the undress effect of Miss Allan's scanty attire. [. . .] Dinner was served to an accompaniment of Salome music tinkled by an orchestra hidden discreetly behind the fortification of palms and flowers. [. . .] Some of the most graceful members of the party demonstrated that they had not only succeeded in matching Miss Allan's costume, but had learned some of her most captivating steps in movements. It was the intention of the British delegates to the international terpsichorean conference to tell this story in horror stricken accents as convincing proof that the Classical dances make for public immorality.[40]

The extract is doubly revealing: besides indicating Allan's popularity (which extended across the Channel to France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Switzerland and Serbia), it suggests a conflation of Salome, her Dance and depravity. Ever since Salome had first appeared on stage, purveyors of public morality called for a

[40] *The New York Times*, 23 August 1908; quoted in Judith Hanna, *Dance, Sex, and Gender: Signs of Identity, Dominance, Defiance, and Desire* (Chicago, 1988), 183.

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cover-up. In the United States, for example, actress Marie Cahill issued a warning to President Theodore Roosevelt requesting that he monitor the outbreak of 'Salomania' and censor the appearance of such 'vulgar exhibition' on stage.[41] But Maud Allan in particular exacerbated anti-Salome fervour.

Catapulted to stardom in 1906 with her performance of the first notable dance rendition of the familiar theme in the post-Strauss era, Allan was Salome's most wanton incarnation.[42] She had the full lips, dark hair, blue-green eyes, pale skin and shapely figure that have now become synonymous with the Oriental vamp: her unbridled sexuality provoked a public dialogue on the subject (see Fig. 3). To one English observer, her art was of a 'magical beauty': 'The wonder of it all is that throughout this fantastic mockery, this enchanting insistence upon the flesh, nothing is extravagant, nothing discordant. London has never seen such graceful and artistic dancing'.[43] However, not all appraisals were so kind: an unsigned editorial in *The Academy* described a 'repulsive performance', 'one which we should not consent on any account to witness a second time'.[44] In some quarters Allan's art even became synonymous with prostitution: openly pornographic articles and books described 'Maudie's' nude modelling and sexual activity.[45] What is more, the perceived immortality of her dance was closely tied to its characterisation. In the British libel trial of May 1918 Allan, accused of perversion, sadism, lechery and lesbianism (to name a few), was famously smeared by association with Salome.[46] In Britain, we might remember, Salome's reception was at best cynical, at worst caustic. A doctor testifying against Allan at the trial gave his medical opinion that Wilde's play, from which the Dance of course derives, was a sado-masochistic treatise based on the work of sexologist Richard von Kraft-Ebing. It followed, he argued, that 'a person performing the part of Salome must be a sadist'.[47]

Anecdotes like this go some way towards explaining the sheer potency of Salome signification: how, returning to *The New York Times*' report, a melding of characterisation, costume, scenography, design, 'look', posture, movement and the general atmosphere surrounding the dance determined by some means a spectatorial response that would eventually defile Allan's reputation. The article cites her 'scanty attire', 'undress effect' and 'captivating steps': how they 'fired the imagination of society women'. But, through citation alone, we are asked to consider our response

[41] See *The New York Times*, 24 August 1908.
[42] On Allan's family relations and career, the following are particularly useful: Allan's autobiography, *My Life and Dancing* (London, 1908); Felix Cherniavsky, *The Salome Dancer: The Life and Times of Maud Allan* (Toronto, 1991); and Bentley, *Sisters of Salome*, 47–84.
[43] *Labour Leader*, 26 June 1908; quoted in Cherniavsky, *The Salome Dancer*, 165.
[44] Quoted in Bizot, 'The Turn-of-the-Century Salome Era', 75.
[45] See Bentley, *Sisters of Salome*, 66. Although unable to trace the original novel quoted by Bentley, I have found a more recent anonymous publication entitled *Maudie: Revelations of Life in London* (London, 1985). The subject matter – the adventures of a courtesan in 1920s London – suggests that this might be a reprint of the original.
[46] On Allan's libel trial, see Philip Hoare, *Oscar Wilde's Last Stand: Decadence, Conspiracy and the First World War* (London, 1997), and Michael Kettle, *Salome's Last Veil: The Libel Case of the Century* (London, 1977).
[47] Quoted in Kettle, *Salome's Last Veil*, 164. Although the doctor in question – Serrell Cooke – was knowledgeable in psychiatry, he is thought to have been a specialist of tuberculosis.

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Fig. 3: Maud Allan as Salome (courtesy of V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum).

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Ex. 3: Richard Strauss, *Salome*, Dance of the Seven Veils, 'Ziemlich langsam'.

not only to what is seen, but to what is heard. Mentioned is the 'accompaniment of Salome music' played by a tinkling orchestra. Might this have contributed to the overall effect?

Allan danced to what is now supposed to be a reworking by Belgian music critic Marcel Remy of Strauss's Dance of the Seven Veils.[48] As Remy's adaptation is unavailable, I refer to Strauss's original. On the surface, Strauss's music resembles that of Rimsky's *Mlada*, Act III, scene 4, and Schmitt's *La Tragédie de Salomé* in numerous ways. Principal thematic material is often presented in a slow tempo by solo instruments or groups, and there is notable use of ostinatos and classic 'flourish' figures. These features, as discussed earlier, might suggest similarities with the stripper's movements, encouraging the envisaging of a music–body partnership. But something else is implied. Consider, for example, the bass ostinato accompaniment to the opening oboe theme of Strauss's Dance ('Ziemlich langsam', see Ex. 3). The ostinato comprises three notes played in one stroke of the bow, ascending through increasingly wide intervals; there is a glissando between notes two and three and a quaver rest after the final note. The jump from first to second notes and, in particular, the slide from second to third strongly suggests anticipation. The next note, at a lower pitch, acts as a sigh of (temporary) relief. Heard repeatedly, the figure can be thought a microcosm of the strip itself, charting a narrative progression that, because of the 'look-but-don't-touch' nature of the genre, teases with the promise of something infinitely postponed. Moreover, it suggests the voyeur's expectancy (his desiring, holding of breath) rather than the object of desire; it speaks to his body rather than any verbal intelligence.

In her recent book on stripping, an insider's account of the personal and socio-cultural motivations behind male, heterosexual strip-club attendance, ex-stripper turned anthropologist Katherine Frank suggests that the inciting of spectatorial bodily response may be a principal drawing card.[49] Her research reveals how clubs provide a neutral site, exempt from domestic or occupational regulations, where customers can experience their own bodies; how through fantasy and voyeurism, spectatorship takes on a performative dimension. Paul Valéry's fictional dialogue *L'Ame et la danse*, in which banquet companions Socrates, Phaedrus and

[48] See Bizot, 'The Turn-of-the-Century Salome Era', 85.
[49] Katherine Frank, *G-Strings and Sympathy: Strip-Club Regulars and Male Desire* (Durham, NC, 2002).

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Eryximachus discuss a dancer called Athikté, illustrates a similar idea.[50] For Eryximachus, the enjoyment of watching Athikté stems from the knowledge of his own body that her performance provokes: 'She is teaching us to understand what we do, showing our souls clearly what our bodies accomplish obscurely. By the light of her legs our immediate movements appear to us as miracles'.[51] Her moving body is a vehicle of knowledge; through it, he understands himself. Furthermore, his oral excitement suggests that it is not only Athikté's body that is caught in a *frisson*: 'She slowly prefigures the birth of a leap. [. . .] She forbids us to breathe until the very moment when she springs up'.[52]

Athikté's leap reminds us of the glissando from Strauss's ostinato: upward-moving, stimulating a bodily reaction, interfering with respiration, both seem physically to arouse. But we are now some way from a reconciliation of music and dancing body, as originally foreseen; at issue here is the inciting of spectatorial bodily response.[53] What are we to make of this? At the least, it makes clear that Strauss's musical fabric can be assigned a more than reflective, imitative role: that its contribution to the effect of performance can be conceived on a broader, more diffuse plane than that of mimetic amplification. Moreover, it draws attention to the voyeur – not only as a required 'receptor' of performance, but also as an investor in its success. This is a fitting note on which to consider a case of scholarly confusion over Strauss's Dance in its original, operatic context. The voyeur's investment in the Dance, besides his musical coercion, might take on new significance.

Richard Strauss, puzzling composer

In response to Strauss's appeal that Salome be 'a chaste virgin', her dance 'played with the simplest and most restrained of gestures',[54] Derrick Puffett struggles:

> While the orchestra heaves and gyrates around the characters on stage, what on earth is Salome to do? (She has to do *something*.) The orchestra might be 'quite adequate' for expressing the turmoil experienced by the characters, but its noise goes for nothing unless it is simultaneously interpreted by the performers we see. Strauss's words tell one story, the orchestra another.[55]

Puffett determines that the music must somehow 'be' Salome: if the music is 'sensual', Salome cannot be 'chaste'. His confusion betrays a tendency in Western society towards audio-visual synchronicity (lip synching, cinematic dubbing) – a

[50] Paul Valéry, *L'Ame et la danse* (Paris, 1923); *Dance and the Soul*, trans. Dorothy Bussy (rpt. London, 1951).
[51] Valéry, 35.
[52] Valéry, 43.
[53] The ostinato is one of many devices of this effect. Consider the solo woodwind melodies of the 'Ziemlich langsam' passage in question, or the hammering ascending semiquavers at rehearsal figure D.
[54] Richard Strauss, 'Reminiscences of the First Performance of My Operas', in *Recollections and Reflections*, ed. Willi Schuh, trans. L. J. Lawrence (London, 1953), 151.
[55] See Derrick Puffett, 'Postlude: Images of Salome', in *Richard Strauss: Salome*, ed. Puffett (Cambridge, 1989), 164.

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desire that music and dancing body match. In other words, music becomes another reflective screen, an elaboration of character and movement.

However, as the Allan episode illustrates, such a melding of the visual and auditory is not absolute. In this case, Puffett's envisioning of a Salome mystified over the dance she is to perform is not only difficult to sustain as part of a larger reading of the opera, but a touch simplistic. Consider, then, the hypothesis that musical subjectivity might be purposefully repositioned: in particular, that Strauss's score might represent the imaginings and desires of the male protagonist, Herod, rather than the undulations of Salome's body. The diegetic and sexual frameworks of the narrative resonate with this idea. There are, for example, plenty of earlier hints that Herod is already in a state of arousal: his first words are 'Where is Salome?'; he tries on three occasions to share a physical experience with her; according to Herodias, he is always looking at her in a sexual manner.[56] Mary Garden, who first sang Salome in 1909 at the Manhattan Opera House in New York, writes in her autobiography that the kissing of Jokanaan's lips in the opera is a moment of *jouissance* for Salome.[57] Might Herod reach a similar climax during the dance, the eroticism of the music reflecting his own dance of paroxysms rather than Salome's?[58]

The idea provides a neat illustration of a Herodian musical conjuring: his desires and imaginings are made sonorous in Strauss's score, rather than visualised physically on stage. It is an idea of authorial and auditory relocation – Herod might be as much an author of the dance as Salome; it is through his ears that we might hear – that amounts to an intentional deafness on Salome's part. Her diegetic strip-tease proceeds without regard for the music 'heaving' and 'gyrating' off stage, engaged in a new alliance with Herod. There is, though, a final sting. A 'Scenario' for the dance written by Strauss in the 1920s, with reference to illustrations from Vuillier's *La Danse* of 1898, projects a further layer of ambiguity, re-evoking the original correspondence between music and dancing body.[59] For example, on the third crotchet beat after rehearsal figure D Strauss directs that Salome 'take off the first veil and adopt the pose shown in Moreau's picture of Salome printed on page twelve of *La Danse*'; at this moment a solo flute begins an embellished line – a continuation of the opening oboe theme. Nine bars later he asks for three steps; the flute repeats an ornamented figure of one crotchet duration in sequence three times. Implied is a correlation between character and musical theme – the flute as a mirror or punctuation of Salome's movements – that upsets Salome's auditory severance. 'What on earth is Salome to do?': we are back to where we started.

* * *

[56] Herod tries to drink from the same cup and eat the same piece of fruit as Salome; he also wishes to sit next to her.

[57] See Mary Garden and Louis Biancolli, *Mary Garden's Story* (London, 1952), 234. I am grateful to Susan Rutherford for drawing this reference to my attention.

[58] In an era when sex was never portrayed openly on stage, might Strauss's scene represent an attempt to depict the sexual act in explicitly aural – rather than visual – terms? Visually, the Dance is 'simple' and 'restrained'; aurally, it 'heaves' and 'gyrates'.

[59] Strauss's 'Scenario' is reprinted as Appendix A in Puffett, *Richard Strauss: Salome*, 165–6. See also Gaston Vuillier, *La Danse* (Paris, 1898).

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My circling around the subject betrays a reversible relation between sound and image: that music can be variably repositioned; that it can confuse boundaries of diegesis, authorship and subjectivity. Put another way: my circling could be described, borrowing from women's history, as a form of audio-visual 'compensatory criticism' – counteracting a tendency to position the audio-track as merely reflective with a claim of performativity for musical discourse. This brand of criticism offers new insight into the function of the Dance as spectacle: how it foregrounds characters, dislocates eyes and ears. But, as might be clear, the interpretations proposed draw less than compelling – even somewhat fragile – conclusions: the meaning of the Dance cannot be fixed. This sense of connotative adjustability is perhaps to be expected. Within the local and cultural manifestations of the Dance discussed, the role of music is likely to shift according to dancer, theatre and narrative: in other words, historical contingency is a determining principle. Moreover, the Dance itself has drifted through history without corresponding signifieds, without points of reference. Biblical versions – the gospels according to Matthew and Mark – recount only the circumstances leading up to and following the Dance; later retellings offer no more clues. It is tempting, then, to settle on music as free-floating, drifting in some unspecified, inter-diegetic territory: there is something signified, but nothing precise or recoverable.

Such a claim resonates too neatly with one of musicology's recent fetishes: the slippery. Excavations into the exotic world of the vague and incoherent are as fashionable these days as unearthings of 'truth', 'unity' and 'logic' were a few decades ago. But perhaps in the present case there is some justification for the overt banner of 'disjunction'. There is, I think, a sense in which Salome's Dance needs notions of musical elasticity. Consider, for example, a recent *Salomé* production by the Moving Poets Theatre of Dance. The score featured music by Schoenberg and extracts from David Sawyer's *Songs of Love and War*. Washing over the on-stage action, the music was more abstract, non-figurative, non-theatrical even than that of the sketches from Paris. One might easily think of it as one of Salome's veils – seamless, enveloping, not a flourish in sight. But from my perspective, replacing an 'objective' musical voice with a music that, drifting freely, can latch itself on to anything, anyone, is enfranchising, assuaging a concern that moment-to-moment resemblance of physical and musical gesture might only further objectify the dancer–stripper on stage. Indeed, in light of contemporary rhapsodies to 'stripping as therapy' – strippers speak of empowerment, liberation, the triumph of female eroticism – the interpretation is apposite. Music seems to have heeded the same call.

This is not to propose a general assumption; instead, and at its most modest, it merely suggests a personal response to performance. In another show – with other dancers, set-designers, costumers, not to mention orchestrators – a different impression might emerge. But there is a larger point. An awareness of the inconsistency of audience response might stimulate a broader awareness of the audio-visual combination's manipulative potential: how it can be adapted to suit individual, local and even generic needs. This, of course, is intrinsic to the scenario itself: the Dance of the Seven Veils, we might remember, is primarily a fantasy; the 'elasticity' it demands is essential to its artistic and commercial success. What

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variations on the Dance – and, if you like, the entire strip industry – remind us of is that this elasticity amounts to a critical narration. The interpretative reins – the opportunity to play at *raconteur* – are there to take hold of.

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