Interview, Andrea Cawelti and Morris Levy, 2/25/15, Denver

Andrea Cawelti: I’m sitting here with Morris Levy, newly published author of a reconstruction of *Furio Camillo*, ballet by Gallenberg.

Morris Levy: hello, people in Radioland.

A: first of all, this is a wonderful publication, I’m absolutely thrilled to see it, and what I really wanted to ask you about first though is how did you get interested in Gallenberg, who is Gallenberg?

M: Gallenberg as a person, was one of those Austrian princes, dilettantes, who for whatever reason found out that he had a knack for composition, and as he had some money and didn’t have to worry about trying to make a living, he went to the right teachers, like Albrechtsberger, one of Beethoven’s teachers. It’s not exactly clear to me how his career began; he was not associated with a court for example, he didn’t have an appointment as such, but he managed to make a career for himself composing stage works of various kinds. When he was in Vienna he composed *Singspiels*, and then started focusing on ballet, and after a time in Vienna he was invited to Naples, where he became the house composer for the school of dance at the Teatro San Carlo. There, he composed over 90 ballets that I could trace. *Furio Camillo* was his final ballet, performed in October 1838; he died in March of 1839.

A: you got some exposure to Gallenberg while working in the Ward Collection at Houghton, I’m guessing?

M: that is correct [laughter—John Ward collected a LOT of Gallenberg] while I was a project cataloger working on John Ward’s ballet collection. This was one of the items in Ward’s Italian ballet collection. Of the items in the Italian ballet coll., this was the only complete, full manuscript of a ballet prior to 1850. I think for that reason it was of particular interest to Ward, and he felt that something should be done with the manuscript, because nearly all of Gallenberg’s ballet scores that survive are still in Naples. This may be the only full score of a complete ballet that managed to get out of Italy.

A: you say it’s a full score, but you certainly had some choices to make in going through, in terms of how you were going to put it together in your reconstruction. You mention in your preface various choices that you made about instrumentation and such. Give me an idea of some of the challenges that you faced?

M: from what I could tell from the manuscript, and from his life and output, he had to work very fast. There are a lot of repeats in his works, and he had a fascinating way of notating this: he would have various siglia that he would use, and then however many measures later he would have a number, and that would tell me how which siglia connected to the repeat. And so my quandary on that was whether to write out the repeat, or reproduce his system, which I decided not to do, given the requirements of the publishers. It also seemed less practical to use today, to make someone be flipping all around all the time.

A: and I guess performers wouldn’t be used to this today either, whereas in the day maybe this would have been standard practice?

M: well no, remember, a performer wouldn’t have seen this: this was the full score to send to copyists. The performers would have received parts. The parts might have had repeats but perhaps not quite so insanely. You would have passages where Gallenberg would bar 4 measures, with measures 1-2 barred so that you would actually repeat those 2 measures, so to perform it, you would do measures 1-2, 1-2, and then repeat all of that 1-4. So that may be a little more than a modern performer could take, especially if they had to page back and forth. So you’re right, but I don’t think in the parts it was to this degree. This was for the copyist to know: this is where I’m picking it up from. Within reason performers could do it, but in the score it is just repeat, go back 16 bars, and then we take it up from there. These little sections could pop up anywhere. Some of the things in considering modernizing it: he notated probably the way that he thought. So, for example, the bassoons were written with the trombones, probably because he was thinking of the lower instruments. He would constantly change the order, too: the strings would always be on bottom, but everything else could be anywhere! For the kind of score that I wanted to produce, I needed to keep it all in modern score order. He also, in particular with the horns, wrote them in various keys, so I had a lot of transposing to do. Again, I could have followed what he did, but it would have been so impractical for anyone trying to read it. People today might be familiar with horns in F, but horns in E-flat, or in D, would make no sense, so I opted to keep everything in C.

A: wow, and the players at the time, were they trained to transpose at sight, or were they playing different valved horns?

M: I think from what he notated that they were playing different valved horns.

A: well, but these weren’t the only choices you had to make were they? It seems from your preface that there were other instrumental issues, but also, that you rearranged the order of some of the acts, or portions of the acts, as well?

M: I didn’t rearrange the acts per se. What I saw in terms of the acts in the manuscript score, was what I transcribed. The question was trying to match what I saw with the printed scenario.

A: so you had trouble relating the scenes in the printed scenario to what you had in the manuscript?

M: right, there were 10 parts in the score, in 6 acts. Acts 1 and 2 were in 2 parts, and there was an introduction. The scenario was in 5 parts, and parts 1 and 2 were divided. In the ballet, I wanted to be able to convey, without having some kind of intertext (since I didn’t have the actual choreography) I at least wanted to give people an idea of what is it that they’re hearing, based on the scenario. Since they didn’t match, I had to listen to the music to match where I thought the emotions would be, to the sounds of the piece, and compare that to where in the story I thought it would be, and that’s how I was able to name the order of the score.

A: was there just one way which seemed to make complete sense, or were there places where you were in the dark, or guessing?

M: I was definitely guessing: especially, there are these Pas de Deux, where there would be a stop in the action for some kind of pantomime dance, then you would have a longer section where there is almost no action because what is happening is some kind of ritual dance going on, or it’s the wife of Camillo in a mournful moment before her uncle comes in, and the action starts again. So where that might be described was not even a scene, it’s really just part of the action, but it was divided in the score as being a separate scene, so I had to identify that: ok, this is the dawn coming up, and they are doing their ritual morning welcome, which is just described as “Beginning of the act,” and then all this other stuff happens. So that would be a separate part as Gallenberg composed it.

A: impressive amount of awareness of the musical connection, given that some the music in this time period is not as programmatic as what we’re accustomed to later in the 19th century!

M: and if I’m wrong, Gallenberg’s ghost will come to get me!

A: while you were working this through in your mind, was this after you left Harvard, or did you have a chance to talk it through with John Ward?

M: actually, yes, but after I left. It was when I came back for my Houghton Fellowship to do this project. I didn’t have anything before but the first 25 or so pages to work from. So when I came back, I was able to talk to Ward about some of this. We talked in generalities about it, because he was quite elderly at the time, and much diminished. I remember that I played for him the introduction, and he listened and he said, “I thought it would be better!”

A: I’m surprised to hear that, he must have been accustomed to the music of that time period.

M: I don’t know what he thought Gallenberg would sound like. I mean, he clearly knew what the music was like, but perhaps he thought that Gallenberg would be the Rossini that we didn’t know, or Bellini, someone like that.

A: no, the Italians would have kept anything that good alive.

M: I think, from talking to one of our professors at Northwestern, there was a style from Naples, that it seems that Gallenberg was really tuned in to, so if you knew, for example, Galuppi [laughter].

A: ah, Galuppi!

M: not a household name these days, but if you knew his music, that would have been much more approachable. Again, very strong on melody, very strong on repeating melodic themes, but by the standards that we have today, second cut.

A: ahhh got it. But he was so popular, it would be interesting to have the choreography, because there’s more than just the music going on with this stuff, so clearly something was working, if he was doing that many ballets.

M: oh no doubt about it, they were very popular, and some of them had a bit of a life outside San Carlo, but of course he was working with one of the greatest families of dancers of that time, and in his time, Taglioni’s time, one of the greatest choreographers. But just like Gallenberg, Taglioni was head of the school, so he had to do all of these programs. But Gallenberg worked in Vienna, worked in Naples, and also had some works premiered at La Scala. So he was not an unknown figure and certainly in some ways respected not only as a musician but also as an administrator.

A: running the ballet and the school.

M: right.

A: it might be worth it to put this into a context now, so this is Gallenberg’s last piece, 1838?

M: right.

A: so now of course Taglioni has done the big ballet for *Robert le Diable*, which many consider to be the birth of our modern conception of ballet, in ‘31, and then *Sylphide* in ‘32, right? So this piece is certainly close to that time period. They’ve been working in this style for a bit now, though how much they were aware of this we don’t know, were they aware that they’d invented something new? But how much the choreography for *Camillo* relates to some of the earlier pieces would be a question?

M: and a completely valid question. The fact that *Camillo* had no life outside of its initial performance, the fact that the dancers for the leads were relatively unknown, as far as we know, in fact I think that the lead role in this ballet is Camillo’s wife, and if I remember correctly, I found almost nothing about the dancer, and only a handful of things that the Camillo himself had danced. So this was not a major production, meant to have a long life, at least from the casting standpoint.

A: now you’ve had a great deal of experience with ballet after working on Ward’s Italian Ballet catalog, as well as all of the other ballet materials that you cataloged in the collection for some years before working on this project. What did you find to be the most challenging? Of course you’re a trained musicologist as well, did anything stand out to you from the experience?

M: I’d say that the most challenging, well not even challenging but really disappointing, was how little information I had about the choreography itself. The scenario gives wonderfully flowery descriptions that give you absolutely no details, no idea as to what was actually happening.

A: very romantic, but no details.

M: no idea what it looked like. We have ideas of what the style was at the time, mostly through oral tradition. We have an idea of how the dances might have looked, but without something really concrete, I feel it’s like transcribing Brahms’ *Requiem* without the text.

A: what a fantastic metaphor!

M: because it was a ballet! This was music accompanying a ballet, as much as it was orchestral music with a dance, and in fact probably would have been seen more as just dance.

A: what did you find out during the course of your research about how, with Taglioni particularly, because of course we have the same problem with the original *Sylphide*, the one that we’re familiar with comes to us from Bournonville, rather than the original version that Taglioni did. Some of it was, we think, based on that, and of course the general scenario is based on that, but the actually choreography, as far as I understand it, we just don’t know what Taglioni’s original was like. Did you get any idea of whether there might be any sources in Naples--of course there have been a lot of fires in Naples, a lot of stuff has been destroyed, what are the chances that there might be some clue somewhere to any of this, or do you think that the transmission was only oral, and since there was no later life, that the line is now totally broken?

M: I think it is possible, well for *Camillo* I think it is more than possible, that all that’s left is this score. For some of Taglioni’s other works that are in Naples, again, I haven’t come across anything otherwise of his choreography. Some of those scores have been digitized, so it certainly would be possible to do another score, perhaps one that the two of them worked on, but again, it would be a similar problem, there’s the music, but where’s the choreography?

A: ah yes, there’s no choreography.

M: it’s very complicated as you know, to describe choreography. Whatever notation that they used, even that we would recognize as notation, and we’ve seen choreography from Italy, and it’s just a collection of circles and squares, and arrows and lines. So especially for the solo dancers, there’s almost nothing. What has survived that we saw in the Ward Coll. is only for the *corps de ballet*. It’s hard to know from what they worked at that time. Was it almost entirely through oral transmission, or whether Taglioni worked with the solo dancers and then with the rest of the group just pointed and said “soldiers go there”?

A: or he was a trained dancer himself, did he just demonstrate?

M: because of course the *corps* would have been the students, so this could have been something they worked on in class.

A: such a fascinating opportunity to go through a score like this, from the most primary of primary of sources.

M: yes, and thank you Harvard Theatre Collection, thank you Houghton Library for the fellowship, and of course all thanks go to John Ward.

A: to John Ward!