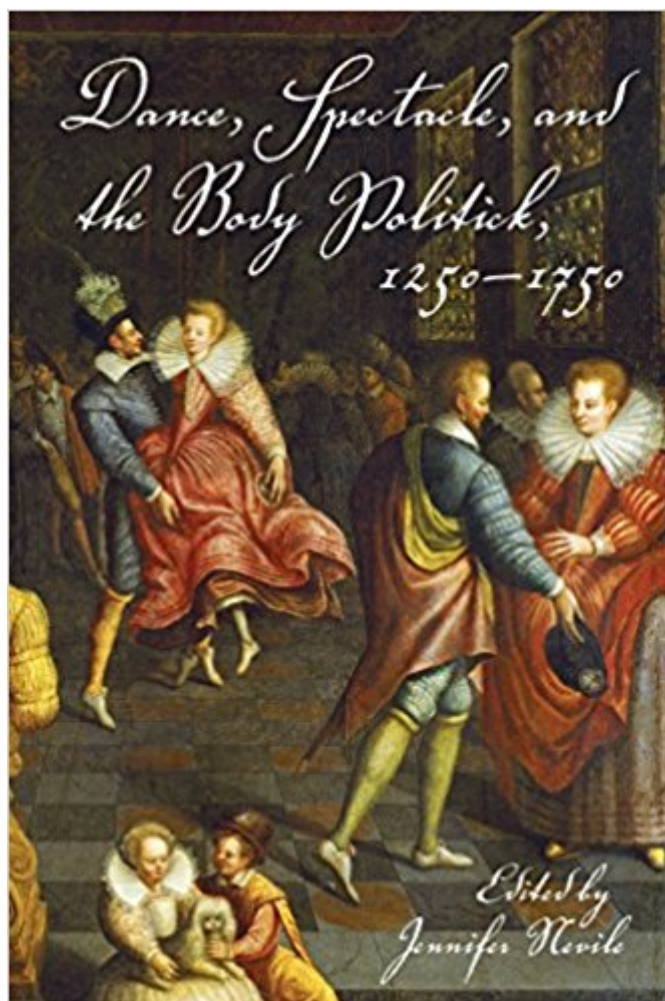


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# Dance, Spectacle, And The Body Politick, 1250–1750



## Synopsis

From the mid-13th to the mid-18th century the ability to dance was an important social skill for both men and women. Dance performances were an integral part of court ceremonies and festivals and, in the 17th and 18th centuries, of commercial theatrical productions. Whether at court or in the public theater danced spectacles were multimedia events that required close collaboration among artists, musicians, designers, engineers, and architects as well as choreographers. In order to fully understand these practices, it is necessary to move beyond a consideration of dance alone, and to examine it in its social context. This original collection brings together the work of 12 scholars from the disciplines of dance and music history. Their work presents a picture of dance in society from the late medieval period to the middle of the 18th century and demonstrates how dance practices during this period participated in the intellectual, artistic, and political cultures of their day.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"[This] collection more than fulfills its goal of opening up pre-1750 dance studies to a general readership, but will also be of interest to the more informed dance historian." [Historical Dance](#) "Neville... has assembled an intriguing book that in many ways serves as an encyclopedia of early dance—a feat not easily accomplished in one volume.... [T]his is a fine resource for those who research this specialized period of dance history. An excellent glossary and bibliography and a 'list of dance treatises, manuscripts, modern editions, and translations' complete the book. Summing Up: Recommended. Graduate students and researchers." [Choice](#), March

2009 "Dance, Spectacle, and the Body Politick makes an important contribution to existing dance scholarship... The essays in Nevile's collection add significantly to this diligent work. Every essay is both informative and interesting, and each author provides a valuable list of further readings on the topic." *European Legacy*, Volume 16 Issue 2 2011 "This well-researched and original collection of essays on early dance addresses the picture of dance in society from 1250 to 1750. The interdisciplinary and wide-ranging approach of the book makes it very valuable for dance historians, musicologists and historians of ideas alike, as well as anyone interested in dance history." *Cahiers Elisabethains*, Issue 78, Autumn 2010 "A big bite of dance history scholarship is undertaken in this study, and it does not seem to be too big for Jennifer Nevile, the editor of the volume, to chew.... Congratulations to... Nevile for bringing this impressive collection to life. I have profited considerably from reading the offerings presented here, and I am certain others will, too. I will recommend readings from this volume to my students for years to come."

*Richard Semmens*, University of Western Ontario, Professor of Music History, *Early Music America*, Spring 2009 "... this ambitious anthology... manages to fill an academic void...."

*Nicole Haitzinger*, University of Salzburg, *Theatre Research International*, Vol. 35.1 2010 "The balanced assortment of general introductions and detailed case studies makes *Dance, Spectacle, and the Body Politick, 1250-1750* a useful collection and an engaging 'read' for dance enthusiasts, reconstructors, and scholars alike." *Emily Winerock*, *Dance Chronicle* "The combination of so many well-researched articles on dance, ranging from the Medieval era to the Georgian period, makes this collection invaluable to anyone interested in dance history."

*Mary Jane Warner*, York University Nevile (research fellow, Univ. of New South Wales, Australia) has assembled an intriguing book that in many ways serves as an encyclopedia of early dance--a feat not easily accomplished in one volume. She arranges the 14 essays in five main sections: "Dance at Court and in the City," "Dance and the Public Theater," "Choreographic Structure and Music," "Dance and the State," and "Dance, Society, and the Cosmos." The contributors cover the material in detail, explaining how dance served to promote and advance those in the higher echelons of the social order, primarily in Italy, France, England, and (to a lesser extent) Germany--i.e., in countries in which court life defined the "body politick." One misses attention to dance at other levels of the social order and to the fashions and manners that accompanied the fetes and spectacles, but even without these this is a fine resource for those who research this specialized period of dance history. An excellent glossary and bibliography and a "list of dance treatises, manuscripts, modern editions, and translations" complete the book. Summing Up: Recommended. Graduate students and researchers. --Choice J. G. Harris, Independent scholar,

March 2009

A big bite of dance history scholarship is undertaken in this study, and it does not seem to be too big for Jennifer Nevile, the editor of the volume, to chew. She manages to weave an introduction into the book, and each of its six subsections make the promise of its lofty title (and the ideas it appears to embrace) within her grasp. Given the book's vast chronological sweep—rather more than the 500 years suggested in the title, since the very useful essay on 'Plato's Philosophy of Dance' by Graham Pont increases the range substantially—it was my guess, when I embarked on my journey through its pages, that I would find some themes on spectacle or the carnivalesque that would override chronology. Or maybe there would be a sociological/anthropological approach to the embodiment of status relationships (politics) through dance that would render chronology secondary to social configurations. With excited anticipation I dove in, expecting to find something along these lines. Although I was not disappointed, I discovered something quite different. The book features a nice selection of generally excellent essays by some leading authorities in historical dance. Each essay offers information situated in its own time frame, and each presents a secure control of primary and secondary sources and includes a very useful list of recommended reading at its conclusion. Some essays provide tantalizing new details (John S. Powell's piece on Beauchamps and public theaters in 17th-century France and David R. Wilson's review of the basse danse are good examples). Some interpret well-known material in new and promising ways. Jennifer Thorp's piece on 'Dance in the London Theatres c.1700-1750' makes me look forward to her important new work. Two essays review material the authors have already addressed, but nevertheless do so here in a compellingly compact way; Ken Pierce's offering on the choreographic structure of Baroque dance and Margaret M. McGowan's essay on court dancing in 16th and 17th-century France. Only a pair of essays (not counting the deceptively erudite and versatile 'Introduction and Overview' by Nevile herself) really fit the themes of bodies, politics, and spectacle announced by the title. Julia Prest's offering on politics and ballet in Louis XIV's France is pretty perfunctory. But Linda J. Tomko's essay on 'Mr. Issac's The Pastorall and Issues of "Party"' really does embrace the kind of inquiry I was expecting. Tomko's is a truly analytical study that responds with vibrancy to the themes called for by the volume's editor. Most of the authors represented here undertake their tasks with precision and skill. Many succeed, and all should be acknowledged for their contribution: those not already mentioned include Alessandro Arcangeli; Katherine Tucker McGinnis, and Karen Silen. Jennifer Nevile's multiple contributions to the volume cannot be praised sufficiently; her essays on Renaissance dance are impressive, her introduction to the volume full of perception. I suppose we must await some future in which an individual truly finds a connection among the various manifestations of social, stage, and court dancing over the ages. But I wonder if this is really

important. Dance, after all, is body, is spectacle, is 'politik' (however we configure it). I'm just not sure that Guglielmo Ebreo (15th century), Cesare Negri (c. 1535-after 1604), or Mr. Isaac (late 17th, early 18th century) shared some common agenda (let alone believed they did) when they created their splendid dances. Nevile, nevertheless, would have us believe that something like the same bodies, the same spectacles, the same kinds of politics were enacted (perhaps unintentionally) over and over again across the centuries addressed in this volume. Maybe she is right. The scholars she has brought together, however, do not appear to espouse such a grandiose vision but appear more concerned with a narrower, well-informed view of dancing in a given place at a given time.

Congratulations to them all, and to Nevile for bringing this impressive collection to life. I have profited considerably from reading the offerings presented here, and I am certain others will, too. I will recommend readings from this volume to my students for years to come.

Richard Semmens, University of Western Ontario, Professor of Music History, *Early Music America*: Magazine of Historical Performance, Spring 2009 "Jennifer Nevile's accessibly written anthology seeks to explore many now obscure aspects of early dance: contributions by twelve scholars elucidate the fascinating, multifarious nature of dance from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century.... contributors demonstrate a high scholarly standard and pursue their chosen themes with assurance and passion. The great forte of this collection is its ambitious, multidisciplinary range, and the authors' practical insight, honed by years of performance experience, represents a rare feat indeed. The book should be required reading in dance studies." Barbara Ravelhofer, University of Dunham, *RENAISSANCE QUARTERLY*, 62 Summer 2009 "This is a great book for understanding music, dance and the part they played in the period covering 1250-1750, in Europe. It is filled with a whole cosmology of ideas. How the arc of five centuries connect, are enmeshed, develop and flow into our own day. This book is a treasure." Paul-James Dwyer, Toronto *Early Music Quarterly*, Winter 2008 "An important book for any musician, theatrical performer, dancer, historian, reconstructor or anyone involved in recreating the work of this time period. Essays with detailed notes, glossary, bibliography and a list of dance treatises, manuscripts, modern editions and published translations are worth the price of the book alone. A great book for understanding music, dance and the part they played in the period covering 1250-1750, in Europe." Paul-James Dwyer, *Dance International*, Summer 2009 "Makes a serious and much needed contribution to cultural history, filling a gap that to my knowledge is not approached in any other volume. It should be of interest to everyone in the field of cultural history. It provides as complete an overview of dance history as one could hope for that period." Timothy J. McGee, Trent University

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