

Combination of Dance Elements in Nicolas Scherzinger's *Calico Dances*

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Calico Dances is a work for viola and electronic sounds by Nicolas Scherzinger, written in 2002 and premiered in Rochester, New York during February 2002 with John Graham as the violist. Its musical meaning primarily derives from the combination of recognizable dance elements into three independent, easily distinguishable dances (which I have named α , β , and γ) in a patchwork development style which results in the combination of all three into a single dance by the end of the piece.

The work exhibits properties characteristic of Scherzinger's compositional style, including electronic accompaniment, distortion and expansion of musical topics, and efficient composition. It marks the end of Scherzinger's exploration with non-interactive electronic accompaniment; every subsequent piece with electronic accompaniment thus far has included digital patches for MAX/MSP software which permits interactive accompaniment with aleatoric music. The piece stands out as one of the few in Scherzinger's oeuvre written in standard music notation; most others use box notation, aleatoric pitch and rhythm, cyclical diagrams, chance elements, or arrow/line notation.

From the very beginning, the piece is undeniably in the dance mode of enunciation as described by Kofi Agawu¹. The highly rhythmicized figures, the intense changes in dynamics, and the pressing tempo are all elements indicative of the dance

mode. There is never sufficient lyricism to suggest song mode and never great enough stagnation to suggest speech mode.

The piece begins with a large swell in the accompaniment immediately followed by dance α 's transitional rhythm (Fig. 1) which begins dance α proper. Dance α is

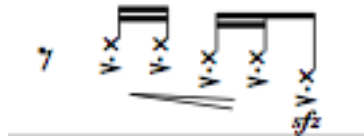


FIG. 1

formed from five rhythm-articulation patterns (Fig. 2A-2E) in addition to the accompanimental transitional rhythm. The entirety of the dance is constructed from these rhythms, which appear in generally the same contour; any aberration from their original contour signals the closing of a phrase, usually one which transitions into another dance.



FIG. 2A



FIG. 2B

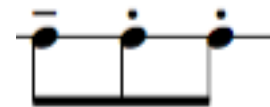


FIG. 2C

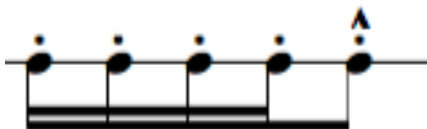


FIG. 2D



FIG. 2E

Dance α is also characterized by the use of six pitches— C_2 , $B \flat_2$, B_2 , F_3 , $E \flat_4$, and E_4 —which form the pitch class set (0 1 2 5 6 7) with interval class vector <4 2 1 2 4 2>. These pitches combine to form four double stops (Fig. 3), all of which are either major or minor sevenths. These double stops are the only melodic/harmonic units utilized by the viola in dance α .



FIG. 3

Taking these two previous ideas of rhythm and pitch content into account, it is evident dance α is structured entirely from its five articulation-rhythms and its four double stops; only the dynamics vary, but even these follow predictable patterns of dramatic swells with falloffs. This technique seems to reference ideas of efficient composition, *calor* and *talea*, and total serialism while not falling neatly into either of the latter two categories. Dance α never presents literal repetition of a phrase, although each phrase is modeled on the the same structure. This combines Agawu's concepts of periodicity and discontinuity into a single unit; each phrase feels familiar because it is generated out of the same prototype, yet each internal expansion (as William Rothstein² might term them) can be disorienting to the listener.

2. William Rothstein, *Phrase Rhythm in Tonal Music* (New York: Schirmer), 1989

When the listener has experienced a vast array of combinations of these α elements, Scherzinger introduces rests into the dance, beginning in m. 54. Prior to this, each rest was transitional material into dance β or γ . These rests in the viola part form the most discontinuous segment of dance α . Scherzinger even marks in “distant” and “like a faint echo” in the score, qualities which this dance has not exhibited thus far. This fading away of α *a niente* acts as a springboard from which to launch dance β .

Dance β moves doubly quick and is much more varied in rhythmic structure than what came before. It comprises primarily sixteenth and thirty-second notes with only the occasional eighth note. Its basic rhythmic structure (Fig. 4) is four or six sixteenth notes. One sixteenth from each of the pairs (1,2), (3,4), and (5,6) may be substituted for two thirty-second notes. In addition, either sixteenths 1 and 2 or 5 and 6 may be substituted for an eighth note. Like dance α , dance β has a transitional rhythm (Fig. 5).

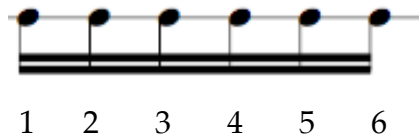


FIG. 4



FIG. 5

This dance uses all 12 tones of the chromatic scale in contrast to dance α . Additionally, the movement between these pitches is by any simple interval other than a minor third, strengthening the contrast between small step-wise motion and large leaps. In every instance of the rhythmic figure of two thirty-second notes and a sixteenth note, the pitches are either rising or falling by half steps.

The melodic repetition of dance β is pervasive. There is such significant repetition that Scherzinger labels large melodic cells with numbers 1 through 6 and brackets them each time they appear, up to 15 times per cell. This leads to a permeating sense of periodicity, the interruptions of which will be discussed later. The only alterations in these cells, similar to dance α , is the dynamic contour of and between cells.

While dances α and β have a serious and forward-moving character, dance γ is expressive of greater levity. Like dance α , it is composed of five basic rhythmic units (Fig. 6A-E). These rhythms, however, involve some syncopation, and each has a duration of one quarter note. There is also a degree of flexibility in these rhythms—they may be offset by an eighth rest or occasionally replaced by a novel rhythm. Furthermore, γ is the only dance to ever contain a pitched duration of a quarter note.



FIG. 6A

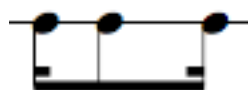


FIG. 6B



FIG. 6C



FIG. 6D



FIG. 6E

This dance's pitch content is similar to that of dance β . It contains all 12 tones, and they are moved between by all simple intervals. Leaps are much more prevalent in this dance than stepwise motion, adding to the light-hearted feel. The most often utilized intervals are the perfect fourth, tritone, minor ninth, and major seventh/diminished octave.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the piece is the way these dances are woven together. Scherzinger himself calls it a "musical patchwork,"³ which is the origin of the name of the piece. What Scherzinger means by this is the dances are not presented in a strictly linear fashion, rather parts of each are presented in succession among segments of other dances. Dances β and γ regularly alternate, almost never being presented in segments longer than two measures. In the latter half of the piece, dance α is presented as what Scherzinger marks in the score as an "interruption" (Fig. 7) and what Agawu would consider a discontinuity.



FIG. 7

As the piece progresses, each of the dances develops its thematic material independently. Additionally, characteristics of each dance begin to meld together, creating hybrid dances. The first example of this is in m. 143 (Fig. 8), in which the

3. Nicolas Scherzinger, "Calico Dances Title Page and Instructions." http://www.scherzmusic.com/pdf/Calico_Dances_titles_notes.pdf

harmonic content of dance α is combined with the rhythmic content of dance γ . At m. 158, dance γ crescendos and reaches into a higher tessitura. This is reigned back in with an α/γ hybrid. At m. 165, dance γ seems to spin out of control, as if the imagined dancers have gone into a frenzy. This time the episode is prolonged before m. 171 arrives as the most intense part of the piece. Here, all three dances are combined into a single Calico Dance containing rhythms from β and γ with pitch content and articulations from α .



FIG. 8

The idea of combination and recombination of these elements can perhaps best be expressed through an analysis inspired by the paradigmatic analysis of Agawu. Fig. 9 shows the categorization of each unit into categories of α , β , γ , α/γ , $\alpha/\beta/\gamma$, and β/γ . Units of α consist of entire phrases where possible and uninterrupted segments where not, units of β consist of ordered groups of melodic cells and uninterrupted segments, and units of γ consist only of uninterrupted segments. The exact measures contained in each unit will not be included here in order to conserve space.

The main ideas communicated in *Calico Dances* are reference to the dance topic, the creation of three dances through this reference, and the recombination of their dance elements to form additional dances. Scherzinger plays off the listener's expectations and

cultural inculcation by creating dances from the elements denoting dance and then recombining them into yet another dance in a show of the flexibility and malleability of dance elements.

α	β	γ	α/γ	$\alpha/\beta/\gamma$	β/γ
1	2	3			
4	5	6			
	7	8			
9	10	11			
12					
13					
14					
15		16			
	17	18			
	19	20			
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37	38				
39	40				
41	42				
43	44		45		
	46				
47	48				
49	50		51		
	52				
	53			54	
				55	
				56	
				57	
	58				59

FIG. 9

Works Referenced

Agawu, Kofi. *Music as Discourse: Semiotic Adventures in Romantic Music*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2008. PDF e-book.

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