Atossa's Dream
Yoking Music and Dance, Antiquity and Modernity in Maurice Emmanuel's *Salamine* (1929)

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Musicologist and composer Maurice Emmanuel's (1863-1938) research on Greek dance and rhythm (*La danse grecque antique d'après les monuments figures*, *Traité de la musique grecque antique*, and *Le rythme d'Euripide à Debussy*) provided both inspiration and source material for musicians, artists and choreographers alike. In *La danse grecque antique* (based on his dissertation in musicology from 1895) he sought to recreate ancient Greek dance by studying vases and statuary from antiquity and then analyzing high-speed action photographs (this technique is called chronophotography, a nascent cinematic technology) of modern classical ballet technique to reconstruct the movements from the distant past. His research on ancient Greek rhythm, dance and music received widespread praise among the general public. While serving as a professor of music history at the Conservatoire for almost thirty years, Emmanuel found success in his academic positions as a pedagogue, scholar, and composer.

Salamine, Emmanuel's second opera, illustrates the tensions between music and dance as well as between antiquity and modernity in the first decades of the twentieth century.[1] Emmanuel collaborated with an eclectic group of scholars and artists on this opera: the classicist and ancient Greek music scholar Théodore Reinach (1860-1928) translated and adapted the libretto based on Aeschylus's *The Persians*; stalwart of conservative Italianate choreography, Nicola Guerra (1865-1942) organized dances featuring the eurhythmic dancer Yvonne Franck; and Emmanuel composed the opera's Debussyian, neo-modal music.

This essay explores the conflicting trends of scholarship and art, tradition and modernism, and unity and independence in Parisian musical and dance culture in the late 1920s through an analysis of Maurice Emmanuel's understanding of the aesthetics of both ancient Greek and contemporary French music and dance. I will examine the 1929 production of *Salamine* as a case study in order to outline and critique tensions in Emmanuel's scholarly contributions to ancient Greek dance and music history. I demonstrate how Emmanuel's own theories about ancient and modern music and dance as well as his aesthetic preferences for modern music (Debussy in particular) and classic ballet technique found unity within the opera. Exploring Emmanuel's aesthetics of both music and dance—ancient and modern—allows us a unique opportunity to see how these creative media were theorized and practiced in the tumultuous years after the Ballets russes while also illustrating some of the conflicts between what Léandre Vaillat termed "the academic and the eurhythmic" in dance and music (Vaillat 1947, 104).

The Persians and the French: Atossa's Dream

In the first act of *Salamine*, we are introduced to Atossa, the Persian queen, wife of the deceased leader, Darius, and mother of Xerxes. She retells a dream in which her son falls from a chariot pulled by a Greek woman and an Asian woman yoked together. In Aeschylus's drama, Atossa's dream foretells of her son's fall; Xerxes tries to unite two opposing forces by attempting to harness the futures of the Occident and the Orient. The dream allegorizes the difficulties in wielding power, that is, Xerxes' ultimately failed attempt to build a military bridge between Asia and Europe. The ghost of Darius looks down in disappointment at his son's failure, and the young Persian king tears his robe in anguish. The metaphor aptly characterizes the forces at work in a work that blended Debussyian harmony, ancient Greek melody and mode, ancient Greek dance, Cecchetti ballet technique, and eurthymics.[2] For Maurice Emmanuel, yoking modern and ancient musical and dance techniques in this Cerberean opera proved to be a Herculean labor.

In shaping the libretto, the classicist Reinach divided the earliest surviving Greek drama into three acts: the first mainly features the chorus as well as the Persian queen Atossa. She

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retells the dream of her son's literal and metaphorical fall; a messenger then arrives to bring the news of Xerxes' defeat at Salamis. The second act is set outside the tomb of Darius where Atossa summons the ghost of the former king who admonishes Xerxes for defying the oracles. The last act rounds out this extended funeral dirge with the antiphonal cries of Xerxes and the chorus. Reinach and Emmanuel took the text for *Salamine* directly from Aeschylus's drama with the intention of representing the ancient Greek as possible. Emmanuel often criticized those who tried to update, falsify and restore works of antiquity, constantly warning his readers to use caution when reading archaeological and other writings on antiques (Emmanuel 1984a, 20-21). Reconstructing the past should be done with care, and the few remnants of the cultures of antiquity required preservation and careful stewardship. This point of view, popular among scholars, found its way to practitioners of the arts as well. *Salamine* was far from the first modern musical work to use an ancient text; however, Emmanuel and Reinach did this in a new way. Instead of writing "simple" music, Emmanuel sought to compose "authentic" music for a contemporary audience (based on his understanding of ancient Greek rhythm and mode and his aesthetic preferences for modern music) to bring the past to the audiences of the Opéra.

The following scene from the opera illustrates Emmanuel's modern musical setting for this ancient text. In Aeschylus's drama, Atossa's dream, a premonition of impending doom, comes early in the play: the queen is the first character we meet after an initial chorus. In Reinach's libretto (and subsequently, Emmanuel's opera), *le coryphée* introduces her before she comes forward to recount her dream. The dream represents the dangers of bringing disparate peoples and ideas together. Atossa's Act 1 soliloquy illustrates the fusion of modern, Debussy-esque parallel chords with Emmanuel's chromatic modality that creates a sense of harmonic stasis: a chromatic and twisting recitative punctuated by octave leaps as the prophecy turns more ominous, runs on the flutes, and chromatic triplet rhythms in the orchestra end the sequence (See 1).

Similarly, the entrance of the messenger in Act 1/3 is heralded by a flutter of chromaticism while Darius's monologue begins as a simple ode uttered on a reciting tone and accompanied by diatonic root-position triads and shimmering ninth chords in a stately 3/2. Modern musical inflections are best demonstrated in Darius's monologue in Act 2. This soliloquy ends with stately seventh and ninth chords over a sustained D-flat pedal (See Ex. 2). Contemporary reviews in 1929 immediately noted similarities in Emmanuel's score to the style of Debussy.[3]

Example 1 Maurice Emmanuel, *Salamine* (1929), Act I, sc. 2 (VS 56-57).

Example 2 Maurice Emmanuel, *Salamine* (1929), Act II, sc. 2
(VS 116-117).

the entire text declaimed rather than sung, but the traditions of the institution prohibited this course of action. Ultimately, only one spoken role remained : the coryphée declaimed his words, which Emmanuel notated rhythmically above the staff, accompanied by the orchestra to "ensure continuity of the music"[4] (See Ex. 3). The rest of the characters sing their lines, but they flow in an almost Pelléasian recitative. The rhythm of Darius' warning from Ex. 2, for example, stresses the natural delivery of the text emphasizing key words, similar to Debussy's treatment in *Pelléas* (See Grayson 1989, 47).

Emmanuel communicates the sense of mythic time that Debussy captured and formed into the mysterious erotic languor of *Pelléas* (See McQuinn 2003, 131-133; and Bergeron 2000, 160-185). Aeschylus's characters walk around lost in a world of ghosts and despair and, like Maeterlinck's characters, they are similarly bound by fate, doomed from the beginning. In both operas the characters are fully aware that they are headed for catastrophe. Mélisande's fate is clear from the beginning, as is Xerxes', and they drift through their respective worlds with impending warnings of a dark conclusion.

Debussy and Emmanuel

Although the similarities in plot between *Pelléas* and *Salamine* may end there, their significant kinship and Emmanuel's own strong affinity to Debussy's music indicate a tacit approval of a modern Debussyian musical vocabulary to evoke ancient Greece. Whereas Debussy's "Greek" works often leaned toward the erotic – *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, *Syrinx*, and *Les Chansons de Bilitis*— Emmanuel made use of this musical language to frame the strophes and antistrophes of Aeschylus divorced from their sensual sources.

Emmanuel's appreciation of Debussy was far-reaching. In 1926 he penned an essay titled "Le Rythme d'Euripide à Debussy" as well as a landmark study of *Pelléas et Mélisande*. In the treatise on rhythm, Emmanuel built an argument that Euripides's ultimate liberation of rhythm from Aeschylus was analogous to Debussy's from Wagner.

> Euripide avait tourné le dos à Eschyle. En faisant passer à travers le quadrillage des barres de mesure, qui ne sont pas pour lui les signaux de temps percutés, des rythmes sans cesse ondoyants, Debussy tourne le dos à Wagner, qui, novateur dans l'agencement et la longueur de ses périodes, *non carrées*, demeure, par la persistance, l'insistance de ses formules

Although the work accommodates the past, Emmanuel acknowledged that in this project it would have been impossible to write a work for the Opéra that remained faithful to the practices of ancient Greek music theory. "It would be absurd and nearly impossible to attempt an imitation of ancient Greek music," he writes in the introduction to *Salamine* (Emmanuel 1929a, 1). Not surprisingly, the text setting remains the most "authentic" Greek element of the production, but as Emmanuel noted, even here compromise proved necessary. Théodore Reinach initially hoped to keep

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[3] Émile Vuillermoz even characterized the choruses of the final act as reminiscent of the death of Adonis in Debussy's *Le Martyre de Saint-Sébastien* (1911), another antiquity-themed work with modern music. "Et il est curieux de constater combien les chœurs de Maurice Emmanuel évoquent par instant la couleur si particulière de ceux du *Martyre de Saint-Sébastien* au moment de la plainte funèbre évoquant la *Mort d'Adonis*. La science et l'instinct nous donnent ici le spectacle d'une de leurs plus émouvantes rencontres" (Vuillermoz 1929, 15).

[4] "Mais le rôle, *parlé en mesure*, du Coryphée, subsiste: aussi bien n'est-il pas sans exemple sur la scène de l'Opéra; et l'accompagnement instrumental, qui le soutient, assure la continuité musicale de l'ensemble" (Emmanuel 1929a, 1).

Example 3 Maurice Emmanuel, Salamine (1929), Act I, sc. 1 (VS 22).

rythmiques, un disciple des grands classiques allemands (Emmanuel 1984c, 554).

Emmanuel praises Debussy for turning his back on Wagner, but this is not praise for a modern turn, or a break with tradition. Emmanuel only extols the composer's break with the recent past. Emmanuel's theory of art centered on a Darwinian belief in artistic evolution, that the best art of the modern world had its roots in ancient Greek models (Corbier 2006, 201-212). New generations added to it, bringing new innovations, but it remained essentially the same. It is a teleological model of historiography, but also a compositional tool in Emmanuel's hands. He writes in his *L'Histoire de la langue musicale* that the ancients lay at the heart of modern music, inspiring new works based on ancient ideals, "Et dans l'éternel tournoiement des siècles elles reviennent, discrètes, sans imposer à notre vanité le joug des vieilles choses. Elles nous laissent créer du vieux neuf" (Emmanuel 1911, 572). Emmanuel sees this best realized in *Pelléas*, and in his analysis of the work concludes : "Histoire ancienne et qui se renouvellera, tant que des artistes originaux surgiront, et que l'art connaîtra, grâce à eux, le renouvellement nécessaire" (Emmanuel 1926, 211). Emmanuel's reading of Debussy's opera highlighted the work's engagement with the past and its resonance with timelessness. He labeled the opening motif "Les temps lointains," yet this became a cipher for his ultimate claim that the opera is indeed timeless (Emmanuel 1926, 135).

It is telling that Emmanuel paid so much attention to *Pelléas*, a work that thwarts conventions of time both musically and dramatically. *Salamine* attempts a similar timelessness. Dramatically, it presupposes that the first surviving drama (Aeschylus's politically relevant *Persians*) is indeed a timeless classic. Musically, Emmanuel used a combination of measured speech and free, *Pelléas*-esque vocal lines in *Salamine* to create a simultaneously modern and ancient feel, yet every attempt is made to retain the rhythms of the Greek.[5] Emmanuel wrote in his introduction to the published score that the "rhythms reflect those of Aeschylus, but they claim nothing more."[6] For its authors, since the setting of the text is "natural" it thus adheres to ancient practice. Emmanuel takes the idea that

poetic rhythm fuels the three musical arts, and argues in *La danse grecque antique* that if one understands the rhythms of poetic verse one can then reconstruct the rhythms of music and accordingly those of dance (Emmanuel 1984a, 3-4). Of course, there are some obstacles according to Emmanuel. For example, he writes,

> […] la poésie véritablement orchestique, celle dont l'allure plus libre ne s'astreint pas à des types métriques, la poésie des chœurs d'Eschyle, d'Aristophane ou de Pindare, n'a pu être soumise à une analyse exacte. Déjà d'admirables travaux en ont fait des ensembles métriques qui paraissaient n'être que confusion. […] En dépit des lacunes qui subsistent et qu'il sera peut-être difficile de combler, la Rythmique grecque, dans ce que la poésie nous en révèle, est une source d'information directe et féconde à laquelle doit puiser l'historien de la danse (Emmanuel 1984a, 4-5).

Thus, based on Emanuel's own assertions, the funeral dance at the opening of Act II of *Salamine* might be imagined from the score based on the rhythms, stage directions, and reviews, despite the lacuna of more detailed information.

(Re)creating the Funeral Dance in
La danse grecque antique

In *Salamine's* dance sequence in Act 2, Emmanuel opts for restraint and solemnity versus orientalist vibrancy.[7] In a letter to the choreographer, Nicola Guerra, Emmanuel expressed his initial hope that the Act 2 funeral dance be performed en pointe, but later realized that it was not appropriate for such a solemn scene (Emmanuel 1929b).[8] Instead, Emmanuel requested a dance comprised of "slow attitudes, on the theme of elongated index and middle fingers [and] small, only moving the torso and arms."[9]

These initial instructions closely resemble steps outlined in Emmanuel's own research on ancient Greek dance. For the Act 2 funeral dance of *Salamine*, Emmanuel's music bespeaks a stoic calm with a lilting allegro tempo in 5/4 whispered by the orchestra. A restrained funeral dance as outlined in *La danse grecque antique* would reasonably follow. As a scholar of ancient Greek dance, Emmanuel was eager to use the dance sequences to test out his theories; however, unlike other examples of "Greek" dance in early twentieth-century France such as Michel Fokine's *Narcisse* (1911) or *Daphnis et Chloé* (1912), the dances created for *Salamine* seem to have been performed devoid of eroticism and harkened back to a sobre classical style (Example 4).

In *La danse grecque antique* Emmanuel discussed the evolution of ancient Greek funeral dances which had origins in an ancient tradition of hired female mourners pulling their hair, but the gesture evolved into a more symbolic

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[5] This is coincidently not that different from the approach of sixteenth-century French musicians who experimented with measured music also designed to re-create music-speech: *vers mesuré à l'antique*.

[6] "Les rythmes reflètent ceux d'Eschyle, mais ne prétendent à rien de plus" (Emmanuel 1929a, 1).

Example 4 Maurice Emmanuel, Salamine (1929), Act II, sc. 1 (VS 100).

Figure 1a Emmanuel, La danse grecque antique (1896). Fig. 543.

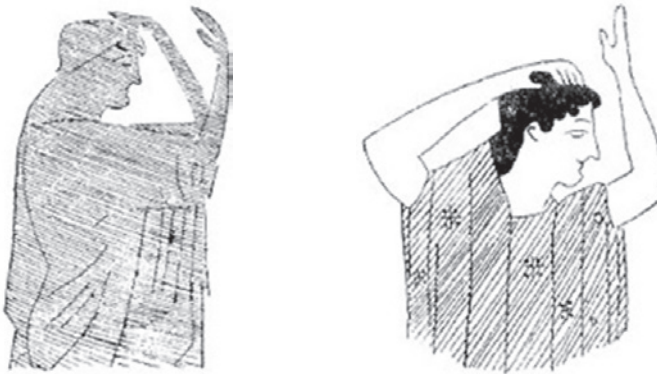**Figure 1b** Emmanuel, La danse grecque antique (1896). Figs. 551 and 553.

expression seen in the placement of one hand on the head and the other directed toward the dead body. In Emmanuel's Figure 543 one can see the earlier depictions of the ritual, which were later replaced by the stylized gesture in Figures 551 and 553 (See FIGURE 1a and 1b). Emmanuel described these latter poses as "prototypical" funeral gestures, and stated that although the ritual of tearing the hair had been lost, the gesture had been retained; moreover, Emmanuel described the dance for these funeral rites as "full of calm" versus the violence of the threnodic hair pulling.[10]

That Emmanuel and Guerra used restrained stoicism as the predominant aesthetic for the funeral dance is amply reported in reviews of the performance. In an article for *Candide* titled "Grecs et Barbares," André Levinson praised Emmanuel's opera and specifically drew contrasts with other "Greek" dancers (Levinson 1929a, 15). After noting the quality of the "Asian mourners" who "accomplish a brief example of a funeral mime," he lauded Emmanuel for his treatise on ancient Greek dance. Emmanuel, he noted, brilliantly proved his thesis and even anticipated the later writhing of the "Anglo-Saxon gymnasts, personified by the barefoot Isadora Duncan."[11] Pitting the funeral dances from *Salamine* against the American barefoot "Greek" dancers such as Duncan (who often felt the brunt of the press against her "free" movements) illustrates the intention of the reviewer to establish an enterprise like *Salamine* as chaste, calm, academic, authentic and past, versus the free and modern American dancer of the future. While Levinson's appraisal of Duncan had always been lukewarm, he repeatedly complimented Emmanuel and Nicola Guerra's work.

In admiration of Emmanuel's *La danse grecque antique* he wrote that it was "high time that the prejudices which range the antique Hellede upon the side of the Duncans and Dalcrozes in the combat against the art of the ballet, be eliminated, for it is a presumption founded upon a misconception" (Levinson 1922, 17; Also see Levinson 1982, 77-78, and 93; Levinson 1928, 15).

Like Levinson, Emmanuel preferred to couple a modern musical style (the music of Stravinsky and Debussy) with a more conservative classical ballet technique. It is thus unsurprising that the Opéra assigned Nicola Guerra to create the choreography for *Salamine*. Guerra was never known as a modernizer in Hungary (where he failed to update the Hungarian Opera Ballet's repertoire), nor in Paris or Milan (Fuchs 2000, 80). As Giannandrea Poesio has shown, Guerra's Italian version of Diaghilev's Ballets russes "proposed a repertory lacking in innovation [and perpetuating] a lifeless tradition" (Poesio 2000, 102). As an unwavering representative and supporter of the nineteenth-century Italian school, Nicola Guerra's short-lived 1915 Balli Italiani di Nicola Guerra helped cement a reputation of the choreographer and pedagogue as decidedly old-fashioned.[12] For a "classical" choreographer, adapting to the styles of the modern "Greek" dancers was not easy (Körtvélyes 1956,

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[7]   For more on Emmanuel's inspirations for his use of modern technology to study ancient dance see Naerebout 2010, 43-49.
[8]   He made no mention of the fact that classical ballet was not very Greek. The Archive Guerra cited in Falcone 1998 is currently housed in a private collection in Rome.
[9]   "attitudes lentes, sur le thème des doigts allongés (index et médius) […] les petites […] seulement exécuter des mouvements du torse et des bras" (Emmanuel 1929b).

188). His frustrations with Rouché and the Opéra's flock of eurhythmic dancers remain legend. As Lynn Garafola has noted, Guerra routinely argued with the director of the Opéra for forcing him to share the stage with Dalcroze choreographers. In one interview, Guerra was particularly dismissive of the "new dance" noting, "Classical dance has its roots in Olympus, and we have been taught by the gods. Modern dance is not even bacchic, it is at best lunacy."[13] Yvonne Franck, the lead dancer in *Salamine*, was a crossover dancer who trained in both the classical ballet tradition and in eurhythmics. Like her colleague, Yvonne Daunt, Franck's technique blended the "Greek" barefoot style with traditional pointe and demi-pointe work.[14] In addition to her role as Mariandyne in *Salamine*, Franck led the ballet in the 1926 and 1928 revivals of Gluck`s *Alceste* (choreographed by Nijinska),[15] appeared in Philippe Gaubert`s opera *Naïla* (1927), and choreographed *L'Eventail de Jeanne* (1927) with Alice Bourgat (See Garafola 2005, 98-99). These events however marked the end to the Opera's eurhythmic experiment, followed by Levinson's gleeful obituary for the cancelled eurhythmic class at the opera (Levinson 1925, 3).

Broken Yokes and Broken Backs

Dissonance between the musical and the choreographic in a work like *Salamine* was not uncommon. The parallels and counterpoints that occur within the remaining sources of *Salamine* reside at the broader interpretive level. We cannot say with any certitude how the positions of the hand interact with Emmanuel's sinuous music: the evidence is insufficient to reconstruct the choreography. The counterpoints become manifest when we explore what this music and what these dances might have meant to Emmanuel, Guerra, and their audiences. In his scholarship on ancient Greek dance, Emmanuel contends that the mechanisms of dance remain the same—a deliberate return to French tradition […] Embracing the beautiful cadences of classicism, the Opéra rejects the idioms of Geneva and pidgin-French exoticism (Levinson 1929b, 201)." As Lynn Garafola has argued, the "death [of the eurhythmic experiment at the Opera] marked a turning point in the 'reclassicization' of ballet, a call to

order" (Garafola 2005, 99). It was, in her opinion, "the end of the experimentalist dance movement born in France in the first decade of the twentieth century from the combined influences of Duncanism, aestheticism, exoticism, eurhythmics, and the Ballets russes" (Garafola 2005, 100).

As a musicologist Emmanuel had little control over the cultural guardianship of the plastic arts, but he could remove the "falsifications" and "restorations" at the Opéra and resurrect the neglected statues from the necropolis on the stage. He allied himself with contemporary scientists and art critics not only by following the paradigmatic Western tropes of representations of the East and Oriental Greece, but more importantly, by placing these within a discourse of musical and choreographic relationships to the modern and ancient body. To Emmanuel, the body signified an instrument as integral as music to bring the past into the present. Debussy's "timeless" music and Guerra's classical technique had roots in the most timeless art of all—that of antiquity. (Nevertheless, while generally condemning erotic and "pathologically" affected modern representations of ancient Greek music and dance, Emmanuel found no problem with eroticism in ancient Greek music when practiced by his friend Debussy.) Yoked together—like like the Greek and the Barbarian of Atossa's dream—the Dionysian and Apollonian forces break free of each other, and Emmanuel's musical representations of antiquity tended toward the Apollonian and the scholarly rather than the Bacchic or the sensual.

While figuring out how to yoke the past with the present in these two media Emmanuel did not seek unity. Wedding modern music with conservative choreography made sense to a scholar who argued that modern music and classical ballet were the true inheritors of the Greek tradition, while modern dance was the result of perversions, pathologies, and Americans. For the modern critic, it is serendipitous that the plot of Emmanuel's opera mirrors his attempts at choreo-musical synthesis. His search for that magic alchemy of musical, poetic, and choreographic aesthetics to resurrect the lost steps of the ancients is, nonetheless, instructive. *Salamine* anticipates our own methodological labors in yoking the aural and visual analytically and culturally.

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[10] "A côté de ce type, il s'en forme un autre dès le VIᵉ siècle (10): le personnage qui prend part à la lamentation funèbre porte une main à sa chevelure, dans un mouvement plein de calme et dont la noblesse révèle le sens purement mimique; et il étend l'autre bras dans la direction du mort" (Emmanuel 1984a, 272-74).

[11] "les pleureuses asiatiques n'y accomplissent qu'une brève et sommaire mimique funèbre. Mais les gestes consacrés de leurs rites font que nous nous souvenons de ce que doivent à M. Emmanuel tous ceux que passionne l'art de la danse […] Bref, son traité est comme la réfutation anticipée de cette conception d'une danse grecque anarchique et impressionniste, chère aux gymnasiarques anglo-saxons, et que devait personnifier Isadora Duncan dansant, pieds nus, […]" (Levinson 1929a, 15).

[12] On the other hand, Guerra did choreograph Ida Rubinstein (en pointe throughout) in a mixed cast version of Florent Schmitt's *La Tragédie de Salome* (1919) that included both "rhythmic" and "classical" dance (See Garafola 2005, 93; Cossart 1987, 75; and Poesio 2000, 102).

[13] "La danse classique a ses racines dans l'Olympe, et nous a été enseignée par les dieux. La danse moderne n'est pas même bacchique, elle est tout au plus sélénique" (Falcone 2010).

[14] André Levinson deplored this mixing of styles. He wrote how he hoped Yvonne Daunt would come to her senses, forget the "outmoded childishness of Duncanism," and accept what she was "a remarkable classical dancer." Quoted in Garafola 2005, 98.

[15] Earlier choreographies in the 1920s were danced by Régina Badet and choreographed by Mᵐᵉ Mariquita.

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