Le Bourgeois gentilhomme: Molière and music

With *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (1670), Jean-Baptiste Molière and Jean-Baptiste Lully created a masterwork of musical comedy. This was the ninth collaboration of their seven-year association, and *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* became by far their most popular work – one that remained among Louis XIV’s favourite entertainments throughout his life. This comédie-ballet, glowing with comic inspiration, proved ‘les deux grands Baptistes’ (as Mme de Sévigné called them) to be simply the best team of comic collaborators before Mozart and da Ponte. In fact, it was for *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* that Molière coined the term comédie-ballet.

*Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* also marked a new direction in the genre of comédie-ballet. The early comédies-ballets were intended for court fêtes in which the King and his courtiers would participate as dancers in the intermèdes [musical interludes]. Louis XIV had performed a variety of colourful and exotic roles in these early works – including those of gypsy (*Le Mariage forcé*), peasant (*La Pastorale comique*) and Moor (*Le Sicilien*). But after the King’s retirement from the stage with *Les Amants magnifiques* (where he was to portray Neptune in the first intermède, and Apollo in the last) the genre broke with tradition.¹ *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* was the first wholly professional comédie-ballet in which noble amateurs did not participate.

As with many of the earlier comédies-ballets, Louis XIV had a hand in selecting the subject matter. The visit of an envoy, Suleiman Aga, from November 1669 until May 1670 provided the comic inspiration for the central musical episode. This diplomat, charged with repairing diplomatic relations between France and the Ottoman Empire, proved a difficult personality. Unimpressed by the splendour of Louis XIV’s court and scornful of the Turkish-style reception given in his honour, Ambassador Aga was overheard to remark that the sultan’s horse was more richly adorned than the French King. Following the ambassador’s departure, Louis commanded the Chevalier Laurent d’Arvieux, recently returned from the Middle East,
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and an expert in Turkish customs, to join with Molière and Lully in preparing a Turkish masquerade.

Later that summer, the three retired to the village of Auteuil, where the Parisians went to escape the stifling heat of the city, to continue preparations. D’Arvieux recounts that, once the play was finished and approved by the King, he ‘spent eight days at the home of the master tailor Baraillon, to have the Turkish clothes and turbans made’. Evidence suggests, however, that the play was far from finished. Most probably D’Arvieux was referring only to the central ‘Cérémonie Turque’, and Molière and Lully had yet to set their musical and comic imaginations to work building up plot and action and fleshing out the entertainment around the Turkish centrepiece. Much of the elaboration and many details of the comédie-ballet were left to the eleventh hour. On 3 October, only six weeks into their busy autumn season at the Théâtre du Palais-Royal, Molière and his actors left for Louis XIV’s fairy-tale château at Chambord, where the King and court had retired for a season of hunting and relaxation. Molière and Lully therefore had a scant ten days to set up, rehearse and coordinate the music, dance and spoken episodes of the play. The printed booklet (livret), distributed to the audience at the court performances (an action depicted in the opening scene of the concluding ‘Ballet des Nations’), offers a rare glimpse into this comic masterwork-in-progress. One undated livret that survives in a single copy evidently served as a first proof. In it, the dialogue en musique and the second drinking song do not appear, and the sung minuet ‘Ah, qu’il fait beau dans ces bocages’ [‘How fair the day in these woodlands’] is placed in the fourth (not the fifth) entrée of the ‘Ballet des Nations’. These and other minor discrepancies between the two livrets suggest that Molière and Lully were still working out the sequence of events during this ten-day period.

The Chambord premiere was given at a staggering cost to the royal treasury — a total of 49,405 livres according to the royal accounts. These accounts reveal many details relating to the premiere performances. Jean Baraillon, royal tailor, and the tailor Forestier received 5,108 livres and 3,571 livres respectively for furnishing 81 costumes. This did not include those worn by the actors (for which Molière’s company received 4,400 livres); nor did it include the costumes worn by Lully (who played the Mufti) and the court singer Mlle Hilaire (who appeared onstage once, to sing the air ‘Je languis’) — for which they received 900 livres. Further payments made for silk hose (ninety-three pairs), ribbons, masks, garters, wigs, beards, feathers, gloves (eleven dozen), and precious stones reflect the magnificence of the production. The ninety pairs of stage shoes (escarpins) supplied to the performers give an idea of the great host of participating singers, instrumentalists and dancers.

The quality and cost of costumes can be gauged from those worn by Lully and Molière, of which there are surviving illustrations. The first, a drawing by Henry Gissey (1621–73), depicts that of the Mufti — played by Lully (listed in the livret under the stage-name ‘le Seigneur Chiacheron’). On his head is a ‘turban de cérémonie’, and under his arm he carries the Koran. This costume cost the royal treasury 200 livres, plus an additional 100 livres for ribbons and garnishes. The second illustration, by Pierre Brissart, depicts the initiation of Monsieur Jourdain into the Turkish aristocracy. While this engraving lacks the detail of Gissey’s drawing, an inventory of
Molière's wardrobe made after the playwright's death in 1673 describes a costume for the performance of *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, consisting of a dressing gown, double striped with rosy-gold and green taffeta, breeches of red velvet, a camisole of blue velvet, a nightcap with lining, some shoes and a cotton Indian-painted scarf, a Turkish jacket and a turban, a sabre, shoes of musk-deer trimmed with green and rosy-gold ribbons and two Sedan points, a taffeta doublet trimmed with lace of faux silver, the belt, green silk stockings and gloves, with a hat trimmed with rosy-gold and green feathers.⁵

Royal accounts list payments for food and lodging, for carriages to transport the singers, dancers, and actors from Paris to Chambord, for carpenters and painters, for lumber, nails, rope and canvas to construct a temporary theatre, designed by Carlo Vigarani, in the *salle des gardes* (where the marks of the rings to which curtains were attached are still visible), for face powder, pomade and make-up assistants, and much else besides. Then, after Chambord, the court and the performers picked up and moved the entire production to Saint-Germain-en-Laye, where performances continued on 9, 11, and 13 November. The cost of transportation by carriage and waggon to Saint-Germain added some 10,000 livres to the mounting costs.

According to D'Arvieux, early performances were an outstanding success.⁶ According to Grimarest, however, the King remained silent after the first performance, prompting courtiers to round on Molière, accusing him of attempting to entertain them with childish inanities, and leaving him in great distress. Then, after the second performance, the King said to his playwright: 'I did not speak to you of your play at the first performance, because I feared being influenced by the manner in which it had been performed: but in truth, Molière, you have never written anything that has entertained me more, and your play is excellent.'⁷ Mortified courtiers, Grimarest recounts, then joined in the applause. Such a prank at the expense of his sycophantic courtiers has the ring of truth, for Louis XIV on occasion revealed a theatrical flair for keeping his courtiers off balance.

Music and ballet inform *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* on multiple levels. The entertainment begins ceremoniously with an instrumental overture, and concludes with a *ballet à entrées* - for the entertainment of Monsieur Jourdain and his family. Moreover, each act (of the recast five-act version) concludes with an *intermède* that grows out thematically from the preceding spoken scene. The first is a kind of dance-demonstration, in which 'the four dancers execute all the different movements and all the kinds of dance steps that the Dancing Master orders'. For the second, choreography informs stage action as four apprentice tailors dress Monsieur Jourdain to
musical accompaniment, and then dance their delight with the tips they have received from him. Then, at the end of Act III, the six cooks enter dancing to present their succulent dishes for the banquet. Collectively, these balletic episodes form a dramatic arc to the apotheosis of Monsieur Jourdain in the fourth intermède, the Turkish Ceremony – an eruption of music, dance and fantaisie (a term which includes notions of both an outer fantasy world and an inner creative imagination).

From the very start of the plot, when the curtain opens to reveal the pupil composing a vocal air, we are made aware that artistic inspiration, comic and musical fantaisie lie at the heart of this work. According to a stage direction in the livret, ‘a pupil of the Music Master is seated at a table composing an air which the Bourgeois has ordered for a serenade’. This laconic rubric gives little insight into the mise en scène that would bring this comic action to life in performance. Fortunately, André Danican Philidor, Louis XIV’s music librarian, preserved the musical score for this scene in his manuscript copy of Le Bourgeois gentilhomme made for the king’s library. By means of this silent score – these mute notes attached to a musical staff, with the syllables to be sung placed below – we are given insight into the inner workings of the creative process. Here the composer ‘invents’ a melody phrase by phrase, while striving to duplicate in musical rhythms and pitches the speech inflections of a skilled orator. As he fashions the melodic shape of each phrase (without the aid of a harpsichord, judging by the stage direction), he writes it down on manuscript paper to his own sung dictation. Musical example 1 shows his setting of the first three lines of text; above the vocal staff, placed in italics, is my analysis of the implied stage action that accompanies each measure of music.

Yet the question remains: if no harpsichord is present on stage, just what does the bass line represent? Clearly, this bass does not correspond to that of the finished air, which has decidedly more melodic contour and harmonic direction. Rather, this bass is a stream-of-consciousness succession of germinal phrases, a series of partially formed musical ideas with the forward impetus of a ‘walking bass’. Indeed, this bass could be viewed as a musical representation of the composer’s thought-processes while in the throes of creative inspiration. As the harpsichord is not present onstage, its music must therefore exist only in the mind of the composer-student as a product (or perhaps by-product) of his musical fantaisie. It is precisely this artistic fantasy-world that lies just beneath the surface of Le Bourgeois gentilhomme – which erupts periodically in the form of the twisted logic of the Maitre à danser (for whom ‘Tous les malheurs des hommes, tous les revers funestes dont les histoires sont remplies, les bëvres des politiques, et les manquements des grands capitaines, tout cela n’est venu que faute de savoir danser’ [‘All the misfortunes of mankind, all the dreadful disasters that fill the history books, the blunders of politicians and the lapses of great commanders proceed from not knowing how to dance’], I, 2) and in the increasingly hyper-real intermèdes. Artistic fantaisie comes to the foreground in the carnivalesque Turkish Ceremony and is compounded meta-theatrically in the ‘Ballet des Nations’ – where the new Mamamouchi and his family become onstage spectators at a second theatrical entertainment as exotic as the first.

At any rate, we learn that the Maitre de Musique has assigned the task of composing this air to one of his pupils ‘who has an admirable talent for these kinds of things’. This elicits the peevish and ignorant response from the bourgeois that the master should have done it himself. The master replies: ‘Il ne faut pas, Monsieur, que le nom d’écolier vous abuse. Ces
sortes d'écoliers en savent autant que les plus grands maîtres; et l'air est aussi beau qu'il s'en puisse faire' ['You must not let the name of pupil fool you, sir. Pupils of this sort know as much as the greatest masters, and the song is as fine as could be made']. We may appreciate the delicious irony (as did the audience) that the actual composer of the air was not the Music Master's student, but none other than Lully, Louis XIV's Superintendent of Music. Lully was a gifted musician who had sprouted from humble roots. Brought from Florence by the duc de Guise to teach Italian to his wife, he rose through the ranks to become not only the most influential musician in France but also a lifelong friend of the King. Lecerf de la Viéville tells us that the intuitively gifted Lully composed music in a manner similar to that depicted here. Once he had the text of an operatic scene:

Lully read it until he knew it nearly by heart; then he sat down to his harpsichord, sang and re-sang the words, playing his harpsichord and fashioning a basso continuo. When he had finished his melody, he would commit it to memory in such a way that he would not forget a single note. Laloyette or Colasse [Lully's secretaries] would then come, and he would dictate it to them. The next day he would hardly remember anything of it.¹³

This scene was played for laughs at the premiere of Le Bourgeois gentilhomme, when the versatile court singer Jean Gaye (who played the music student) sang in falsetto and notated the melodies onto manuscript paper with a flourish. Contrary to our expectations, what follows is a masterpiece: an air tendre [love song] of ravishing beauty which, when sung by the delectable court singer Hilaire Dupuis,¹⁴ must have left the audience transfixed.

Musical example 3: *Chanson*, transcribed from BnF, Rés. F. 578, p. 11.

Monsieur Jourdain’s musical tastes, however, run in quite a different direction, and he finds the student’s composition a bit lugubrious. Expressing his preference for a rustic chanson (‘There’s sheep in it’, he recalls), Monsieur Jourdain sings the ditty in falsetto, taking pride in being able to do so without ever having studied music.¹⁵

The drinking songs found in Act II of the livret (or Act IV of the printed play) provide a lively counterpoint to the earlier air sérieux of Act I. These performances, like the banquet they accompany, have been laid on, not by Monsieur Jourdain (who merely foots the bill), but by his aristocratic fair-weather friend Dorante. An easily recognisable type of parasite, Dorante is a penniless courtier driven to trading on his nobility to raise money in a sham alliance with someone below his station. He uses Monsieur Jourdain’s food and music to whet the sensual appetites of Dorimène – an aristocratic lady he intends to court – and right under the bourgeois’ nose. Yet, even this farcical scene is ennobled by Lully’s music. The first song (‘Un petit doigt [a little drop] Philib’s’) tells of how wine inflames love, while the second (‘Buvons, chers amis, buvons’ [‘Drink, friends, drink!’]) expands on the familiar carpe diem theme (wine being a metaphor for love). Indeed, Lecerf de la Viéville tells that of all his airs ‘Buvons, chers amis, buvons’ was the one that Lully loved most throughout his life. Thus, the diverse vocal music so far presents a cross-section of the different secular song traditions popular in mid-seventeenth-century France: the air sérieux, the air buchique or drinking song and, as will be discussed presently, the pastoral dialogue en musique.

In his performance of ‘Je croyais Janneton’, Monsieur Jourdain is evidently unaware that these sheepish lyrics were by Pierre Perrin – who the previous year had acquired the royal privilège to establish French opera. Molière and Lully took every opportunity to ridicule this rival poetaster and his eccentric theories on opera. Two years later Lully would break with Molière, take over Perrin’s opera monopoly and establish his own
symbolic of the disharmony that he has brought about in his family life. Just as surely as his determined social climbing draws attention to, and indeed exacerbates, his poor taste in the realm of the arts, it also ruins such judgement as he has in family matters. While he wishes (harmlessly enough) to learn music to ape ‘people of quality’, he (rather more seriously) disregards his daughter’s wishes and insists upon marrying her to a gentleman. Trapped in his narrow world of a vulgar, social-climbing bourgeois, Monsieur Jourdain is hell-bent on underlining his bleak philistinism by deck ing himself, his house and his family in the trappings of nobility. Yet increasingly, as the action unfolds, his vulgarity is little more than an artistic motif: Monsieur Jourdain becomes no more than a bourgeois clown, around whom playwright, composer, choreographer and costumier create a swirl of richly inventive comic dialogue, music, dance and image.

The arts, always kind to young lovers, will set this situation aright by means of a musical ruse – the Turkish Ceremony. We have seen the comédie-ballet setting up a delightful counterpoint of comic scenes and musical episodes drawn from the tradition of court ballet. As the plot unfolds, however, these musical interludes, first presented to Monsieur Jourdain and his household as mere entertainment, become increasingly fantastic and meta-theatrical. They will serve as stepping-stones away from his comfortable life of middle-class reality and toward an exotic, musical fantasy-world.

Not surprisingly, patterns and rhythms of music and choreography inform many of the spoken episodes of the play: we see this formal patterning in the articulation of comic set pieces, in dialogues and in verbal games. In the first scenes we meet the five masters, of music, dance, fencing, philosophy and tailoring. The first two, obsessed with earning money, full of themselves and their professions, are taken to their hyperbolic limits: for them, everything in the world is explicable only in the narrowest terms of music and dancing. Molière adds to the squabbling pair the still more lunatic self-admiring figures of the Fencing Master and the fist-waving Master of Philosophy. It is no accident that none of these cultural parasites has a proper name, for they are depersonalised archetypes drawn from the realms of farce and ballet de cour. Moreover, in true ballet tradition, each appears with his entourage of followers: the first with three musicians, the second with four dancers, and the tailor with four apprentices.

The linguistic symmetries of these scenes in particular mirror balletic choreography. The opening dialogue is a verbal pas de deux in which the Music and Dancing Masters have a professional quarrel which, like so many professional quarrels, begins with a tiny difference of opinion. The one, preferring to display the indifference to money of a man devoted to his
art, feels that fulfilment can be attained only if he is paid to the accompa-
niment of lavish and discriminating praise, while the other is content to
take his wages from a rich fool while gathering approval from less well-off
connoisseurs. In the second scene, their rivalry grows as one evokes a world
which could only attain perfect harmony if all studied music, while the
other believes that universal peace can be attained only through the study
of dancing, which would eliminate all faux pas from human affairs. When the
Fencing Master arrives in the second act, the heated verbal interplay
between the three gathers pace, threatening to break out in song and dance:

MAÎTRE D'ARMES: Et c'est en quoi l'on voit de quelle considération nous autres
nous devons être dans un État, et combien la science des armes l'emporte
hautement sur toutes les autres sciences inutiles, comme la danse, la musique,
là ...

MAÎTRE À DANSER: Tout beau, Monsieur le tireur d'armes. Ne parlez de la
danse qu'avec respect.

MAÎTRE DE MUSIQUE: Apprenez, je vous prie, à mieux traiter l'excellence de la
musique.

MAÎTRE D'ARMES: Vous êtes de plaisantes gens, de vouloir comparer vos
sciences à la mienne!

MAÎTRE DE MUSIQUE: Voyez un peu l'homme d'importance!

MAÎTRE À DANSER: Voilà un plaisant animal, avec son plastron!

MAÎTRE D'ARMES: Mon petit maître à danser, je vous ferais danser comme il
faut. Et vous, mon petit musicien, je vous ferais chanter de la belle manière.

[FENCING MASTER: And by that you see in what consideration men like me
should be held in the State, and how the science of arms excels greatly all
other useless sciences, such as dancing, music, and ...]

DANCING MASTER: Easy, easy, sir wielder of arms. Don't speak of dancing
except with respect.

MUSIC MASTER: I pray you, learn to treat better the excellence of music.

FENCING MASTER: Amusing folk, to want to compare your sciences with
mine!

MUSIC MASTER: Do but see the importance of the man!

FENCING MASTER: My little dancing master, I'll make you dance as you
should! And you, my little musician, I'll make you sing in the prettiest way.]

The rhythm and patterning of these exchanges lead up to the arrival of
the Maître de Philosophie, who, having commended Seneca's treatise on
anger to the warring masters, rapidly takes the quarrel to a new intensity,
dismissing the other three as mere practitioners of the 'pitiful trades of
gladiator, songster, and mountebank'. The exchange concludes with insults
and fisticuffs:

MAÎTRE D'ARMES: Allez, philosophe de chien.

MAÎTRE DE MUSIQUE: Allez, belître de pédant.

MAÎTRE À DANSER: Allez, cuistre fiéffé.

PHILOSOPHY MASTER: Comment? Maraudez que vous êtes ...
(Le Philosophe se jette sur eux, et tous trois le chargent de coups, et sortent en
se battant).

DANCING MASTER: Get out, you cad of a pedagogue!

MUSIC MASTER: Get out, you scoundrel of a pedant!

[FENCING MASTER: Get out, you dog of a philosopher!]

The masters of music and dance, together with their players, singers and
dancers (for all their human limitations), are the very instruments of fantasy
which lift audiences and performers out of their trivial and self-obsessed
private worlds into a magical world of comedy and harmony, order and
beauty.

For his part, Monsieur Jourdain is repeatedly drawn into the swirl of
ballet surrounding him: with each master in turn, he sings his tasteless ditty,
dances a clumsy minuet, fences ineptly, rehearses elocution and serves as a
tailor's mannequin. As the musical episodes become increasingly fantastic
and surreal, they lead inexorably to the apotheosis of Monsieur Jourdain in
the carnivalesque 'Cérémonie Turque'. In the spoken dialogue preserved in
the printed edition of the play, Molière linguistically prepares for this
transformation from prosaic reality to musical fantaisie in three distinct
stages. First, Covielle (Cléonte's valet) arrives in disguise to persuade the
gullible Monsieur Jourdain that the son of the Grand Turk wishes to marry
his daughter (IV, 3). As he prepares the ground, the bourgeois mechanically
picks up and repeats Covielle's ends of sentences: as a baby, ladies took him
in their arms, says Covielle, 'pour vous baisier' ['to kiss you'] ; 'pour me
baisier' echoes Jourdain. Covielle proclaims himself a great friend 'd'e feu
Monsieur votre père' ['of your late father']; 'De feu Monsieur mon père', he
retorts. This flight of fancy continues with Covielle's delightful proof that
Monsieur Jourdain was born of a noble father who was far from being a
merchant but, ‘comme il se connaissait fort bien en étoffes, il en allait choisir de tous les côtés, les faisait apporter chez lui, et en donnait à ses amis pour de l’argent’ [‘as he was a connoisseur of fabrics he went everywhere to choose them, had them brought to his house, and gave them to his friends for money’]. The newly gentrified bourgeois instantly raises the register of his speech so that it corresponds to his new status: ‘Je suis ravi de vous connaître, afin que vous rendiez ce témoignage-là, que mon père était gentilhomme’ [‘I’m delighted to make your acquaintance, so that you may testify to it that my father was a gentleman’].

In the second stage of this transformation, as Coville announces the intention of ‘le fils du Grand Turk’ [‘the son of the Great Turk’] to become Monsieur Jourdain’s ‘gendre’ [‘son-in-law’], these two terms – highlighting the preposterous imaginary relationship to which they allude – echo backward and forward between the two speakers. Then Coville, having prepared the bourgeois to swallow anything, launches into lingua franca, taking audience and bourgeois into a world of the purest linguistic fantasy: ‘Acciam croc soler ouch alla moustaph gidelum amanahem varahini oussere carbubath. C’est-à-dire: n’as-tu point vu une jeune belle personne, qui est la Fille de Monsieur Jourdain, gentilhomme parisiens?’ [‘That is to say, “Have you not seen a beautiful young person who is the daughter of Monsieur Jourdain, a Parisian gentleman?”’]. Bewitched by this exotic language, which tells him all he wants to hear, the bourgeois marvels at the discovery that ‘Marababa sabem’ could mean ‘Oh, how enamored I am of her!’: ‘Voilà une langue admirable, que ce Turk!’ [‘What an admirable language is this Turkish!’].

In the third and final stage of Monsieur Jourdain’s linguistic journey to the land of music and make-believe, rituals of verbal repetition give way to pseudo-Turkish rituals. Now masquerade has become for the bourgeois the new reality, and he proudly assumes his role as the Mamamouchi in the ‘Cérémonie Turque’. Hearing the heir to the Grand Turk personally declare ‘Ambousahim oquì boraf, Iordina, salamalequi’, translated by Coville as ‘Monsieur Jourdain, may your heart be all year long like a flowering rose-tree’, the bourgeois responds with a formula at once florid and grovelling: ‘Je suis très-humble serviteur de son Altesse Turque’ [‘I am His Turkish Highness’s most humble servant’]. Monsieur Jourdain’s attempt to match Cléonte’s metaphoric compliments is a measure of his psychic estrangement from his bourgeois past. The high watermark of absurdity is achieved when Coville, suddenly tiring of this linguistic charade, translates Cléonte’s ‘Bel-men’ as ‘Il dit que vous alliez vite avec lui vous préparer pour la cérémonie, afin de voir ensuite votre fille, et de conclure le mariage’ [‘He says that you must quickly go with him to prepare yourself for the ceremony, in order to see your daughter afterwards and conclude the marriage’]. ‘Tant de choses en deux mots?’ [‘So many things in two words?’], marvels the bourgeois. ‘Oui, la langue turque est comme cela’ [‘Yes, the Turkish language is like that’], says Coville.

These symmetries, repetitions and lingua franca prefigure the patterns of the ‘Cérémonie Turque’, providing a seamless transition to its farcical musical ceremony and choreographed initiation rite. Monsieur Jourdain

Musical example 4: Excerpt from the ‘Cérémonie Turque’.
expresses no surprise at the outlandish costumes, the pseudo-Turkish jargon, or the elaborate ceremonies performed in song and dance. In a brief scene missing from the first edition (but happily preserved in Philidor’s music manuscript), the Mufti demands to know Monsieur Jourdain’s religion – and the Turks assure him that he is Mohammedan. This vocal music illustrates the patterned and rhythmic lingua franca that is characteristic of the ‘Cérémonie Turque’ (see musical example 4).

Despite the broad farce of the ‘Cérémonie Turque’, Molière, Lully and d’Arvieux devoted a surprising amount of attention to authenticity. Not only do its lyrics contain several genuine Turkish words and phrases, but the ceremony itself draws upon the ritual for reception of novices into the order of Mevlevi Dervishes. In addition to the Mufti and Monsieur Jourdain, the participants include twelve Turkish singers, four Dervishes, and six Turkish dancers. While in Tripoli d’Arvieux had attended a Mevlevi Dervish ceremony, where he had heard authentic Dervish ceremonial music. However, in view of the fact that the ‘Cérémonie Turque’ is not a real Turkish ceremony, but a masquerade devised by Cléonte to dupe Monsieur Jourdain, one should not look too closely for authenticity, particularly in musical matters. The Dervish songs attempt to achieve an ‘exotic’ effect through monotonous repetition, extended sequential progressions, hemiola rhythms, pattering and disjunctive vocal leaps (see musical example 4). The livret indicates that singing and dancing were to be accompanied ‘avec plusieurs instrumens à la Turquesque’ (‘with several instruments in the Turkish manner’), and therefore it seems unlikely that any authentic Turkish instruments were used. Whatever the case, when on 13 June 1704 Hajji Mastapha, an envoy from Tripoli, saw the ‘Cérémonie Turque’ performed at court, he reportedly ‘took great pleasure in seeing portrayed the customs of his country’. His main criticism was that ‘the character of the Mufti ought never to have departed from the seriousness that he had affected when coming on stage, because gambols and prances are not at all appropriate for a Mufti’.

The concluding ‘Bal de Nations’ builds upon this linguistic and musical exoticism, while scaling new meta-theatrical heights. Before, we witnessed Monsieur Jourdain as the unwitting participant in a masquerade put on by his family; now, the masqueraders settle back to watch a ballet à entrées – which has its own onstage audience. In the first entrée a dancer arrives to hand out the livrets to the awaiting spectators and is immediately accosted by provincials who ask for them in chorus, and then by three troublemakers who harass him in dance. After the audience settles down, the ballet proper begins. In the third (Spanish) entrée, a lovesick Spaniard (counter-tenor) sings of the pains and pleasures of love, while another (bass) points out the folly of complaining so harshly of love; then a third Spaniard (bass) claims that no one who knows how to love dies of love, and the three agree that love is indeed a sweet death. In their concluding trio they call for feasting and dancing. The fourth entrée shifts focus to Italy and features the acclaimed commedia dell’arte actors who shared Molière’s theatre. An Italian singer (soprano) proclaims that the more violent the love, the more it causes pleasure. Then two Scaramouches, two Trivelins and an Arlequin represent night in the manner of Italian actors in time to the music, while another Italian (tenor) joins the soprano to urge everyone to enjoy youth while they can. In the end, the Scaramouches and Trivelins perform a dance of celebration to the music of a chaconne. The fifth entrée returns us to the bucolic pleasures of the French countryside. Two Poitevins sing and dance minuets in praise of the sylvan landscape and invite the shepherdess Clémène to follow the example of the love-birds. The sixth and final entrée joins together representatives from the three nations, and the entire onstage audience offers its choral applause for these ‘spectacles charmants’. A tale of social-climbing ends in universal rejoicing.

NOTES

1 According to Boileau, Louis XIV quit dancing onstage after having taken to heart some lines in Act IV of Racine’s Britannicus, in which Nero is mocked for performing before the Roman people. However, Jérôme de La Gorce recently discovered in the dispatches of the Venetian ambassador that Louis XIV had abruptly stopped dancing because of occasional swooning sensations (‘vapes à la tête’). The Gazette ordinaire d’Amsterdam (21 February 1670) confirmed that the king had been ‘a little indisposed for some time’. See Jérôme de La Gorce, Jean-Baptiste Lully (Paris: Fayard, 2002), pp. 156–7.

2 This account is to be found in the Mémoires du Chevalier d’Arvieux (Paris, 1735), IV. The quotation is on pp. 252–3.


5 See Jurgens and Maxfield-Miller, Cent ans de recherches, pp. 554–84 (at pp. 566–7).


7 Jean Grimarest, La Vie de Mr de Molière (Paris: Liseux, 1877), pp. 142–3.

8 The printed livret demonstrates that the comédie-ballet premiered at Chambord consisted of three acts. By the time Molière published the play in 1671, however, he had recast it in five acts, making a number of revisions to the spoken scenes in the course of the twenty-four public performances at the Théâtre du Palais-Royal.
Critical consideration of *Le Malade imaginaire* is often shaped by the fact that Molière, playing the hypochondriac of the title, Argan, fell ill during the fourth performance of the work and died later that evening, on 17 February 1673. With this in mind, it is impossible not to be aware of the striking irony of the play’s cheerful discussion of death, of the scenes in which Argan pretends to be dead (III, 12–14) and of his invective against Molière’s stage depictions of the medical profession. In III, 3, for example, Argan declares that ‘si j’étais que des médecins, je me vengerai de son impertinence; et, quand il sera malade, je le laisserai mourir sans secours’ [‘if I were a doctor, I would avenge his impertinence and, when he falls ill, I would leave him to die without any assistance’]. With hindsight, his words seem almost prophetic, but there is no reason to believe that, in writing *Le Malade imaginaire*, Molière was somehow anticipating his own death. Rather, he was entering a new and challenging period of his theatrical career at the pinnacle of his creative inspiration, having just had his theatre renovated at great expense and having recently taken on a new musical collaborator.

While Molière was a genuine ‘malade’, Argan is only a ‘malade imaginaire’. When Toinette and later Béralde (the two most sensible characters of the play) ask Argan what exactly is wrong with him, he is unable to provide a specific answer and responds instead with righteous indignation. Toinette informs the audience that Argan walks, sleeps, eats and drinks like everybody else (II, 2) and Béralde confirms Argan’s physical health, saying, ‘je ne vois point d’homme qui soit moins malade que vous, et ... je ne demanderais point une meilleure constitution que la vôtre’ [‘I don’t know a man who is less ill than you, and ... I couldn’t ask for a better constitution than yours’] (III, 3). He cites as evidence of Argan’s good health the fact that his body has survived all the medical treatments it has endured. In several of his interactions with Toinette, Argan chases her around the stage, temporarily forgetting that he can supposedly only do so with the aid of a cane. In I, 5