

Greek dances of Antiquity recreated by Maurice Racol

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illustrated by M.-H. Delavaud-Roux's dance on Maurice Racol's *Emmeleia*

A composer of the XXth century born in Marseilles (1), "on the blue banks of Europe", a "phocean, which got excited of the Greek miracle" (2), delivered himself to the study attractive and exciting of the ancient Greek music (3) which nourished a part of his work, that is to say twenty-eight partitions on a total of one hundred and thirty one compositions.

He centres its art inside a relation between several sources of perceptions (painting, poetry, dance). Several compositions were conceived with a choreographic background (4) (Persephassa, Juxtaposition...). Maurice Racol speaks even about vocal choreograph in Chants and dances of Amen (5) "

This visionary inspired evokes by his harmonies, his rhythms, the human Adventure ; he causes sumptuous or dramatic choreographies thus. He sang, in its imaginary creator, Sappho, Ariane, Eurydice, Persephassa (6), Atalante, and so much of others still (7).

He thus composed of the Greek dances inspired by Antiquity, here are the titles and the analyses of the author :

Hormos: Holding the ones with the others by the hand with garlands, young man of Sparte and girls spring through the city (8).

Kordax: Dance lives fruitfulness, very popular, of Lydian origin (9), devoted to Artemis Kordaka (10). With the opposition to the emmeleia, this dance was of a sharp and carried nature. From its vehement pace, it degenerated rather quickly into a licentious dance and bouffonne that Aristophanes (*Clouds*, 555 sq.) stated to proscribe its parts and that Demosthenes (*Olyntiennes*, II, 18) and a little later Theophrastus (*Characters*, VI, 1), condemned with glare.

Sikinnis: The army overcame in Marathon. Crowd exulte in her cries and the mimes of the sikinnis exaltent with the agora the merits and the sizes of the triumph (11). The sikinnis, thus called name of its inventor, Sikinnos, was a theatrical dance of satirical nature.

Emmeleia: A noble and serious pavane guided the steps, in the sanctuary, of the dancers to the white veils, evoking in sinuous inflections the mysteries of nature (12).

In the Greek tragedy, the *emmeleia* accompanied the evolutions by the chorus, in some of its elements where it found its place, from its noble and serious style or the perfect harmony of its rhythmic or its songs.

Very often, after the theatrical action, whereas a major emotion seized the crowd of the spectators in the presence of Oedipus with the torn off eyes, of Antigone dedicated to the torment or mislaid Orestes, pursued by Erynies, the musicians played one alleviating *emmeleia* (13).

Maurice Racol had also composed a fifth Greek dance, the *Enoplienne*, which was undoubtedly inspired by the dances armed with Greek Antiquity (14).

Three of these Greek dances, *Hormos*, *Emmeleia*, and *Sikinnis* were created in 1972 in Marseilles by the orchestra of the Opera of Marseilles, to celebrate the Sesquicentennial of the Foundation of the C.N.R. of Marseilles (15). Like all Maurice Racol's compositions, they were conceived for modern instruments and not of the ancient instruments (16).

In a letter which it addressed to Denise Jourdan-Hemmerdinger, Maurice Racol explained the direction of his step, when it composed these dances: "(...) I do not know if in a certain manner, science does not take part of the dream and if there is not an overlap between one and the other. There are discoveries which like are dreamed and as the fruit of an illumination (...) My Greek dances (...) rest on very thin indices, but though being the result of a dream, an imagination, they are also the fruit of a pious zeal which will make it possible to forgive with their imperfection." (17).

Lionel Pons, Lecturer in Music at the University of Provence, which studied Maurice Racol's work, estimates that "its music refuses strict anchoring in the dial tone like the rigorous adoption of the serial dogma. It primarily modal, i.e. is conceived on melody scales different from those of the major and minor ranges characterizing the tonal system. The melody wire does not obey the usual rules of attraction, and is renewed more especially as Racol often creates its own modes (Olivier Messiaen does not act differently). Its method is thus very different from that of a Maurice Duruflé in the sense that it takes its source neither in the ecclesiastical modes, nor in the Gregorian modes." (18) Lionel Pons also specifies that Maurice Racol's music comprises three important axes: "modal, free savour however of any Gregorian or ancient imitation), the flexible inflections (that it is in the vocal or instrumental field) and the firmness of the drawing" (19). Lionel Pons applies this analysis to the first of Maurice

Racol's Greek dances, the *hormos*, which it describes as follows: "the line of the first violins opens out in a full curve evolving/moving preferably by united, or at the very least tightened intervals (the octave is not exceeded), marked by a predilection for the varied repetition of short melodico-rhythmic fragments and the presence of decorative figures, the whole in a mode of C, with a fourth increased degree. The musician avoids all carefully that could resemble an useless weakness, and it is without recourse none to archaisms frontage that these four Greek dances create at the same time an at the same time coherent and fascinating universe" (20).

Among the five Greek dances composed by Maurice Racol, it is the *emmeleia* which we chose to make represent, because by its harmonious and sober character, it fed passion considerably that Maurice Racol nourished for Greece. With the origin, the word *emmeleia* has a musical direction, it is the "accuracy of the sound" in opposition to the *ekmeleia*, "discordance" or "except *melos*". By extension the word *emmeleia* can apply to any "peaceful" dance (21), but there remained famous in its use of principal dance of the tragedy. It is carried out when the chorus took its place, in orchestrated, at the time of the *stasima*, i.e. during the lyric interludes which separate the tragic episodes. This dance is characterized by the expression of an emotion measured and contained, conscience of the drama inspired by the spectacle of passions and the pain (22). Not comprising any jerked abrupt movement nor, it acts of a succession of gracious installations which are connected in a harmonious way. The goal of the dance is to represent actions but also to illustrate the feelings which the choreutes beyond the text feel that it recite (23). The dance becomes thus, to take again the expression of Plato, able to imitate the word of the Muse (24). To make a choreography on Maurice Racol's *emmeleia*, there does not exist textual support, since the partition is purely musical, but we know the three tragic heroes which inspired our musician : Oedipus, Antigone, Orestes. One can thus translate the emotions of these characters by means of a certain number of schemata (mimetic gestures), indexed by Athenaeus and Pollux (25) and sometimes represented on the painted vases of ancient Greece, in particular in the scenes of funeral (26) (for example to *cheir simè* and to *cheir kataprènès*, i.e. respectively "palm of the drawn up hand" [towards the spectator] and "palm of the hand lowered towards the ground"). One can also have recourse, to express the pain of the characters, with some gestures the whining ones, depicted on the vases Greek but not quoted among the *schèmata*. Thus for the fact of carrying the hand to the head by curving the top of the body. The principal source of choreography presented here remains however the music of Maurice Racol's *emmeleia*, at the slow rhythm, on four-four times, and undoubtedly inspired by the ancient mode hypophrygien.

(1) Maurice Racol (1908-1988)

(2) Juliette Racol, *ΑΝΑΒΑΣΙΣ. A la rencontre de Maurice Racol*, Paul Tacussel editor, 1990, p. 25; Denise Jourdan-Hemmerdinger et Juliette Racol, *L'œuvre musicale et poétique de Maurice Racol. Une collection de manuscrits autographes et inédits suivie de sa correspondance avec René Char, Marie-Jeannne Durry, and de nombreuses personnalités des Arts et des Lettres*, new work not published, p. 3.

(3) Denise Jourdan-Hemmerdinger locates Maurice Racol in the line of the composer and hellenist Maurice Emmanuel (1862-1938), cf. D. Jourdan Hemmerdinger and J. Racol, *Op cit.*, p. 7.

(4) D. Jourdan-Hemmerdinger and J Racol, *Op cit.*, p. 3, n. 8.

(5) *Ibid*, p. 43: "the third part [of Pater Noster's triptych] entitled *Songs and Dances of Amen* has a character more particularly symbolic system (than have also the other parts) because owing to the fact that I conceived it by reference to these wheels so sumptuously worked Temple of the Sun of Konarak in India. It is thus established to some extent on a topic of the wheel and I used for that of the very simple elements of rhythmic Hindu: the voices thus appear to be driven and like dancing around elements forming pivots; symbolically still, this kind of vocal choreography bursts in final of a sharp joy, homage paid by the creatures in all the universe to their creator."

(6) Another appellation of Persephone.

(7) The catalogue of Maurice Racol's composition being referred to Antiquity is as follows:

- piano: *Sphinges* (1981)

- guitar: *Sanctuary*

(1986)

- violoncello: *Persephassa* (1986)

- bassoon: *Atalante* (1977)

- oboe: *Ariane's complaints* (1968)

- trumpet: *Funeral ode* (1970)

- oboe and trumpet: *Eurydice* (1970)

- together instrumental: *Electra's dream* (for trumpet, string orchestra, solo and reciting, 1969) *Greek dances* (*Hormos, Emmeleia, Kordax, Sikinnis, Enoplienne*; for string orchestra, 1971-1972); *Epigrammata* (*Retouche, Fabliau, Intermezzo, Dance, Aïorpata'tomb, Trisms*; for clarinet solo and

string orchestra, 1974-1975); *Bucoliques at the Amazones'* period (*Thalestris, Aiorpata, Toxares*; for string orchestra; 1974-1986).

- vocal music (melodies): *Hymn to Aphrodite* (Sappho's poem, 1968-1971, unfinished); *Figures* (Sappho's poems, 1975).

- vocal music (voice and together of room): Saphos's Love songs (concerto of room for dramatic soprano, oboe de amore, grips and percussions, 1967); Ode to Artemis (for chorus, soprano, mezzo, viola and percussions, 1965)

- vocal music (dramatics compositions): *Music and song for Euripide's Electra* (for voice, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, trumpet, drinking cups, triangle, 1959-1963, unfinished); *Antigone* (project of opera on a booklet of Jacques-Henri Mirat according to Sophocle's tragedy, 1974-1975). It is also necessary to add Three Greek threnes (*Prelude for Antigone's death Antigone, Lunar Syrinx, Parmenide's dispatch riders*) currently lost, but announced in Maurice Racol's correspondence, cf D. Jourdan-Hemmerdinger and J Racol, *Op cit.*, p. 68.

(8) For this composition, Maurice Racol took as a starting point Lucian, *On the dance*, 12: "The same sort of thing is done by those who dance what is called the String of Beads. That is has dance of boys and girls together who move in a row and truly resemble a string of beads beads. The boy precedes, doing the steps and postures of young manhood, and those wich later he will uses in war, while the maiden folows, showing how to do the women' s dance with propriety; hence the string is beaded with modesty and with manliness." (translation A. M. Harmon, Loeb Classical Library, 1962). Perhaps Maurice Racol was also inspired by the article of Meursius being referred to the *hormos* (Meursius, sv. OPMOΣ, cf Frederick Naerebout and Alkis Raftis, *Johanes Meursius and his "Orchestra, sive de saltationibus veterum" of 1618. The first monograph on ancient Greek dance since Antiquity*, Greek Dances Theatre "Dora Stratou" & IOFA, Athens, 2003).

(9) The Lydian origin of the kordax is evoked by Pausanias, VI, 22, 1: "Going forward about a stade from from the grave one sees traces of a sanctuary of Artemis, surnamed Cordax because the folowers of Pelops celebrated their victory by the side of this goddess and danced the cordax, a dance peculiar to the dwellers round Mount Sipylus" (translation W H. S. Jones and H. A. Ormerod, Loeb Classical Library, 1966). But the interpretation of Pausanias's text is the debate object. Maurice Racol joined here Charles Picard's position (*Ephèse et Claros: recherches sur les sactuairees et les cultes de l'Ionie du Nord*, Bibliothèque des Ecoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, CXXIII, 1922, p. 336), which sees a Lydian origin in the kordax and the dances carried out in the honor of Artemis. It is based on the fact that the cordax danced for Artemis Kordaka

and other choreography carried out for various Artemis of the Peloponnese present common features with the dances honouring Artemis from Ephese, for example the movements of hips. But Louis Sechan (*La danse grecque antique*, E. de Boccard, Paris, 1930, p. 178, n. 13), which follows in that A. W. Pickard-Cambridge (*Dithyramb, Tragedy and Comedy*, 2e éd., Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1962, p. 260-261), differently comment on Pausanias's passage in question: "undoubtedly Pausanias, speaking about the sanctuary of Artemis with Elis (VI, 22, 1), returns account of this denomination by affirming that the cordax was danced there by the companions of Pelops who thus celebrated the victory of their chief by a practice of their country (...). But it by no means does not result from there that the cordax was imported of Asia in the Peloponnese, because it is very probable that this feature was imagined at a later date to explain, by a foreign influence, the anomaly similar practices in Artemis's cult, at which prevailed from now on the character of the goddess of chastity. On the elements of dorian extraction in Kordax, cf H. Schnabel, *Kordax*, Munchen, Beck, 1910, p. 4, 8 and 15-19.

(10) Before becoming the most famous dance of the Greek comedy, the kordax is a dance for Artemis Kordaka, in Elis, in the Peloponnese.

(11) The matter of Maurice Racol, who sees the origin of the *sikinnis* in the dances of victory, brings two remarks. First is that the origin of the *sikinnis* makes the object of a debate (K Latte, *De Saltationibus Graecorum*, A. Topelmann, Giessen, 1913, p. 89; V Festa, "Sikinnis, Storia di un' antica danza", *Memorie della Reale Accademia di Archeologia, Letteratura e Belle Arti di Napoli*, 2,2, 1918, p. 35-78, cf. p. 69 ss.). Second is that the *sikinnis* has analogies with the dithyramb, that one connects sometimes to the thriambos (on the debates concerning this assumption, cf Pickard-Cambridge, 1962, p. 14-15). But there exists much of other theories to explain the origin of the dithyramb. Among all the assumptions relating to the origins of the theatrical dances, that which chose Maurice Racol implies that the *sikinnis* has the same origin as the dithyramb and than this last plunges its roots in the dances of the victory. Undoubtedly Maurice Racol it was inspired in this choice, by the fact that the invention of the *sikinnis* is sometimes reported to certain Sikinnos of barbarian or cretan origin (Athenaeus, I, 20e; XIV, 630b) that one sometimes brings closer Sikinnos, the slave that Themistocle used to mislead the Large King before the battle of Salamine (L Sechan, 1930, p. 213).

(12) This poem of Maurice Racol constitutes one of possible interpretations of the *emmeleia*. These interpretations are many and various but when Plato (*Laws*, VII, 816b) employs this term, it indicates

thus not only the most famous dance of the Greek tragedy, but also all the peaceful dances, nonwarlike nor dionysiaques. One can thus call name of emmeleia very varied, mixed, male or female choreographies. They are the female dances, and among those, the veiled dances, which inspired particularly Maurice Racol for the composition of sound emmeleia.

(13) Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, v. 1524-1532; *Antigone*, v. 944-987; Euripides, *Orestes*, 316-347.

(14) The *enoplion* is a rythmed march with weapons, of which nature seems rather religious, cf Athenaeus, IV, 184 F.

(15) D. Jourdan-Hemmerdinger and J. Racol, *Op cit.*, p. 337.

(16) Let us note that Maurice Racol modified the orchestration which it had conceived for Sappho's Song for technical reasons: "My songs of Sappho were originally designed for tooting-stone and oboe de amore. Impossibility of finding this instrument, of which nobody plays in the area (and it is a pity infinitely) obliged me to replace by the flute and to duplicate the part of tooting-stone (too much difficult) with the harpsichord, by adding a trumpet to balance certain parts ", cf D. Jourdan Hemmerdinger and J Racol, *Op cit.*, p. 305. In the same way, Maurice Racol would have wished to make sing the songs of Sappho in Greek, but not finding any person able to make sing in Greek, it chose to make a French adaptation of the texts of Sappho, cf D. Jourdan Hemmerdinger and J. Racol, p. 352-353.

(17) J Racol, 1990, p. 29.

(18) Lionel Pons, Maurice Racol (1908-1988), *Les Amis de la musique française*, 2004, p. 24. L Pons, 2004, p. 32 give the example of Ariane's complaints, composition for oboe gone back to 1971: "the composer still proceeds to it of this Greece dreamed, free of any imitation of the antique. This work is doubly original: on the one hand it exploits a tragic aspect of the oboe which is requested less than its rural side, on the other hand, it precisely clarifies the vision of Hellade which was that of the musician. To evoke the myths inevitably does not mean to have recourse to an imitative music or even simply to use the Greek modes like Maurice Emmanuel made in Salamine."

(19) L Pons, 2004, p. 24.

(20) *Ibid.* The use of the mode of do, according to L Pons, indicates that Maurice Racol was inspired partly by the Lydian ancient mode. In the

same way for the *emmeleia*, the use of the mode of sol would return to the hypophrygian mode.

(21) Supra, n. 11.

(22) Athenaeus, XIV, 630d-e; Herodotus, VI, 129; Lucian, *On the dance*, 25; Aristophanes, *Frogs*, 895-898; scholia in Euripides, *Hecuba*, 647; Marie-Hélène Delavaud-Roux, *Les danses pacifiques en Grèce antique*, *Publications de l'Université de Provence*, Aix-en-Provence, 1994, p.154.

(23) M.-H. Delavaud-Roux, "La gestuelle de l'absence dans la tragédie grecque : un exemple extrait d'«Iphigénie à Aulis» d'Euripide", *Amadis. L'absence et l'effacement*, 3, 1999, p. 283-297, cf. p. 289. 283-297, cf. p. 289.

(24) Plato, *Laws*, VII, 795e.

(25) Athenaeus, XIV, 629f-630a; Pollux, IV, 105.

(26) M.-H. Delavaud-Roux, 1994, p. 116-133.

(27) Supra, n. 18.