

Promotion of diversity in the choreography : an original dance, using voice and mask, in the beginning of the *parodos* of Euripides' *Bacchae*, v.64-86¹

At the Last congress in 2005, in Larnaca, we asked the question about the use of voice in the ancient greek dance, to know if the people who performed choreographies sang or only danced while other people sang? And we answered that yes², they did. We have proved this idea with two demonstrations and two

¹ The verses 64-86 of the *parodos* represents the prelude and the strophe 1 :

“From the far-off lands of Asia,
From Tmôlus the holy mountain,
We run with the god of laughter ;
Labour is joy and weariness is sweet,
And our song resounds to Bacchus !
Who stands in our path?
Make way, make way !
Who in the house? Close every lip,
Keep holy silence, while we sing
The appointed hymn to Bacchus !

Blest in the happy man
Who knows the mysteries the god ordain, And sanctifies his life,
Joins soul with soul in the mystic unity,
And by due ritual pure,
Enters the ecstasy of mountain solitudes ;
Who observes the mystic rites
Made lawful by Cybele the Great Mother ;
Who crowns his head with ivy,
And shakes aloft his wand in worship of Dionysus.”

translation Philipp Verlacott, *Euripides. The Bacchae and other plays*, Penguin books, 1954.
On the historiography of Euripides' *Bacchae*, see J. Bollack, *Dionysos et la tragédie. Commentaire des Bacchantes d'Euripide*, Paris, Bayard Editions, 2005. p. 45-68.

² M.-H. Delavaud-Roux, “More than movement : the use of voice in ancient greek dance”, *Much More than Movement, 19th World congress of Dance Research, Larnaca, Cyprus, 9-13 november 2005* (Publication sur DVD) ; M.-H. Delavaud-Roux, "Communiquer avec Dionysos : la danse des Ménades à travers l'iconographie des vases grecs", *Gestuelles, Attitudes, Regards : l'expression des corps. Gestes, attitudes, regards dans l'imagerie antique. Colloque du RUOA*, 2004, Lydie Bodiou, Dominique Frère, Véronique Mehl (ed.), Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2006, p. 153-163 ; M. H. Delavaud-Roux, « Reconstitution de la danse du karkinos, Aristophane, *Guêpes*, 1518-1537 », *Colloque international Ressources et activités maritimes des peuples de l'Antiquité, Université du littoral Côte d'Opale, Boulogne-sur-mer, 12-14 mai 2005*, ed. par J. Napoli (sous presse).

choreographies using movement, voice and mask : the first on the end of Aristophanes' *Wasps* with Karkinos and his three sons' dance (v. 1518-1537), and the second on one passage of Nonnos of Panopolis' *Dionysiaca* (XVIII, 182-191). Karkinos' dance was a pleasant experiment because we know that the crab has no voice and we tried to give him one, to prove that it was possible. It was possible for Philocleon and for the chorus to dance and sing at the same time. And in Nonnos, we are not sure that the verses 182-191 were really danced and performed with a mask. If it was danced, it was in the context of the *symposion*, so the mask was not necessary. So we now try some piece that we are sure was danced and sung or spoken at the same time. We have done an experiment with the beginning of the *parodos* of Aristophanes' *Frogs*³ and another on the beginning of the *parodos* of Euripides' *Bacchae*. For the two performances, we have made a mask with materials near what we could find in ancient greek world : plaster. The work with the material was very interesting. Next time, we hope to work with really ancient materials, some gypsum from which plaster was made, or stucco which was marble powder, and with linen to support it. But with the first experiment of a plaster mask, even if it is not ancient plaster, we learned a lot about speaking and dancing, and particularly in Euripides's *Bacchae* because, in this piece, the mask was more important than in others. First, the Bacchantes were women parts, so the mask was necessary to hide the identity of the actor who was always a man in the classical period. Second, it was an original woman mask, a bacchant mask. Third, it is not easy to perform with it and to perform the frenzy dance of a Maenad. These three reasons explain the choice of this piece for the congress. How can we associate the use of voice and mask with the very frenzied gestures of the Maenads ? First, we tried to answer this question with a study of our mask. How to make it ? how to make the mask hold on well during the movements of the choreography ? how to attach it ? Then we study the gestures of the choreography and the use of voice with the mask ? how to inhale ? What should we privilege, the perfection of the voice or the frenzy of the choreography ?

The material of the mask and the breathing during the dance

The first condition in dancing with a mask is that it really holds on to the head of the actor-dancer. In our first experience, with Nonnos of Panopolis, our mask, which was not in plaster but in plastic, could not hold on for more than three verses because the movements of the Maenads were ample and abrupt. To help

³ « Musiques, rythmes et danses dans la parodos des Grenouilles d'Aristophane », *Actes du colloque international « Musiques rythmes et danses dans l'Antiquité »*, Brest, 29-30 septembre 2006, ed. par M. H. Delavaud-Roux (publication for 2007)

it hold on, we have used pins and hair spray, and we can dance with it during the 9 dactylic hexameters of the piece we have selected. In this second experience we have understood that the problem of respiration and use of the voice is more important with a mask than without. To inhale at each end of dactylic hexameter is not enough to not run out of breath. We must sometimes inhale more often, and the question is where to inhale in relation to the verse. The ancient greek poets, when they composed dactylic hexameters, used the metrical pauses, and we think actors-dancers could use them to inhale. But all the metrical pauses are not easy to use by the dancer because there is the danger of loosing the rhythm. For example, the trihemimere pause, after the third half foot, cuts the second dactyle after the first long. We have other examples of this problem with the heptemimere pause which is after the seventh half foot, and with the pause called *kata triton trochaion* which is after the first short of the third foot. So last year, our conclusion was that the better moment to inhale was the bucolic pause which is situated between the fourth and fifth feet of a dactylic hexameter when it exists. The performance will be harder with the song than with the spoken word but not impossible. In the Euripides' *Bacchae*, the verses are not the same, they are particularly ionics⁴, so the metrical pauses are not the same. But it is very difficult to keep the mask on, even with pins and hair spray.

Is it easier to use a plaster mask ? Our mask with texture and plaster is not too heavy for the face⁵, and the ties of leather makes a good choice of materials

⁴ On the rhythm see Philippe Brunet, *La naissance de la littérature dans la Grèce ancienne*, Le livre de poche, 1997, p. 144-145 ; J. Bollack, *Dionysos et la tragédie. Commentaire des Bacchantes d'Euripide*, Paris, Bayard Editions, 2005. p. 71. On the historiography of the rhythm, see M.-H. Delavaud-Roux « Dire Dionysos dans le début de la *parodos* des Bacchantes, v. 64-86 », *Amadis. Dire Dieu*, n° 8, 2007 (sous presse). We have worked on Philippe Brunet's scansion and the music composed by Jean Baptiste Appéré (which follows the rhythm of the text) when we have created the choreography of this verses in the performance, *Orphée*, played by the Démodocos theatre, managed by Philippe Brunet, in 2000. The performance of this choreography was without mask, then after we have made others versions of this choreography, and one with a mask.

⁵ Some scholars think the mask is a material too heavy to can play during all a theatrical performance. For example in the production of Euripides's *Héraclidae* by par Delfim Leão, Professor of Classical letters at the University of Coimbra, whom the costumes were made by Luisa de Nazare Ferreira, Teacher in this same University, in may 2001 : the members of the chorus wear mask and when they take it off, appears a white making up of the face, which sculpts the face as a mask. They cannot play all the drama with the mask because it is too heavy ! An other production, different, by Gemma López (Helios Teatro de Madrid), on Sophocles' *Œdipus at Colonus*, with masks created by par Thanos Vovolis, but the actors do not wear a mask. This second experience was published by par José Luis Navarro, Docteur en Filologia Clásica de l'Universidad Complutense, et directeur du Teatro Selene, cf. J.L. Navarro, *Teatro total. XXV años de Teatro Griego en el I.E.S. Carlos III*, ediciones clásicas, Madrid, 2005, p. 86-88.

for attaching the mask. But you must be careful to attach the mask at the right place on the head, the best is to make a bun and to attach the mask under the bun, then to let one's hair down to play the Maenad part. We have made two experiments with the texture and plaster, one simple mask and one mask with a skullcap, i. e. a mask which covers the face and envelops part of the head. We have seen that the mask with a skullcap and attached with ties of leather was easier to keep on than the simple mask and it was better for dancing the beginning of the *parodos* of Euripides' *Bacchae*. But here we have the problem with the plaster because it sometimes falls in the eyes and mouth. We think it is not an important problem and we will find a solution. Now, we have to do the same experiment with ancient materials, gypsum or stucco and try to put long hairs on the mask with skull cap, as a wig. Only after that will we get a better understanding of the problem.

But with our experiment, even if it is not complete, we can understand the problem of the coordination of the voice and the movement.

The coordination of the voice and the movement in the beginning of the *parodos* of Euripides' *Bacchae*

We are not going to study the detail of choreography because we have studied it in another article⁶. The first question is the use of the voice with the mask and movement which are an hinderence. It is more important, than without a mask, to use well the abdominal muscles and the idea of an air column in the body, to help the voice to go up in the body and not tire the vocal cords. We can give the example of the three first verses of Eurides' text⁷, where we decide to dance with the body in squatted position with the head bent forward : this is not the position the most used by the Maenads in their dance, but it is not impossible⁸. It is very

⁶M. H. Delavaud-Roux « Dire Dionysos dans le début de la parodos des Bacchantes », *Amadis. Dire Dieu*, n° 8, 2007 (sous presse)

⁷ Euripides' *Bacchae*, v. 64-66 : "From the far-off lands of Asia, from Tmôlus the holy mountain, we run with the god of laughter", translation Philipp Verlacott, *Euripides. The Bacchae and other plays*, Penguin books, 1954.

⁸ See the black figured cup with prophylactic eyes, Bibliothèque Nationale, Inv. N°478, Cat. 326, en of the six century B.C., CVA France 10/ Bibliothèque nationale 2, IIIHe, pl. 55(441) 1-4 : the maenad is the dancing face to face with a satyr ; she is squatted one the left leg, the right foot is on the half-too. The head is bent forward. The two arms are bent and the two palms of the hands are turned to the ground. This position inspires us to the first verse of the *parodos* (v. 64), where we strike the rhythm on the minor ionic ground. An other example of squatted maenad, which inspire us for the verses 65-67the skyphos of Mocow, Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts II 1 B 1426, 525 av. J. C., attribution to the Haimon group by Sidorova, CVA Moscow, Pushkin State Museum of fine Arts 1, 49-50, p. 53 (53) 1-2. : on the two faces there is a Dionysos seated with a drinking horn and a maenad dancing.

hard to be heard in this position. To help we can imagine, with using the abdominal muscles, that the voice is not going to go out by the mouth but by the back. The back must become a resonance chamber, as in an instrument. Then with a mask, it is more important so, even if it is not easy, to work more the vocal articulation, with the muscles of the lips and of the jaws. Another movement, which is not easy is in the 72-76 the jump of the maenads from a squatted position with the body bent forward to a standing position with the head bent backwards. You must try to have an equal voice during the movement and the movement hinders that.

That problem prevails on to the second question which is the quality of the voice. We know the quality of the breathing is essential for the strength of the voice. But we are not going to speak only about the breathing. It is clear that the metrical pauses must be used and longer the piece is, the more you need these pauses, in order to not run out and be able to dance. Even with good use of the abdominal muscles and good breathing, the quality of the voice cannot be the as good in frenzy movements as in quiet movements, and it cannot be as good when you bent your body as your body is upright. In the *parodos*, it is impossible to keep a perfect voice. Is it compatible with what we know about the greek theatre, that was founded on quality of the voice of the actors and the chorus ? If we hypothesize that the chorus would not sacrifice his vocal quality, either the mask was too difficult for a play such as *Bacchae* or that the chorus abandoned the frenetic choreography in order to preserve the vocal quality⁹, or they danced wearing the mask that did not sing at the same time¹⁰. However to

⁹ The interpretation of Tecmessa's complaint (written on the Berlin Papyrus 6870, composed by Timothée of Milet, see A. Bélis, "Un Ajax et deux Timothée", *REG*, 1998, 1, p. 74-100), by Brigitte Tessé-Robustelli (from Kerylos, managed by Annie Bélis, cf. see the CD *Musiques de l'Antiquité grecque. De la pierre au son. Ancient Greek Music*, ensemble Kérylos, sous la direction d'Annie Bélis, K 617, 1996), which is not a song of a Maenad but the threnos of Tecmessa, Ajax's captiv after the dead of his master ask the same question : the singer does not use a mask, and she sings without movement, because she is afraid to sacrifice her vocal qualities. To hear a record of this complaint. For a choreographic experience on this threnos, see M. H. Delavaud-Roux, "Gestuelle du deuil et danses funéraires", *Musiques et danses antiques . Rencontre thématique du Groupe d'Etude sur les cultures anciennes (GRECA), Université de Nantes, 10 février 1996, Revue Belge de Philologie et d'histoire*, 80, 2002, p. 199-220.

¹⁰ This third hypothesis is the idea of Lucian, II century A.D. In the *Peri Orcheseôs*, 30, he says that formerly the same people danced and sang at the same time but they were out of breath because they were practicing the song and the dance at the same time. So after, they danced but became silent and were accompanied by voices of singers and Lucian, to speak about this fact, used the verb *hupadein* which means "sing on accompaniment". Lucian writes in the second century AD and the reality, which he describes, is probably true since the Hellenistic period.). At the Hellenistic period and the roman period the mask of the dancer is a mask for pantomime, that means this mask is not open at the mouth. But it was not the same

the frenziness of the choreography is typical of the Maenads dance, and it seems impossible that they abandoned this such a defining element. The mask also seems necessary because the Bacchantes were played by men, and the mask was necessary to hide the actors identities. Therefore we come to the conclusion that the dancer-actor had to sacrifice the vocal qualities in order to use the mask. But if he was losing the vocal quality, he was finding the quality of the character, which was instigated by the reality of the cult of Dionysos : the Maenads who danced for Dionysos, without mask, were singing sometimes at the same time, and there were an opposition between the treble voice of the maenads and the bass sound of the phrygian *aulos*¹¹. The voice of the Maenads was sharp and probably not very strong because they were not actresses. More than that, the sound of the voice could change with the movement. So if the actor lost a part of voice's quality with the conjunction of the mask and the movements, he was closer the character of the Bacchant. Contemporary performances of operas are sometimes performed by professional actors¹² rather than singers. And we know that professional singing and speaking are two distinct techniques, especially for the female voices : singers actually often have problem to speak in their medium notes, and actresses do not have as beautiful voice as singers. In the ancient greek theatre, the voice was the most important but not for a special part such as the Bacchantes.

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at the classical period, where the mask of the dancer was the same as the mask of the actor, i.e. with an opening for the mouth. So we can think at the classical period, the mask didn't prevent the dancer to sing. On that point, see M.-H. Delavaud-Roux, "The use of the voice in the Ancient Greek dance", *Op. cit.* On the date of the pantomime, see C. Vendries and V. Péché, *Musiques et spectacles dans la Rome antique et dans l'Occident romain*, éditions Errance, Paris, 2001, p. 21, the pantomime in Greece and Minor Asia is practiced since the first century B.C. and J.Y. Strasser, « Inscriptions grecques et latines en l'honneur de pantomimes », *Tychè. Beiträge zur Alten Geschichte Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 19, 2004, p. 175-212 et pl. 7-9, cf. p. 175, who speaks about the dynamism of the pantomime since the third century, even it is not knew well before the first century B.C.

¹¹ A. Bélis, "Musique et transe dans le cortège dionysiaque", *Transe et Théâtre : actes de la table-ronde internationale (Montpellier 3-5 mars 1988)*, *Cahiers du GITA*, n° 4, Décembre 1988, pp. 10-29, cf. pp. 19-20.

¹² See for example the performance of the Offenbach's *Périchole*, in 2006, at the festival of Aix-en Provence, where the actress Jeanne Balibar had a very important part. The qualities of this actress, who is not a professional singer, was congratulated by the critics.

