

Dance and entertainment (Paris, 26 Nov 21)

Paris, INHA / BnF, Nov 26, 2021

Deadline: Jul 10, 2021

Pauline Chevalier, INHA

Quadrilles

Dance and entertainment between Republic and Empire, around the figure of Jean Étienne Despréaux (1748-1820)

Organizer of public celebrations under the Consulate and the Empire, dancing master at the Royal Academy of Music, professor at the Paris Conservatory, songwriter, playwright, and inventor of a system of dance notation and a "musical chronometer," Jean Étienne Despréaux (1748-1820) was a major figure in dance at the turn of the century, witnessing and acting on the evolution of dance and ballet between 1790 and 1820. Although some of his works have been published, many autograph documents preserved in the André Jean Jacques Deshayes collection of the Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra remain little studied today. This day intends to take the figure of Jean Étienne Despréaux as a starting point for analyzing a singular period that saw the evolution of the choreographic language, the terminologies related to it, and an aesthetic that is also reflected in the history of performances. Between the history of dance, the history of art, and political and social history, these days also invite us to think more precisely about the relationships between artists of different disciplines during the first decades of the 19th century.

As the inventor of a very elaborate system of notation that was never published, Despréaux worked precisely on a form of dance writing that showed great proximity to verbal language, letters and typography. If the terms "grammar" or "alphabet" of dance are not present in Despréaux's work and only appear in the second half of the 19th century in a more general context that takes up "grammar" as a model of scientificity, Despréaux's system offers the beginnings of this rationalization of notation through a thought inspired by syntactic logics. "A catalog of movements of the most remarkable song and dance tunes would be a very useful thing; but it can only be done by means of an invariable instrument, composed according to the laws of nature . What are more precisely the intellectual, scientific and philosophical sources underlying the establishment of such a system? The publication of the New Musical Chronometer, established on astronomical grounds, offers some avenues of reflection on the role of the history of science and the rationalist context that deserve to be explored. This day will also revisit Despréaux's position in the history of notation, when he places himself more willingly in the filiation of Thoinot Arbeau than of Beauchamps, while proposing a modality of reading the body on the frontal plane that moves away from the Chorégraphie d'Ancien Régime and that anticipates the methodologies of Saint-Léon, Henri Justamant and Friedrich Albert Zorn.

In 1789, Despréaux married Marie-Madeleine Guimard, an important dancer of the 18th century,

close to artists such as Jean Honoré Fragonard, François Boucher, Carmontelle or Claude Nicolas Ledoux, who built her private mansion in the Chaussée d'Antin district. However, in 1789, the glory and splendor of Guimard are behind her. What artistic circles did they keep then? This study day will be particularly interested in the relations maintained by the Despréaux-Guimard couple with painters, engravers, sculptors in the years 1790-1815. It is known that Despréaux frequented a Masonic lodge, the Anacreon lodge, which was appreciated by engravers and also frequented by Pierre Gardel. Despréaux's collection at the time of his death shows an attachment to engraving and theater models.

The tone adopted by Despréaux also invites a literary analysis of his work and allows us to read a polymorphous figure who explores literary forms as much as choreographic forms, disciplines as much as their narration, through dialogue, the model of the scientific treatise, or even song and parodic poetry.

The day does not intend to be reduced to the figure of Jean Étienne Despréaux, but will seek to grasp a network of artistic, social and political relationships. Despréaux's creations of quadrilles are a direct echo of architectural creations and an important place will be given to the study of the places of representation of the entertainments at the court of Napoleon I.

In addition, the pictorial representations of quadrilles in the first half of the 19th century will also occupy a large place in our exchanges: both the representation of the teaching of society dances and the representation of balls, parties and sociability through dance.

This study day is part of the research project led by Irène Feste "Les quadrilles de Jean Étienne Despréaux, organisateur des divertissements et spectacles à la cour de Napoléon Ier" (Aide à la Recherche et au Patrimoine en Danse 2020) and the program "Chorégraphies, écriture et dessin, signe et image dans les processus de création et de transmission chorégraphiques" conducted at the INHA, in partnership with the Bibliothèque nationale de France and the Centre national de la danse, in the continuity of a first day dedicated to the André Jean Jacques Deshayes Archives (BnF – Bibliothèque musée de l'Opéra). Irène Feste's research is based on a crossed approach of sources, between theoretical analysis and the reenactment of the quadrilles choreographed by Jean Étienne Despréaux, interpreted by the court nobility, during masked or adorned balls.

Researchers working on contemporary figures of Despréaux are encouraged to contribute and the following areas may be proposed (the list is not exhaustive):

- Sources and documentation on quadrilles in the first half of the 19th century. How does one work today on these archives and treatises, sometimes unknown, unpublished? What is the place today in the historiography of the period for works of choreographic reconstruction and reenactment?
- Experiments and systems of notation of social dances and gestures in the years 1780-1820 (beyond dance notation: swimming, fencing, working gestures, etc.)
- Contemporary musical culture and theories (in Despréaux's circle, his brother Louis Félix Despréaux was a musician and composer: a singular context that nourished J. É. Despréaux's works, notably around the Chronomètre, but not only.)
- Teaching circles for society dances, dance masters' certificates and the circulation of dances through teaching (and through the military)
- Ballroom settings: from court balls to the "new post-revolutionary leisure economy"

- The representations of balls and quadrilles: engravings, caricatures, pictorial representations.
- Entertainment in troubled times: sources, images, caricatures and models of the court party between Revolution and Empire.
- The architecture of entertainment and the spatiality of dance: ballrooms, private homes and royal residences
- Dance and party costumes (many costumes are inspired by Napoleonic military campaigns)
- Opera parodies
- The dancers of the Imperial Academy of Music in the parodies of Despréaux

The study day will be held on November 26, 2021, in the auditorium of the BnF François Mitterrand and will include a part of reconstitution of the quadrilles elaborated by Jean Étienne Despréaux.

The language of the study day and the exchanges will be French, but communications in English will be accepted.

Proposals for papers, not exceeding one page, followed by a brief bio-bibliographic presentation, should be sent before July 10, 2021 to the following email addresses: pauline.chevalier@inha.fr and irene.feste@wanadoo.fr

A response will be provided by July 30.

Scientific Committee :

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Institutions :

BnF - Bibliothèque National de France

CN D - National Dance Center

INHA - National Institute of Art History

Research program :

<https://www.inha.fr/fr/recherche/le-departement-des-etudes-et-de-la-recherche/domaines-de-recherche/histoire-des-disciplines-et-des-techniques-artistiques/choreographies.html>

Reference:

CFP: Dance and entertainment (Paris, 26 Nov 21). In: ArthHist.net, Jun 18, 2021 (accessed Jan 28, 2026),

<<https://arthist.net/archive/34393>>.