

Working with the Cecchetti Method: Technique and style in contemporary ballet training

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This paper investigates some of the principles underlying the Cecchetti Method and questions how they might be relevant today. Cecchetti's particular use of the torso and the arms, as well as his approach to gravity, are examined and posited as areas which are relevant to contemporary training and which can be used to promote a physical understanding of movement through principles of total body integration akin to those described by Irmgard Bartenieff. Many aspects of Cecchetti's technique are intimately associated with its style which is rooted in romantic ballet, however, far from being a barrier to the acceptance of Cecchetti's work to contemporary training, the stylistic connections can be seen as a valuable part of a diverse training where students are explicitly made aware of stylistic choices available in ballet.

Introduction

The Cecchetti Method is a fascinating relic of earlier dance practice derived from the teaching of Enrico Cecchetti (1850-1928) who, towards the end of a long and illustrious career, settled to live and teach in London (1918-1923). It was during this time that the dance writer and publisher Cyril Beaumont (1891-1976) instigated a project to record his teaching and was instrumental in setting up the Cecchetti Society (1922). Without Beaumont, Cecchetti would no doubt still be known to ballet historians as an important dancer, mime and pedagogue, but he would probably be a minor figure and little would be known about how and what he actually taught. As a result of Beaumont's efforts, assisted by many of Cecchetti's own pupils and successive generations of teachers, Cecchetti's teaching has survived and continues to form the basis for the syllabi of various teaching organisations which still employ some of the very enchaînements that Cecchetti taught. But ballet has changed remarkably since the 1920's, and Cecchetti's teaching was likely to have been rooted in an even earlier romantic style from his native Italy. In addition, surely we have been able to develop more effective teaching practices than Cecchetti's over the intervening years! In the light of these concerns, of what relevance can the Cecchetti Method be today, other than to inform scholars about earlier styles of dancing?

The fact that the Method continues to be taught indicates that some people do still consider it relevant, and the well known Cecchetti teacher and dance writer Richard Glasstone argues a case for this in an article entitled 'Into the Future with Cecchetti'(1990, 695). Glasstone and other Cecchetti teachers believe that what they call Cecchetti's 'principles' offer something special to today's dancers, but what are those principles and exactly how are they relevant today? Unfortunately, there is little literature which characterises the Method in anything but very general terms, and the exact nature of the principles of the Cecchetti Method remains somewhat vague. For Glasstone they are 'rooted in the human potential for harmonious, balanced, flowing, rhythmic movement'

(*ibid.*), and for Raymond Lukens (another well-known Cecchetti teacher) they 'give the dancer purity of line, coordination, speed, stability, breadth, flow and harmony of movement' (1995). But surely we could say this about all classical ballet. Can we point to facets of Cecchetti's work which are particular to the Cecchetti Method apart from the fact that they are stylistically of an earlier period?

The issue of style is important. Geraldine Morris argues that 'all training systems produce dancers with a particular way of articulating ballet's codified movements' (2003, 18) and that 'the presence of style in all training systems affects the dancers' bodies in a variety of different ways' (p. 17). The question, therefore, arises whether the Cecchetti Method is becoming increasingly irrelevant as a result of changing taste, contemporary practice moving ever further away from Cecchetti's aesthetic. In other words: is Cecchetti's work appearing more and more 'old-fashioned'? Glasstone counters this argument saying that 'There is, of course a sense in which [Cecchetti's enchaînements] are locked into the style and taste of an historical period; but the exciting thing about so much of Cecchetti's work is the way it can and does transcend its time and its stylistic boundaries' (1990, 695). Lukens goes even further suggesting that 'the method is based on universal principles that transcend the specific stylistic boundaries of romantic, classical, neoclassical and even contemporary ballet' (1995). Both Glasstone and Lukens seem to be acknowledging that there is a style problem but that the underlying principles of Cecchetti's work can somehow be distinguished from the style. But in what ways are style and technique distinguishable and what does this mean for the practical application of Cecchetti's work today?

The relationship between style and technique is a complex area which I do not intend to investigate in detail, however, for the purpose of this paper I will follow Morris' lead and consider them to be two inseparable facets of the same thing; in other words it is impossible to have one without the other, and each is fundamentally dependent on the other. I suggest that this indivisibility of style and technique even extends to factors that one might consider to be purely in the realms of stylistic adornment rather than technique, such as the mime-related ports de bras frequently seen in Cecchetti's enchaînements. Rather than being superficial elements which can be removed at will, these elaborate ports de bras appear to be important initiating and coordinating factors in the dynamic and spatial characteristics of the movement (Bennett and Poesio, 2000). An example is the 'blowing a kiss gesture' where the arm uncurls forwards taking the hand from the lips out to the edge of the dancer's kinesphere. In so doing the arm movement projects energy into space as the kiss flies to its target. The degree of spatial intent which results from this movement is not possible with a more academic port de bras where the arm circles around the body at the periphery of the kinesphere. To replace a kiss gesture with an academic port de bras is to fundamentally change the movement, especially where it accompanies a transfer of weight.

This paper is stimulated by my own experience of the Cecchetti work. I was trained initially in the Cecchetti Method and later in largely RAD (Royal Academy of Dance) based training at the Ballet Rambert School. Later still, I was taught by various teachers in both French and Russian styles. This background has left me with a deep respect, indeed love, for Cecchetti's work, but also a realisation that aspects of it differ greatly in many respects from what/how I was taught by non-Cecchetti teachers; I will try to articulate

some of these differences here. In addition, over the last ten years I have taught ballet technique in the UK university sector (mainly at Roehampton University) and this teaching has allowed me to explore the work in greater depth to search for ways in which aspects of Cecchetti's work can be applied in contemporary pedagogy. The practical basis of this research is important: it is grounded in doing, teaching and watching rather than a purely theoretical analysis; getting to grips with the movement and exploring what it looks and feels like is at the core of my understanding.

The aim of this paper, therefore, is to present an analysis of certain features of the Cecchetti Method and consider their relevance to contemporary training in the light of their stylistic consequences.

Cecchetti Principles

To attempt to make a comprehensive study of Cecchetti's principles of movement is far beyond the scope of this article; therefore, I have selected three areas for study: the torso, the arms and gravity – interestingly they turn out to be interrelated.¹

The Torso

One thing which is immediately surprising, when looking at Cecchetti's work from the perspective of contemporary ballet training, is the frequent occurrence of movements involving large displacements of the whole torso. Examples of these include 'crescent bends' or attitudes penchées (the torso is displaced forwards and sideways with a strong backward arch), à la seconde lines with the torso tilted away from the leg in second, and arabesque allongée lines. In all of these the torso is held more or less parallel to the ground and there is little sense of 'keeping the back up' (in the sense of attempting to maintain verticality). Further examples are more dynamic, and include renversé turns (the torso bends side-back-side in a sweeping, circling movement as part of a turn), and movements where the torso swoops quickly down towards the ground and back up again. In an extreme example of the 'swooping torso' the dancer lands in first arabesque from a jump, swoops down quickly 'as if to pick something up from the floor'² and uses the impetus from this movement to recover and make a three-quarter turn ending on relevé in croisé devant.³

The renversé en dedans is probably the most extreme of Cecchetti's torso movements and one which, like many others, is almost entirely lost from contemporary practice other than in the Cecchetti syllabi; here a complex movement of the torso is the principal initiator of a turn. The movement is difficult to analyse and teachers seem to explain it in different ways, but in essence the dancer starts in arabesque and brings the arabesque leg into retiré at the same time tilting over to the side of this leg and bringing the arms in; the torso and leg movements together initiate a full turn with the torso continuing by arching

1 In a previous article I have also considered some aspects of Cecchetti's technique in the use of the leg, including the bent-legged jumping technique (Bennett, 2003b)

2 This an image employed by many Cecchetti teachers.

3 Glissade derrière, jeté to arabesque croisé, dégagé en tournant, entrechat six (Craske and de Moroda, 1979, 42-43)

backwards and tilting to the other side to maintain the momentum (the supporting leg does not bend at any time). The movement ends with a sudden opening of the arms and the leg to the side with the final torso tilt (away from the aerial leg) maintained. For the dancer this is an extremely difficult movement where equilibrium is challenged in a way that can take some time to perfect – I have heard it described as feeling as if you are turning yourself inside out! Once mastered, however, the *renversé en dedans* gives you a wonderful sense of the core of your body powering the movement as the body gathers in and turns about itself, followed by the energy radiating from the centre as the body and limbs open out suddenly to halt the movement suspended at a precarious angle on *relevé*.

All these movements are notable for their large and deliberate displacements of the torso from the vertical. They are also unfamiliar to most contemporary dancers who can find them very disconcerting as they challenge both their conception of the invariable uprightness of ballet, and their physical sense of equilibrium and safety in ballet technique. But not all non-vertical uses of the torso in the Cecchetti Method are so large; others are more subtle and pervade the work. In particular, the use of the inclined head technique is frequent; again, those not trained in the Method find this movement alien.

The inclined head technique is used in many contexts where other methods might use *épaulement*, for example: *jetés* from one leg to the other. Although *épaulement* is used in Cecchetti's work (and is often considered to be a characteristic feature) a survey of the recorded *enchaînements* suggests that the inclined head technique may be more characteristic. (This may be an area where practice in the oral tradition may have changed with *épaulement* sometimes replacing the use of the inclined head in contemporary teaching⁴.)

The inclined head movement can be seen as a mechanical aid to jumping as the head is lifted to vertical (to aid propulsion into the air) before inclining to the other side on landing to absorb some of the landing energy and prepare for the next jump; Cecchetti teachers often use the imagery of throwing a ball up into the air and catching it on the other side, the ball representing the head. Particularly in larger jumps, the head inclination appears also to include a degree of torso movement and the throwing of the head and upper torso upwards and from side to side represents a significant engagement of the upper body weight in order to coordinate and give power to jumps. This is entirely different from *épaulement* which involves a rotation of the shoulder region and counter-rotation of the head with no vertical, lifting component to the movement at all.⁵ In *épaulement*, although the torso may be important in coordinating turning movements as one side moves forwards in relation to the other, the lack of any vertical component to the movement means that it has little value in engaging the body in elevation.

The inclined head (often including some torso component) is also used in Cecchetti's work to lead the weight of the body in travelling as it inclines in the required direction.

4 For example, some teachers now appear to teach *épaulement* for *assemblés dessus* whereas Craske & Beaumont (1946, 15-16) only make mention of the inclined head.

5 Actually *épaulement* does sometimes include a slight inclination of the head (and often does in the Cecchetti Method) but the inclination component is small and appears to be reduced or absent in much contemporary training.

Again, épaulement cannot do this in the same way since there is no directional displacement of the whole torso from the vertical.⁶ Such a use of the head/torso can be seen in Cecchetti's temps levé, chassé to second, where the head leads the travelling motion to the side, and in his brisés dessus, where the torso inclines to the diagonal in the direction of travel.

Although not ostensibly to do with the use of the torso, an aspect of Cecchetti's use of the arms also has important implications for the torso's use – ironically this is the frequent minimal use or absence of arm movements. In ordinary pirouettes the Cecchetti teaching tradition holds that the leading arm should not initiate the turn by opening with the second arm chasing in to meet it; rather the 'leading arm' should not be used at all and the second arm should merely close in front. In some diagonal turns, such as posé turns, the arms merely move from demi-seconde position to a very low fifth en avant,⁷ and in some pas de bourrées en tournant the arms are not used at all. In many jumps there is either no arm movement (they are just held in fifth en bas) or simply a slight opening of the arms to demi-seconde closing again in fifth en bas upon landing.

This absence of arm movements might appear somewhat stark to today's eyes, but it does open the way for the torso to become both a potent source of movement initiation and a powerful site for expression: In turns, the arms are not used to gather energy, rather the torso is strongly engaged in order to initiate the movement; and in some jumps the use of the head and torso to coordinate movement (both through the inclined head and épaulement) is emphasised by the absence of more peripheral arm movements. The effect is that neither the eyes of the observer nor the intent and sensation of the dancer are distracted from the torso by extraneous arm movements – the focus is on the torso as an organising factor and an expressive element. The Tuesday enchaînement *Relevé, petits battements, posé, petits battements, pas de bourrée to fourth position, pas de bourrée with allongé* (Craske and de Moroda, 1979, 20-21) provides a perfect example of this in Cecchetti's work: the arms are held low throughout (in fifth en bas) but the body turns repeatedly from corner to corner with an upper torso initiated épaulement. The delicate repeating pointe work sequence continues below, but the eye is drawn to the play of the shoulders as they turn 'with a swinging movement' (p. 21) from one effacé line to the other.

In summary, the use of the torso in Cecchetti's work represents, at one level, a different approach to line rooted in the aesthetic of an earlier age where the importance of verticality in the body alignment appears less than in contemporary practice: lines such as the arabesque allongée and the attitude penchée are stylistically valued and are quite different from the more upright lines of the torso seen in much contemporary practice. On another level this is not just an aesthetic change: many of these torso displacements

6 Épaulement can of course give some directional impetus for travelling but only in combination with a turning movement where one side is stabilised in space and the other moves forward in relation to it. The effect is likely to be quite different and the travelling component much reduced in comparison to the torso displacement under discussion.

7 See *Series of tours en diagonale* (Craske & Beaumont, 1946, 94). This may be a problem with the written description and a low third position (one arm so the side in demi-seconde the other in a low position in front) may be what was performed before opening the front arm to demi-seconde, nevertheless this remains a very low position with the use of the arms much reduced in comparison to contemporary practice.

are functional and lie at the root of Cecchetti's coordinated movement, and these movements may represent fundamentally different ways of using the body from those promoted in contemporary teaching.

The Arms

When looking at the use of the arms in Cecchetti's work there appears to be a contradiction. De Valois, who studied with Cecchetti for several years, considers that in the Italian School 'the 'curve' of the limbs (ending in a marked roundness in the general line and execution of the dancer) is accentuated'⁸ (de Valois, 1937, 239), but other evidence suggests much longer arm lines. *The Manual* seems to be ambiguous on this matter: some of the line drawings⁹ seem to show some distinctly curved lines, however, it also states that 'Whenever an arm is rounded in front of the body, as in first fourth or fifth positions, it should be extended as much as possible (always preserving a rounded appearance)' (Beaumont & Idzikowski, 1932, 25). Some of the 1925 photographs of Margaret Craske (Richardson, 1925) also appear to support much longer arm lines¹⁰ as, perhaps, does Glasstone when he states that Cecchetti's 'famous ports de bras develop enormous breadth of movement' (Glasstone, 1990, 695). What is going on? Is de Valois wrong? Are Craske's long arms her personal style rather than Cecchetti's? Are the line drawings wrong? Perhaps the long lines are a result of later 'contamination' of the Cecchetti Method from the Russian School in which, according to de Valois (1937, 240) 'a considerably extended line is noticed and a complete denial of Italian "roundness"'. It is also possible that by this stage of his life, Cecchetti himself had started to adapt his own teaching in the light of changing tastes. It may be, however, that both these things are true, and that some arm movements (most likely the mime-related ones) do employ some distinctly curved/bent arms whilst at other times extended lines predominate.

These observations illustrate some of the difficulties in reconstructing earlier Cecchetti practice. Fortunately, some underlying principles in Cecchetti's use of the arms are more open to analysis through a study of his two sets of ports de bras and his exercise for the eight directions of the body. These exercises are, perhaps, most responsible for developing a Cecchetti-style use of the arms, and they exhibit two features which will become key to my argument: the balance and connection of the arms across the back, and the integration of the torso with arm movements¹¹.

In Cecchetti's work it is rare for one arm to remain static whilst the other moves¹². The arms should move at the same time and in balance, either mirroring each other in lateral

8 Note that she applies this to both arms and legs.

9 See, for example, fourth port de bras (Beaumont and Idzikowski, 1932, plate XIV figs. 60 & 61).

10 Craske was one of Cecchetti's principal disciples and inheritors of The Method and these photos were published only two years after he left for Italy.

11 Cecchetti's 'Theory of ports de bras' is usually considered part of the Cecchetti principles.

12 This is in contrast to much contemporary practice where, for example, in a change from *à la quatrième devant* to *éffacé devant*, one arm might lower and then rise via the front to above the head whilst the other is held motionless in second position. In Cecchetti's work one arm would move directly up to above the head at the same time as the other lowers in a balanced movement to the characteristic *demi-seconde* position.

symmetry or in opposition as if making one line which pivots around the centre of the shoulders¹³ (Beaumont and Idzikowski, 1932, 28). A feeling of widening the front of the upper chest as the arms pass through second position is also an important stylistic feature in Cecchetti's ports de bras. Perhaps this openness of the chest and the continuity of arm lines encourages the dancer to feel the breadth of the movement (as Glasstone points out) and leads to a greater extension of the arms particularly as they move through second position.

If we look at the way the torso is used during these ports de bras movements we can see that this coordinated, broad movement of the arms is probably achieved through the mediation of the torso, this is supported by Lukens who claims that 'To correctly execute [Cecchetti's] ports de bras the dancer needs to have a deep understanding of how the head and arm movements organically grow out of the use of the spine and shoulder girdle' (1995). An example is found in the exercise for the eight directions of the body when the dancer changes from Cecchetti's *croisé derrière* line to *croisé devant*¹⁴; not only do the arms balance and move more or less as one as they pass through second position (the upstage arm rising from the low demi-second line and the other lowering from above the head to reverse the arm line), but as they do this the torso tilts slightly in the same direction of movement, from one side to the other. It is important to note that the arms do not just articulate independently at the shoulders with a neutral, vertical torso maintained; rather, the torso is integrated in the movement of the arms through its own side-to-side inclination. Interestingly, the current ISTD (Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing) Cecchetti syllabus even contains an exercise where the 'eight directions of the body' are performed with the arms held neutral, the fact that this has been included suggests the primary importance of the torso as the origin of the movement rather than something following on from the arm movements or simply added as stylistic decoration.

Again we see a theme emerging of the torso being the fundamental organising factor in Cecchetti's movement: in port de bras the torso initiates arm movements, and in jumping and travelling it is involved in both elevation with a ballon quality, and rapid directional displacements of weight. The arms often grow out of these torso movements but they seem neither to be the primary initiators nor move independently of the torso as we see in much contemporary practice.

Gravity

The earthy under-curve of Cecchetti's *chassé* is seen by many as an important characteristic of his technique. Guest suggests that when dancers not trained in ways similar to Cecchetti's are asked to perform Cecchetti style under-curve *chassés*, they frequently revert, in performance, to over-curve movements which are more similar to their training (Guest, 1997, 823). What is different about this training goes deeper than just not being familiar with under-curve *chassés*; I believe it has its origin in a different relationship with gravity which underpins the technique.

13 For example, if one arm moves forwards the other must balance it by moving backwards, and if one moves down the other must move up

14 A similar arm movement is found in Cecchetti's fourth port de bras.

In contrast to today's training, which appears to stress the vertical with an unremittingly upwards pull, Cecchetti allows the 'down' to play a strong role as well. The low centre of gravity of the Cecchetti chassé, with the weight being allowed to lower temporarily during a transfer of weight, is only one result of this. The reduced emphasis on the vertical dimension that we saw earlier in Cecchetti's use of off-vertical torso movements is another. His frequent use of low, quarter pointe relevés and his many falling 'tombé' movements are also dependent on this relationship with gravity, as is the particular quality of downward movements of the arms found in the Cecchetti work. It appears to be characteristic that the arms should often drop through *giving in* to gravity rather than being *put* in a new position¹⁵; these weight sensing movements of the arms are subtly different from the more rigidly held and placed arms of contemporary practice. It seems, therefore, that Cecchetti plays with gravity: he holds the weight high and low, he overcomes and he gives into gravity, he accesses different dynamic qualities through relaxation, falling and dropping, contrasted with the more familiar qualities of balance and muscular resistance to the downward pull of gravity. In doing this he adds extra texture to movement and increases the dancer's range.

Connections

What is interesting to me is the way that all of these features (Cecchetti's use of the torso, his use of the arms, and his approach to gravity) are connected. Molly Lake appears to have been aware of this when she said that Cecchetti's movement had '...that flow, continuity and coverage of ground, that almost animal quality joining one movement to the next...', and 'above the waist a lightly lifted, poised, almost airborne quality [which] enabled the dancer to take his or her weight right over the feet no matter in what direction or with what speed the dancer moved' (Lake, 1976). Lake also claims that Cecchetti used to say about jumping, 'Use the floor, the floor is your best friend ... Sink into it as far as you would go over it and stand in the air' (ibid.). I think she is talking about the very things revealed in this analysis – the torso is a mobile element which shifts in order to guide the body's weight, and a lowered centre of gravity is used to allow lower body strength from the floor to support the movement of the upper body as well as to support elevation.

An observation by de Valois suggests that not only was the torso important for Cecchetti but that he himself recognised it as the origin of his movement – she claims: 'You had to learn the whole step with your shoulders, body and head first, before adding the feet. If the top knows where it is got to go for each movement, I can't tell you how easy it is for the feet to follow afterwards' (de Valois, quoted in Glasstone, 1990, 695).

Irmgard Bartenieff's theories of total body connectivity provide a useful theoretical framework from which to view these features¹⁶. The most important thing to note is that, in line with Bartenieff's theories, Cecchetti's work does seem to rely on a connected body

15 I am reminded of Wilson's exhortation 'not put, drop' when trying to get me to lower the arms to fifth en bas with the correct quality (1998).

16 Bartenieff has six patterns of 'total body connectivity' which she believes underlie efficient human movement: breath, core-distal, head-tail, upper-lower, body-half, and cross-lateral. See Hackney (1998) for a discussion of Bartenieff's theories.

powering and dynamically coordinating movement from the centre. In terms of particular patterns of connectivity, we see a strong upper-lower patterning supported from the lower body: the weight is able to lower giving a stronger sense of grounding, and this grounded lower body supports the movement of the upper body allowing it to be carried in different directions as an aid to movement (exactly as Lake observed). We also see a body-half patterning in the inclined head/torso technique: the side to side movement can be seen as one side of the body being moved in relation to the other, the two sides working by alternating patterns of stabilisation and mobilisation. There may also be a core-distal patterning in *renversés en dedans* as the body closes to and opens from the centre, and I have previously suggested a head-tail organisation in a different kind of *renversé* turn in Cecchetti's work¹⁷ (Bennett, 2003a).

This analysis points to a rich use of the body/torso and weight that may be quite different from much contemporary ballet practice. This is certainly my experience as a dancer, and I am reminded of two examples of teaching which seem to add weight to this idea. In the first a teacher told a class how she taught younger students to hold a position by pretending to spray them with 'statue paint'. In the other example, I am told that some teachers talk about the torso as a 'Cornflakes box' and suggest that you must not move the box for fear of crushing its contents. In both these examples the dynamic, integrative nature of the torso seen in Cecchetti's work seems to be denied at the expense of a model where the torso is a strong, but static foundation for the articulation of the extremities which move independently of both the torso and each other.

Contemporary Relevance

I am interested in the rise in various 'somatic' practices in much dance teaching (particularly in contemporary dance), which emphasise approaching the body as a whole, and investigating its connections in movement¹⁸. The analysis I have presented here suggests that certain principles of Cecchetti's technique are doing the same thing. I suggest, therefore, that this is an area in which the study of Cecchetti's principles can make a real contribution to teaching of ballet in line with contemporary ideas about dance training.

Once fully embodied, the ways of moving promoted by the features of Cecchetti's work I have described give particular ways of coordinating the body and develop in the dancer a physical awareness of bodily connections which, I believe, can be maintained through other approaches to ballet movement. This awareness can allow the dancer to inhabit the movement more fully, to become an integrated being moving through and relating to space rather than a set of body parts held in particular places to produce set body designs such as *retiré* and *arabesque*. The movement becomes more meaningful to the dancer (and the viewer?) both through the kinaesthetic sensing of the connected body in motion, and through spatial and dynamic relationships which are articulated more clearly through whole body engagement and the use of gravity.

17 In *Coupé dessous, fouetté, coupé dessous, fouetté en tournant, coupé dessous, pas de Basque, tour en attitude renversée* (Craske and de Moroda, 1979, 101-103)

18 Examples include Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen's 'Body Mind Centering' and some release-based approaches to technique.

Style

But what of the style? If the Cecchetti Method produces dancers who move in an 'old-fashioned' way then what use is that? To give but two examples, the inclined head technique is little used nowadays and neither are the very open 'attitude' lines seen in Cecchetti's fourth port de bras, so of what use are these stylistic elements to contemporary ballet students?

As we have seen previously, Morris argues that all ballet training is infused with stylistic consequences. She also suggests that as a result of the failure of teachers to recognise the stylistic implications of what they are teaching, contemporary ballet training does not equip dancers with an awareness of stylistic factors. She continues that such awareness, if specifically addressed in teaching, would give dancers the means to make more informed expressive and interpretative choices as artists, something that she feels is generally lacking in contemporary ballet training (2003). Morris makes a compelling argument for a diverse, style-aware training in ballet, according to her 'students need to be encouraged to become aware of the stylistic consequences of different training methods and to realise that there can be a variety of ways of approaching ballet's codified steps' (p. 27).

So if there are stylistic consequences from learning to move in Cecchetti's way (which there most certainly are, as for any other training method or system) then these can be valued, rather than glossed over or watered down, and a study of Cecchetti's work can enrich the development of dance *artists* as part of a varied training. The other side of this argument is, however, that the traditional Cecchetti work alone is not enough to provide such a style aware training.

A Changing Tradition

Like all training systems Cecchetti's work has changed through time and been adapted due to changing artistic and pedagogic ideas and shifting tastes in dancing. At one level this is essential and inevitable, all dancers and teachers are products of their time and will interpret the work in their own ways to keep it alive, indeed this has certainly enriched The Method in many ways. But there is also a potential problem here: if the Cecchetti's enchaînements are allowed to continually evolve in their manner of performance then how do we know that the style and the movement principles have not been lost?¹⁹ Are we really teaching his principles? This section looks at how change takes place and the sources that are available to try to understand what has changed.

The three Cecchetti manuals²⁰ are, of course, the main textual sources; however, they are also very problematic. One only has to look at the illustrations in *The Manual* (Beaumont and Idzikowski, 1932) to see their lack of anatomical accuracy and for alarm bells to be sounded. More seriously, the texts are sometimes incomplete (for example omitting detail

19 Laura Wilson (1901-1999), an early teacher of the Method, was of the opinion that this is the case, and that the performance of the work has changed in contemporary teaching of the Method (Bennett, 2003a).

20 Beaumont & Idzikowsky (second edition 1932, first edition published 1922) known as *The Manual*; Craske and Beaumont (1946); and Craske and de Moroda (1979, first published 1956)

found in the oral teaching tradition) and mostly lack important timing information; they are, therefore, not very useful for a revealing analysis or reconstruction²¹. However, if the manuals are considered in conjunction with information from the oral teaching tradition, many of the gaps can be filled in and we can begin to generate a fuller picture of Cecchetti's enchaînements and their style of performance. But the oral tradition often reveals different versions of the work which cloud our view: which version should we use to fill in a particular gap? It is possible that some of these differing versions may have their origin in Cecchetti's own adaptation of the enchaînements, either over time or to suit different dancers, whilst others may have developed since Cecchetti's time; the distinction is important as the former may provide more information about Cecchetti's own approach whilst the latter may obscure it.

An example of one of Cecchetti's own adaptations may be in the enchaînement *Temps levé, développé, temps levé, fonetté, jeté en attitude, gargonillade volée, deux jetés* (Craske and de Moroda, 1979, 29-30). In the written record, and in most of the oral tradition, the arms are held in fifth en bas throughout the enchaînement. However, a version reported to be from the teacher Molly Lake²² (1899-1986) has 'Pavlova arms' when, at the end of the gargonillade volée, they uncurl from the shoulders and reach forwards as the head and upper back reach backwards. It is well known that Pavlova studied extensively with Cecchetti: did he teach her this version or just allow her to do it like this because it suited her? On the other hand, perhaps someone else added these arms later, calling them Pavlova arms because they were linked stylistically with her.

An example of a change in the work since Cecchetti's time may be in Cecchetti's 'Mercury' attitude croisé arm position. Some early images (e.g. Beaumont and Idzikowski, plate VII, fig.35 and Margaret Craske in Richardson, 1925, 288²³) show a distinctly upward sloping line of the arms with a pronounced curve of the front arm, whereas a recent photograph shows a much more elongated arm line which is much nearer the horizontal (Glasstone, 2001, 86, fig.24). These two versions are very different in their body and spatial characteristics. The later photograph is of the renowned dancer and choreographer Michael Clark: are we merely seeing his personal interpretation or is this a change in the performance of an element of The Method?²⁴

Such change in the oral tradition since Cecchetti's time results in part from conscious or unconscious 'updating' where changes in performance are adopted as a result of changing perceptions of what ballet 'should' look like. If the dominant images of dancers in the media, on the stage and in the classroom portray a particular look or way of doing things, teachers will be naturally drawn to teach their students to look like this – they do want them to get jobs after all! Whether the work is 'updated' by teachers in this way, or just

21 I am reminded of a conversation with an important figure in the Japanese dance world (who had been a dancer himself) who told me of how he once bought a copy of The Manual in order to learn about The Cecchetti Method but was unable to make any coherent reconstruction based on its instructions.

22 Lake was a key early teacher of the Cecchetti Method.

23 These images show this arm line in both the full attitude body position and in Cecchetti's second port de bras respectively.

24 I examine some other changes which may have occurred in the teaching of The Method in a previous paper (Bennett, 2003a).

taught slightly differently because of the vagaries of human memory and varied interpretation (or even a one off whim of a particular teacher which gets passed on as the traditional version by their students), these changes will accumulate through the generations as the work is handed on; and if this process carries on with no anchor to the origins, this will lead to significant change and the multiple versions whose relationship to earlier versions is increasingly unclear. The textual references in the Manuals can help us understand this variation, however the variation in the oral tradition is often in areas about which the manuals are vague or silent. The memories of older teachers also have an important role to play, but as the generations pass this link with the past becomes ever weaker. Fortunately, there are more recent and lasting records which attempt to record the work in more detail, for example Linda Pilkington's Benesh notation of Nora Roche's teaching of the work (Pilkington, 1978) and Sheila Kennedy's word-based notes which expand on the detail given in the Manuals (Kennedy, 2006). Dr Ann Hutchinson Guest and I are also preparing a Labanotation-based record and analysis of the work to try to make sense of some of this rich variation (Guest and Bennett, in preparation²⁵).

It is only through attention to how the work has changed, and is changing, that the work can continue to meaningfully represent Cecchetti's own approach. The work can be adapted and updated to bring it alive as one teaches it, and in many ways it can be (and has been) enriched in this way, but unless this is done with an understanding gained through an investigation of how it was performed, the movement principles and the style which I have suggested are so valuable are in danger of becoming obscured.

Conclusions

It would seem, therefore, that the principles underlying the Cecchetti Method are different in certain ways from those in much contemporary practice. The way the body is integrated through his use of the torso and the textural richness accessed through his approach to gravity are two areas I highlight, and suggest to be of real value in contemporary training. In addition the historical style that is embedded in Cecchetti's movement, far from being simply a historical curiosity, can be explored to great effect in a rich, style aware training with the aim of producing more artistically empowered dancers. We must, though, be careful in how we perpetuate Cecchetti's teaching for it would be easy to lose sight of what makes it special in the face of inevitable incremental change. This is no easy task but the richness of Cecchetti's legacy makes this a worthwhile pursuit.

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25 Since the writing of this paper this book has now been published (Guest and Bennett, 2007)

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