

By Laura Nelson (MA 2007)

*Critical Observations on the Art of Dancing to Which is Added A Collection of Cotillons or French Dances*

Giovanni Andrea-Gallini (1728-1805), manager of the King's Theater, London, from 1785-89, authored at least two books treating the art and history of dance. The first, *A Treatise on the Art of Dancing* (1762), draws from the writings of John Locke, Carlo Goldini and John Weaver. In this book Gallini examines world dance, commenting on the dance traditions in Britain, China, Africa and Mexico as well as other countries. His analysis illuminates existing cultural biases.

Lesser known is his work, *Critical Observations on the Art of Dancing to Which is added a Collection of Cotillons or French Dances* (1770). This book is both a formal analysis of the history of dance and a practical manual. Just as the title suggests, in this work Gallini honors the dance of the ancient Chinese and Greeks. He validates dance as art and as the foundation of human expression. He offers a comparison of ancient and modern dance and includes a collection of 44 cotillions comprised of music and choreography. He uses a system of word notation instead of steno-choreography (symbolic notation) so that the general public might learn the dances without formal instruction.

The book is a response to the attempt on the part of certain bishops and councils within the Catholic Church to suppress dancing as a profanation. He begins with observations in defense of the ritual dances of the Greeks, Romans, and Chinese. Then he argues that the church's position is in conflict with the idea that ancient dances were utilitarian and spiritual in purpose. His goal is to show that historically, dancing was not always looked upon as frivolous. Nevertheless, he reminds us that even as early as 550BCE, Confucius had already complained that the art of the dance was degenerating!

Gallini's *Observations* appears to be one of the last publications by dancing masters who treat the history of dance as ritual among the ancients. His unique history brings back to the English their original country dances, which had passed through the hands of the French and become associated with continental culture across the Channel. In so doing, he participates in an active cultural exchange between England and France. We may surmise that the association of the cotillions with France allowed Gallini further to extol this originally British art form.

According to WorldCat, seventeen copies of Gallini's original *Treatise* exist in library rare book collections today. Six libraries own a modern edition of this book published by in 1967. Significantly, WorldCat makes no mention of the *Critical Observations*. The edition we present here is in very good condition. It has been rebound in beautiful brown leather binding embossed with the title. The substantial gilded pages are not paginated, although the book is divided into two parts, each with its own title page, one to introduce the observations and one to introduce the cotillions. This idiosyncrasy suggests that in its original form, the book may have been sold in two parts.