



I-san Tarantella Pas de deux: Embodying I-san Culture in Ballet

อีสานทาร์เนลล่า พา เดอ เดอซ์: การผสมผสานกายวัฒนธรรมอีสานในบัลเลต์

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to present the creative technique for I-san Tarantella Pas de deux, the experimental ballet creation which consisted of 1) the technique of creating the "Pas de deux" and 2) the experiment on embodying I-san culture in the ballet. The creation process is divided into four parts: 1) collection and study of related data, documents, online information, and the dance experience of the author to be analyzed as a conceptual framework; 2) experimental creation; 3) evaluation and refinement; and 4) public performance presentation.

I-san Tarantella Pas de deux presented the ballet creation in a new style, characteristic, and aesthetics with an intercultural approach: 1) Appreciating I-san culture; 2) Contextualizing I-san culture; and 3) I-san folk movements. After the public presentation, I-san Tarantella Pas de deux was recognized as a unique performance following the Pas de deux approach, which embodied I-san culture to create a new dance style. Furthermore, it demonstrated an intercultural dance performance. The I-san folk dance and ballet techniques harmonised with the exciting music and consequently inspired the movements.

Keywords: I-san, Tarantella, Pas de deux, I-san Culture

บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อนำเสนอกลวิธีการสร้างสรรค์บัลเลต์ชุด อีสาน ทาร์เนลล่า พา เดอ เดอซ์ ซึ่งเป็นงานสร้างสรรค์บัลเลต์เชิงทดลอง ประกอบด้วย 1) เทคนิคการสร้างสรรคบัลเลต์แบบพา เดอ เดอซ์ และ 2) การทดลองการผสมผสานกายวัฒนธรรมอีสานในบัลเลต์ โดยมีกระบวนการสร้างสรรค์แบ่งออกเป็น 4 ส่วนคือ 1) การรวบรวมและศึกษาข้อมูลที่เกี่ยวข้อง เอกสาร ข้อมูลออนไลน์ และประสบการณ์ของผู้สร้างสรรค์ มาวิเคราะห์เป็นกรอบแนวคิด 2) การทดลองสร้างสรรค์ 3) การประเมินและการปรับแต่ง และ 4) การนำเสนอผลงานสู่สาธารณชน การสร้างสรรค์บัลเลต์ชุด อีสาน ทาร์เนลล่า พา เดอ เดอซ์ นั้นนำเสนอกระบวนการสร้างสรรค์บัลเลต์รูปแบบใหม่ ลักษณะใหม่ และสุนทรียศาสตร์ใหม่ด้วยแนวคิดระหว่างวัฒนธรรม ดังนี้ 1) สุนทรียะในวัฒนธรรมอีสาน

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2) ปรับปรุงท่วงท่าวัฒนธรรมอีสาน และ 3) ทำรำพื้นบ้านอีสาน ซึ่งจากผลการนำเสนอการแสดงชี้ให้เห็นว่าการแสดงอีสาน ทารันเทลล่า พา เดอ เดอชี่นั้นมีลักษณะแตกต่างในระบบคลาสสิก และมีการผสมผสานกายวัฒนธรรมอีสานลงไปเพื่อให้เกิดรูปแบบการแสดงที่มีเอกลักษณ์เฉพาะตัวในลักษณะการเต้นรำระหว่างวัฒนธรรม โดยการเคลื่อนไหวร่างกายได้รับแรงบันดาลใจมาจากการแสดงพื้นบ้านอีสาน เทคนิคบัลเลต์ และสอดคล้องกับดนตรีที่น่าตื่นเต้น

คำสำคัญ: อีสาน ทารันเทลล่า พา เดอ เดอชี่ วัฒนธรรมอีสาน

Introduction

Tarantella is an Italian folk dance that is commonly performed during celebrations, rites, and festivals, reflecting the way of life and cultural traditions of Italy. It has evolved into a distinctive cultural symbol of the country. The term “tarantella” originated from the Italian word “Tarantola,” which refers to the tarantula, a type of wolf spider often found in the province of Puglia, namely in Taranto, during the 15th-17th century (Eataly, 2019). Thus, the Tarantella dance originated from the physical characteristics of the spider. The movements were distinguished by swift footwork and chaotic and frenzied dances, with indigenous people dancing in the town square.

According to the above, the unique and captivating rhythm of the Italian tarantella influenced the development of a dance form in the Italian court during later periods. This dance form also contributed to the enhancement of character dance, which can be observed in various ballet performances like Napoli and Esmeralda. Furthermore, George Balanchine, the renowned creator of neoclassical dance, reimagined the Grand Tarantella Pas de deux in 1964. While the motions of the Tarantella dance were influenced by classical dance, its gestures maintained a distinct and original form. To put it simply, the performance will use tambourines. The activity comprises rapid motions. Furthermore, the second sort of ballet performance incorporates elaborate footwork and an atmosphere of enjoyment and exhilarating spectacle (Stowell, 2009). This form can be referred to as the “Demi-Character” form.

In the northeastern region of Thailand, known as “I-san,” I discovered a captivating rhythm and lively movement reminiscent of the Italian tarantella. The I-san folk dance incorporates a repertoire of gestures derived from the local villagers. It is characterised by lively, rapid, and uncomplicated movements, and occasionally includes improvised sequences (Musika, 2015, p. 25). For instance, “Seaung Yae Khai Mod Deang” (เซียงเห่ไข่มดแดง) is a traditional dance created by the Department of Dramatic Arts at Buriram Rajabhat University. This dance reflects rhythmic movements and a lively song, while also portraying the emotions, personalities, and occupations of



the local people. This piece's movement was inspired by mundane motion and showcased the process of locating a red-ant egg for culinary purposes.

As previously stated, this proposal is to develop a ballet that draws inspiration from the unique tarantella dance. The aim is to synchronise the lively pace of the music with precise dance steps to create a captivating “Pas de deux” performance. Pas de Deux is a French term used to describe a ballet performance involving two dancers, usually a male and a female. The purpose of this performance is to showcase their skills in partnering, communication, interpretation, and conveying emotional narratives through dynamic body movements (Kaewploy, 2020). Furthermore, the renowned Pas de deux is titled “Grand Tarantella Pas de deux,” which is one of the choreographic works composed by George Balanchine in 1964. The Pas de deux showcases an abundance of intricate steps and rapid changes in direction. This concise yet dynamic Pas de deux exemplifies Balanchine's innovative expansion of the conventional lexicon of classical dance (The George Balanchine Trust, 2022).

In addition to the “Pas de deux” approach, my experimental ballet creation, “I-san Tarantella Pas de deux: Embodying I-san culture in ballet,” has the potential to revolutionise the dance by introducing new styles and atmospheres in addition to the “Pas de deux” technique. The ballet creation I anticipated was meant to depict an intercultural dance performance that combines elements from both Eastern and Western societies and cultures (Somphaiboon, 2017). The I-san Tarantella Pas de deux will be crafted using ballet techniques, incorporating the essence of I-san culture. It will showcase fast footwork, synchronised music, and the use of tambourines to demonstrate dance skills. Moreover, the plot will be conveyed using theatrical dance, mime, and the exploration of partnering dance in relation to spatial awareness and dynamics, to challenge the ability to design and create the style. Ultimately, I anticipated that my experimental dance work would introduce a novel dimension, incorporating a distinct style, fresh attributes, and unique aesthetics through a global approach, while also integrating several artistic disciplines in Thailand.

Objectives

1. To present the technique of creating the “Pas de deux.”
2. To present the experiment on embodying I-san culture in the ballet.

The process of creation

The experimental ballet creation “I-san Tarantella Pas de deux” is divided into two steps as follows:

1. Collect and study related data, documents, online information, and dance experience.

The author researched and analyzed the related data including Tarantella dance, I-san culture, I-san folk dance, dance composition, elements of dance, Pas de deux, and dance experience to develop a conceptual framework.

2. Experimental creation

The process of choreography (Minton, 1997) is as follows:

2.1 The author derived inspiration through observation and conducted an analysis of two traditional dances as a case study: The Tarantella folk dance and Balanchine's version of the Grand Tarantella, as well as Yae Khai Mod Deang and Silpakorn's version of Seung Ka-po. Therefore, the author discovered tools, distinct motions, and attributes that guide movement styles, arrangement, and selection, encompassing music and performance aspects.

2.2 The author created the Pas de deux by incorporating ballet principles and partnering dance as its foundation. Furthermore, the author conducted experiments, integrated and implemented I-san culture into the movement, occasionally rectifying moves that posed obstacles for the dancers.

2.3 For evaluation and refinement, the author enhanced the choreography by refining the quality of movement via many rehearsals, aiming to achieve proficiency and unity. In order to increase the level of difficulty, the author pushed himself to learn more challenging dance skills and practiced them repeatedly to improve dance dynamics and muscle memory. A skilled dancer should exhibit liveliness and naturalness. To assess the dance portrayal and the smoothness of the movements, including costumes, sensory perception, expression, and the overall performance atmosphere, the author utilised Laban Movement Analysis, which encompasses four elements: body; energy; space; and shape (Bernarde, 2019).

2.4 For the public performance presentation, the I-san Tarantella Pas de deux was showcased online on 23 February 2022 during the 2nd International Symposium on Creative Fine Arts (ISCFA) 2022 at the Auditorium of Language and Computer Centre (The 100th-anniversary Auditorium) of Phranakhon Si Ayutthaya Rajabhat University. The piece underwent a rigorous peer-

review process by qualified reviewers from different institutions and was honourably awarded the “Gold Prize.”

Results

The results of the I-san Tarantella Pas de deux aligned with the following objectives:

1. The technique of creating the “Pas de deux”

The author employed the research methodology of carefully examining the materials and thoroughly observing them in order to analyse the conceptual framework of Pas de deux choreography. The term “Pas de deux” in the art of dancing translates to “Step of two” in English and is occasionally known as “Supported Adagio” (Greskovic, 2005, p. 520). In dance creation, the author referred to a dance performance with a male and a female dancer that encompasses three distinct qualities: 1) elegance in body alignment and movement; 2) aesthetic appeal in the musical accompaniment; and 3) emotional impact and intensity in the dramatic elements.

The creation incorporated seven partnering techniques, deviating from the traditional structure of Classical Ballet Pas de deux. Specifically, the focus was on developing partnering techniques without the customary elements of Adagio, Male's variation, Girl's variation, and Coda (Charassri, 2005). Additionally, the Classical partnering dance served as the central concept in this production.

First, the author conducted experiments by applying styling and storytelling to each position, while still adhering to conventional principles such as balance, centre support, lift, hold, turns, and promenades, to convey the essence of lovers within the I-san context.



Figure 1: Promenade and Lift (Kaewploy, 2022)

Second, the technique of transferring weight and creating off-balance can be employed in formulating positions by allowing the male dancer to shift the weight of the female dancer. Subsequently, the female dancer was able to execute a multitude of poses due to the presence of complementary movements that would not occur if she were performing solo. As an illustration, the author often allows the female dancer to shift her weight towards the side of the front, while the male dancer shifts his weight towards the other side.



Figure 2: Off-balancing (Kaewploy, 2022)

Third, the bouncing technique was modified to provide assistance in either facilitating the movement or connecting many forms of leaping actions.



Figure 3: Bouncing to link the other position (Kaewploy, 2022)

Fourth, employing a dance technique that prevents the dancer from exerting full weight on the entire foot facilitates rapid weight transfer and enables zigzag movement. In addition, the author proposed utilising unrestricted body movement and mobility, as well as employing the off-balance approach, which involves relying on gravity by shifting the weight from the hip to the toes rather than the heels.



Figure 4: Transferring the weight quickly (Kaewploy, 2022)

Fifth, a strategy that was employed to enhance the dynamism and appeal of the performance to the audience was the specification and enumeration of tempos, including slow, swift, short, and long, in each dance movement. Some movements were not executed as *Allongé*, but rather executed rapidly in order to transition into another position and highlight that stance by allocating more time for its execution.

Sixth, the technique of elevating the hip was employed to enable female dancers to execute a range of movements that were highly visible to the audience, resulting in remarkable and impressive performances that were not typically observed in classical ballet.

Seventh, each piece of work exhibits distinct qualities, including the presence of I-san cultural elements such as I-san Folk Mime, I-san Hopping, Jumping, Hip isolation, and shaking shoulders.



Figure 5: Hip isolation (Kaewploy, 2022)

The significance of Pas de Deux lies in the requirement for both dancers to maintain a steady performance. The female dancers had faith in the male dancer's ability to securely grip, support, and maintain balance in order to avoid the potential for harm. Male dancers were required to maintain or transfer balance in different postures to enhance the aesthetic appeal of female dancers. A male dancer served as an aide to a female dancer, similar to a noble consort. Male dancers should consistently bear this concept in their thoughts. In accordance with Naraphong Charassri's (2001) assertion, the Pas de Deux should be executed without any distractions and without any sexual undertones.

Furthermore, Pas de deux not only symbolises the synchronisation between two dancers and the music but also mirrors the decorum and conduct of the societal realm. Naraphong Charassri stated:

The gender difference is that men move more openly than women. For Thai classical dances, the male character sits with his knees open. On the other hand, the female character sits with her knees closed. In Western folk dances, the men can lift their legs higher and more openly than the women. This is also seen in ballet; women tend to be supported by men. Men can hold women and lift them in the air, focusing on the use of different parts of the body. Furthermore, there is more sexual energy than other dances and it shows the supernatural, not off-the-ground; there is no limitation between sex and gender interactions.

(Charassri, 1997)



2. The experiment on embodying I-san culture in the ballet

“I-san”, also known as Phak Tawan-Og-Chiang-Nuea in Thai, is the northeastern region of Thailand. It is located on the Khorat Plateau, as stated in the Royal Institute Dictionary (1999). The I-san region comprises 20 provinces and holds cultural value due to its social activities and relationships (Phanlukthao, 2018). In this section, the author explores the incorporation of I-san culture into the dance production through three distinct methods.

2.1 Appreciating I-san culture.

Studying the I-san culture and appreciating its beauty are crucial for the author as a choreographer specialising in other cultures. The author possesses an understanding of deriving inspiration from perception and gaining firsthand knowledge of the distinct beauty of I-san culture through observation. Consequently, the author thoroughly examined the relevant documents and observations, taking into account personal experiences as a Thai individual. An effective approach to inspire the author to create this dance performance would be to contextualise I-san Culture and use I-san folk movements.

This creation showcases the local culture of I-san and allows for the appreciation of its beauty. Thus, the I-san society exhibits a convivial manner of life devoid of any royal court influence. Consequently, there exists a method to withstand circumstances that may not be otherwise possible. The I-san culture is characterised by its focus on entertainment, effective communication, and embracing a minimalist lifestyle. Tik Saenboon (2021) states that I-san is a multicultural region, with predominant Lao culture. Additionally, there are other ethnic groups, such as Guay or Khmer, who possess their own distinct arts and culture. These groups contribute as significant cultural agents by integrating into the context of cultural-political transformations.

Based on the information provided, the author has utilised them to establish comprehension with the dancers. During the characterisation and role-play process, the author facilitated comprehension and appreciation of I-san Culture by providing explanations, engaging in discussions, observing case study video clips, and listening to I-san music. Furthermore, the author motivated them to be cognizant of the ambience of the forthcoming performance and the anticipated movements, including the choreographic sequences.

2.2 Contextualizing I-san Culture.

According to Chatchawan Wongprasert (1989, p. 92), the I-san community is a collective of art and culture that has been passed down by previous generations for the benefit of future generations. The I-san ancestors devised the style of life known as playing to foster socialisation and social interaction. Engaging in play is a concept that is not immediately apparent in the field of psychology, while the practice of living philosophy helps to educate the community in acquiring knowledge via firsthand experience. Plays designed for young I-san individuals involve the growth of children's play but use more intricate procedures to showcase their talents. The majority of young people's activities revolve around romance.

The author has compiled this knowledge pertaining to creative management and divided it into three distinct parts: 1) plotting; 2) costumes; and 3) music.

1) Plotting: the author created the ambience of the performance by designing the setting. A pair of individuals engaged in a dance performance during a communal gathering, while several individuals partook in the festivities. The dancers perform intricate movements resembling courtship rituals within the enthusiastic atmosphere of the audience or fellow dancers. The performance involves physical contact, emotional expression, and enjoyment, accompanied by the rhythmic sound of a tambourine.

Regarding the story, the author did not specifically choose a site in the I-san area to depict a particular incident. Instead, the author drew inspiration from the northeastern city to develop a distinct style that captures the mood and tone of I-san.

2) Costumes: the author conducted thorough research from credible sources in order to develop a fresh and unique personality for this ballet production. The design of the intercultural dance performance incorporated the philosophy of Appropriation Art. The author has no inclination to showcase any aspect of the major, whether it was Northern I-san, Central I-san, or Southern East, as emphasising any of these regions' attractiveness would hinder the author's inventiveness. Hence, the dance costumes draw inspiration from traditional folk clothes and numerous artefacts that symbolise the unique cultural identity of I-san. These costumes are meticulously crafted by combining, modifying, and mixing elements such as I-san folk attire, Morhom shirts, fabric colours resembling natural dyes, pompom head ornaments and silver necklaces.



The author collaborated with a couturier to develop a novel ballet gown by adopting ballet tailoring as a fundamental approach since dancing costumes must prioritise convenience and facilitate a wide range of actions, including jumping, leg splits and kicks.

3) Music: Music is a stimulus that activates the imagination through the sense of hearing, experiencing, appreciating the aesthetic qualities, and emotional impact. The significance of music extends beyond its classification as an art form. However, it also encompasses the tone, style, time period, wording, and overall depiction. The concept of making motions is derived from the inspiration drawn from music, hence the title “understanding music”.

In the author’s point of view, I-san folk music is a delightful representation of the ambience of courting. The author revised the composition “Seaung Yae Khai Mod Deang,” which is part of the “E-san folk song suite” performed by the Thailand Philharmonic Orchestra. The duration of the performance is approximately 4 minutes and 30 seconds.

2.3 I-san folk movement.

The I-san artists are highly skilled individuals who are dedicated to preserving the community’s traditional plays. They have enhanced some of these plays by including elements of “Dancing Arts,” adding artistic value and enhancing the beauty of the community’s cultural heritage. Chatchawan Wongprasert (1989, p. 92) and Vibhavadi Phongam (1996, p. 11) have provided a definition of folk dance as “a dance that is rooted in national customs and traditions, not intended for professional dancers but rather a form of play for the people.” The movements in I-san folk dance are free-flowing and not rigid, involving the use of both hands and feet in various positions. These movements are inspired by natural gestures and everyday actions. Furthermore, Chweewan Phanthu (2020), a National Artist, has described the identity of I-san folk dance as “ก้มต่ำรำกว้าง ไม่หวงเนื้อ หวงตัว” (Kom Tam Rum Kwang Mai Huang Nuae Huang Tua), which means that the I-san movement involves a low body posture, bending, a creeping walk, large postures, and no emphasis on sexual differences.

As previously stated, the author has created the I-san movement as a Pas de deux and Ballet, making it a contemporary presentation. Through the concept of Appropriation Art, the author has incorporated the I-san Identity into a new style of movement. To enhance it, the author has altered the nature of the movement towards the head, resulting in a novel form of body language

achieved through dance improvisation. Improvisation serves as one method of characterising the movement.



Figure 6: The dancers demonstrate hops at the low level. The Girl hops on pointe and turns around in an attitude position while the boy cheers her. (Kaewploy, 2022)



Figure 7: The dancers demonstrate mime, an action of courtship inspired by the I-san folk dance language. (Kaewploy, 2022)

Discussion and Conclusion

The I-san Tarantella Pas de deux draws the inspiration from the lively and amusing traditional Italian folk dance known for its rapid footwork, fast movement, and incorporation of tambourines. The I-san folk dance shares similarities with the Tarantella dance in terms of the gestures derived from everyday movements. However, these gestures are arranged in a distinct manner that showcases the unique beauty of each culture, aligning with Hahn's assertion.



The representation of the human body in dance globally exhibits significant variations across diverse civilizations. The dancer's physique during a performance diverges from their everyday body due to the deliberate purpose of its exhibition. How is the body structured and coordinated to perform dance movements, encompassing elements such as posture, focus, respiration, vitality, distribution of weight, and locomotion? (Hahn, 2007, p. 59) According to Hahn, the identity of dance in a diverse culture is unified through embodied culture regarding dance within a particular context and culture.

The author's approach to creativity has always involved pushing boundaries, exploring new ideas, and offering a fresh perspective on ballet dancing. Drawing from an extensive ballet background, the author sought to create a ballet piece inspired by the Pas de deux style. While the performance maintained the classical essence of Pas de deux, it showcased novel aesthetics and distinctive movements influenced by the cultural lens of I-san, a region in Thailand. To achieve this, the author employed the embodiment method, which involved three key steps: 1) Appreciating I-san culture, 2) Contextualizing I-san culture, and 3) I-san folk movements. Additionally, the author plans to experiment with another dance form to further expand the possibilities of creating a unique performance style.

Consequently, the author has defined this creation as "Intercultural Performance" based on Richard Schechner's concept of "interculturalism" as opposed to "internationalism." According to Schechner, "interculturalism" does not involve merely collecting performances from different nationalities, but rather focuses on the portrayal of multicultural interactions (cited in Strohschein, 2007, p. 20). Additionally, Patrice (1996) emphasises that "Intercultural" goes beyond the mere inclusion of artists from different nationalities or practices in a festival. In the context of contemporary theatrical or choreographic production, the term "international" has become commonplace and lacks the depth associated with true interculturalism.

Based on the information provided, the author would like to emphasise that the creation of an "intercultural dance performance" involves more than simply incorporating elements from different cultures. It is a transformative process that generates "novel creations" and "new cultural expressions" that may not exist at present. This process applies to societies, groups of people, or cultures that are not claimed by any particular entity. Ultimately, the creation of an intercultural

performance involves the exploration of new ideas, drawing from intellectual and folk wisdom, and utilising the experiences of intercultural artists to produce original pieces.

Suggestion

1. Embodying I-san Culture is a successful approach to generating a new style and achieving multicultural performance. Consequently, the author was prompted to engage in a novel artistic endeavour or explore an alternative artistic technique in order to generate a “new culture.”

2. The significance of the stage performance lies in the manifestation of emotions, facial expressions, body language, and the effective conveyance of the story, all of which captivated the audience with the eloquence of the performance. If the dancers have excessive anxiety and concern with dancing skills, the performance may not achieve the desired level of fluidity.

3. The majority of dancers in Thailand have received training in classical ballet techniques, which posed difficulties in adapting the presentation, movement, and dance technique to deviate from the established style. Hence, it is imperative to enhance the practice of different dance types in the class in order to develop a novel dance style and augment the prominence and reach of ballet within the dancing arts community of Thailand.

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