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Sounding Jacqueline du Pré through Ballet: Classical Music and *The Cellist* (2020)

Adam Whittaker, Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, UK, adam.whittaker@bcu.ac.uk

Few cellists of the twentieth century were as recognisable as Jacqueline du Pré. Her dazzling and distinctive talent, said to have enraptured audiences the world over, was overcome by a tragic diagnosis of MS. This sense of tragedy was all the more heightened by du Pré's famed physicality on the stage, leading critics to describe her playing as a physical (and even sexual) experience. Her status as a musical celebrity, further intensified as she became one half of a classical music power couple, has led to numerous dramatic retellings and reimaginings of her biography, played out in film and TV, and now on stage.

The most recent example of this fascination with du Pré is the ballet *The Cellist*, Cathy Marston's new work for the Royal Ballet, which premiered in February 2020 at the Royal Opera House (London) to much critical acclaim. Its score, composed by Philip Feeney, features a cello soloist and interweaves extended extracts from repertoire that became associated with du Pré alongside newly composed musical materials. Along with the characters of Barenboim, du Pré, and her family, her 1673 Stradivarius cello is given a starring role in the form of Marcelino Sambé, a new take that makes this a distinctive contribution to media representations of du Pré. This article examines the interactions across this complex web of musical representations of musical personae by analysing depictions of acts of musical performance and the representation of a performer-instrument relationship in *The Cellist*. Ultimately, it considers the ways the disciplinary partnership of music and dance combine to establish new layers of interpretive meaning and to represent classical music.



Few cellists of the twentieth century were as recognisable as Jacqueline du Pré. Her dazzling and distinctive talent, widely reported as enrapturing audiences the world over (Wilson, 1999: 296–314), was characterised by an impassioned physicality in her performances that channelled an intense communicative power. It was therefore all the more tragic that she was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis at the peak of her musical powers, cutting her career short and robbing audiences of one of their most beloved performers. The profound sense of a musical genius having exceptional talents snatched away prematurely has contributed to the creation of something of a du Pré ‘legend’: a story of vast musical gifts, enigmatic personality, and tragic intrigue.¹

Such tragedy, twinned with her prominence in the popular media consciousness in mid-twentieth-century Britain and with the British musical establishment (see Wilson, 1999: 87), meant that the press covered her career (and subsequent illness) widely. Her status as a musical celebrity was further augmented by her marriage to the pianist and conductor Daniel Barenboim. This complex life story has led to numerous documentaries, dramatic retellings, and reimaginings of her biography, played out in countless books, film, TV, and on stage, with varying degrees of fidelity to family wishes and clearly documented facts. Among the best-known of these works are Christopher Nupen’s documentaries containing extensive footage of du Pré in her prime (Nupen, 2004, 2005, 2007). These films, especially *The Trout*, dating from 1969, have helped to cement her image as a flamboyant and joyful performer in the popular consciousness. Biographies by Carol Easton (1989) and Elizabeth Wilson (1999) both painstakingly chart du Pré’s life in (and beyond) music, drawing on accounts from those who worked with her and knew her personally very well, as well as tracing her formative years and key influences. Other portrayals have been much less flattering, with Anand Tucker’s film *Hilary & Jackie* (1999) leading some in the classical music establishment to rush to prevent du Pré’s legend from being tarnished (Lloyd-Webber, 1999). What is clear is that her story has been, and will continue to be, a subject of media interest in a range of forms and contexts, creating a complex tapestry of facts – real, half-true, and fictional – which inform multiple understandings of her life.

The most recent example of this fascination with du Pré is the ballet *The Cellist*, Cathy Marston’s new work premiered by the Royal Ballet in February 2020 to much critical acclaim (inter alia Nayeri, 2020; Winship, 2020). Its score, composed by Philip Feeney² – one of Marston’s regular collaborators – features a solo cello and interweaves

¹ Musical mythologising is typically associated with composers, with Beethoven perhaps being the most widely discussed figure: see DeNora (1995). Accounts of his deafness have led to similar intrigue into his compositional activities later in his life.

² For a complete list of Feeney’s works, see Philip Feeney, ‘Works’, <http://philipfeeney.com/works> (accessed 20 December 2020).

repertoire extracts that have become so associated with du Pré, along with other well-known works from the cello repertoire. *The Cellist* continues an artistic partnership in a broadly similar manner to their other collaborations, though with some noteworthy features.

Feeney and Marston's collaborations include ballets in a number of different forms, ranging from full-length orchestral productions of *Jane Eyre* (2016) and *Victoria* (2019) (both for Northern Ballet) to the compilation scores for *Snowblind* (2018) and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (2018). Of these, all but *Victoria* includes excerpts from, and allusions to, pre-existing musical works, alongside newly composed material (Royal Opera House, 2019). For example, *Jane Eyre* takes a number of passages from the works of Felix Mendelssohn and Fanny Hensel, weaving these together around Feeney's original music, creating a musical tapestry of the historical period. *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, which is built around excerpts from the piano music of Alexander Scriabin, takes a similar approach, as does *Snowblind*, which features a number of passages from Amy Beach's works, though newly composed material is less prominent in both of these works. For Feeney and Marston, building from pre-existing musical material is part of their musical-choreographic process.

The Cellist is scored for orchestral forces (paired winds, four horns, percussion, piano, harp, and strings) and includes a prominent part for a solo cellist, performed by Hetty Snell in the premiere. The solo cellist is heard throughout the score, but is most prominent at scenes depicting musical performance and, as we shall see later, in representing the symbiotic musical and emotional relationship between du Pré and her instrument.

On stage, her 1673 Stradivarius cello is brought to life as the Instrument in a starring role in the form of Marcelino Sambé, along with the characters of the Conductor (Barenboim, danced by Matthew Ball), the Cellist (du Pré, danced by Lauren Cuthbertson) and her family.³ This representational approach is, to my knowledge, unique in documentary accounts and dramatic retellings of du Pré's life.⁴ Its origins can perhaps be traced back to du Pré's comments in a 1968 article, where she emphasised the importance of knowing your cello 'like a human being' and spoke of an attachment to it (Cleave, 1968: 51). Speaking of the role of the Cello in the ballet, Marston noted,

³ Throughout the article, the on-stage characters will be referred to with their character name taken from the case listing, so as to aid the distinction between on-stage characters and the real-life individuals represented. The full cast list can be found <https://www.roh.org.uk/tickets-and-events/the-cellist-stream-details> (accessed 20 May 2021).

⁴ Exploring the different ways in which human performers are used to portray musical instruments goes beyond the scope of this paper. However, a particularly interesting example is Nacho Duato's *Multiplicity* (1999), which includes a section featuring Bach playing the cello. The cello is represented by a female dancer, and there is a sense that the player is containing the energy of the instrument.

‘It’s her friend and companion, with her most of the time’ (Marston, 2020a). At many points in the ballet, the cello soloist and the character of the Instrument are heard and seen as one expressive voice. The Instrument is the embodiment of the soloist’s melodic line and, perhaps, an extension of du Pré’s emotional state. This is especially true of the closing moments of the ballet, which I discuss in the final section of this essay.

Such a distinctive choice makes this an interesting dynamic to explore in the representation of both du Pré’s life and wider perceptions of classical music. The characterisation of the cello as the Instrument leads to intriguing choreography and demands a consideration of the close affinity a performer has with their instrument. This article examines the interactions across this complex web of musical representations of musical personae (Auslander, 2006) by analysing depictions of acts of musical performance and the representation of a performer-instrument relationship in *The Cellist*. Its argument focuses principally on two key strands. First, the deployment of well-known classical works in *The Cellist* in terms of the representation of musical performance. Second, the role of a musical motif in the narrative trajectory of the ballet. Ultimately, it considers the ways the disciplinary partnership of music and dance combine to establish new layers of interpretive meaning and to represent classical music.

Framing Jacqueline du Pré in *The Cellist*

Jacqueline du Pré’s public image, both at the time of her fame and in the decades that have followed, established a musical persona that is somewhat distinct from the person it was built upon. The lines between historical fact and myth-making fiction are therefore porous. Recalling Kidnie (2005), Adrian Curtin notes, ‘musical personae, like plays, are not spatio-temporally bound, ontologically fixed entities. On the contrary, they are works-in-process, contingent phenomena, cultural scripts that may be multiply authored and continually renegotiated’ (Curtin, 2015: 153). In *The Cellist* these processes are enacted through dance and gesture, with the charting of du Pré’s life being represented by different framing scenes. Each of these scenic narrative frames spotlights a different aspect of concert performance in the public consciousness of the 1960s, or at least as we perceive it from modern perspectives.

Although biographical aspects of *The Cellist* are subject to some dramatic embellishment and simplification, its drawing on du Pré’s biography is clearly an important component. Matthew Ball (The Conductor) remarked: ‘This is quite clearly [a] narrative, and a biography, if you will, of Jacqueline du Pré, or some aspects of her life’ (Nayeri, 2020). These comments usefully foreground a key tension that runs

throughout the ballet: how to represent du Pré's complex life story through music and dance, capturing her distinctive physical presence and musical identity, and the musical contexts in which it formed, whilst still achieving narrative cohesion in a balletic form.

Intermedia relationships

The relationships between music and dance, and their respective analytical frameworks, are often contested. Pairings of music and dance have been variously described as 'marriage', 'conflict', 'conformance', and 'visual capture', to offer but a few examples (Short, 2016: 10). Whilst some of this terminology evades analytical precision, it points to the notion that placing music and dance together leads to the creation of new artistic meaning, even in cases where one (or both) components have a separate existence outside the combined form. This applies equally to instances where music and dance appear to complement one another, and where these two components seem to work against each other. Drawing on the work of Nicholas Cook (1998), Stephanie Jordan likens this to 'enabling similarity' and the 'transfer of attributes', which bestow layers of new meaning upon each of the distinct elements (Jordan, 2011: 48). Paul H. Mason similarly identifies the formation of a new entity when combining music and dance: 'much can be said about the structured impulse music can give to dance, the evocative inspiration dance can give to music and the dynamic reciprocity between both activities' (Mason, 2012: 6).

These perspectives, two amongst many, suggest that something new is created when we place music and dance in close proximity. This includes, but is not limited to, the creation of new layers of interpretative meaning in relation to existing cultural artefacts. Focusing on the differences between music and dance rather than affinities 'implicitly refers to the tension between a separatist (Euro-American high art) view of music and dance as "similar but distinct phenomena" versus a holistic ('World'-folk/popular/traditional) view of music and dance as one art form in which the boundaries are blurred or non-existent' (Damsholt, 2018: 25). *The Cellist* demonstrates the playing out of a creative tension by way of a narrative retelling of du Pré's life, using some of the pre-existing music with which she became so memorably associated. The use of these pre-existing musical works in a dance setting opens up a range of intermedia possibilities throughout the ballet, including representing du Pré as both part of the world of classical music and as a performer who interacts with the score. It places the affinities between dance and music front and centre.

The visual imagery of musical sound production is powerful. Rolf Inge Godøy argues: 'mental images of music would also include components of sound-production, both of the instruments (their material as well as resonant features) and the sound-producing

body motion' (2018: 208). Music may be mapped gesturally and visually in diverse ways, perhaps as an accent emphasised through a forceful hand movement, or a trill as a shimmer of movement through the body (Damsholt, 2006: 10), creating 'concurrency or imitation between music and dance' (Jordan, 2000: 74).⁵ *The Cellist* forges strong connections between the gestures of sound production on the cello and du Pré's narrative. Throughout the ballet, the character of the Instrument is represented as both a sounding object and a distinct character in its own right. At the same time, we see choreographed gestures mimicking playing musical instruments and conducting to accent key musical moments visually, especially in performance contexts. There is a sense of hyper-reality about this, pointing to brief moments of alignment between the sound as heard and sound as gesture, which then move in and out of phase with varying degrees of fidelity to the mechanics of sound production usually witnessed in live musical performance (see **Figure 1**).⁶ The analyses of scenes 5 and 8 unpack these ideas more fully later in the essay.

In addition to mimicking sound production, *The Cellist* also makes extensive use of classical repertoire in its score. The use of pre-existing musical works in a balletic form is, of course, not a new phenomenon. Many choreographers have used pre-existing musical works as the accompaniment to their ballets (Homans, 2010). Notable twentieth-century examples include Jerome Robbins' *Dances at a Gathering* (1969),⁷ which takes a variety of mazurkas, waltzes, études, and one nocturne by Frédéric Chopin as its score, and Frederick Ashton's *The Dream* (1964), which uses Felix Mendelssohn's incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The form of these ballets is quite distinct: Robbins' *Dances at a Gathering* is a 'plotless work' with the very simple conceit of watching dancers dancing with no additional set (Lawrence, 2001); Ashton's *The Dream* is a balletic retelling of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with a much stronger narrative impulse.

The second half of the twentieth century also saw a number of ballets that take famous musicians as their subject matter, both explicitly and implicitly, using pre-existing repertoire as their musical scores. Two particularly pertinent examples are George Balanchine's *Robert Schumann's Davidsbündlertänze* (1980), which uses Schumann's *Davidsbündlertänze*, Op. 6 (1837) as its score, and Frederick Ashton's *Enigma Variations*

⁵ Damsholt (2006) discusses several movements from Mark Morris' setting of Vivaldi's Gloria in D (RV 589).

⁶ This is somewhat analogous with the larger-than-life presences of popular music stars on stage, where their hyperreal forms and personae are played out. See Cook (2013: 288–307).

⁷ Jerome Robbins' *Dances at a Gathering* was paired with *The Cellist* at the Royal Ballet premiere in February 2020. These two works are markedly different in their approach to narrative, though both have scores which contain extensive quotations from pre-existing classical music. In the case of *Dances at a Gathering*, the score is entirely made up of piano music by Frédéric Chopin.

(*My Friends Pictured Within*) (1968), which sets Edward Elgar's *Variations on an Original Theme* ('Enigma Variations'), Op. 36 (1899).

Balanchine's *Davidsbündlertänze* presents contrasting scenes of joy and depression that characterised Schumann's career and life, though this biographical element is only implicit. It features dances from four couples, and may refer to the reunion with his future wife, Clara Wieck, after over a year of estrangement. However, the approach here is to avoid direct biographical narratives, instead exploring emotional responses to Schumann's music.

By contrast, Ashton's *Enigma Variations* takes each of Elgar's *Enigma* variations as a scene, featuring the character whose identity is the ciphered title of each variation.⁸ The ballet centres on a gathering of Elgar's friends and associates, waiting for a message from London. Each scene represents the personalities of the featured character of the movement, with the list of characters provided in the programme. Perhaps the best-known scene from this ballet, and movement from the musical work, is 'Nimrod', which depicts Elgar, his wife, and his friend Jaeger going for a walk in the woods. Mary Cargill, a dance critic, described the scene as 'one of the richest depictions of sympathy and understanding and friendship in dance' (2004). However, neither of these balletic representations of the musical worlds of Elgar and Schumann go to such lengths to map the gestures of sound production into a balletic form.

By contrast, Feeney's score for *The Cellist* places arranged and orchestrated excerpts within a framework of newly composed material. Rather than taking each piece of music as a set scene, this approach establishes a 'through-composed' feeling and is key to its dramatic impetus and the representational tapestry of the ballet. The score includes numerous quotations, heard in extended form and used almost as leitmotifs in places, from pre-existing classical music mixed with newly composed material. The repertoire selections themselves, and their dramatic importance, are explored more fully in the final section of this article, but it is helpful at this stage to outline two distinct types of dramatic usage throughout the ballet: 1) representations of performance modalities; and 2) as motivic character developed across the ballet.

Representing musical performance in *The Cellist*

Turning to the first of these, there are two notable moments in *The Cellist* where a key signifier of musical performance is brought to the fore – that of the concert. In these instances, the traits of concert rituals are in evidence, and point to one of the

⁸ Each of the variations in the *Enigma Variations* has a cipher which encodes the names of important figures in Elgar's life. For an overview of this and possible identifications, see Rushton (1999).

ways in which concert performance modalities are represented in the ballet. Whilst all performances will, by necessity, 'be invested with a sense of the sacred and the extraordinary', concert settings for classical music 'clearly have their own specific or peculiar rules' (Abercrombie & Longurst, 1998: 41, 44).⁹ The first concert scene in *The Cellist* – Scene 5, Jackie's First Recital – occurs in the early part of ballet, representing du Pré's adolescence. It marks the point at which du Pré crosses a threshold from talented child into a prodigious young musical talent. The second – Scene 8, The Concert Scene – forms the musical apex of the whole ballet in a performance of the first movement of Edward Elgar's Cello Concerto (1919). An exploration of these scenes provides an insight into some of the ways that orchestral concert culture is represented in *The Cellist*.

Scene 5 – Jackie's first recital

In Scene 5 the audience peers into du Pré's (the Cellist's) first recital, an intimate chamber music recital where her mother accompanies her on piano. A small audience assembles on the stage, including William Pleeth (performed by Gary Avis), du Pré's most important teacher. The Cellist strikes the 'cello pose' – described in Marston (2020b) and depicted in **Figure 1** – with the Instrument kneeling between her legs with his left arm stretched upwards as though the fingerboard of the instrument. The scene is one of a cosy chamber music concert to be shared with a few friends, peers, and influential figures. The demarcation of the performance modality is perhaps signalled musically by the brushed cymbal in the score, a sound heard only in these concert scenes: a musical 'hush', if you will.

There is a moment of pause whilst the Cellist positions the Instrument and prepares to start playing. Her Mother (representative of Irene du Pré), sits as though accompanying the Cellist from a distant piano at the extreme edge of the stage in half-darkness. The momentary pause before playing, twinned with the musical stasis of this moment, marks a slight change in the function of the score, and changes its diegetic perspective. The mimicked playing motions of the first few notes of Felix Mendelssohn's *Lied ohne worte*, op. 109 (c. 1845, published posthumously) are mirrored by both the Cellist and her Mother, including a balletic imitation of a cello bow-hold in the right hand, and a shaped left-hand to represent pressure on the fingerboard. The process of reanimating the music, a combination of the Cellist and Instrument, leads to a physical expression that is a stylised representation of cello performance, rather than mimicry, even in this more intimate setting of chamber music.

⁹ The popular fascination with these 'rules' as something extraordinary is played out in countless newspaper articles each year which rehearse arguments about when/when not to clap in a classical concert: see, for example, Prudham (2020).

After starting the performance in the ‘cello’ pose, with the Instrument kneeling between the Cellist’s legs, the pair quickly move into elegant, paired movements. The *pas de deux* work is quite intricate, and sees moments where both dancers support each other to perform similar gestures, with their two bodies moving synchronously, almost intertwining as one. The Instrument lifts the Cellist above his head numerous times, before returning to brief moments of ‘mickey-moused’ (Audissino, 2020) cello playing where she mimics playing the Instrument. The pair move fluidly from this imitative visual plane to something more expressive and extended. However, hints at the sounding voice of the Instrument persist through these subtle reminders of instrumental technique and gestures, and its aural prominence in the musical score.

The presence of an on-stage audience is another feature that indicates that this scene represents a musical performance in its own right. On this occasion there is a small audience watching, drawn into the musical visualisation unfolding on stage. There is the sense that the Cellist grips everyone who sees (and hears) her play, with the on-stage audience visibly leaning forwards in their seats, and that this visual communication is an important feature of her musical identity. The visibility of the on-stage audience is an interesting feature at this moment, modelling the behaviour of the real audience whilst observing the presentational aspect of the performance. The on-stage audience cast are meant to be ‘seen’, specifically the character of William Pleeth who was so enraptured by her playing that he was to take on an important formative role in her musical development. Immediately following the conclusion of this first chamber recital, and the Mendelssohn extract that is the musical basis for the scene, a darker brooding theme in D minor is heard. The lighting shifts to cooler-blue tones and a montage of scenes follows, depicting the sense of abandonment that du Pré’s mother might have felt when her daughter outgrew her tutelage.

The sight (and sound) of the Cellist’s first recital is one of a quite restrained performance that charms and captivates a small audience. It marks a key moment of transition from the Cellist as a young performer into the virtuoso she was to become. Hints at the expressive and overblown gestures that pervade her debut concerto performance (seen later in the ballet and discussed later in this essay) are there, but these are tempered by the apparent innocence of youth. Such innocent naivety is perhaps symbolised by the 1950s-style knitted cardigan that she quickly eschews in the excitement of lessons with Pleeth and her growth into a mature performer. The repertoire extract, which is innocently song-like, quietly poised, is not something that would necessarily be associated with ‘a musician known for her physical abandon’

(Curtin, 2015: 145). The foregrounding of the relationship between the Cellist and Instrument in this scene is also significant. The physical composition of this scene does not prominently feature her Mother. Instead, she sits rather timidly out of the spotlight whilst dutifully accompanying her daughter. Her Mother, central to the scenes of the Cellist's youth, is now on the fringes of the performance and, perhaps, Jackie's musical world.

Three key aspects of the Cellist's (and du Pré's) representation as a talented musician and classical music itself are identifiable in this early scene from *The Cellist*. These are: 1) concert etiquette; 2) musical gestures mimicking instrumental performance and response to the music; 3) musical collaborations, both between individuals and instruments. In *The Cellist*, musical performance modalities represent key transformations and transitions in du Pré's life. A comparison of the intimate chamber setting of Scene 5 'Jackie's First Recital' with Scene 8 'The Concert Scene' is particularly illuminating in this regard. The impassioned performance intensity of Scene 8 depicts her debut concerto performance, tracing her breakthrough into a fully-fledged mature musician. A consideration of the altered representation of concert etiquette, musical gestures, and artist collaborations in this later scene shows this narrative pivot point in full flow.

Scene 8 - The concert scene

'The Concert Scene' is arguably the most important musical moment in the ballet, occurring almost exactly halfway through. It sees the Cellist's extraordinary talents reach full maturity in a performance of an abridged five-minute extract of the first movement of Edward Elgar's Cello Concerto, supported on stage by an orchestra of dancers. Layered onto this musical performance is the first encounter between the Cellist (du Pré) and the Conductor (a youthful Daniel Barenboim, danced by Matthew Ball), her future husband, performing together. With relatively dim lighting, save for spotlights on the key musical protagonists, the ballet chorus arrange themselves in three main blocks. As **Figure 1** shows, these are clearly evocative of the strings (upper strings left; lower strings right) and wind/brass sections (behind the Cellist, at the back of the stage) of a symphony orchestra. There are two podia for the musicians: one for the Cellist (with the Instrument), and the other for the Conductor.

The scene evokes something of a musical whirlwind romance between two highly committed and passionate musicians, experiencing an intimate courtship through a piece that became 'irrevocably associated' with du Pré (Wilson, 1999: 87). Whilst the configuration with Barenboim conducting was not her first performance of this work, and the two were already a couple by the time he conducted du Pré performing the



Figure 1: Scene 8: Concert Scene from *The Cellist* – The Conductor (Ball as Barenboim) conducts the Cellist (Cuthbertson as du Pré) and the Instrument (Sambé as the cello) in an extended extract from Edward Elgar’s Cello Concerto, with chorus arranged in orchestral blocks. Screenshot taken from Royal Opera House (2020).

Elgar,¹⁰ it represents a key marker in the narrative arc of the ballet. It represents the crossing from du Pré’s sheltered musical upbringing into full maturity, both as an artist and as partner to Barenboim, mapped musically onto the characters of the Cellist and the Conductor. The representations of musical culture are layered and complex, but can be grouped around the key themes of 1) etiquette, 2) gesture, and 3) collaboration, all of which featured in the analysis of Scene 5 earlier in this essay.

The concert setting: etiquette

That the dancers are arranged in formation as an orchestra, conductor, and soloist, is immediately obvious. Importantly and additionally, there are other more subtle aspects that relate specifically to etiquette associated with concert hall settings. In the final moments of Scene 7, we hear scalic passages played on the bass clarinet, placed in free time over a sustained open chord in the strings. This creates the impression of an orchestra warming and tuning up before a concert, and builds the suspense of musical anticipation. The stage goes dark and then there is a period of silence. Only at this point do we see the Cellist and the Instrument walk across to take their places on the platform. We might be forgiven for imagining applause. The Conductor follows,

¹⁰ Both her debut performance of this work, and subsequent iconic recording, were conducted by Sir John Barbirolli, one of her most enthusiastic and influential musical mentors.

again in silence. The orchestra, represented by the chorus on stage, waits attentively. There is a sense of the excited expectation of a ‘real’ concert before the first notes are played. The silence emphasises its dramatic importance and intensity, and signals the change in diegetic musical perspective from supporting score to on-stage action.

The ritual structure of this moment in the ballet is a stark contrast to the somewhat giddy whirlwind that accompanies the depictions of the Cellist’s youth. The extended silence, running for approximately 20 seconds, demarcates this as a powerful narrative moment. The audience is invited to peer into the concert experience, with the preceding audible ‘tuning up’ and brushed cymbal motif at the end of scene 7 smoothing a transition from non-diegetic scoring towards an intense diegetic musical experience. As in Scene 5, the brushed symbol acts as a kind of musical ‘hush’, transitioning to a performance modality. The concert formalities distinguish this as a key moment, representing a semi-fictionalised transformative moment in du Pré’s life. From the perspective of the representation of concert hall culture, key codes that pervade countless media depictions of orchestral performance cultures are evident here.

One such code is the placement of soloist and conductor on podia. Though not necessarily in concert formation, it serves the narrative framework here but also points to another trope where a soloist and conductor are valorised as the featured artists in concert culture. This is especially interesting because we see the solemn concert rituals juxtaposed with an intense and explosive musical (and visual) encounter with Elgar’s work. The musicologist Lawrence Kramer remarks: ‘Part of the problem with the culture of classical music is that it receives all this with too much solemnity. It stifles its own energy with too much ceremony’ (2007: 74). Of course, Kramer does not discuss a balletic rendering of musical performance, nor Elgar’s Cello Concerto specifically. However, it is noteworthy that such solemn ceremonial features pervade the representation of a concerto performance, and one that reimagines a key moment in du Pré’s life, in *The Cellist*. Part of the remedy to overt ceremonialism, he suggests, is knowing ‘how the energy embodied in the score inspires the performer with the power to tap it and be touched, even transfigured, by it’ (Kramer, 2007: 75). This scene presents such transfiguration in abundance, visualising the immense expressive potential of Elgar’s music channelled through du Pré. It allows her character to become transfigured as the energy is released from the score in this new presentation. The seen Instrument, and heard solo cello, is key to the process played out on stage, rather than in mind of the audience only. Marston noted precisely this point, remarking the character of the Instrument is ‘the musical force that brings Jackie and Daniel Barenboim together’ (Marston, 2020a).

The dramatic energy of the paired dances between the Instrument and the Cellist certainly shows that characters respond to the music with great physicality, but it also reinforces du Pré's legacy as a performer of tremendous communicative and expressive power. The placement of the Cellist in the eye-line of the Conductor further enhances the sense that the focus of this scene is on the soloist (and Instrument), and conductor. Their fluid gestures are shaped simply from the air around the orchestra as a natural extension of their musicality.

The conductor and orchestra: gesture

The role of a conductor in performance is silent, but of immense musical importance. Gesture, construed broadly to include aspects such as facial expression and physical stance, and breath are the means through which they communicate their artistic intentions to the musicians who respond as directed. Such is the interest in conducting gestures that they pervade modern orchestral televised concert broadcasts, with conductors having close-up cameras trained on them to show distanced audiences what the musicians see.¹¹ Scene 8 – The Concert Scene – takes this to heart and uses conducting gestures as its starting point in shaping the choreography and, perhaps even, visualising the music (see the Cellist's hand gestures in **Figure 1**). Throughout the Elgar excerpt, conducting is represented as a full-body experience. The Conductor (danced by Matthew Ball) extends his arms and leaps off the podium as though he is the embodiment of the orchestral sound, encapsulating and controlling these massive forces. His dramatic rotations and extended arm gestures, allied with shaped hands that hold the sound as weight in his fingertips, appear simultaneously to encourage and tame the bursts of sounds that frame the cello, both sounding and seen here. The choreography maps distinctive moments in the score, with hand gestures that mimic orchestral cues being directed towards relevant locations within the orchestral layout of the chorus, further confirming their role in representing different parts of the orchestra and intensifying links between the Conductor's movements and the score. The orchestra remains somewhat anonymous, responding to the Conductor's gestures, and never entering the proximity of the main protagonists. Such a literal mapping of the musical score into the choreography enhances the narrative power of this moment; the audience is watching a concert performance of a work closely connected to du Pré, animated through ballet. Musical gestures are mapped onto the body, helping the

¹¹ This was particularly notable in the recent, socially distanced, BBC Last Night of the Proms 2020, where the conductor, Dalia Stasevska, had a close-up camera to show her facial expressions and gestures in great detail.

audience to hear this piece afresh in a new context, whilst retaining recognisable hints at instrumental performance gestures.

A particularly powerful example of this comes after the exposed and emotive opening solo cello line, where the wind and brass sections rise and turn in perfect time with soft wind and horn chords that softly punctuate exposed moments in the solo cello line. The rhythmic placement of these gestures is not mere coincidence, further enhancing the sense that the audience is attending a concert performance. The arrangement of dancers on stage nods to a traditional symphony orchestra, anonymous blocks of sound to support the featured soloists, strengthening the connectedness of sound and movement. The chorus on the right-hand side, representative of the lower strings, even adopt an arm position that partially imitates the neck of a cello (**Figure 1**). The dancers *are* the sound at this moment; they offer a visualisation of an aural phenomenon. This serves to reinforce the sense that a *real* musical performance is being depicted on stage, and confirms beyond all doubt the intrinsic link between sound and gesture throughout the ballet.

The combination of music and dance in this way, visualising and extending a musical performance, presents Elgar's well-known work in a new light, intensifying the expressive nature of the solo material with a layered emotional narrative that certainly attributes new meanings to this musical excerpt. Such a combination results in an impassioned and intense musical experience for all involved, with Elgar's score dominating and directing the action on stage. The audience is 'not only listening to, but also experiencing music as part of a composite production' (Short, 2016: 5).

The soloist and conductor as collaborators

A typical orchestral concert programme will include a featured soloist performing a concerto, usually before concluding with an extended symphonic work. The featured soloist is likely to form a significant part of any promotional material for a concert, represented as distinct from the other musicians. They perform from the front of the stage. The conductor serves as the bridge between the soloist and the orchestra. A key part of du Pré's musical persona that occupied significant attention in her own lifetime, and has been integral to the myth making of her distinctive musicality, was her physicality with the instrument and as a performer on stage. As Curtin notes, 'the *sight* of her playing was also an important element' and it was this that 'distinguished du Pré as a performer' (2015: 145).

Throughout this scene, the Cellist and Instrument work together to move from a balletic representation of the performance position of a cello, including some gestures which mimic the score, to expressive paired movements with extended body lines.

The movement between these two types of choreography is particularly noticeable at the start and end of the concert scene, further reinforcing the sense that the audience is observing and experiencing a concert environment. Such mimicked gestures perhaps mark the transition into and out of the concert scene, and indicate a shift in representational layer to and from the primarily musical to the biographical. These gestures bookend the performance, briefly focusing attention on the mechanics of sound production.

After the dramatic opening chords of Elgar's Cello Concerto, themselves inextricably bound up in the musical aura of du Pré, the Instrument lifts the Cellist above his head as she extends her body as though the music courses through her. The intensity of the soloistic line is mapped into ballet as a representation of this performance as an other-worldly experience, perhaps suggestive of a transcendental quality in du Pré's musical experience. Such interaction between instrument and soloist is important for a number of different reasons, not least because it depicts a symbiotic relationship between the two, reaching a heightened musical plane, and shows the Instrument as a driving force in these encounters. Numerous reviewers remarked upon this, with Winship (2020) writing 'But there's also the easy flow of bodies entwined, the way artist, instrument and music become one.' In effect, the Cellist is enraptured with her instrument, something that becomes clear in the *pas de trois* between the Conductor, the Cellist, and the Instrument later in the ballet. Her representation here is almost as a 'musical apotheosis', a musician touching the divine.¹²

In addition to the formal elements which serve to establish this scene as a representation of both concert culture and a musical marker attached to du Pré's musical identity, the relationship between the conductor and soloist is clearly depicted as one that extends far beyond the mere performance of a particular piece of music. At first, the interaction between the conductor and the soloist appears to be purely musical, but as the scene progresses, and the intensity of the music builds, there is a sense that the connection between the Conductor and the Cellist is emotionally and physically charged. This is especially noticeable in the final pizzicato notes in the scene – 'mickey-moused' choreographically (see Audissino, 2020) by gestures aligning with the pizzicato cello notes in the score – where the eye contact between the Cellist and Conductor is telling. This performance has deeper meaning beyond the music itself; it is a representation of a passionate and romantic relationship grounded in music.

¹² Similar terminology is used in Curtin (2015: 145) in describing an engraving of du Pré. Recordings of Elgar's cello concerto are often compared against du Pré's interpretation. See, for example, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/music/reviews/9fcg/>.

Reviewing a concert of Beethoven cello works by Barenboim and du Pré at Royal Festival Hall in 1969, critics described their partnership as ‘intensely expressive’ and that du Pré ‘supported him like a tigress in several of the finale’s climaxes’ (Wilson, 1999: 315–316). As Short (2016: 11) notes, ‘while the choreography stays true to the spirit of the score, music and movement together form an even greater spirit’, in this case, a powerful musical pairing. In this moment we see exactly what Mason describes as a ‘mimetic relationship’, occurring when dancers ‘mime playing an instrument’ (2012: 18). Thus, we see the communication between the Cellist, the Conductor, and the Instrument working across both planes of mimesis and embodiment, all grounded in a performance modality that is inextricably bound up with a well-known piece of classical music. Kramer notes that ‘individual performances...can utterly change the meaning or even the very identity of the musical work’ (2007: 76), and this is arguably what takes place in the on-stage performance represented here. The audience witnesses a representation of both a classical concert and an artistic representation of the Cellist’s response to a cultural artefact to which du Pré became so closely connected.

Classical music, repertoire, and memory

Although the most memorable use of pre-existing classical repertoire in the ballet is clearly the performance of an abridged version of Elgar’s Cello Concerto in the concert scene, there are numerous other fragmentary allusions to, and excerpts from, well-known cello repertoire that punctuate the score beyond formalised concert settings. The other excerpts are detailed in **Table 1**.

Repertoire Excerpt	Position in <i>The Cellist</i>
Ludwig van Beethoven, Sonata for Cello and Piano in F, Op. 5, No. 1	Scene 4 – School
Felix Mendelssohn, <i>Lied ohne worte</i> for cello and piano op. 109	Scene 5 – Jackie’s First Recital
Alfredo Piatti, Caprice No. 8, Op. 25	Scene 6 – Pleeth develops her Talent
Edward Elgar, Cello Concerto in E minor, Op. 85	Scene 8 – Her Debut Concert
Franz Schubert, ‘Scherzo’ from Trout Quintet, D.667	Scene 9 – The Trout Gang
Gabriel Fauré, Cello Sonata No. 1 in D minor, Op. 109	Scene 13 – Pas de Deux
Sergei Rachmaninov, <i>Morceaux de Fantasie</i> Op. 3, No. 1 (arranged for cello)	Scene 20 – Jackie and her Cello: Loss

Table 1: Repertoire excerpts used in Philip Feeney’s score to *The Cellist* (2020).

Discussing the deployment of each excerpt in detail is not possible here, but it is sufficient to say some of this repertoire is familiar to the wider public through widespread usage in other media contexts, whilst other selections are perhaps less well-known. For example, Beethoven's Op. 5 No. 1 Sonata is a staple of conservatoires and music colleges, with countless renditions taking place in practice rooms and chamber recital halls all over the world each day. Although this work plays an important role in the musical education of many aspiring cellists, and is likely well-known in musical circles, it does not have the same prominence in the cultural consciousness as Elgar's Cello Concerto. Its function as a sounding sign of classical music is tied less specifically to the character of du Pré, perhaps pointing towards a sound world familiar in higher musical education, certainly in the 1950s and 1960s, rather than a sonification of du Pré herself. It therefore functions in a different way from the two concert scenes explored earlier, serving to represent the musical world in which du Pré developed, but not comment directly on her character.

The inclusion of an excerpt from the Scherzo of Schubert's 'Trout' Quintet (D.667) in scene 9 – itself called 'The Trout Gang' – takes a slightly different tack. The 'Trout' Quintet is so central to one of the performance scenes in Christopher Nupen's documentary footage that its mere echo can recall some of the powerful images associated with du Pré performing in the chamber setting. Nupen's film *The Trout* is one of the most popular classical music documentaries ever made, perhaps so because of the excellent quality of playing and, crucially, the way it gives 'the viewer the impression of being right in the middle of the music-making' (Wilson, 1999: 327). *The Trout* shows a relaxed, joyful atmosphere between a group of young musicians at the peak of their powers. It is perhaps for this reason that its use in the ballet appropriately underscores the blossoming of du Pré's career before her illness prevented her from playing. There is pre-emptive nostalgia for du Pré, drawing on culturally acquired associations that prompt 'memories and a longing for time periods or places that we only know about second-hand' (Garrido & Davidson, 2019: 37). Pre-existing music is represented and operationalised across different layers, moving fluidly between underscored musical accompaniments to the sonic imprint of a previously encountered audio-visual experience. Thus, the ballet sits in a peculiar intermedia narrative space, intersecting historical fact, pre-existent cultural artefact, and filmic audio-visual associations. A detailed examination of a motif associated with the Instrument neatly encapsulates this intersectionality.

Cello motif

One of the most interesting uses of pre-existing classical music is a recurrent extract from Sergei Rachmaninov's *Morceaux de Fantaisie* Op. 3, No. 1 (1892). Originally a piano work, the 'Élégie' from this five-piece collection has become a staple of the cello

repertoire, further popularised in a variety of other chamber music arrangements. Heard numerous times as a fragment in scenes throughout *The Cellist*, its use in different contexts points to another way in which pre-existent works are used in this rich patchwork score. These different presentations, viewed together, present the ‘Cello’ motif as a key component of the narrative identity of the Instrument.

Although the subject matter of the ballet is focused on du Pré’s life, a distinctive component of this representation of her biography, albeit somewhat fictionalised, is the credit that is given to her instrument as a character, both on stage and in the score. It is her ever-present companion from the very beginning of the piece. Indeed, the Instrument is almost never off-stage for the entire 60 minutes of the ballet, and takes on various roles as soloist, partner, support (both physical and emotional), and onlooker. Musically, the score features a prominent cello soloist throughout – performed by Hetty Snell in the premiere – and is closely related to the character of the Instrument that is seen on the stage.

Though the performative presentation of the robust soloistic power of the widely known Elgar Cello Concerto is arguably the most memorable use of pre-existent repertoire, the most recurrent musical motif across the ballet is the powerfully melancholic melodic line of Rachmaninov’s ‘Élégie’.¹³ Its title becomes especially poignant in its use at the end of the ballet whilst the Cellist is in ill health. The extended melodic line affords great scope for individual players to demonstrate expressive control and interpretative command, whilst shaping the lyrical inflections with varying degrees of passion and intensity. The opening of the original piano solo version is shown in **Figure 2**. Charting the development of this motif across the ballet facilitates a fuller understanding of the dramatic significance and musical power of its use in Scene 20, ‘Loss’, where the Cellist succumbs to her illness, and participates in a tragic *pas de deux* with the Instrument.

The motif is heard first in the prologue to the ballet as the initial entry of the solo cello part in the score. Following the sounding of the descending minor second interval between the first two notes, the opening four bars of the melody (see **Figure 2**) are then broken into two phrases, divided by extended pauses. Sustained string chords are heard throughout these quiet interjections, supporting these motivic statements and evoking a sense of timelessness. The opening two notes accompany the Instrument appearing to wake from a slumber, embracing an instrument case as though asleep. The brief movement, which becomes more fluid on the sounding of the

¹³ Countless cellists have recorded this work, drawn to its extended and impassioned melancholic melody. For example, it featured in Sheku Kanneh-Mason’s performances in 2016 BBC Young Musician of the Year.

ÉLÉGIE.

Op. 3, No. 1.

Moderato.

PIANO.

pp *mf*

cresc. *dim.*

p *pp* *mf*

simile

Figure 2: Opening melody from 'Élégie' from Sergei Rachmaninov, *Morceau de Fantaisie*, Op. 3, No. 2. (London: Augener, 1911).

complete opening phrase, establishes the motif from the outset as the 'voice' of the Instrument, both as soloist and character in the ballet. The linking of the character to this thematic fragment serves as a prefiguring of the conclusion of the ballet and forges a strong connection between the sound of the solo cellist and the Instrument's gestures on stage.

In the prologue itself, each of these entries is marked on stage by the wiping the thin edge of a LP record along a surface, before the vinyl disc is held aloft, almost as though the vinyl record is being bowed, reanimating the Instrument. This is significant as it symbolises both the way in which many audiences came to 'know' du Pré – through her recordings – and temporally locates the ballet in the past. Obsolete technology as a visual marker of the past is particularly powerful when it comes to musical experiences, as it 'may prompt nostalgia, evoking lived or borrowed memories of vinyl records spinning on record-players' by 'staging the technological differences between the past and the present' (Roy, 2014: 150).

The next appearance of the 'Élégie' occurs in Scene 7 'Jackie has left home'. Unlike all other uses of this theme in the ballet, the score for Scene 7 presents this motif without the Instrument being on stage. The theme is used to represent the sense of loss that her Mother feels as the Cellist leaves home. The Cellist's Father holds back

her Mother as she sobs into a neatly folded cardigan, a memory of Jackie's time at home, accompanied by the anguished descending minor second. This scene is one of mourning rather than excitement about the Cellist's debut concert. It pre-figures the role of the motif as both voice of the Instrument and the sense of loss associated with the Cellist, whether this be the loss of family, her playing abilities or, ultimately, her debilitating illness.

We see and hear the culmination of the layering of dramatic meaning through this motif in the final two scenes of the ballet, where the Cellist attempts to play the Instrument, and then passes away peacefully with her cello dutifully beside her. Scene 19 – 'Jackie tries to play the cello again' – depicts the tragic moment she is no longer able to play the cello, with the realisation occurring on stage in front of a small audience, including the Conductor. The Cello motif appears in a quite extended fashion here, leading up to the point of painful silence as the Cellist's tremors prevent her from playing. As in Scene 7, the motif pleads passionately over the top of a relatively understated orchestral texture. We hear this both as the Instrument's anguish at realising he and the Cellist are not going to be able to make music together again, and the palpable panic at her own prospects.

The Cello motif continues into Scene 20 'Jackie and her Cello: Loss' and is heard in its most extended form. At first, Feeney places this melody with the arpeggiated piano accompaniment seen in the original piece (see **Figure 2**), though punctuated with subtle vibraphone and woodwind three-note figures that recall another recurrent motif in the score. As the melody grows to reach its impassioned *forte*, accentuated by ascending triplets, the orchestration becomes fuller, presenting this chamber work in a quasi-orchestral context. This makes the three declamatory descending crotchets (Gb₅, F₅, Eb₅: bar 26) all the more powerful, as does the indication of 'intense' for the cello soloist.

In terms of its staging, this scene consists mostly of a *pas de deux* between the ailing Cellist and the Instrument. It recalls some of the choreographic gestures from the Cellist's first recital discussed earlier in this article (Scene 5), lit in cool-blue hues with no other cast on stage. However, the pairing is much more oppositional than the fluidly symbiotic relationship seen in Scenes 5 and 8, with the Cellist's illness preventing her from reaching the transcendental heights that we see earlier in the ballet. There are several moments when the Cellist pushes the Instrument away, throwing him to the floor (see **Figure 3**), and other moments where they achieve the same intertwined gestures as before, albeit with the Cellist's character exhibiting much greater stiffness and tension in the body (Marston, 2020b).



Figure 3: Scene 20 – Jackie and her Cello: Loss, from *The Cellist* – the Cello (Sambé) supports du Pré (Cuthbertson) as she collapses in tragic despair in an extended extract from Sergei Rachmaninov’s, ‘Élégie’ from *Morceau de Fantasia* op. 3, no. 1 (1892). Screenshot taken from Royal Opera House (2020).

The tragic sense of pain and loss is communicated powerfully through the Cello motif, with its layers of meaning accrued throughout the ballet enhancing its expressive power still further. Its previous presentations, though less passionately tragic than this moment, speak to Garrido and Davidson’s observation that, for some, ‘classical music provides a more absorbing emotional journey than popular music, and deep scope for the imagination’ (2019: 41). In this scene, we see the culmination of this prefiguration of the anguish of the Instrument at being unable to achieve the same symbiosis with the Cellist, and its acceptance of her inability to play anymore.

The scene is laden with emotional power and demonstrates how a pre-existing musical work can be imbued with new meaning through its alignment with a dramatic narrative. It places Rachmaninov’s *Élégie*, in an arrangement for solo cello and orchestra, in a different context and encourages diverse modalities of engagement. As Mason notes, ‘Much can be said about the structured impulse music can give to dance, the evocative inspiration dance can give to music and the dynamic reciprocity

between both activities' (2012: 6). The notion of 'reciprocity' is especially important here given the musical subject matter at hand, and the dramatic development of the motif throughout the ballet. Connections between the emotional world of the dance are strengthened through the clear relationships between sonic identities and characters on the stage. Nayeri quotes Lauren Cuthbertson's observation that the Instrument's character is more complex: 'The instrument "really isn't displayed in that kind of 'Fantasia', 'Beauty and the Beast' way, where there's a Disney-like cello with a smiley face on it"' (Nayeri, 2020). Instead, we might hear this as though the Instrument is sobbing, completing the sense of intimacy between the Cellist and her instrument, and the conflicting sense of loss and release at her death.

Conclusion

From the analyses set out in this essay, it is clear that *The Cellist* presents a rich tapestry of visual and aural markers that represent the life story of a twentieth-century musical icon, the concert music culture of mid-century Britain, and detail the close personal relationship a musician has with an instrument as a living personality. The ballet offers multiple representational lenses which shed new meaning on pre-existing musical works, contribute to the 'legend' of Jacqueline du Pré, and further rework the rich patchwork of symbols, emotions, and artefacts which are so closely associated with du Pré's performances, immortalised in concert reviews, hugely popular recordings, and documentary film footage.

The present article has focused principally on two main aspects of representation in this work, that of the character of du Pré as the Cellist, and her relationship with her instrument. On the first point, it is clear that *The Cellist* goes to great lengths to communicate the intensity of emotion in du Pré's playing and uses the personification of her cello as the Instrument as a dramatic foil to enhance this further. The *pas de deux* work between the Cellist and the Instrument is powerfully emotive and musical, and moves seamlessly from choreographed moments which mimic playing an instrument to extended lines with intertwined movements that represent a symbiotic relationship between performer and instrument. In *The Cellist*, the Instrument is not merely a means of producing sound. The musical instrument is alive and soulful and is an equal partner in the musical gift of du Pré. It is the driving force of her musicality. The Instrument is a complex emotional character, not a cartoonish caricature, craving intimacy with its partner and feeling du Pré's sense of loss sharply. Indeed, the *pas de trois* of the Conductor, the Cellist, and the Instrument serves to highlight the intimacy and complexity of these connections.

That nineteenth- and twentieth-century cello repertoire features prominently in a ballet about one of the best-known cellists of the 1960s is hardly surprising, especially given du Pré's prominence in the media landscape. However, the repertoire woven throughout the score is, for the most part, that with which she was closely associated in her lifetime. The central performance of Elgar's Cello Concerto, so intimately connected to du Pré's reception history, builds a strong connection between the repertoire as musical signifier and as a symbol for du Pré herself. Through such repertoire, the ways *The Cellist* explores and represents notions of concert musical performance in the chamber recital and concerto forms is noteworthy, drawing attention to their associated rituals and hierarchies in this narrative context.

Both formalised performance scenes represent slightly different aspects of concert music culture: chamber music and orchestral music. Some of the same conventions apply, but there are important differences. For example, the intensity of communication between soloist and conductor in the concerto scene, though part of a narrative device to bring Barenboim and du Pré together as Cellist and Conductor, spotlights musical virtuosity in ways that might be expected on the real concert platform. These characters are the musical protagonists in a performance, with the orchestra as quasi-anonymous backdrop. In the chamber recital scene, Irene du Pré, who dutifully accompanied her daughter in her real-life formative years, is depicted as a timid accompanist lurking on the periphery of vision, not taking centre stage as part of an equal partnership. Such a decision may be motivated by the desire to facilitate choreographic freedom, but it points to yet more evidence of the valorisation of the soloist in concert music culture. The audience sees and hears these key figures above all others.

Thus, *The Cellist* offers an insight into the representation of a key musical figure of the twentieth-century, retelling parts of her biography, whilst at the same time animating her musical instrument. The characterisation of the Instrument is a powerful dramatic device that contributes new material to the du Pré 'legend'. Allied to this, the use of concert formalities to demarcate performative spaces within the ballet is particularly powerful, as is the use of pre-existing repertoire to create a musical collage of works closely associated with cellists and, in many cases, du Pré's landmark recordings. Thus, classical musical culture, both in the staging of symbolic ritual forms and through the evocation of its iconic personalities, is represented in a variety of ways in this new ballet which will undoubtedly contribute to the fascination of another generation of audiences with du Pré's life and work.

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