

RESEARCH REPORT

Costumes in *Le Devin du village* then and now: From the archive to the stage

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Abstract: This research report looks back at the process of experimental costume recreation for the historically informed performance of Le Devin de village (The Village Soothsayer) by Jean-Jacques Rousseau from 1752/3, which was conducted in 2019 within the research project Performing Premodernity and shown at the Ulrikdals Palace Theatre Confidencen. It demonstrates the collaborative method of historically informed costume and its productivity: in the first phase, the historian and costume maker join forces, combining their knowledge and approach to looking at sources; subsequently, the costume created is tested in relation to movement, equally informed by historical sources, and in the setting of the reconstructed eighteenth-century flat wings. The various historical practices are thus confronted, illuminating their mutual codependence.

Keywords: Historically informed performance, costume, opera, ballet, Le Devin du village, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, performance practice.

The experimental, historically informed production of *Le Devin du village*, the one-act opera written by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in 1752/3, was created in 2019 by members and collaborators of the research project Performing Premodernity. The project assembled an interdisciplinary group of historians, artists, and artistic researchers, in order to combine their knowledge, experience, and ideas regarding historical theatre practice. They included dramaturge and Rousseau scholar Maria Gullstam, conductor Mark Tatlow, costume historian Petra Dotlačilová, costume maker Anna Kjellsdotter, and choreographer Karin Modigh. The piece was performed by dancers and singers with previous training and experience with eighteenth-century dance, singing and acting techniques: Laila Cathleen Neuman as Colette, Thomas Volle as Colin, João Luís Paixão as the Soothsayer; three solo dancers – Matilda Larsson, Andrew Erickson, Adrian Navarro, and five members of the singing and dancing chorus – Mathias T. Stintzing, Ingrid Berg, Kajsa Lindberg, Jakob Nilsson, and Mika Boman Lindelöf.

Maria Gullstam offered the team a plethora of sources about the original performance of *Le Devin du village* and some of its subsequent revivals, including various versions of the libretto with Rousseau's annotations, reviews, letters, and other comments on the piece. They described and analysed the performance on stage and its reception in the auditorium, offering insights into the details of the performing practice, props, and costumes. Furthermore, she presented different interpretations of these sources in her research publications,

which offered various options for experimentation.¹ In her choreography, Karin Modigh applied aesthetic and technical principles of eighteenth-century dance, drawn from preserved notated choreographies, theoretical treatises, and visual sources, for instance Feuillet's notations *Receuil de danses* (1700–1709), Magri's *Trattato teorico-pratico di ballo* (1779), and Ferrère's manuscript (1782). She focused particularly on elements of the *demi-caractère* and comic dance.² These were later put in contact with the objects: the stage, the props, and the costumes, which were recreated according to textual, visual, and material sources from the period, as will be detailed below.

The aims of this experimental production were to test various options and the information available to us about the historical piece and practices of the period. By recreating and performing them, we sought to understand how certain particular actions (singing, gesture, dance and pantomime) and materials (costumes and props) could work on stage. In particular, we investigated the communicative potential of these elements on the spectators and in relation to each other, e.g., the relation between the costumes and movement. So, the aim was to investigate the performative power of a historical theatre piece through practice today. While everything in this process is connected, and we have noted various illuminating outcomes of this experimental production which are valuable for our understanding of the historical piece, its popularity, and its potential for today's audience, this report focuses primarily on the outcomes in relation to costume. It demonstrates the collaborative method of historically informed costume³ and its productivity, describing working with sources in detail, the collaborative dynamic between people and objects, and what we have learned from this experimentation.

The piece: a short presentation

Le Devin du village (The Village Soothsayer), one of the most popular French operas of the eighteenth century,⁴ is a peculiar piece from various points of view. There are numerous studies of its musical composition, especially its relation to Italian opera, the interconnection between music, text, and gesture, and its relation to the acting styles of comical theatres or genres (Waeber 2001, 2002, 2009, Charlton 2012, Law 2008). The plot is centred on a seemingly conventional story of two young people in love and their troubles, but the point of view is different. Rousseau added a class-based conflict, emphasizing the morally corrupting influence of the nobility on the peasants. Jean-Jacques Rousseau was very much aware of the social role of

¹ For her interpretation of the piece, see her PhD thesis: Maria Gullstam, *Rousseau's Idea of Theatre: From Criticism to Practice*, Stockholm University, 2020, 136–141.

² Among other sources of inspiration for the choreography, Modigh selected the Gavotte de Vestris danced by Auguste Vestris in 1785 and noted in Théleur (1832); 'Allemande du Devin de Village, contredanse par M. Joly' from *De La Cuisse* (1762).

³ Dotlačilová and Kjellsdotter (2023).

⁴ It was performed almost four hundred times at the Opéra, and one of the few pieces created during the *ancien régime* still performed after the French Revolution, even up to 1829. See Olivier Bara, 'La réception du *Devin du village* sous la Restauration, ou comment Rousseau fut chassé de l'Opéra', Saby Pierre (ed.), *Rousseau et la musique: Jean-Jacques et l'opéra*. Publication du Département de musique et musicologie – Actes de colloque (Université Lumière Lyon 2, 2006), 141–171.

dress. The luxurious accessories, which represent the inequality between people and the corrupting power of the ruling class, also perform in Rousseau's *intermède*. Rousseau included detailed directions in his libretto, among which we also find hints regarding clothing, more precisely the role of costumes and accessories in the story: they refer to real and pretend relationships and highlight class differences.

Le Devin du village opens with the entrance of Colette, who laments the loss of Colin's love. She decides to seek the advice of the local Soothsayer, *le Devin*, who reveals to her that Colin is now in a relationship with a noble lady. He encourages Colette to pretend that she, too, has a suitor from the noble class. Then the Soothsayer arranges a meeting between the two young villagers, where Colette arrives dressed up, *parée*. Her adornments might be 'gifts' from the imaginary gentleman. After a long scene of quarrelling between the two, they finally reconcile, and Colin falls on his knees in front of Colette. At this point, Rousseau explicitly has Colette point to the ribbon on Colin's hat, a gift from the noble lady, take it away and exchange it for her own, simpler, ribbon. The pantomime in scene eight, composed later for the 1753 première at the Opéra, depicts the play of seduction through material luxuries even more explicitly: here, a nobleman offers a necklet to a peasant girl, who briefly falls for the shining diamond, but when her lover appears, she returns the gift and turns the nobleman away. The pantomime recounts the story of Colin and Colette with reversed genders, the temptation and corruption of luxury embodied in the figure of the nobleman (at the place of the noble lady who seduced Colin). Obviously, in silent actions such as pantomime and dramatic dance, the visual representation of the characters and their actions becomes all the more constitutive, and the role of costumes and accessories increases in importance.

Textual and visual sources for costume recreation

What do the sources tell us about the actual costuming of the opera? Except for the stage notes, Rousseau did not leave any more comments regarding the costume. However, we can read about the initial performances through the comments, reviews, and letters of his contemporaries such as Denis Diderot, Elie C. Fréron, and De Brosses.⁵ These suggest that in 1752/53, the villagers were not dressed in a very truthful manner, resembling more foppish city boys, while in 1754 they wore 'smocks', suggesting less fashionable attire. The change in costuming might have been caused by the change of designers at the Opéra, where Jean-Baptiste Martin (1730–1763) was slowly replaced by Louis-René Boquet (1717–1814). Martin's drawings of peasants (Fig. 1) feature garments richly decorated with ribbons, rosettes, and lace 'volants', and the male costume is reminiscent of a fashionable fob. On the other hand, Boquet's peasants (Fig. 2 and 3), while still highly decorated with ribbons (thus not accurately reflecting peasant dress), show a more relaxed attire – especially the male costumes with their short-sleeved jackets and wide trousers. The front lacing and apron for the female characters seem to have been typical for peasant girls.

⁵ For brevity, we have provided a summary of the source analysis. Full discussion and complete references can be read in Dotlačilová 2020:225-243.



Figure 1. Jean-Baptiste Martin, 'Paysan Galant', 'Paysanne Galante'. Engraving on paper, printed in 1763 (designs from between 1748 and 1761). Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, dép. Arts du spectacle, FOL-ICO COS-3 (18, 19)



Figure 2. Louis-René Boquet and workshop, 'Pastourelle et pastre' (1760s). Ink drawing and watercolour on paper. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, BMO D216O-4 (60).



Figure 3. Louis-René Boquet, 'Villgeois pas de deux', from *Sancho Pança* (1762). Ink drawing and watercolour on paper. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, BMO D216O-7 (25, 26).

More precise records of the costume's materiality from various shows have been preserved in the court and Opéra archives: invoices from the fashion merchant, who meticulously noted the accessories for each performer in their role (Vattier 1752a, 1752b, 1763), and later even inventories and costume programmes recording the entire costumes:

Colin (M. Jeliote)

Bombet and breeches in blue satin decorated with cutouts of white satin, on the sides white ribbon pendant, a white satin jacket with cutouts of blue satin, all lined with white taffeta. Straw hat covered with white satin and blue satin cutouts / *Straw hat with blue satin cutouts, blue and white ribbon rosettes and pendants*. White stockings, yellow shoes.⁶

Colette (Mlle Nuette)

Corset, tails and skirt in white satin with cutouts of pink satin, decoration on the *corset* made of small pink ribbons.⁷

⁶ 'Un bombet/s et culotte de satin bleu ornés de découpures de satin blanc, pendant sur les cotés de ruban blanc, veste de satin blanc découpures de satin bleu; le tout doublé de taffetas blanc. Chapeau de paille couvert de satin blanc orné de decoupures de satin bleu. / Chapeau de paille orné de découpures de satin bleu. Rosettes et pendant bleu de blanc. Bas blanc, souliers jaunes', *Inventaire général des habits des Ballets du Roi par Caractères* (entries from 1762), MS [s.p.], F-Pan, O/1/3235. The second version of the hat, highlighted here in italics, is from 1763, F-Pan O/1/3266.

⁷ 'Corset basques et jupes de satin blanc ornés de découpures de satin rose, pièce de corps de petit ruban rose', *Inventaire général des habits des Ballets du Roi par Caractères* (entries from 1762), MS [s.p.], F-Pan, O/1/3235.

Accessories: In the beginning, a gauze cornette decorated with lace; a small gauze apron decorated with lace, a purse and a handkerchief; a gauze fichu decorated with lace; a golden cross in a black ribbon; a dozen gold coins; flat gauze cuffs.

*For her second appearance, a white hat decorated with lace and flowers. A white ribbon necklet decorated with flowers, double cuffs decorated with lace, bracelets of horsehair adorned with pink ribbon. White stockings and shoes, new pairs, they will serve for the second time.*⁸

[The costume descriptions are from 1762, and the lists of accessories, written in italics, are from 1763.]

Besides the individual parts of the costume, the colours, materials and decoration, the inventories and list of accessories inform us about the change of Colette's attire for her second appearance, when she arrives dressed up (*parée*). The extra adornments in the form of a fancy hat, cuffs with lace, necklet and bracelet are present in each preserved source about her costume, which shows consistency with Rousseau's stage note and true costume dramaturgy.

As suggested above, the pantomime is a mirror image, reversing Colin and Colette's roles. And indeed, the solo dancers wore costumes and decorations similar to those of their singing colleagues: white and blue taffeta *bombet* and breeches; a *corset* and skirt with an apron. The bright colours and decorations made them immediately recognisable as the principal roles. In contrast, the chorus and *corps de ballet* wore less striking colours such as lilac, yellow, and brown. In the case of the chorus, the rougher materials of *camelot*⁹ and wool were used.

The Soothsayer's character also underwent a certain reinvention over time, which Jacqueline Waeber described as a passage from 'magician' to 'sorcerer' (2009). Although the distinction between these two character-types is not entirely clear from today's perspective, in eighteenth-century French, the terms 'magicien' and 'magicienne' evoked certain powerful characters from epic poetry and tragedy, while 'sorcier' and 'sorcière' were more suggestive of a local charlatan, believed to practice witchcraft, a warlock. Apparently, the first version of the Soothsayer's costume resembled more that of the 'magician', or – as Diderot put it – a 'demon from grand opera'. The inventory of the Menus-Plaisirs from 1754 lists an 'old costume for the Soothsayer' made of red taffeta decorated with black cut-outs, and a black cloak trimmed with

⁸ 'En commençant, une cornette de gaze d'Italie ornée de blonde; un petit tablier de gaze d'Italie orné d'une petite blonde, une poche et une bavette; un fichu de gaze orné de blonde; une croix d'or avec un ruban noir; une douzaine de jetons d'or; manchettes plates de gaze d'Italie. Pour le second changement, un chapeau blanc orné de blond et fleurs. Un collier de ruban blanc garni de fleurs; manchettes à deux rangs ornés de blonde. Bracelets de crin ornés de ruban rose gros gain. Bas, souliers blancs à fournir à neuf. Serviront une seconde fois.' The accessories from 1763, F-Pan O/1/3266.

⁹ A type of fabric usually made of goat's hair and mixed with wool or silk. See *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, Quatrième édition. Paris: Brunet, 1762.

stripes of white taffeta, with ‘magical symbols’ painted on.¹⁰ In later productions, the Soothsayer acquired the more civil attire of brown taffeta and a black satin cape, all adorned with red ribbons, buttons, a collar, and tall hat.¹¹ Two engravings record scenes from *Le Devin du village*, in which the title role is represented rather differently. One depicts him in a long robe with wide sleeves and a tall hat, perhaps closer to the *magician* (Fig. 4), while the second one is strongly reminiscent of the costume programme entry from 1763: the robe had been exchanged for city dress, replete with a short cape and hat.



Figure 4. After Marillier and Moreau le jeune, scenes from *Le Devin du village*. Engravings in *Œuvres... de Jean Jacques Rousseau*, ed. Jacques-André Naigeon, François Fayolle (Paris: Didot, 1801).

The changing visual interpretations of this piece show its gradual development, which might be interpreted in the terms of advancing costume reform during the second half of the eighteenth century (Dotlačilová 2020).

¹⁰ ‘Devin (M. Cuvillier): Un habit du Devin de village de taffetas feu, garni de découpures noires, robe, armures de taffetas blanc, peintes en caracteres magiques, et chamarés de taffetas feu. La robe en destruction, il ne reste que les armures.’ *Inventaire Général des habits des Ballets du Roy fait au mois de Décembre 1754 et distribué par Chapitres suivants les différentes sortes de Caractères*, MS [s.p.], F–Pan O/1/3234.

¹¹ ‘Habit, veste, grande culotte de satin brun ornés de ruban cerise, manteau de satin noir orné de rubans cerise, de gros boutons cerise; le tout doublé de toille noire et brune. Chapeau à haute forme de satin noir orné de ruban cerise. Un rabat de dentelle. Perruque ronde noire. Bas bruns, souliers noirs avec pièces rouges rabatues. A emprunter à l’Opéra le Grimoire et la Baguette.’ *Programme du Devin de village, Opéra en un acte Représenté devant le Roy à Versailles le mercredi Neuf Mars 1763*, MS [s.p.], F–Pan O/1/3266.

However, when working on a particular production, the creative research team can only make one set of costumes, and therefore decisions have to be made. Since we were working with both singers and dancers, we could test how garments recreated through the historically informed method would work with the various kinds of movement and signing, which themselves are also historically informed, and how the chosen fabrics and colours work on the Confidencen eighteenth-century stage.¹²

Recreation

In Colin's costume we opted for the descriptions and images from the 1760s – blue silk taffeta with white decorations. The previously unknown term 'bombet' was identified through the cross-study of drawings and annotations to be a short sleeved open jacket (Dotlačilová 2020:207-208). Furthermore, two exemplars of such a jacket were found in the Royal Swedish Armoury collections, among the late eighteenth-century costumes from the Rosersberg theatre (Fig. 5).¹³



Figure 5. 'Demi caractairesklädning [sic], hertig Carl'. White and blue silk for garments and their cutout trimming, sequins, gauze. Stockholm, Statens historiska museer / Livrustkammaren, 21494. Photos: Petra Dotlačilová (left) and Helena Bonnevier.

¹² The Ulriksdal Palace Theatre Confidencen was built in 1753, however, its original machinery washas been torn down during the nineteenth19th century, and it was only rebuilt after 2000. Today, it has functional theatrical machinery and stage décor rebuilt after the preserved eightenneth18th-century theatres of Drottningholm and Gripsholm.

¹³ On the picture is 'Demi caractairesklädning', the other 'bombet' jacket is part of the 'Bohemiens klädning', 21500_LRK. See here: <https://samlingar.shm.se/object/49F3F805-75B2-41AD-80FB-D061A2631253>.

The bombet jacket of the ‘demi-caractère’ costume has the same colour palette but inverted, strongly resembling the garments from Boquet’s designs. On the other hand, the inventories do not mention these costumes bearing sequins, so we avoided their use. Due to a lack of time, the bombet in our version was worn over a shirt with a sleeveless plain white vest, although the images and preserved garments suggest that it was actually worn over a long-sleeved vest, decorated in a similar way. The ribbon and decorative cut-out stripes of fabric were inspired by the garment, as well as by the textual descriptions (their composition, material and colour), and the drawings (their placement on the garment). Colin’s outfit was completed with a straw hat with a blue ribbon, and the cut of the men’s breeches was inspired by the patterns from the 1770s (Fig. 6a, 7, 9).¹⁴

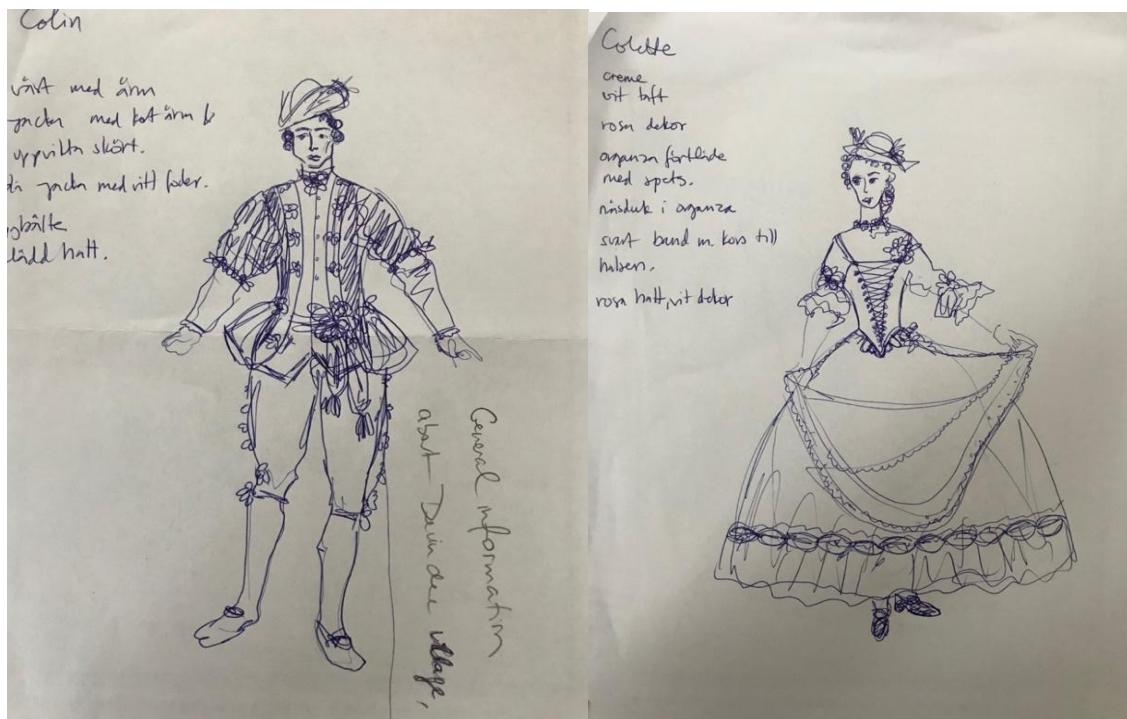


Figure 6a & b. Anna Kjellsdotter, drawings for Colin and Colette, 2018. Photo: Author.

A very similar costume was created for the dancer, who was de facto impersonating Colin in the pantomime. As a result, we were able to test the garments’ functionality in various types of movement. The choreography was technically rather advanced, since it was inspired by late eighteenth-century dance manuals and iconography, particularly those describing or depicting peasant dance in a *demi-caractère* and comic style. The dance contained higher leg gestures (as much as between 45° and 90°), high jumps including *pas de chat* (Fig. 8, 10b), and arms raised over the head. Both the bombet and breeches did not limit these movements in

¹⁴ More precisely, from the pattern of Swedish king Gustav III’s wedding suit, preserved in the Swedish Royal Armoury (Livrustkammaren 33243_LRK): <https://samlingar.shm.se/object/43D30CC7-B6C0-4530-8BF1-C4C5DD0F3019>.

any way – the long and narrow cut of the armholes, typical for this period (Kjellsdotter 2019:204), the short sleeves and open jacket allow the arms to move freely, while the crotch on eighteenth-century breeches enables full movement below waist, even though the fabric is not stretchable (they were made for horse riding), and hence they do not impede this kind of dancing either. In fact, as mentioned above, such costume composition was typical for peasant characters, who usually danced in a *demi-caractère* or comic style. Our experiments thus proved that the genre of dance performed by such characters and the composition of their garments were in full convergence.



Figure 7. Thomas Volle as Colin and Laila Cathleen Neuman as Colette in *Le Devin du village* (2019, Ulriksdal Palace Theatre). Photo: Eva Frykevall.

The other two male dancers wore only breeches and vests in white taffeta, complete with a white linen shirt. For the pantomime alone, Adrian Navarro wore a white taffeta coat in a 1730s cut (Waugh 1964:66-67) with wide pleats, pink ribbon decoration, and a tricorne hat in order to transform into the nobleman who seduces the peasant girl with pretty gifts (Fig. 10b).



Figure 8. Dancer Andrew Erickson in the *pas de chat* position in *Le Devin du village* (2019, Ulriksdal Palace Theatre Confidencen). Photo: Eva Frykevall.

When creating the costumes for the female performers, we particularly experimented with the various kinds of stays that were possibly used on stage at the time. The 1750s inventories indicate a ‘*corset*’ for several female performers. In today’s usage, the word ‘*corset*’ refers to the nineteenth century boned undergarment. However, in eighteenth-century French this word referred to a ‘bodice without boning’, which is quite the opposite. According to Furetière’s dictionary (1690), it was worn by peasant women and wet nurses, but in the fourth edition of the dictionary of the Académie Française (1762), the term *corset* is associated with the informal dress or *deshabillé* of the wealthier classes. This means that women might not always wear these rigid stays (*corps baleiné*) on stage, as is generally assumed,¹⁵ but rather a lighter garment more suitable for agile movements. We therefore decided to create various types of bodices with more or less boning, to test how they interact with the aforementioned movement.

¹⁵ Chazin-Bennahum uses the terms ‘*corset*’ and ‘*stays*’ interchangeably, not considering the possibility of an alternative garment for theatrical costume. See *The Lure of Perfection*, 27–29.

The costume for Colette (Fig. 6b, 7, 9) was made entirely of white silk taffeta with subtle pink decoration, and included half-boned stays based on a pattern from the 1730s, with shoulder straps, lacing up the centre front and centre back, completed with a stomacher (Waugh 1995:39). The front and back lacing allowed the stays to adapt to the body to a great degree: it could be tightened or loosened, depending on the needs of the singer while still offering the necessary front and back support. As such, the garment put the singer's body in the upright position required of the eighteenth-century performer, who should, according to the manuals, maintain a graceful and contained posture. The shoulder straps were attached to the front part of the corset with a pair of laces, so they did not necessarily hinder arm movement in any way.



Figure 9. Matilda Larsson, Laila Cathleen Neuman, Thomas Volle and the chorus in *Le Devin du village* (2019, Ulriksdal Palace Theatre). Photo: Eva Frykevall.

The bodices for the female solo dancer and for the female members of the chorus were based on a pattern from the *Encyclopédie* (plate XXII), reproduced in Waugh's book (1995:40). However, since there is no pattern for the earliest versions of the unboned *corset*, the construction needed to be adapted in order to create a 'lighter' version of the stays. We created a simplified version of the back-laced half-boned stays, only reinforced with a couple of bones in the front, side and back, without tabs; they were laced at the back and two puff sleeves were attached. The reinforcement was done along the lacing at the back, in order to prevent

the fabric from wrinkling when the laces were tightened, and on the sides and front along the seams in order to emphasize the shape of the bodice. We used plastic strips for the boning, which is the most common replacement for whalebone within today's historical tailoring. The front was adorned with decorative, non-functional lacing. These stays effectively held the body upright with their fitted cut and lacing but offered sufficient flexibility in the torso to allow the dancer to bend slightly forward, backwards, and to the sides. She was able to twist her body at the waist, which was an important feature of the period dance technique – slight twists of the torso and shoulders added to the graceful bearing, and was also a powerful expressive tool. In the choreography, the dancer employed all these movements. Her dance included leg gestures such as the *attitude en arrière* (a turned-out leg slightly bent and raised to approx. 45°), which requires a certain flexibility of the garment in the back if the body is to be kept straight. She was able to bend forward when putting a basket down on the floor. Since the choreography also includes an *allemande*, a dance where the performers hold their hands above their heads, and generally use elevated arm gestures, it is obvious that her costume also had to allow for these movements. The high, narrow armhole cuts, in combination with wider puff sleeves proved very effective (Figs. 9, 10a, b). This style of sleeve construction was rather unfashionable for the mid-eighteenth century, which could have been linked to the fabrication of peasants' clothing.





Figure 10. Matilda Larsson dancing in a lightly boned corset in the performance of Le Devin du village (2019, Ulriksdal Palace Theatre); a) attitude en arrière, b) in the pantomime scene, holding hands à l'allemande with Andrew Erickson and Adrian Navarro. Photo: Eva Frykevall.

The costumes for the three ladies in the chorus were made in a similar cut to the dancer's costume but in different colours and fabrics. The inventories suggested that the chorus and the corps de ballet performers wore less striking colours such as lilac, yellow, and brown, and materials like *camelot* and wool were used. We opted for shades of beige, sand, and brown, and various fabrics for the skirts, both lighter and heavier (Fig. 9).

While the villagers' costumes were somewhat inspired by later mentions in the inventories, in an attempt to create a simpler version of the costumes (as opposed to J.-B. Martin's over-decorated version), we could not resist the temptation of the 'magician' costume for the Soothsayer, despite the fact that it was not particularly appreciated by contemporaries. This choice was also supported by the fact that the description of the 'old' costume for the character bore remarkable similarities with the preserved costume for a magician in the collection of theatre costumes of the Český Krumlov State Castle: it was a black cloak trimmed with stripes of white taffeta, with magical symbols painted on (Fig. 11). Therefore, we decided to make a copy of this cloak in black linen, replete with painted symbols, which turned out to be mainly old horoscope signs, Hebrew letters, and some other fantasy symbols. Furthermore, the costume consisted of red taffeta breeches, a vest, and a black shirt (Fig. 12, 13).



Figure 11. Costume of Magician, Collection of the Český Krumlov State Castle. Photo: Petra Dotlačilová.

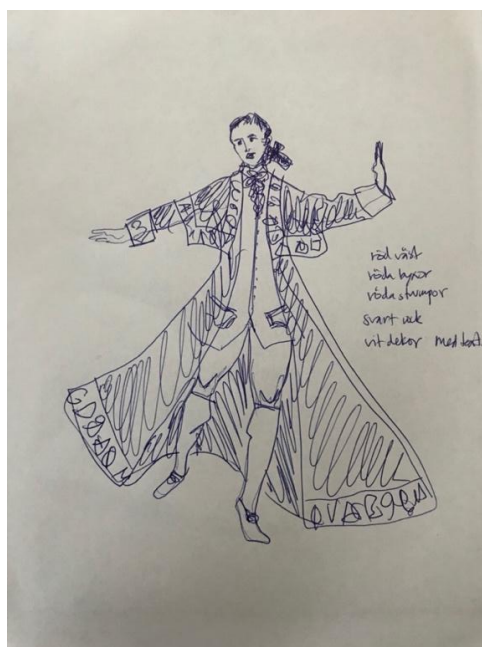


Figure 12. Anna Kjellsdotter, costume drawing for *The Soothsayer*, 2018. Photo: Author.



Figure 13. João Luís Paixão as the Soothsayer in Le Devin du village (2019, Ulriksdal Palace Theatre). Photo: Eva Frykevall.

This costume truly stood out among the peasants in white, pink, blue, and sand-coloured garments, indeed it looked like it was from another world. It should be added that the performer, together with Karin Modigh and Maria Gullstam, played with the possibilities of the ‘*jeu mystérieusement bouffon*’, i.e. a kind of acting containing improvised pantomime and comical ‘contortions’ of the body, which was apparently required by Rousseau for this role. Comical acting obviously clashed with the costume of a serious or even mysterious ‘magician’, which also showed in this performance. On the other hand, a ‘magician’ jumping around in his big cloak added to his performance's comical effect.

Conclusion

Our experiments confirmed that the particular composition and cut of stage costumes, suggested by the cross-study of sources from the period, are in full convergence with the movement and overall appearance recorded in choreographies and treatises. The costumes offered support, while also allowing all typical movements. Regarding the costumes of the main characters and solo dancers, dressing peasants in white taffeta with pink and blue ribbons would perhaps not be the first choice of designers today, but it indeed reflected the stage aesthetics of the period, which required a certain visual ennobling of the characters from the lower classes. Furthermore, these colours and materials made the performers visually stand out on stage, which seems to be a typical use of costume in the period (Dotlačilová 2020:185). On the other hand, the chorus ‘shone’ a little

less in their sandy-brown costumes but still were visible within the reconstruction of the eighteenth-century set representing woody countryside with some houses.

These findings would not be possible without collaboration between several people, who each contributed their own particular knowledge – of the piece and its dramaturgy, the archival sources recording its materiality, the visual sources, the historical garments and their composition, the period's aesthetics, the dance and gesture – and the practical experiments on the eighteenth-century stage. The combination of theoretical and practical contributions from all the collaborators and the interaction between the bodies and the objects (costumes, accessories, and sets) informed and shaped each other and brought illuminating insights into the performance practice of the past.

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