



Performance at J. G. Bennett's International Academy for Continuous Education at Sherborne House, 1972

The 39 Series on CD

The 37 pieces for the 39 Series were composed by Thomas de Hartmann, c. 1950.

Interpretations of all the pieces-as regards tempo, rhythm, characteristics of melody and other musical dynamics-have been based on personal instructions received over many years from direct pupils of G. I. Gurdjieff. Also, we have studied and taken into account the earliest available recordings of these compositions. Originally no titles, only N-numbers, were given. These N-numbers as well as the indications of tempo stem from the first private publication prepared by de Hartmann himself, *Musique pour les Mouvements de G. I. Gurdjieff*, Editions Janus, Paris 1950.

In some of the Movements, the dancers have to speak certain words or phrases. These might be in Russian, Greek, Latin, French, Tibetan as well as English. When such words are mentioned in the notes, they are in English translation only.

Detailed description of the 39 Series

CD1

1 N1, Allegro Risoluto

(Canon of Automaton, Counting Automaton, The Automaton)

The structure of this canon divides this piece in its 4, 5 and 6 measured units. When the canon reaches a specific place, the piece makes a quick quarter turn, right or left, taking specific postures of arms and legs and then stays as if frozen until their next turn. A mechanical law seems to govern this class of "puppets," which brings to mind an interesting anecdote. Once a journalist, looking at a Movements class, commented to Gurdjieff: "These are not dancers at all Mr. Gurdjieff, they are only marionettes!" Gurdjieff, as the story has it, answered: "You are quite right, they are just marionettes. But... remember one thing, they are marionette on the outside; inside they are free!" (22)

2 N2, Grave

(Prayer in Four Parts)

This is the only piece in the 39 Series composed of three relatively independent musical sections, punctuated by a rhythmical cadence. On the oldest choreographic notes of this Movement known to us (23), it is titled "The Great Prayer" (not to be confused with the earlier "Great Prayer" we recorded for our previous CD set) and, certainly, it is the most elaborate ritual in the entire Series.

After an introduction composed of quiet prayer-like gestures, the first part has the dancers slowly circling around one another while turning around their own axis. Mme. Solange Claustres once compared this section to the slow revolving of planets in their orbit in an immeasurable sky. After an intermediary rhythmic cadence, a fast gymnastic for the arms, the second main section-often referred to as "the vibrations"-consists of six sacred body positions, taken with hands lightly shaken. These hand-tremors, frequent in Gurdjieff's Movements, may be a rudiment of the shaking of the whole body in trance-dancing, one of the most basic forms of human dance (24). During these six positions two resounding bass notes bring the body into a slow swaying from side to side and, for that reason, this section is also dubbed the "elephant step."

The third section has everybody turning around their axis in a fast tempo with sharp, precise arm positions, until the whole Movement comes to its silent and reXective end. The first section has the words "Lord, help me," the second has the words "Lord have Mercy."

3 N3, Con moto

(The Three Tableaux)

During the first eight measures the class steps towards a new con?guration, in which a priest in the middle lifts his arms upwards to the heavens, as if at the height of a religious service. This lasts for the two forte measures and then the triplets have the class whirling back to its original con?guration. This is repeated twice in between the representation of three such sacred tableaux.

4 N4, Andante Molto

(Essentuki Prayer, Prayer for Instruction, Hymn of the Institute)

For this prayer-type Movement de Hartmann adapted Gurdjieff's oldest known composition, adjusting it to a constant ostinato in the bass to give the class rhythmical support. To understand the significance of this Movement the following impression (25) will be better than any description of just the physical actions: "I felt that the whole of Creation was depicted in this Movement in a continuous cosmic dance, seeking, at all levels, union with its Creator. I saw both mineral and animal life reflected in some of the postures and the diversity of the human spirit in others-our pain and frustration as well as our striving for transformation. The central figure of the priest, towards whom all gestures are directed, stood as the still axis around which this ever-Xowing dance revolved and the stately and beautiful gestures of the entremets (26) seemed to indicate the direction of our own individual journey towards the divine."

5 N5, Deciso
(Pointing Dervish)

Quick kneebends, quarter turns and asymmetric arm gestures have to be executed in a swift, light and subtle way. Originally, Gurdjieff required the dancers to sing one long sustained note during their performance.(10) This is not taken into account by de Hartmann's inspired and exciting dervish-rhythms.

6 N6, Allegro Molto
(Canon)

A fast canon like this one, which starts with quarter-turns and gradually adds steps, bodybends and a complex turning configuration, can only be performed if one develops an attention that is able to follow the whole continuous Xowing of the Movement through the entire class, as if from a distance.

7 N7, Allegretto
(Women's Dance)

Every position in the class has its own gestures. As soon as the music starts the first row divides itself in two and gradually, as a wall revealing a secret passage, an opening is created. Three women, who were standing in between the first and second row, now come forward; circling around their axis to the front of the class, but immediately circle back again while the first row closes its lines.

Something is shown and then disappears; as if in the moment we understand something that might be gone the very next. The oldest choreographic notes known to us has this Movement described as "esoteric." Others of the 39 Series are described as "mesoteric" or "exoteric." (27)

8 N8, Allegro ma non troppo
(Walking Six Positions)

The walking is done lightly on the toes and without any unnecessary motion in the body, reminiscent of the way women glide forward, as if without moving, in Russian folk-dances. The melody notes give the rhythm of the feet, in a pattern of three, while the head and arms have the pattern of two of the left-hand chords. To be able to function in this Movement requires a split attention, one for the complexity of ones own patterns, the other to keep in line with the class.

9 N9, Allegro con brio
(Ol-Bog-Mek)

The arm gestures of this Movement, the same as in N1, are combined with exhausting jumps right and left in one of the strongest rhythms of the Series, to be performed only by men.

10 N10, Andantino
(Persian Dance)

A graceful women's dance. A slow, wide and solemn gesture of arm and vibrating hand after a small displacement forwards and backwards characterises the feeling of trust and sensitivity that this Movement creates in its participants. Many years have passed, but I still can hear Mme Solange Claustres' instructions to the women in the class: "Feel... be present in your own atmosphere... trust yourself."

11 N11, Largo
(Lord Have Mercy)

The only piece other than N2 in the Series with more than one musical section.

In the first part, another interesting variety of the canon principle occurs, not from left to left but, in the body of each dancer, from limb to limb; right arm, right leg, left leg, left arm, in various formulas. In combination with this canon of the limbs, the head has to add a completely independent pattern. On the first three counts of each measure the words "Lord have Mercy" are spoken quietly. In the second part the feet start moving graciously and solemnly, while from behind the class a female dancer in the role of a priestess comes tiptoeing forward, the only one for whom the rhythm in triplets is written. One of her gestures illustrates the unveiling of her face, which brings to mind an oracle, performed on rare occasions by a priestess coming out of her tower. Some Movements have inner exercises and in this case, during this section, the exercise demands an effort to visualise and feel one's place in the left and in the row.

12 N12, Lento
(Hallelujah)

This truly majestic ritual, also belonging to the "esoteric" series, is performed in concentric circles, with an inner circle consisting of three women. The class comes from a prostrate position up to a standing prayer position and goes down again, mirroring the sequence of the first positions. The music follows this pattern closely with crescendos and diminuendos. The melody, a scale in C-minor, is sung by resounding the word "Hallelujah." De Hartmann sustains the scale melody with a harmonisation of unusual depth and intensity. During the Movement an inner exercise connects us to parents, brothers and sisters, as if these are brought into the community of the class and now form part of its aspirations, expressed in the rising and descending waves.

13 N13, Andantino
(Persian Waltz, Ancient Waltz)

This tender women's dance combines an elegant toe-heel foot pattern with body bends right and left to be executed with an attitude of surrender; but, at each split second in which the dancer finds herself in an erect position, she has to renew her presence in her body. The arm gestures, of a complex geometrical nature, are highly precise and clear and contrast in a remarkable way with the devotional aspects expressed by torso and feet. Arm gestures are, again, in the ever-challenging mirror-sequence.

No accompaniment is conceivable that would support this Movement better than de Hartmann's music of crystalline beauty. De Hartmann has written out a separate line for the melody to be sung by the class.

14 N14, Allegro ma non troppo

(Reading of a Sacred Book, Breast-Beating Dervish)

In this score the repeating melody-curves have a somewhat hypnotic effect, not unlike the ney dervish Xutes over heavy pounding drums in Turkish music.

Everybody in the class turns towards somebody holding a Sacred Book and bends rhythmically while beating their chest with a fist. De Hartmann's music requires two pianists to perform this piece, one for the rhythm and one for the melody, on the same piano. The rhythm part on this recording is performed by Gert-Jan Blom.

15 N15, Moderato

(Monday, Tuesday...)

The 39 Series covers a wide range of Movements, from highly complex configurations to more simple ones. N15 belongs to this last category but it is by no means easy to perform. The body is divided mathematically in quick and exact arm and hand positions, ending with a lunge of the leg forward.

16 N16, Con bravura

(Dance, Running, Seagull)

The "Seagull" name refers to the fast wing-like hand movements. The original sheet music is not clear about the repeating of the rhythm in the left hand, but we have performed it in accordance with the earliest recording known to us, dating from 1951.

17 N17, Allegro Moderato

(Multiplication)

This is the first multiplication in the Series (28). It is a complex and difficult Movement, which nevertheless has to be performed with lightness, like all Gurdjieff's dynamic Movements. Many have reported that it was Gurdjieff's favourite.

18 N18, Andante Tranquillo

(Body Circling)

The name of this Movement reflects the bending of the torso in a semi-circle sideways and backwards, while the outstretched arms execute a mirror-like exchange.

CD 2

1 N19, Allegro con brio

(Stop Exercise, The Wheel)><The frequently described "stop exercise" is traditionally used in this canon type Movement in which the hands describe a huge semi-circle from right to left. From time to time, the instructor calls out "Stop!" and the dancers have to freeze in their positions. With the command "Continue!" they and the pianist resume the Movement where they left off.

2 N20, Allegro ma non troppo

(Dervish Exercise, Dervish Tramping)

One of the dervish-steps employed here, amidst a variety of displacements and circle-type gestures of feet and arms, is a step with strong heaving upwards of the leg, which has given the Movement its name.

3 N21, Lento

(Prayer, Remorse)

A solemn and dramatic Movement with an inner exercise focussing on the feeling of remorse for the way we have treated those dear to us. The Movement demands a pattern of three, executed simultaneously with a pattern of four; but, even if we cannot keep the physical exercise going, we must continue the inner part of the feeling of remorse. This example shows something of the variety of the inner work demanded by the different Movements in the Series.

4 N22, Allegro ma non troppo

(March 16-20)

This Movement was qualified as the first of the "mesoteric" series. Note how beautiful and subdued de Hartmann's music leads and stimulates the dancers in their complicated step-pattern. The arm gestures are different for each row.

Note-No music was composed for Movement N23; the pianist has to improvise different rhythms as an accompaniment.

5 N24, Allegro feroce

(Sharse Varse)

The vigour of this dervish Movement has to be seen to be believed: the feet take up the rhythm in three, while the arms perform a three versus four rhythm. The front members of the middle two files hold one another in a traditional dancing-posture and seem to represent a quiet eye amidst the storm of energy generated by the class. The words "Sharse Varse" are called loudly on each rhythmic pulse.

6 N25, Lento Pesante / N25bis, Vif

(White and Black Magic)

It is said that this Movement originated in Gurdjieff's ballet The Struggle of the Magicians, from which it inherits its name. The white magician's pupils perform a solemn, procession-type Movement to the music of N25 lento pesante, while the black magician's pupils, accompanied by the neurotic sounds of N25 bis, let themselves go in ugly grimaces of the face and claw-like gestures of the hands, as if they want to scratch somebody's face open with their nails. The two pieces follow each other without a break. Programmatic body-expressions like these are very rare in Gurdjieff's Movements and indicate their older origin.

7 N26, Moderato

(Multiplication, March)

Another multiplication (28) characterised by a difficult twist of the torso versus the legs.

8 N27, Andante con moto

(Canon of Twelve)

The oldest choreographic notes label this Movement as number one of the "esoteric" series and mentions 29 September 1948 as the date Gurdjieff taught it. It is an incredibly beautiful, highly complex Movement in which the whole class participates in constantly changing configurations. Music and dance are like the ever-changing patterns and dynamics of cosmic life. Sub-groups in the class perform many different roles, but the canon-sometimes invisible, sometimes visible-has to go on all the time.

9 N28, Moderato

(Machine Group)

Gurdjieff gave this Movement on 12 October 1948.

Despite the fact that almost all dancers have individual roles to perform, the whole class must control the difficult mirror-type sequences of this Movement to such an extent that the impression of one great and complex machine is created. (29)

10 N29, Pesante

The rhythmical sequence emphasises the Movement's basic pattern, consisting of deep kneebends, stretching to normal standing position, followed by standing on tiptoes, while arm and head-movements continue independently. De Hartmann's end chords are unusual in their complexity but somehow add to the strength of this remarkable composition.

11 N30, Rigoroso, con moto

(Canon of Six Measures)

A high-spirited and happy canon made of simple gymnastic exercises alternated with some strange Egyptian-like positions.

Note-No music was composed for Movement N31; the pianist has to improvise different rhythms as an accompaniment.

12 N32, Allegro con spirito

(Exercise of Automaton, Automaton Note Values)

N32 is a virtuoso Movement where the dancer as an "automaton" has to perform an up-tempo mathematical step-pattern, simultaneous with torso-circling and unusual arm gestures. Despite its geometrical eccentricity the Movement gives a peaceful and balanced impression.

13 N33, Tempo di Marcia

(Cosmic Rhythm, Group with Stop)

Much more complex than its music would suggest, this Movement creates an intensive spectacle, full of displacements and turns, with a priestess in the middle of the group. The Movement comes to a total and unexpected stop twice, while several dancers continue during the sudden silence of the class. Quite unusual for a stop-exercise. The choreographic notes of this Movement are marked "premier exercice après retour d'Amerique" which would date it around early March of 1949.

14 N34, Allegretto

(Multiplication)

De Hartmann's music for this multiplication (28) is the only piece in the 39 Series written in a major key (30) .

15 N35, Allegro rigoroso

(March)

Another Movement of the automaton type, N35 offers an ingenuous step-pattern, highly complex displacements and unusual, mathematical, entremets. (26)

16 N36, Con moto, Rigoroso

(Dervish Exercise)

The feet follow the rhythm, the body bends with abandonment to the right and left, and the arm divides with precision its radius in six segments. All of this has to be executed precisely in the breathtaking tempo of the music.

17 N37, Allegro ma non troppo

(Dance)

A women's dance, silent and beautiful. The complexity is in the many feet and leg positions which are not congruent with the weight of the body and, in addition, very quick turns are necessary. 12 July 1949 was the date on which Gurdjieff first gave this Movement.

18 N38, Allegretto

(Twice Six)

The last dervish Movement of the Series offers an example of quiet control and precision of its mirror-sequenced arm gestures combined with the strong rhythmic feet-patterns.

19 N39, Lento

(Prayer, Meditation)

This was the last Movement taught by Gurdjieff on 11 October 1949.

Slow sacred gestures mark the inner exercise in which one connects with one's physical, emotional and mental centres in sequence, and then adds all three together to experience the "whole man."

The '39 Series'

The last decade of Gurdjieff's life, the second stage of his Movements teaching, was one of extraordinary creativity. "Our group had a class once a week," remembered Mme. Solange Claustres, "and he taught at least one new Movement in each one of them. This continued for the seven years I was in his classes! He demonstrated the new Movements, but rarely explained much about them. His presence was so strong - it literally filled the whole place-that you could absorb the new exercise in a direct way. No further explanation was needed. It was never allowed to make choreographic notes, because this activity would reduce our first and complete impression to an analytical or rational attitude."

Gurdjieff's stream of creativity was confirmed by another pupil, Mrs. Jessmin Howarth, a choreographer at the Paris Opera and a pupil of Dalcroze before she joined forces with Gurdjieff: "He used to come every evening with three or four absolutely new attempts." Those who were in his classes at that time described Gurdjieff's creativity to me as an empirical experiment of great intensity, lasting years. He made a supreme effort to develop exercises that would help people to strengthen their awareness, will and power of attention. Sometimes he was weak or sick and had to support himself, leaning against the piano to keep standing, but kept on working.

It was also explained to me that Gurdjieff studied the results of each new Movement he gave by observing the state of the people in the class. Many of his new exercises did not reach the goal he had in mind. It is reported that sometimes he went away during the classes, to come back after a while to propose a small change in a Movement: for instance, a wrist that had been straight was now bent, an arm that was horizontal forward was now diagonally forward. Occasionally even these new changes did not bring about the desired state in the dancers, and he then gave a strict order: "No... stop and forget this one, don't perform it again ever." However, if a Movement did create the desired state in the psyche and bodily expressions of the performers he'd say, "That's it, this one is set and ready now. What number are we?" referring to the numbers they gave to the new set of "successful" Movements, representing the slowly growing list of what became the "39 Series."

The 39 Series were thus the kernel of his new exercises, the ones he had accepted as finished and relevant. All his other attempts, many of which have been remembered and have been performed since by his students, did not have his full approval. However beautiful they are, their relevance remains open to discussion.

Work on the Series went on until the last moment, to come to a stop only because of Gurdjieff's sickness and, ultimately, his death. Even on his last trips to America he added seven new Movements to the list.

If we compare the 39 with Gurdjieff's earlier Movements we find the same components: strong dervish dances, beautiful and quiet women's dances, powerful geometrical patterned Movements, as well as sacred prayer-rituals. However, the ancient religious and ethnological components are markedly reduced while abstract gestures and positions, performed in mathematical displacements, now prevail. It is as if, during the fifteen-year interval since his first efforts, Gurdjieff had digested his earlier impressions and rejected upon them. When he continued his work on the Movements, they re-appeared with an even more personal style, in which mathematical and geometrical crystallizations are now dominant.

The drama of the human condition, so poignantly captured in a number of the old Movements, seems to have given way to a more abstract construction, but one that gives immediate and plentiful opportunity for work on oneself and work for the class as a whole. The later Movements were even more difficult to perform than the earlier ones and demanded a huge effort from a class in terms of precision, quickness, discipline and sustaining attention.

The 39 Movements have been called Gurdjieff's magnum opus; many have felt that they summarized his whole teaching to mankind.