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Dancing in Step with Society: American Popular Dances and the Urban Body between Regulation and Amusement in Imperial Berlin (1900-1914)

Linda Braun

English abstract: This article analyzes the urban body in Imperial Germany through the lens of an integral part of night life: popular dancing. In the first decade of the twentieth century, American popular dances appeared in Berlin and other European metropolises. The cakewalk and various step dances replaced the established tradition of popular dancing: In general, American popular dances did not follow a choreography but instead allowed the leading (usually male) dancers to experience more autonomy and combine figures more freely. The dancing bodies moved into more directions than previously with the waltz. Even more importantly, individuals from different social strata enjoyed the same dances, often in the same locations. Such concepts and social practices of popular dancing might suggest that American dances softened or transformed social distinctions. This article shows that a new physicality of dancing, the accessibility of American popular dances to all social strata, and the possibility of learning the new dances via imitation did not change social behavior in Berlin's dance halls. In Berlin, dancing bodies moved in new ways but previously established social distinctions continued to limit contact between social strata: Urban bodies danced in step with German norms.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, dance halls spread rapidly in different areas of Berlin and were often described as “marvellous pleasure-palaces that spring up like fungi, and fill the night with feverish colour and perfume.”¹ Quite a few venues were located close to Friedrichstraße, a space of leisure in the center of Berlin at the “border between the eastern, manufacturing and trading and the western, consuming” part.² A conglomeration of leisure spaces enabled people to spend the whole night in restaurants, bars, cabarets, operas and dance halls where they could socialize until the early morning hours.

Night life in Berlin started with going out to a restaurant at around seven o'clock and was followed by visiting the theater, cabaret or cinema before entering a new phase: Berliners and tourists often went

1 Herman Scheffauer, “The City without Night: Berlin 'Twixt Dusk and Dawn’,” *The Pall Mall Magazine* 53, no. 251 (1914): 277-291, here: 277.

2 Translations of German quotes are mine – LB. Hans Ostwald, *Berlin und die Berlinerinnen: Eine Kultur- und Sittengeschichte* (Berlin: Haus Bondy, 1911), 56.

to one of the crowded dance halls.³ According to actress and journalist Else Marland, these sites provided an atmosphere of “shining light, magnificent evening dresses, the odor of cigars and sparkling life.”⁴ One of the most popular dance halls in the center of Berlin was the Palais de Danse in the Metropolpalast, which also contained a theater and multiple restaurants.⁵ Here, guests entered a room of “baroque sumptuousness with gilding, wall paintings and fans.”⁶ In the atmosphere of endless dancing accompanied by an excellent orchestra of twenty-five men and the excessive consumption of champagne and wine, “[o]ne does not think any longer about the world order or anything else [...] but just about the enchanting, fascinating colorfulness of the moment,” gushed one patron.⁷

The previously quoted impressions of dance halls show that contemporaries perceived these urban spaces as ‘the other,’ as a contrast to everyday life that provided the opportunity to ‘step out.’ However, by analyzing fashionable dances, their standardization, and the way they were perceived by dancing instructors, as well as descriptions of dancing and social interactions in dance halls, I develop a contrasting picture. Yes, dancing bodies in urban settings participated in leisure and experienced the fast pace and transformation of the city. The situation is nonetheless more complex: Urban bodies were still regulated by social distinctions.

Even though visitors from provincial areas experienced an international cultural repertoire and listened to unfamiliar songs, physical behavior in the dance hall was regulated by manifested social distinctions. Berliners danced on a regular basis and their amusement was often connected to everyday life: Popular dancing was a chance to relax from the work routine, but such physical movements could also help to motivate night revelers for the next workday. In Berlin’s dance halls, a conglomeration of people from various backgrounds shared the same space but dancing bodies followed established distinctions of categories like class, race, and gender.

The advent of American popular dances could have potentially transformed this situation: Instead of choreographed figures, the central

3 E. Alexander-Katz, “Die Stadt ohne Nacht,” *Elegante Welt* 3, no. 19 (1914): 18 and 20.
Franz Wolf, “Berliner Nächte,” *Elegante Welt* 2, no. 24 (1913): 14-16, here: 16.

4 Alexander-Katz, “Die Stadt ohne Nacht,” 20.

5 A more detailed description of Metropolpalast and Palais de Danse is available in: Kerstin Lange, “Tanzvergnügen,” in *Weltstadtvergnügen: Berlin 1880-1930*, ed. Daniel Morat et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 74-108, here: 74-77.

6 F. v. Güntzel, “Zwischen Fünf und Sieben,” *Elegante Welt* 1, no. 11 (1912): 12-14.

7 Walter Turszinsky, *Berlin drüber weg und unten durch* (1911) (Berlin: Mann, 1999), 9 f.

concept of cakewalk, one-step and two-step was walking. In addition, the individuality of every dancing couple was important instead of a dancing formation that put order on the dance floor. However, American popular dances were regulated through ‘disciplining techniques’ like standardization and opposition aiming at the creation of the moral dancing body. In the dance hall, American popular dances were omnipresent but individuals only enjoyed them if they followed regulated social behavior. In this context, social distinctions actually controlled who was privileged enough to dance.

The Concept of American Popular Dances: The Individuality of Moving Bodies

The first American popular dance that became fashionable in Berlin and other German cities was the cakewalk. It gained attention from 1903 on and was performed on a regular basis on stage in the following years. The German press discussed this dance in detail, and early articles repeatedly told one particular story about its heritage: Originally, it was danced competitively by slaves on American plantations around a huge cake which would be the prize for the best couple.⁸ German visual sources (like postcards) made the connection between cakewalk and black culture in stereotyping and racist ways.⁹ During the first years of its presence in Imperial Germany, the importance of the cakewalk’s heritage faded. Instead, publications mentioned that it “originated in America.”¹⁰ Nonetheless, primary sources repeatedly described performances by black artists as “authentic.” One example is Hans Ostwald’s observation: “For a change, a real negro [leibhaftiger Neger] is dancing a totally authentic cakewalk.”¹¹ Such a claim for ‘authenticity’ was deeply connected to the constitution of the black body: A black protagonist would have the ‘natural’ ability to dance an ‘authentic’ cakewalk, while “it takes an enormous level of effort and energy for white people to acquire [...] this skill.”¹² Here, the black body was

8 “Der Cake Walk,” *Illustrierte Zeitung*, February 2, 1903, 204.

9 Astrid Kusser, *Körper in Schiefelage: Tanzen im Strudel des Black Atlantic um 1900* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013), 339-359.

10 W. K. von Jolizza, *Die Schule des Tanzes: Leichtfaßliche Anleitung zur Selbsterlernung moderner und alter Gesellschaftstänze* (Vienna and Leipzig: A. Hartleben, 1907), 133.

11 Hans Ostwald, *Berliner Tanzlokale* (Berlin and Leipzig: Hermann Seemann Nachfolger, 1905), 87.

12 “Die Entstehung des Exzentriktanzes,” *Das Variété* 9 (1902): s.p. Quoted in: Kusser, *Körper in Schiefelage*, 302.

defined in antagonism to the abilities of a white dancer. Sources that emphasized the ‘authenticity’ of the black dancer’s performance equated this term with an ‘original’ or ‘primitive’ way of dancing. Viewing the ‘other’ body was only significant for experiencing a performance and did not matter for Germans dancing the cakewalk in their free time. As I analyze later, amateur dancers experienced a ‘civilized’ version of this dance and primary sources do not reveal if they tried to imitate or mock performances of black artists.¹³

Dances that succeeded the cakewalk did not gain as much attention, although one-step and two-step were quite popular around 1912, the same time the tango was en vogue.¹⁴ Many contemporaries did not even care about the name of a particular dance but instead generalized using terms like American or modern dances. Therefore, it is often not possible to identify which dance was described.

Often, popular dances were distinguished by geographical categories: While tango, maxixe brésilienne, and matchiche were viewed as Latin American dances, cakewalk and two-step were American popular dances. Simultaneously the same dances were separated into sophisticated and eccentric dances. While the cakewalk and the so-called animal dances (like the turkey trot) belonged to the latter category, and therefore also mostly on stage, one-step and tango fulfilled the definition of a sophisticated dance.¹⁵ Opponents of any form of new popular dancing categorized them in a different way: Instead of applying terms like American or modern dancing, they frequently used the catch-all terms “Schiebetanz” (shuffling dance) and “Wackeltanz” (wiggling dance). This was a remarkable re-definition of the expression shuffling dance as it was used before to refer to the ‘uncivilized’ dancing of the lower classes.¹⁶ It is unclear why American popular dances were called

13 Ostwald mentions in his publication that “two pale-faced dancers accompanied” the “real negro.” This scene does not mention any form of ‘acting black’ or mockery. Ostwald, *Berliner Tanzlokale*, 87. In some cases, actors in blackface performed on stage. In the annual revue “Der Teufel lacht dazu” (1906) of the Metropol-Theater, Henry Bender and Fritzi Massary possibly performed the cakewalk. (They might have danced a can-can. Postcard and script of the revue do not reveal this aspect.) Tobias Becker, *Inszenierte Moderne: Populäres Theater in Berlin und London, 1880-1930* (Munich: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2014), 188-190.

14 For an analysis of discourses surrounding the tango in Imperial Germany, see: Kerstin Lange, *Tango in Paris und Berlin: Eine transnationale Geschichte der Metropolenkultur um 1900* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 124-185.

15 Franz Wolfgang Koebner and R. L. Leonard (eds.), *Das Tanz-Brevier* (Berlin: Eysler, 1913), 59 f. and 63.

16 Astrid Eichstedt and Bernd Polster, *Wie die Wilden: Tänze auf der Höhe ihrer Zeit* (Berlin: Rotbuch-Verlag, 1985), 17.

shuffling dances. One possible explanation might be that all shuffling dances had in common the close embrace. Other reasons include the negative connotations associated with both kinds of dances and the quick succession of American popular dances: using one term might have been easier than making distinctions within the (at least yearly) changing dance fashion. Of course, this is just my speculation and it is more important to keep in mind that the term was re-defined and used in a much broader way: not anymore for a single dance belonging to a particular social milieu but for American popular or modern dances in general.

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, many contemporaries viewed the importation of new dances as a fundamental turning point. Looking at the history of dancing since early modern Europe, such a perception was not uncommon. Whenever a new dance became popular, it was described as something very different from existing dances, and often contested.¹⁷ To some extent, the arrival of American popular dances in Imperial Germany and especially in Berlin indeed was a major change. For the first time, the differentiation between courtly dancing and the dancing culture of the masses was blurred.¹⁸ Traditionally, higher social strata enjoyed so-called formation dances like the gavotte and polonaise, which were directed by a “Tanzmeister” (dancing master).¹⁹ Choreographies like the star figure (part of the cotillion) or the promenade (part of the polonaise) were common for established European dances (figure 1a and 1b).

Each individual fulfilled a defined role within such formations and a dancing master created order and ‘accountability’ throughout the social event. In order to participate in such complicated choreographies, potential dancers had to take classes with a dancing instructor. In contrast, lower social strata generally did not receive dance lessons and stuck to folk dancing. Such dances consisted of simple movements and did not require learning complicated dance figures or formations.

17 One example is the appearance of the waltz: Vera Jung, *Körperlust und Disziplin: Studien zur Fest- und Tanzkultur im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2001), 48 ff. Remi Hess, *Der Walzer: Geschichte eines Skandals* (Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1996), 102 ff. Kusser, *Körper in Schiefelage*, 72 f.

18 A short historical overview of dancing is available in: Sibylle Dahms (ed.), *Tanz* (Basel: Bärenreiter, 2001), in particular: 62-84.

19 For more information about the role of the dancing master, see: Monika Fink, *Der Ball: Eine Kulturgeschichte des Gesellschaftstanzes im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Innsbruck and Vienna: StudienVerlag, 1996), 67-79.

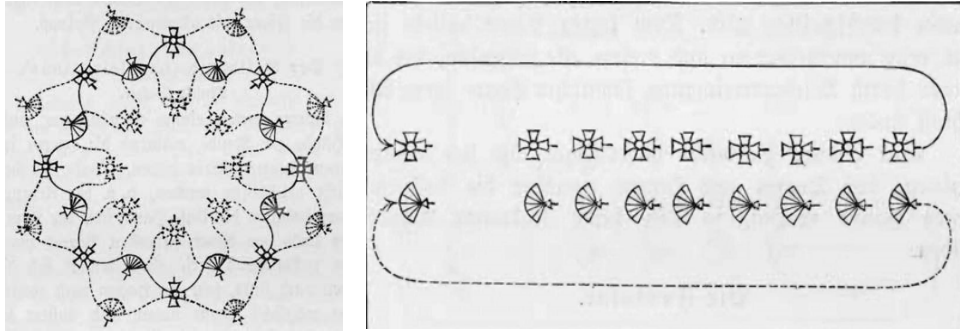


Figure 1a-b: Drawings (bird's eye view) of a) the star figure and b) part of the promenade.²⁰

All social strata enjoyed American popular dances. Like folk dances, they could easily be imitated because they shared characteristics that simplified dancing: They did not consist of formations and dance figures, and the main principle of moving forward was walking. For example, the main principle of the cakewalk was to walk around as a couple through the dance hall and then add a range of movements. Dancing bodies moved in various directions (and not just forward), but also on the spot, leaning to the side or even performing knee bends (figure 2b).²¹ Furthermore, the performance and variety of dancing steps changed dramatically. For example, dancing one-step or two-step meant leaving the foot on the floor and even sliding, while the fish walk required small hopping steps or the legs to be raised high.²² These various expressions of physicality were not characterized as figures but as a variety of movements that could be combined in endless ways.



Figure 2a-d: Photographs of the famous dancers Oscar and Suzette.²³

20 Both illustrations were published in: Jolizza, *Die Schule des Tanzes*, 105 and 109.

21 Max Geißler, "Das Linkstanzen," *Allgemeine Deutsche Tanzlehrer-Zeitung (ADTZ)* 15, no. 4 (1912): 23 f.

22 "Von neuen Tänzen," *ADTZ* 17, no. 8/9 (1914): 51 f.

23 These photographs were published in: Koebner and Leonard, *Das Tanz-Brevier*, 66 f.

Apart from the increased flexibility of the moving body, body postures changed in general. The cakewalk embodied a bent body to such an extent that it became the signifier of the dance: standing next to each other, the dancers did not touch each other, the upper bodies leaned backwards, and the arms as well as one leg typically were raised in the air (figure 3).



Figure 3: This postcard (ca. 1903) is part of a series depicting various stages of dancing the cakewalk.²⁴

Animal dances like the turkey trot or grizzly bear shared the characteristic of the bent body but in a more diverse way: for example, dancers performed very wide steps and knee bends. In addition to those features, these dances were actually designed to be imitations of animals, the “grotesque” walk of a turkey and a bear’s “ungraceful” steps. In contrast, the body posture of one-step and two-step was more reminiscent of the days of the polka or gavotte, since the bodies were not bent. Feet and arms stayed much more in previously known positions.

In general, body postures were much more flexible due to various forms of the embrace. Previously, dancers held each other at a certain distance but with the new dances, the body posture could even change during a single dance between the close and open embrace. Most of the

²⁴ Astrid Kusser also analyzed these postcards: Kusser, *Körper in Schiefelage*, 300. The series can be accessed at the collection “Kolonialismus und afrikanische Diaspora auf Bildpostkarten” (Cologne University, Library): <http://www.ub.uni-koeln.de/cdm/compoundobject/collection/kolonial/id/5157/rec/85> (last access: May 6, 2016).

time, primary sources describe the embrace as being close and the arms were often placed on the hips; as a result, the dance partners' knees touched. With such an embrace, the upper body was held stiff while the lower body was dancing. The dancers' faces were barely visible to each other due to the close proximity or because of a dancing posture in which the arms were raised, as was common for the fish-walk. When switching to the open embrace, dancers did not touch each other for a few measures, as was common in many figures of the one-step.²⁵ The photographs of Oscar and Suzette performing the turkey trot illustrate that the embrace could constantly change from close (figure 2d) to open (figure 2c) and that sometimes, the dancers did not touch each other at all (figure 2a).

Whatever the way the dancers moved over the dance floor, the distinction between leading and following was always a gendered one. The man was responsible for leading the woman over the dance floor without running into other couples. In addition, his dancing moves had to make the couple look respectable: "He has to pay attention to the appearance of the woman, whom he holds in his arms and who is a will-less creature [...]." The woman's part of couple dancing was clearly defined: She had to follow the man's lead not in a passive way but "she has to sense what the partner wants."²⁶

While common gender roles were not transformed by the new dances, one aspect significantly changed. As a dancing master did not choreograph anymore, the focus was on each individual couple so that viewed from above, dancers would look like "drunken microbes."²⁷ The individual dancing couple decided how to dance; the collective organization via formations of multiple couples had vanished. However, spatial limitations on the dance floor and the music could restrict movements and control activity.

The rhythm of ragtime was so distinctive due to syncopation that it automatically had an impact on the physical experience. Music and dancing depended on each other: "An amusing sight is two such closely spaced people, who are merged in the rhythm of the music: A vibrating, tremendous rhythm in the limbs. If the music stopped, the dancers

25 K. O. Ebner, "Von der Quadrille zum ‚Turkey Trot‘: Eine Tanzstudie," *Elegante Welt* 1, no. 8 (1912): 14 and 16. Franz Wolfgang Koebner, "Die Bälle der Behrenstraße: Metropol – Palais de Danse," *Elegante Welt* 1, no. 8 (1912): 10-13. Franz H. Martin, "One Step," *Elegante Welt* 1, no. 48 (1912): 10 f.

26 Ebner, "Von der Quadrille zum Turkey Trot," 16.

27 Koebner and Leonard, *Das Tanz-Brevier*, 107.

would be dead on the spot.”²⁸ Apart from this restriction, the new role of the dancing couple was connected to a sense of individuality and individual dancing;²⁹ dancers did not follow choreographed formations anymore. In short, the principle and concept of American popular dancing was walking in multiple directions with the addition of various steps, body postures and embraces. While this idea and concept of dancing seems to embrace the experience and practice of (gendered) individuality on the dance floor, in actuality a process of standardization organized and arranged dancers within urban dance halls.

Standardization and ‘Civilization’ of American Popular Dances

As soon as American popular dances arrived in Germany, a process of standardization started: Dancing connoisseurs and instructors published descriptions in books, as pamphlets or as part of music scores. Such manuals aimed at an autodidactic approach of dancing, so that individuals would not have to pay for dance lessons. At the same time, descriptions inevitably also led to a standardization of dances; therefore, the concept of individual dancing and individuality was contested by such publications.

Although the dance fashion changed quickly, most dancing descriptions focused on the cakewalk. In 1906, two Austrian aristocrats, Baronin Johanna Krauss and Lizzy von Waldheim, published *Die Schule des Tanzes* (The Dancing School) under the pseudonym W. K. Jolizza. The book described established and new dances, provided a history of dancing, and delivered instructions on how to behave in the dance hall. The authors provided a textual description of how to dance the cakewalk by applying the same rules as for the established European dances: They divided the dance into seven figures and explained the movements by using typical French dance terminology (e.g. “balancé” and “tour de main”).³⁰ They integrated the cakewalk into the tradition of the European dances and did not present it as a novelty. The process of standardization is difficult to reconstruct, as the descriptions do not provide a comparison with an archetype, but it is clear that Jolizza

28 Ebner, “Von der Quadrille zum Turkey Trot,” 16. Also: Franz Wolfgang Koebner, “Rags,” *Elegante Welt* 2, no. 5 (1913): 11-14, here: 14. Id., “Die Bälle der Behrenstraße,” 10.

29 Ebner, “Von der Quadrille zum Turkey Trot,” 14.

30 Jolizza, *Die Schule des Tanzes*, 134 f.

replaced or removed potentially provocative movements in order to control the body: “the crude steps and grotesque skips of the negroes were largely replaced with modern dancing steps.”³¹ The authors also attempted in a different way to turn the cakewalk into a “graceful” dance: The movements of the rounds through the dance hall are described as fluid rather than abrupt, and arms are raised “gracefully,” which eliminated the notion of dancing the cakewalk as akin to experiencing an epileptic seizure.³²

The music score of Otto Teich’s *Hänschen und Fränzchen* is a second example for a textual description of the cakewalk.³³ Like in the previous example, the dance was divided up into several figures, here six instead of seven. The author of this description focused on the dancers’ changing positions: with each figure, man and woman stand in different relations to each other. In addition, the dancing steps were standardized since the description guides the dancer when to raise the knee or lean the upper body backwards. The author did not mention the concept of walking but relied on dancing figures. Surprisingly, since the description is part of a music score, no reference to the music exists: Dance and music paradoxically seem to be disconnected. In contrast, Jolizza’s publication actually mentioned how specific steps should be synchronized with the music and provided more details; the authors even standardized when the dancers should hold accessories (like a necklace or a hat).³⁴

A third example of the standardization of the cakewalk is the music score of Adolf Kunz’s *Cake Walk*. In contrast to the previous instructions, this one combined text with images of a dancing couple on the cover.³⁵ The textual explanation is very similar to the previous examples with one major exception: The author added that each figure should be danced for eight bars. This standardization gave dancers the opportunity to actively combine the music with the description. The performance of steps was not explained but the images portrayed how the dancers should stand with respect to each other and highlighted using accessories (top hat and handkerchief).

Through the means of standardization and ‘civilization,’ these three descriptions aimed at teaching the cakewalk without any grotesque or humorous elements. In contrast, the manual accompanying *Jim & Mary’s*

31 Ibid., 133.

32 Ibid.

33 Otto Teich, *Hänschen und Fränzchen* (Leipzig: Otto Teich, n.d.), 1.

34 Jolizza, *Die Schule des Tanzes*, 134.

35 Adolf Kunz, *Cake Walk = Kuchentanz* (Berlin: Adolf Kunz, n.d.).

Cake-Walk repeatedly emphasized grotesque aspects.³⁶ Instead of dividing up the cakewalk into figures, the textual description focused on “grotesque” characteristics: “the dance demands grotesque movements” as well as a “grotesque body posture.” However, the unknown author of this description did not give any further explanation what grotesque dancing would be, since the cakewalk “will not be a common dance” but will mainly be important for stage performances. The reader got a glimpse of how the cakewalk functioned but the description was too general to actually serve as teaching material.

In contrast to the previous examples, *Der perfekte Tänzer* (The Ideal Dancer) from 1914 provided instructions for one-step and two-step. In total seven pages long, the manual provided short textual descriptions and only included drawings for the tango.³⁷ The manual describes steps from the male perspective. Following the gendered understanding of dancing, the author defined female dancing as an intuitive social practice: the woman would just pick up correct steps through the male dancer’s guidance. Although this is probably the most obvious example for the representation of gendered dancing, the other aspects of standardization happened in relation to former dances. In contrast to Jolizza, *Der perfekte Tänzer* did not employ French terms but instead compared the two-step with the previously popular polka by identifying similarities as well as differences.

While all of these descriptions controlled the dancing body in the city through different techniques of standardization, one book offered a completely different approach. In 1913, Franz Wolfgang Koebner published the *Tanz-Brevier*, a conglomeration of various aspects of dancing: dances, music, spaces, and social behavior. Being published in several editions, it was one of the most popular descriptions of modern popular dancing. Like *Der perfekte Tänzer*, Koebner presented introductions to several dances but did not provide descriptions of every single figure and body movement. Instead, he explained the general idea of the dances and introduced the reader to the concept of walking, instead of focusing on specific figures. Illustrations only showed particularly significant moments of some dances, for example a specific body posture or step.³⁸ Koebner’s goal was not to teach a correct execution of the dances but to introduce his audience to the

36 Harry Cooper, Jim & Mary’s Cake-Walk: Amerikanischer Negertanz (Leipzig: Carl Rühle, n.d.), cover.

37 Ph. Müller, *Der perfekte Rag-, Onestep-, Twostep-, Boston- und Tango-Tänzer* (Berlin: Harmonie, 1914), 3 f.

38 Koebner and Leonard, *Das Tanz-Brevier*, 63.

individuality of dancing due to walking and the flexibility of steps, body posture, and embrace.³⁹

In contrast to the previously analyzed dancing descriptions, the *Tanz-Brevier* provided information in a chapter about the so-called animal dances. Koebner explained the heritage of turkey trot and grizzly bear, accompanied by photographs of a dancing couple. Although he repeatedly emphasized that animal dances should be performed on stage and only danced in the ballroom by professionals, he gave a hint on how to dance the grizzly bear: it should almost be performed like a one-step.⁴⁰ Since animal dances were often viewed in a negative way, Koebner actually questioned such a characterization by including details about them in his book.

In all of these manuals, standardization of American popular dances took place through different techniques: Most authors explained modern dances in the same way as they had taught gavotte or polka. As a result, they decided to remove the concept of walking from the cakewalk, one-step and two-step. Another disciplinary technique was gendered standardization by reinforcing the male dancer as the learner and active dancer while the female partner was defined as an intuitive follower. Jolizza's attempt of making the cakewalk more "graceful" translated to whitewashing and 'civilizing' it. If the cakewalk was described as a grotesque dance, it was standardized as not being fashionable and at most belonging on the stage. All of these standardizations were disciplinary techniques attempting to control dancing bodies in the city. Furthermore, dancing instructors tried to have individual bodies dance in step with their vision of society.

Attempts of Regulation through Opposition: Dancing Instructors as Agents of Morality

As soon as American popular dances were discussed and witnessed at dance halls, dancing instructors belonging to professional associations felt the need to speak up in order to prevent them from spreading.⁴¹ Their profession was respected, since instructors not only explained

39 Ibid., 22-25.

40 Ibid., 63.

41 For earlier discussions about dancing, see: Elisabeth Kosok, "Die Reglementierung des Vergnügens: Konzessionspraxis und Tanzbeschränkungen im Ruhrgebiet (1879-1914)," in *Kirmes – Kneipe – Kino: Arbeiterkultur im Ruhrgebiet zwischen Kommerz und Kontrolle (1850-1914)*, ed. Dagmar Kift (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1992), 60-82, here: 71. Lange, "Tanzvergnügen," 94-104.

figures but also represented, educated, and controlled social norms and behaviors. In 1913, approximately 200 German instructors were members of the professional association *Bund deutscher Tanzlehrer* (Association of German Dancing Instructors) which had been founded in 1898.⁴² This organization followed a federal structure, organized meetings and conferences, offered professional dancing classes, and published the journal *Allgemeine Deutsche Tanzlehrer-Zeitung* (ADTZ).

With the success of cakewalk, one-step and two-step, dancing instructors feared that their mastery of formation dances would be irrelevant, since these new fashionable dances could be imitated instead of being taught. Quite a few instructors also feared losing their reputation as pedagogues for social behavior and as educators and civilizers of the nation, so that they would be reduced to “Maîtres de Plaisir.”⁴³ In two nationwide journals (ADTZ and *Der Tanzlehrer*), dancing instructors referred to the importance of dancing for morality in connection to nationalism. However, the material dimension of their compounded financial situation also resonated: Most dancing instructors were part of a professional association that fought offers for cheap dancing lessons in the cities' taverns and bars.⁴⁴ In 1913, members of the professional organizations discussed controlling offers and advertisement for dance lessons through a nation-wide law: they expected the government to regulate the quality of dancing lessons and protect their exclusive right to teach under the umbrella of nationalism and morality.⁴⁵

In addition, dancing instructors tried in several ways to regulate the new dances. At first, they trusted in the “good taste” of their pupils who would not be willing to dance the cakewalk. Teachers were convinced that modern dancing would soon and ultimately vanish from urban ballrooms and that the established European dances would return.⁴⁶ However, they quickly realized that this strategy would not pay off, as the modern dances were popular among all social strata and were being danced in various social contexts and spaces within the city. As a result, dancing instructors tried different strategies in order to dismiss, diminish the influence of, and ultimately ban the unwelcomed dances.

42 Lange, *Tango in Paris und Berlin*, 144-152, here: 147 f.

43 J. R. Boßhardt, “Mode-Tänze,” ADTZ 16, no. 8/9 (1913): 54.

44 This already happened before the cakewalk became popular. See: H. L., “Mißstände im Gewerbe des Tanz-Unterrichts,” *Der Tanzlehrer* 10, no. 10 (1902): 74 f.

45 “Sitzung der Vorstände der vereinigten 5 Deutschen Tanzlehrer-Vereine am 19. März 1913 in Berlin,” ADTZ 16, no. 5 (1913): 28-31.

46 Jürgen Schmidt, “Moderne Tänze,” *Der Tanzlehrer* 20, no. 3 (1911): 18 f.

From 1903 on, dancing instructors extensively discussed modern popular dancing. In their professional journals, they tried to motivate their colleagues not to teach them, discussed health problems that result from the practice of those dances and refused to publish descriptions of any modern dance. Apart from spreading a negative image of the dances, instructors worked on reviving choreographed dances and invented new ones in order to reduce the interest of colleagues and customers in teaching or dancing the foreign novelties.⁴⁷ The journal *Der Tanzlehrer* even published a series of articles providing advice on how to create a new dance. Unsurprisingly, the major suggestion was to create formation dances in order to return to the choreographed order within the dance hall.⁴⁸ Therefore, the role of the individual couple on the dance floor was de-emphasized. In short, the collegial advice was in every way antagonistic to the concept of American popular dances, as analyzed above. In this first phase of battling the new dance fashion, professionals tried to emphasize the importance of the waltz as a patriotic German dance that when danced would intensify national sentiments.⁴⁹

Since dance creations were rare and unsuccessful and American popular dances gained more and more attention especially in the city, dancing instructors changed their strategy. At the conference of German dancing instructors in September 1911, their association agreed on a resolution that each member would be responsible for forbidding such dancing.⁵⁰ Since this resolution did not result in substantive improvements, in June 1913, professional associations sent a deputation to Berlin's police president seeking the establishment of a "law" against the shuffling dances.⁵¹

47 Josef Häusler, "Zur Reform der Tanzkunst," *Der Tanzlehrer* 20, no. 3 (1911): 21. Max Geißler, "Die neuen Tänze," *ADTZ* 16, no. 12 (1913): 71-73. J. Scht., "Neue Tänze," *Der Tanzlehrer* 10, no. 10 (1902): 76 f. F. L. Schubert, "Alte und neue Tänze," *Der Tanzlehrer* 11, no. 2 (1902): 9-11.

48 Karl Link sen., "Was soll man bei der Komposition eines neuen Tanzes beobachten," *Der Tanzlehrer* 11, no. 6 (1903): 43.

49 Elfriede Hoppe, "Verschiedenes vom Tanzen," *Der Tanzlehrer* 19, no. 1 (1909): 6 f.

50 "Gegen den Schiebetanz," *Der Tanzlehrer* 20, no. 1 (1911), 6 f.

51 The usage of the term "law" is problematic as Germany was a constitutional state in which a parliament, not the police, passed laws; the police could only issue regulations on the local or regional level. Nonetheless, dancing instructors' associations, morality leagues, and private individuals who requested a regulation in their local region used the term "law" – probably in order to highlight their wish for a restriction by the state and not just by the local police. "Der Polizeipräsident gegen die Schiebetänze," *Der Volkswart* 6, no. 7 (1913): 109. "Gegen die Schiebetänze," *Der Volkswart* 6, no. 7 (1913): 108 f.

As a response to petitions, several dancing regulations were issued all over Germany in 1913.⁵² Apart from a few exceptions, the local administration or police department generally prohibited shuffling and wiggling dances. In practice, the broad language of these regulations enabled the police to subsume as many dances as possible under the regulation and to redefine what constituted an inappropriate dance.⁵³ Concerning the punishment, regulations generally referred to the paragraphs 183 (public obscenity) and 360 (public nuisance) of the *Reichsstrafgesetzbuch* (German Penal Code).⁵⁴ An exception was the police regulation for Dresden, which only forbade dancing the grizzly bear: "The dancing girl opened her legs to the side so far that the underwear, stockings were visible, or while bending one leg to the front, she stretched the other so far backwards on the floor so that the pinafore dress rucked up and not only the lower leg with the stocking but even more a part of the naked thigh was visible."⁵⁵ Only few convictions actually took place but those were quoted extensively by morality campaigners and dancing instructors since they were viewed as victories for the supporters of regulations.⁵⁶ The rare appearance of complaints about immoral dancing and infrequent descriptions of policemen entering dance halls to inspect the goings-on suggest that despite vigorous moral attacks and regulations, the police seemed to have little interest in fighting immoral dancing in the city.⁵⁷

The call for police regulations was not a singular phenomenon taking place in Imperial Germany. Agents of morality and dancing instructors in other Western European countries as well as the United States debated and criticized the transformation of popular dancing. For example, the *United Kingdom Alliance of Professional Teachers* published

52 Examples of regulations: "Schiebetänze polizeilich verboten," *Der Volkswart* 6, no. 1 (1913): 15. "Der Schiebetanz," *Der Volkswart* 6, no. 2 (1913): 27 f. "Mit der Angelegenheit des sogenannten Schiebetanzes," *Der Volkswart* 6, no. 2 (1913): 28. "Auch gegen den Schiebetanz," *Der Volkswart* 6, no. 3 (1913): 44 f. "Zur Abwehr der unsittlichen Tänze," *Der Volkswart* 6 (1913): 63. "Ein Verbot der anstößigen Tänze," *Der Volkswart* 6, no. 8 (1913): 127.

53 "Der unsittliche Schiebetanz," *ADTZ* 15, no. 2 (1912): 13. Franz Wolfgang Koebner, "Der Tango und Herr v. Jagow," *Elegante Welt* 2, no. 27 (1913): 4 f.

54 "Der Polizeipräsident gegen die Schiebetänze," 109.

55 Koebner, "Der Tango und Herr v. Jagow," 4 f. Other exceptions were made in provincial areas and prohibited, for example, the darkening of dance halls. "Verbot von Unsitten im Tanzwesen," *Der Volkswart* 6, no. 10 (1913): 158. "Der Schiebetanz," 27 f.

56 "Der unsittliche Schiebetanz," 13. "Ein Opfer des Schiebetanzes," *Der Tanzlehrer* 20, no. 11 (1912): 90. "Gegen die Schiebetänze," 108 f.

57 Karl Kingsley Kitchen, *The Night Side of Europe: As Seen by a Broadwayite Abroad* (Cleveland: David Gibson Company, 1914), 23-26.

a rejection of the turkey trot and upper-class hostesses of balls complained in the London *Times* about the animal dances.⁵⁸ In the United States, opposition to dancing had a long tradition and entering the dance hall was viewed by social reformers as the “entrance to hell itself.” Activist Jane Addams even requested the closing of dance halls to save “future generations.” The possibility of a close embrace led opponents to conclude that already existent dangers would be exacerbated in public, like alcohol and sexual encounters before marriage.⁵⁹ In contrast to Imperial Germany, members of the church participated in this discussion and it seems that physicians were also significantly more involved. Bans against dancing in public were common and local police chiefs all over the country shut down public dances when animal dances were performed or couples danced in a sexualized way.⁶⁰ Reports of these bans only describe which urban locations were raided, if guests were arrested and whether the space was closed. Therefore, it is unclear what the police’s motivations for these actions were and if dancing instructors supported such bans.

Although dancing instructors were heavily invested in banning American popular dances, their success was limited. Even if local police regulations were put in place, dancers were rarely punished. In contrast to the United States, locations were not raided. German dancing instructors attempted to create a disciplined body in order to maintain their professional standing as teachers of morality and nationalism as well as to prevent potential unemployment. For the most part, their strategies to regulate dancing did not affect night revelers in Berlin. Therefore, dancing instructors were invested in a general discourse about modern popular dancing but could only reach members of their profession and did not have a significant impact on society.

With Germany’s defeat in World War I, dancing instructors finally could not avoid coming to terms with American popular dances. The associations gave in to the great demand for such leisure and started to teach the foxtrot and its accompanying dances. Professional

58 “Abused Turkey Trot Spreads in London,” *The New York Times*, February 18, 1912, C2. “Turkey Trot Denounced,” *The New York Times*, February 25, 1912, C3. “Modern Dancing: A Peeress’s Protest to the Editor of the Times,” *The Times*, May 20, 1913, 9. “Modern Dancing: English and American Comment,” *The Times*, May 21, 1913, 11. “Modern Dancing: A Peeress’s Protest,” *The Times*, May 22, 1913, 11. “Modern Dancing,” *The Times*, May 24, 1913, 43. “Modern Dancing and Manners,” *The Times*, May 26, 1913, 9. “On Stage,” *The Times*, February 6, 1912, 10.

59 Mark Knowles, *The Wicked Waltz and Other Scandalous Dances: Outrage and Couple Dancing in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2009), 12 f.

60 *Ibid.*, 93f.

organizations still promoted a nation-wide standardization of popular dancing, but these attempts failed. Dancing instructors belonging to associations were individualistic and more interested in selling their manuals than following through with a national and moral way of dancing.⁶¹ In Imperial and Weimar Germany, dancing instructors demonstrated to some extent the will to standardize popular dancing but attempts failed to implement it: The organization of physical movements and policing remained a wish on the dance floor and in this sense, urban bodies were not disciplined. So if instructors did not succeed with their regulation strategies, was popular dancing indeed an individualized matter in the cities?

Regulated Bodies in Urban Dance Halls

As mentioned in the introduction, a huge diversity of dance halls existed in Berlin at the beginning of the twentieth century. The Palais de Danse was a place for the mondaine and demimondaine and one of Berlin's most prominent dance halls in the urban center. The main room measured 400 m² and mirrors gave the impression of an even larger space decorated with marble, plastering, and expensive furniture.⁶² The dance floor was surrounded by tables and next to it stood a platform for the musicians; one level higher, a balcony invited guests to spend time and watch the dancers. Even though the Palais de Danse was one of the larger spaces, visitors wrote that even there, a ritualization of night life existed: "everywhere the same people, the same faces."⁶³

More intimate spaces like the Eispalast-Kasino in the Bayerisches Viertel, a type of modern bar-restaurant, were structured in a different way. Around the dance floor were tables with wicker chairs, on the left side an estrade, on the right side a bar. Due to the size and composition of the space, "only the good dancers venture to produce themselves here."⁶⁴ Such a place was much more intimate than a larger venue like the Palais de Danse.

61 I analyze this development in Chapter 4 of my dissertation. The manuscript will be defended in 2017. Please contact me in case you would like to read this chapter.

62 "Der Metropolpalast in der Behrenstraße," *Die Bauwelt* 1, no. 75 (1910): 21 f.

63 Güntzel, "Zwischen Fünf und Sieben," 14. Alexa Geisthövel, "Das Tanzlokal," *Orte der Moderne: Erfahrungswelten des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Alexa Geisthövel and Habbo Knoch (Frankfurt a. M.: Campus, 2005), 141-150.

64 Koebner, "Die Bälle der Behrenstraße," 10-13.

Berlin's suburbs offered various locations for dancing; those spaces were mainly frequented by the working class.⁶⁵ Their interior was modest, rooms often filled with tobacco smoke, guests drank beer instead of champagne while they sat at tables along the wall, and the remainder of the room functioned as dance floor.⁶⁶ Here, amusement was not just relaxation from a hard working day but dancers received new energy to go back to the factory the next day.⁶⁷

Although various kinds of dance halls existed, they had one aspect in common. At first glance, night revelers gave the impression of being a homogenous crowd that could be categorized into dancers and spectators. On the contrary, these spaces were heavily structured by social distinctions and categories like gender, class, and race. In many cases, only certain social strata had easy access to certain dance halls. According to Koebner, only gentlemen and "the supposed worst audience of dames" frequented the Palais de Danse.⁶⁸ It is not clear how Koebner actually defined gentlemen in this context.⁶⁹ Whatever their background was, they mainly danced with working class women (from the suburbs) hired by the manager of the dance hall to make sure that enough women were present. In addition, prostitutes visited the Palais de Danse looking for customers.⁷⁰ The travel guide *Berlin bei Nacht* (Berlin at Night) from 1910 provided descriptions of dancing women by presenting three stereotypes: the working girl Lucie who prostitutes herself, the happy Jewish girl Lilly and Mi, the lovesick woman. Only the first type, the working woman, was described in a detailed way: "Girls

65 Concerning social life in the dance hall: Stefan Bajohr, "PartnerInnenwahl im Braunschweiger Arbeitermilieu 1900 bis 1933," *Jahrbuch für Forschungen zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung* (2003): 83-98, here: 85 f.

66 Fedor von Zobeltitz, *Chronik der Gesellschaft unter dem letzten Kaiserreich*, vol. 2: 1902-1914 (Hamburg: Alster-Verlag, 1922), 252 f.

67 Ostwald, *Berliner Tanzlokale*, 84. See also: Astrid Kusser, "Arbeitsfreude und Tanzwut im (Post-)Fordismus," *Body Politics* 1, no. 1 (2013): 41-69, here: 53-55.

68 Koebner, "Die Bälle der Behrenstraße," 12.

69 He might have followed ideas expressed in *Der Gentleman* which was published one year later. Franz Wolfgang Koebner, *Der Gentleman: Ein Herrenbrevier* (Berlin: Eysler, 1913).

70 Ludwig Ernst, "Tanz und Mode: Präludien zum Münchener Karneval," *Allgemeine Rundschau* 11, no. 4 (1914): 56-58. Willi Wolff-Jeanquirit, *Berlin bei Nacht: Ein gründlicher Wegweiser durch das nächtliche Berlin vom frühen Abend bis zum späten Morgen* (Berlin: Marcus, 1910), 89-91. Knowles, *The Wicked Waltz and Other Scandalous Dances*, 80 f. Julie Malign, "Apaches, Tangos, and other Indecencies: Women, Dance, and New York Nightlife of the 1910s," *Ballroom, Boogie, Shimmy Sham, Shake: A Social and Popular Dance Reader*, ed. Ead. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 72-90.73-109 (chapter 3: Low-Down Whiteness, A Trip to Coontown)., n American Performance American populr dances but ny as well as the

with loud, cheap demimonde-clothes. Girls with poorly dressed hair. [...] One can easily observe their life in the factory or their existence as a maid.”⁷¹ Such a ‘male gaze’ suggests a fascination for (potentially) interacting with those “girls” and how easily they could be spotted. The crowd at a dance hall was by no means homogenous because fashion immediately gave away the social background.⁷²

Looking for ‘the other,’ the working woman, happened not only at sites like the Palais de Danse but also in a different context: when men from higher social strata went to the dance halls in suburbs. In his chronicle, Fedor von Zobeltitz described how he went in 1911 to a ball in Halensee. To some extent, curiosity drove him there but at the same time, he took pains to highlight that his journey was an ethnological undertaking: “I see, I thought, here dances the common folk.” According to Zobeltitz, most female guests were minor shop assistants and “not demanding” since one asked him to pay for a beer while he gave another woman ten pennies for using the cloakroom. At this point, his narrative reveals that he implied by the description “not demanding” characteristics like naïve, innocent, and childish: “[She] wanted to sit down next to me right away, probably because she thought that I am rich.” Zobeltitz described his reaction as being “amused” and invited the woman for dinner. After she asked him to dance and Zobeltitz refused, he described how he bought dessert and “now she was really moved.”⁷³ The constant repetition of buying food for women pleased Zobeltitz. His narrative is valuable as an example of the ‘male gaze’ on women from lower social strata. Zobeltitz was not just fascinated by ‘the other’ but specifically enjoyed that women were, according to him, so easily impressed by his donation of dinner and cream puffs.

Contact between men and women from lower social strata did not happen in one circumstance: If a female relative accompanied a gentleman to a place like the Palais de Danse, he “remain[ed] at the table out of respect to them,” inhibiting this class-crossing contact.⁷⁴ Such gentlemen segregated themselves from the social intermingling on the dance floor by sitting with the women on the balcony above the dance floor where the “Jeuness [sic!] doreé” spent the nights. They participated in the slandering of women and the actions on the dance floor while remaining on the balcony: working class women, prostitutes and specific

71 Wolff-Jeanquirit, *Berlin bei Nacht*, 64 f.

72 Rae B. Gordon, “Fashion and the White Savage in the Parisian Music Hall,” *Fashion Theory* 8, no. 3 (2004): 267-300.

73 Zobeltitz, *Chronik der Gesellschaft unter dem letzten Kaiserreich*, 252 f.

74 Kitchen, *The Night Side of Europe*, 24.

types of dancers like the poseur who “behaves like peacock” were selected for ‘critique.’⁷⁵ Between the dance floor and the balcony was only the “heavily perfumed air, quivering with the sound of the rhythmic two-steps, the rustling of colored paper streamers, with swirling snow-white confetti.”⁷⁶ The strict social separation was bridged only when the women from the balcony threw confetti at the dance floor.

Noticed by all guests was the flamboyant appearance of pairs of dancing women, which was negatively connoted. Only women who were not sufficiently beautiful to attract a male dancing partner or those who were involved in a scandal formed female couples.⁷⁷ If a woman was part of a scandal or scandalous court trial, it was very likely that she only had other women available as dance partners.⁷⁸ Newspapers closely covered from July to October 1911 the trial of Graf Gisbert von Wolff-Metternich in Berlin, who had been accused thirty-one times of financial fraud. As a charming bon vivant, Wolff-Metternich had even tried to escape the trial by telling his creditors that he would soon marry Dolly Landsberger, daughter of the owner of the well-known department store Wertheim.⁷⁹ However, the “party animal” was unsuccessful and he was brought to court. The female star witness of the trial constantly appeared in newspaper articles and her role was discussed in depth: Elvira Gustke, the so-called Diamond Kitty, had allegedly lent over 1000 Mark to Wolff-Metternich. Whether this actually happened or not was unsolved. Over the course of the trial, Wolff-Metternich’s lawyer was successful in presenting the witness as a questionable person: He characterized her as a demimondaine and presented witnesses who denied Gustke’s profession as a dancer and instead called her a prostitute.⁸⁰ Although Gustke was able to refute such accusations in front of the judge and they did not matter for credibility, her reputation was destroyed. A woman associated with such a scandalous trial could not find male dancing partners anymore and therefore had to dance with other women.⁸¹

75 Paul Schüler, “Tanz im Sporthotel,” *Elegante Welt* 1, no. 7 (1912): 12 f.

76 Koebner, “Die Bälle der Behrenstraße,” 12.

77 Schüler, “Tanz im Sporthotel,” 12.

78 Koebner, “Die Bälle der Behrenstraße,” 12.

79 Hugo Friedländer, *Interessante Kriminal-Prozesse: Ein Pitaval des Kaiserreichs* (Berlin: Hermann Barsdorf, 1911-1921), 204-252.

80 “Graf Wolff-Metternich vor Gericht: Fünfter Verhandlungstag,” *Berliner Volks-Zeitung*, October 7, 1911, s.p. M. M., “Die Frauen im Metternich-Prozeß,” *B. Z.* am Mittag, October 6, 1911, s.p.

81 Koebner, “Die Bälle der Behrenstraße,” 12.

Apart from such regulations of social distinctions, it was also common to define the nationality of dancers based on their dancing style. Americans were described as excellent dancers but observers repeatedly mentioned the custom of chewing gum; the “Shewinggum” was only put into the cheek during the most interesting dances.⁸² Their dancing steps were specified as pacing or shuffling instead of dancing. While the American was characterized as the archetype of eccentric dancing, German cavaliers were thought to be docile pupils who never exceeded the imitation of original dances: “Happy when they are mistaken for being Americans by their appearance, they are already so two-steppized, that they will have lost, due to their assiduity and talent for imitation, every national nuance from their dances.”⁸³ Such a typology of dancing connected to nationality culminated in the statement that “everybody [...] [can] easily distinguish the nationality of the guests” at dance venues.⁸⁴ Even more, the description of the dancing German body leads to the conclusion that the standardization of American popular dances, as analyzed earlier in this article, was visible to a certain extent.

In contrast to class, gender, and nationality, race barely played a role in dance halls in Imperial Berlin. When it did, it happened in the context of a black performer dancing or making music. The few examples available in German publications highlight the distinction between the black performer and the audience. Hans Ostwald described in *Berliner Tanzlokale* the case of a black dancer performing an “authentic” cakewalk.⁸⁵ Another example were “mulattos and niggers [Nigger] [who] played and rumbled their own rhythm.”⁸⁶ In both cases, black performers were not guests but employed at the dance hall; they did not have any direct contact with the audience but instead were just watched in a racist way.

Conclusion

Popular dancing was an integral part of night life in Imperial Berlin. The appearance of American popular dances introduced night revelers to a

82 Martha von Zobelitz, “Im Walzer von Küste zu Küste,” *Elegante Welt* 1, no. 5 (1912): 16 f.

83 Schüler, “Tanz im Sporthotel,” 12.

84 Franz Wolf, “Tanzsaison in Paris und London,” *Elegante Welt* 1, no. 8 (1912): 20-22.

85 Ostwald, *Berliner Tanzlokale*, 87.

86 Franz Wolfgang Koebner, “Eispalast-Casino,” *Elegante Welt* 1, no. 15 (1912): 4 f., here: 4.

new concept of dancing: Instead of following a strict choreography, couples could decide how to combine figures and bodies moved into new directions. Only a minority, mostly dancing instructors and members of morality leagues, contested cakewalk and various step dances. For the first time in modern European history, individuals from different social strata enjoyed the same dances – in Berlin often even in the same dance halls. Even though walking was now the new concept of dancing and the newest fashion could easily be imitated without taking lessons, social distinctions still heavily regulated any form of social interaction of urban bodies. In this sense, popular dancing allowed mingling of different social strata but previously established social distinctions dictated who was able to enjoy the international fashion. Depending on categories like gender, class, race, and nationality, it was possible or impossible to be on the dance floor. In Imperial Berlin, popular dancing was not so much restricted by attempts of standardization or policing. Instead, urban bodies moved to international popular music and dances while dancing in step with the norms of German society.

Linda Braun, contact: linda (at) jhu.edu, is a Ph.D. Candidate in Modern European History at the Johns Hopkins University. She specializes in analyzing popular culture since the nineteenth century and connecting history and musicology further. Currently, she is writing her dissertation on ragtime and jazz cultures in Modern Germany, focusing on an analysis of the music itself as well as social practices like music performances and dancing.