

# Tell Me More: Dr. Fausters Tumblers

by Graham Christian

The last edition of *The Dancing Master, the Third Volume*, published c. 1726, included two dances with intriguing titles: “Dr. Fausters Tumblers” and “The Hey-Makers Dance in Faustus; or, Wing’s Maggot.” They are relics of the fierce rivalry between London’s two licensed theater companies in the first part of the 18th century, part of a heady brew of competition, innovation, and sheer hijinks. In November of 1723, the Drury Lane house produced *Harlequin Doctor Faustus*, an afterpiece in two parts, one that pertained to the famous magician’s mad exploits, with plenty of music by hitmaker Henry Carey (1687-1743; of “Sally in Our Alley” fame), stage effects, and sight gags, and an incongruous coda, a *Grand Masque of the Heathen Deities*, with still more song and dance, the latter devised by dancing master John Thurmond (1690-1754), culminating in a long minuet solo by Diana, portrayed by the great Hester (Santlow) Booth (1690-1773), known to English dancers now as the star of *The Fair Quaker of Deal*. Not all critics were impressed, but it scored a remarkable success of thirty-nine performances, at a time when a run of three days was considered good.

In what must have been something like panic, John Rich (1692-1761) and his colleagues at Lincoln’s Inn Fields rapidly devised a riposte: *The Necromancer; Or, Harlequin Doctor Faustus*, this time with music by the German-born composer Johann Ernst Galliard (1876-1749), who was a fine oboist, and supplied music for many of Lincoln’s Inn Fields’ productions in the period. Rich’s afterpiece was similar in length, but different in character, lacking gods and goddesses, and naturally emphasizing star turns by Rich himself in his celebrated character of Lun, the mute Harlequin. The Faust of these spectacles did not much resemble the restless philosopher of Goethe’s long play, the embodiment of Romantic disquiet. The pantomime Faust, having made his infernal bargain, uses his powers for a series of vulgar or trivial tricks, and his demise at the hands of demons is scarcely to be regretted. Country dance, however, is part of the fabric of *The Necromancer*, as we learn from a remarkably detailed account of both shows published in 1724, *An Exact Description of the two fam’d Entertainments of Harlequin Doctor Faustus; with the Grand Masque of the Heathen Deities; and the Necromancer; or Harlequin Doctor Faustus*.

In the second and third scenes of *The Necromancer*, four couples dressed as haymakers enter, and Faustus, having summoned music out of the air with his wand, watches as they wonder, and then begin a country dance, almost certainly to the tune we know as “The Hey-Makers Dance in Dr Faustus.” He “takes hold of one of the Men’s Hands, (who is going to lead ’em round in a Line one after another,) and fixing the Person still, who is at the other End, he runs round with ’em, till they are all bundled up together: Then; after peeping roguishly at ’em in that Posture, he waves his Wand, and in that Manner they dance off, and he makes his Exit.” The fifth scene featured the dazzling Nivelon brothers, Louis and Francis (fl. 1720-1730), who played eight roles in the show between them. In this scene, the brothers come to Faustus to have their fortunes told, and, not liking what they hear (they are both to be hanged), decide to defraud Faustus of his payment and leave the room, but “he soon puts a Stop to their Mirth, by the Wave of his Wand, and in an Instant brings ’em back on their Hands, making ’em in that Posture dance a Minuet round the Room; that finish’d, he permits ’em to go off.” Although the tune we have for “Dr Fausters Tumblers” is not a minuet, the *Description’s* author may have recalled the music for the scene imperfectly, and certainly the Nivelons would have seemed like tumblers. “Dr Fausters Tumblers” was reprinted by Walsh until at least 1754; both dances appear without music in *The Weekly Amusement* in 1735. Imagination, technical bedazzlement, and acrobatic skill guaranteed the lasting success of *The Necromancer*, which was revived in varying forms through the 1760s.

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D<sup>r</sup> Fausters Tumblers      Longways for as many as will      888887

Each Strain twice

The First Man Sets to the 2<sup>d</sup> Wo. and turns single and then Back to Back with her 3<sup>d</sup> The 2<sup>d</sup> Man and the first Wo. do the same 4<sup>th</sup> Then the first and 2<sup>d</sup> Man fall back to the Wall and the two Wo. the same at the same time and change into their Partners Places then all four fall back and change into their own Places 5<sup>th</sup> Then cast off and go the whole Figure with the 3<sup>d</sup> Cu and turn your Partner into her proper Place 6<sup>th</sup>

Dr Fausters Tumblers, from *The New Country Dancing Master*, 3d Book [1728]