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Library News

From the Dance Notation Bureau

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How I Survived as a Notator by Ray Cook



Photo #1 Main road in Carruchan, Australia, 1950s

You couldn't be further away from notation than my first fulltime job shoveling sawdust in a timber mill in Carruchan, a small bush town of thirty people in the north of Australia. I was paid two pound ten shillings (12 pennies an hour U.S.) for a five and a half-day workweek. **(PHOTO # 1)** Before coming to Carruchan when I was ten years old, my father had always taken my mother and me every two weeks to Brisbane, the capital of Queensland, to a vaudeville theater. There the theater bug had been planted in me, so much so that I was making toy theaters, stage scenery and cut out figures. Even at fourteen I knew that shoveling sawdust was not for me. Theater was already in my veins. Then my father offered me a choice—either he would buy me an electric train (which I had always wanted) and pay for me to have a holiday in Melbourne, or I could go away and join fifty other boy students from the outback and bush at a boarding school in Townsville. Knowing I had to get out of this very small bush town, the choice was obvious.

Near the end of the second year at The Townsville Grammar School, students had to take a vocational guidance test administered by the Department of Education. As a result, the only thing they could suggest for me was to be a window dresser. (They may have been right because twenty years later, when the curtain went up on my production of *The Mikado* at New York's Fashion Institute of Technology, the audience burst into applause for my simple stage setting.) However, there was a shortage of school teachers at this time, so I applied for and received a scholarship. It paid for my next two years of education at the Grammar School with the understanding that I would continue on to the Teachers' Training College

in Brisbane. Every two weeks all boys at the school went to the local outdoor movie theater. One week the movie we were scheduled to see was *Snake Pit* which the Headmaster thought unfit for young boys. The next week was *An American in Paris*. I entered the theater wanting to be a school teacher, but left knowing I had to be a dancer. The following week I took my first ballet class at the age of eighteen.

While training to be a school teacher in Brisbane, I continued my ballet classes, but they were cut short with my next fulltime job teaching in a primary school for the Department of Education in Ayre, a small town in the sugarcane district in the north of Australia. If you came from the outback or bush, you were sent back there because a city teacher would not survive in those environments. When I found out what was going to happen to me, I went to the head of the Teachers' College and begged him not to send me there. When I told him I wanted to teach dance in the schools, he replied, "Over my dead body." I wonder what he would say now that public schools in my home state of Queensland have a thriving dance program? My father said I was ahead of my time.

I was teaching in Ayre when I turned twenty-one and won a share in a lottery prize. This enabled me to quit teaching and go back to Brisbane to continue studying ballet fulltime. After repaying the Educational Department for my scholarship and with only fifty pounds left, I knew that if I did not escape then I would never escape. Heading south to Melbourne I secured a job with the Postal Department. There I mistakenly put a decimal in the wrong place and posted off a money order for thousands of pounds. Under threat of being fired, I returned to my desk, looked at all the dancers I had drawn on my blotting pad and walked out so that I could study with Margaret Scott, who, not having trained in the school of Russian ballet, was not welcome as a teacher at the Borovansky Ballet School. I next took a job in the railways waving trains in and out, collecting tickets and cleaning toilets. What I remember most was getting up at 4:00 A.M. and walking through the streets of Melbourne littered with "dead" bodies for a filming of *On the Beach*.

During the years that I worked for a living I studied with Margaret Scott and at the Victorian Ballet Guild as well as the school of the Borovansky Ballet. I auditioned for and was accepted by the Borovansky Ballet, which is now the Australia Ballet. Thus began the first stage of my life working as a fulltime dancer. While with the company I met Meg Abby, an Australian dancer who had recently returned from America where she had studied Labanotation. At the Victorian Ballet Guild I attended an evening lecture on Labanotation by Meg. To challenge her statement that Labanotation could record any movement, a gentleman in the front row asked her to record what he was doing—sitting with legs crossed and smoking a cigarette. She did it and I was hooked. The next day I signed up for my first lesson. And so began my lifetime obsession with Labanotation.

As a new company member, I learned the dances for the corps de ballet, which included *The Three Ivans* from *The Sleeping Beauty*, while continuing my study of Labanotation by correspondence with Meg.¹ Borovansky died during my first year in the company. He was replaced by Peggy van Praagh from London. van Praagh taught the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) method—tight fifths and tight expressionless face. She immediately fired all dancers, who, like me, were not technically proficient. The two principal dancers asked her to not fire me, promising they would work privately with me. "No," she said. "He has a nice quality, but he has to go." She suggested that I could sell shoes.

Discouraged but knowing I had to keep dancing, I auditioned for the first overseas company of *West Side Story* (**PHOTO #2**). Before they realized that I could not sing in tune, I was hired. I had a basic knowledge of music and asked Dobbs Frank, the company's music director from America, if he could teach me to read the music score for *West Side Story*. He did, and I practiced beating out rhythms on my body as I walked the streets of Sydney. I think that it was meant for me to be fired from the ballet company because now I had a clear focus that made me more determined than ever to get to America. I wanted to notate ballets.

¹ Little did I know then how very important that score would be when years later I introduced repertory to the dancers at Vassar College. Choreographed for three men, I also had three women enter dancing as the men exited the stage. Although only one and a half minutes long, applause from the nearly 1000 strong student audience was deafening.



Photo #2 *West Side Story* Ray Cook center of male trio

When I applied for my visa, I was given an industrial trainee visa by the Australian government because they had never heard of Labanotation. After a six-week journey by sea, I arrived in Manhattan in October, 1961. During the six months that my visa allowed, I studied with Lucy Venable and Muriel (Mickey) Topaz at the Dance Notation Bureau which was then on East Eighth Street. I received my Elementary and Intermediate certifications, but failed the Advanced by one-half point. On my second attempt I passed. I often wonder what my life might have been like if I had given up and gone to England to continue my career as a dancer and there discovered the Benesh system of notation.

Until recently I always thought I had been paid a fee to teach notation at the Bureau. I realize now that my salary was twenty-five dollars a week, which included teaching the Elementary notation class of one student and doing whatever work had to be done. That included using a stylus to copy symbols on waxed paper which was then placed on an inked roller. The roller was turned by hand, and the notation was transferred to green porous paper. Very small symbols could not be drawn because they bled and were unreadable. The waxed sheets were then placed between two sheets of newspaper and stored for a later date. The office manager reported me for wasting paper. I was called into the office, but when I explained the reason, she was fired, not me.

With my six-month visa about to expire, Martha Hill, the Director of the Dance Program at the Julliard School of Music, gave me a scholarship for two years which covered all tuition and a free lunch. With notation as part of the curriculum, I continued my notation studies with Allan Miles. During this period I went to as many Broadway shows as possible with five dollar standing room tickets. Thinking big, I began to put my notation knowledge to work and made notation notes on the choreography during intermission—just in case I was ever asked back to Australia to stage a Broadway show.²

² At that time Peggy Watson, a former member of Leonide Massine's company, and now a jazz teacher in Sydney, was sent to America by J. C. Williamson's Theater Trust to learn a show's choreography, which she would stage on returning to Australia.

While on scholarship at Julliard, the Bureau began the process of applying on my behalf for my green card. Firstly, there was a requirement that the Bureau prove I would not be taking work from an American. An ad was posted in appropriate papers seeking a notator and included in the job description the word “reconstruction.” This caught the attention of the powers in Washington and brought them to the Bureau to investigate. I had no idea why. I wonder what they thought as they went through the files and discovered pages of mysterious symbols. A secret code? One person had responded to the ad, but fortunately for me did not have enough experience as either a reconstructor or notator.

While a student at Julliard I was allowed to work in the profession I was studying. I took advantage of this to work in summer stock for ten weeks as a dancer in a non-equity theater in Rochester, New York. I was hired as a dancer, but soon was choreographing a new musical every week. It was the best training imaginable for someone who wants to be a choreographer. I realized that choreographing a Broadway musical in a few days required me to use only basic floor patterns and very little movement that required too many rehearsals that took time away from finishing the show.

During the time I worked in summer stock, I sublet my Manhattan apartment. Fortunately, my mail was not forwarded and I never received my deportation notice. Later when I was summoned to the Bureau of Immigration I was told that I was not even supposed to be in the country. After a rather farcical interview, I received my green card which allowed me to work fulltime and I embarked on my dream of becoming the best notator in America.

Before I met Anna Sokolow I had always been told exactly what to do as a ballet dancer. But this was to abruptly change. When I was cast with ten men and one woman to dance the twist in one of Anna’s opuses, only four of the men turned up for the Saturday rehearsal. I did not have a clue how to improvise. With no dancers to hide behind, I just went wild, and Anna saw that I did not have a clue on how to follow her instruction to improvise. She liked what I did, and soon afterwards asked me to join her company. It was a natural transition for me to start to notate her choreography.³ I did notate one Opus and staged it for a college in Rhode Island in the late 1960s. Unfortunately, I lost my score.



Photo #3 Ray Cook in Anna Sokolow’s *Dreams*

The first famous Sokolow work I performed was *Dreams*. **(PHOTO #3)** With no notators available to record the work, I remembered advice my father gave me when I was fifteen before I left the sawmill. “If you want something done, do not rely on others to do it for you. Do it yourself.” Each evening after rehearsal I notated *Dreams* at home. A decade later, Anna entrusted me on two occasions to restage the work for her.

I have often made the statement “the less you put into a score the better.” This belief resulted from my dancing and notating the Sokolow repertory. There were

seldom learned dance steps, only movements that created a situation, told a story or created emotions. It was the early 60s and notation that I had learned was difficult to apply. The decision I made was to record only what was necessary. This meant leaving out symbols that might appear as detail in the score, but were only the dancer’s idiosyncrasies. If notated, it might make it difficult to decide on what is important or unimportant from the printed symbols. When reproduced, the

³ Anna Sokolow was not interested in having her works notated. It was her sister, Rose, a well-known tapestry maker who convinced her to do so.

movement would not ring true. The audience does not remember steps no matter how fantastic, exciting and applause-getting the combination. They remember only images, and I decided that these images would best be reproduced with undecorated or embellished notation. With Sokolow you are a human being first—be yourself and do not copy others when creating the image.

When I started to notate Anna's work there was little if any information on Motif Notation. Today I realize notation classes should include discussions on Motif Notation to help identify the most important elements in a dance that should be in the Labanotation score. It would underline the fact that Labanotation is a language, and as an author juggles words, the notator must juggle symbols to make clear the images.

During the early 1960s I studied Limón technique and continued to take ballet classes at the old Met where I studied with Antony Tudor, Alfredo Corvino, and Margaret Craske, who said to me in class one day, "I don't care if you can write it down. Can you do it?" Lucy Venable, a fellow notator and Limon dancer who was also in that class, told me that Craske told her that I was the only student she had ever had, who, after receiving a correction one day would have it corrected by the next class. I credited this to my notation knowledge that allowed me to zero in on the missing elements in the movement.

In these years there were few dance scores to study, but I found three: Balanchine's *Symphony in C* and two Humphrey works, *Song of the West* and *The Shakers*. The only memory that remains of the Balanchine work was that I restaged the first movement for a New Jersey company. As a ballet dancer I found the reading and teaching of the first movement of *Symphony in C* to be very easy—and I was paid to do it.

Not long after passing the advanced theory exam, my first reconstruction was *Song of the West* which had been choreographed with images that capture the deserts of America's west. It had been notated by Els Grelinger, and she came to see my completed work. After a run-through, Els pointed out corrections in the presence of the dancers. This taught me a valuable lesson—never criticize the reconstructor's work in front of the dancers. Instead call a break, send them out of the room and talk about the work in private. At a later time, Els, an inspiring teacher, opened my mind to think outside the box, to see similarities among dance, music, art and architecture—something that has been foremost in my thinking and teaching ever since.

Before staging my first *Shakers* I had the experience of being paid to dance in a restaging of *The Shakers* in Washington, D.C., and thereby hangs a tale. I ended up in jail. Jeff Duncan, who started Dance Theater Workshop, myself and a large group of young men were disco dancing in the basement of a private home. A neighbor complained about the noise. The police arrived and carted all of us off to jail where we were crammed into a few cells. After spending the night in the lockup, Jeff and I were the only two released in the morning. It turned out the woman who was doing the restaging was married to a judge who had us released so that his wife could continue rehearsals with a full cast. If I had been fined and entered into the books, it may have come against me later when I applied for American citizenship. But the really important thing I learned from this *Shakers* experience was what constituted choreographic craft.

Because of my enthusiasm for Labanotation, restaging of dances from a score and certification, I was voted into the International Council on Kinetography Laban (ICKL). I attended my first conference in Herisau, Switzerland in 1964. During the conference I read that ICKL's aims were, and still are, to promote the use of the system; to increase research for its development and applications; to act as a deciding body with regard to the orthography and principles of the system; to support experimental projects in related areas; to encourage information exchange among cultures and individuals using the system. Its activities include the organization of a biennial conference and the publication of the conference proceedings. There was little if any discussion on how to promote the system, how to apply it, how to teach the system, and definitely no literature or discussion on how to restage a dance, which was a major component of the Bureau's work. I think I am correct when I say that at that time only one or two ICKL members had ever read a complete score, let alone stage it. Therefore, during lunch one day I wrote the opening diagonal from Humphrey's *Day on Earth* on the blackboard for all to follow as I explained the images imbedded in the symbols. At the end of the diagonal, there is a turn propelled by the foot of the gesturing leg pushing on the floor, which I saw as a water mill. Afterwards, Lucy said to me, "For God's sake, Raymond, it's just a turn."

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Photo #4 Ray Cook at ICKL conference

When I was fourteen and working in the timber mill, my father had encouraged me to go into politics saying, "It's not what you know, son, it's who you know." This was never more true than when my mentor, Ann Hutchinson, secured my first overseas notation job in Liverpool where I was to notate two danced masses being choreographed for the opening of a new Roman Catholic cathedral, the Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King. On arrival at Heathrow, I was pulled aside to have my bags searched. The inspector found a letter in which Ann had written "good luck on the job." My brain worked at twenty to the dozen as I realized I was about to be sent back. In England, even though I was Australian and a member of the British Commonwealth, work permits were required. I explained that I was in England to observe how a British

choreographer worked and I was to report back to America. They let me in. Later Ann told me that she had applied for my papers, but failed to mention it in our correspondence.⁴

My second overseas project also came through Ann. I was to stage *The Shakers* for a company in Wales, England. During rehearsals as the rhythms abruptly changed from 8s to 9s to 10s, it caused convulsions in a Jamaican dancer who collapsed to the floor. Fortunately the artistic director, Bill Luther, was quick to recognize what was happening and gradually led her to fully recover.

More work came to me from somebody else I knew, Meg Abby, with whom I had continued to study Labanotation while on tour with the Borovansky ballet and later *West Side Story*. Using her own money, Meg became a big supporter of notation in Australia. With several unfinished dance scores of her own, Meg asked me to come back and finish her scores from film. Ones I remember in particular were Walter Gore's *Peep Show*, Rex Reid's *The Night is a Sorceress*, Beth Dean's *Corroboree*, and *Death and the Maiden* by Cecil Bates. I asked for all expenses to be paid, including a round-trip ticket from New York to Adelaide, with half of my salary to be paid when I started and half when I finished each score. Meg agreed and

⁴ Ann had also arranged for another Australian, Philippa Heale, to be my assistant. Coincidentally, Philippa was one of three other dancers who, with me, commenced her notation studies with Meg Abby in Australia.

let me stay in her beautiful home in Adelaide while I finished each project. There were three trips in all. I remember at the time telling Mickey Topaz that I was America's first fulltime notator. She disagreed, saying that she was. I pointed out that because she was director of the Bureau's school as well as a notator she couldn't be a fulltime notator. The discussion went no further.

Not directly related to my use of notation, but rather to who I knew, was performing in Humphrey's *Brandenburg Concerto* staged by Lucy Venable from the notation score. It was to be the first modern dance in the then-named New York State Theater. The dance was then chosen for the Dance in America series. Soon to follow was Limón's notated *Missa Brevis* marking the performance as the first modern dance in Avery Fisher Hall. For this one performance we were paid twenty-seven dollars which José said he was embarrassed to offer us. I have lost count of the number of restagings I have done over the years except for the ten plus in 1995 to celebrate Humphrey's centennial.

While on salary at the Bureau, I was asked by Mickey to teach a course in restaging a dance from the score. It began as a three-day course, but soon developed into a three-week course. There was no text book, so I wrote *The Dance Director*. I chose the word 'director' over 'reconstructor,' because, like a music conductor or a play director, a dance director does more than just reproduce the movement. I heard it said that I was on an ego trip when I commenced to write the book, but again my father's advice guided me: "if you want something done, do it yourself." After rewriting and enlarging, the book went into a second desktop printing with both editions selling a total of three hundred copies.

My first fulltime job as a choreographer was for a summer equity drama company at Dartmouth College. In addition to doing all the stage movement and period style for the actors, I was given the money necessary to hire four dancers fulltime for my own dance company. **(PHOTO #5)** I hired three that I knew from my work in New York and Ulysses Dove, who was still a student at Bennington College, but later became a well-known international choreographer. With the success of my first summer with the drama company, I was asked back to work with Dartmouth's drama students. I said "yes," but only if I could have a dance class. The dance class was added to the curriculum. When asked back for a second year, I said, "Only if I can have another dance class." It was agreed. During these two years about 150 male students took my dance classes, Moses Pendleton was one. When I left Dartmouth in 1970, Alison Chase was hired and joined the soon-to-be-formed Pilobolus Dance Company as the first female dancer. She was followed by Martha Clark with whom I had danced on television in the 60s. In 1971 Pilobolus Dance Company gave their first performance, and the rest is history.

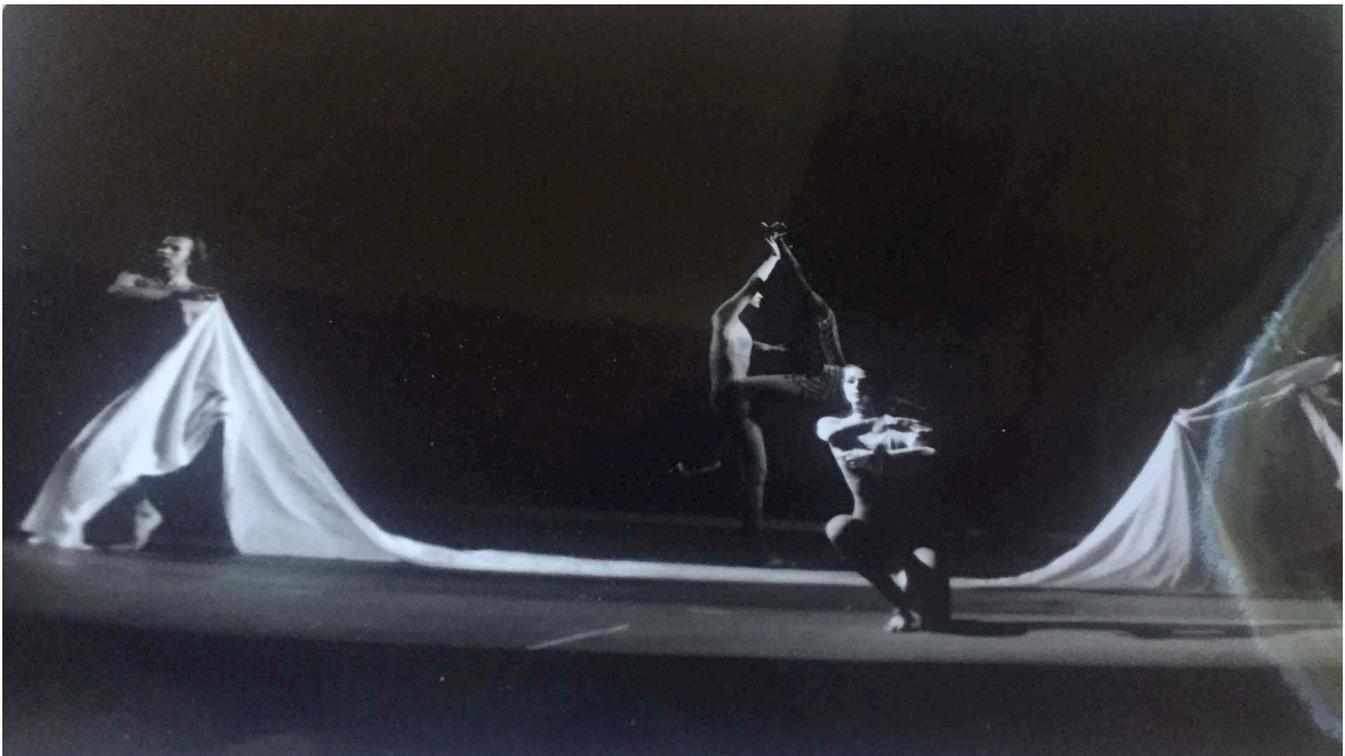


Photo #5 Dartmouth Dance Company, Ray Cook Center

In 1969, during my first year at Dartmouth, the Bureau offered me my first paid freelance notation job which was to notate Norman Walker's *Variations from Day to Day*. The question arose: How much to pay a freelance notator?. At this stage, there was no data on which to base a fee. As I remember, there was a very small amount offered. Because I was on salary at Dartmouth College, I took the job and kept track of my notating hours. It turned out that my hourly rate came to be ten cents – true. This was not the only dance I notated for a small fee. Many years later the Alvin Ailey Company wanted *Revelations* notated. As a freelance notator, I was offered \$8000.00 by the Bureau. I accepted because I wanted my name on the *Revelations* score. Afterwards, I found out that I was the third person offered the job. I wonder if I had known that, would I have taken the job? Yes, I think so.

Two projects each lasting several years to complete were very satisfying to do. The first was working with dancers at Arizona State University's Department of Physical Education. The Department wanted to achieve recognition as a Department of Dance. To achieve this recognition an evening of works by Doris Humphrey was planned to be performed in their circular theater designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. I returned every year for three years, each time adding another work which I already knew. New for me was Humphrey's *Two Ecstatic Themes*. Their project was a success. The second satisfactory project was working with Connecticut Dance Theatre under the artistic direction of Julliard graduate Mary Giannone whose introduction of Humphrey's movement philosophy marked the crystallization of the company's philosophy and direction. Two new works for me were *Night Spell* and *Ritmo Jondo*. The latter work I had previously notated when staged by Limón dancer Lucy Venable. Both were dramatic works, which, with my Sokolow background, I always preferred. A local TV station asked me for an interview, and rather than talk in the abstract, and to help spread the word on Labanotation, I notated a long sequence on butcher paper. While a film of the section being performed was shown on one half of the screen, I followed the movement in the score with a pointer.

I always enjoyed returning to Salt Lake City to work with Utah Repertory Dance Theater known worldwide for its collection of dance treasures. I spent a lot of time learning Humphrey's *With My Red Fires* from score, but the reward for me was worth it. Not long afterwards, the opportunity arose for me to visit Florence, Italy, to stage the dance at their Opera House. Another memorable experience in Salt Lake City was staging *Water Study* for Virginia Tanner's Children's Theater. Never had I worked with such beautifully trained dancers. They understood immediately the breath phrasing and the use of body weight. I credited this to Virginia's teaching and the fact that as yet they had not developed any personal habits that so often get in the way of achieving a desired result.

I discovered that I had a passion for researching and piecing together dances considered lost. Perhaps this came from my favorite reading genre, the mystery. Again taking my father's advice to "do it yourself," I joined forces with Ann Vachon, a retired dancer from the Limón Company and then the Artistic Director of Philadelphia's Dance Conduit. Our first challenge was to retrieve from a silent film Limón's *Dances in Honor of Poznan, Wroclaw, Katwice and Worszawa*. As we brought the work back to life each day, I stayed up late after the dancers had retired to notate the days' work. The dance was soon taken into Limon's company.

Looking for more dances to research and stage, I decided on Humphrey's partially notated *Dawn in New York*, which I found in the Dance Notation Bureau's files. After learning the movement and choreography, I met with Ann Vachon's company and taught what I had, which was almost half the dance. We then put out a call to all the dancers who may have been in the piece and anybody else interested. Thirty people turned up in a New York studio which we rented for the occasion. Everybody agreed that what they saw was correct as they remembered it, but when asked what came next, there was dead silence. With some coaxing, a few small movement phrases were recalled. The most depressing news came from Deborah Jowett who said that she had notated her part in Labanotation, but due to lack of space in her files, she had recently thrown it out. Martha Hill loaned me the dance scrapbook from the time the dance was staged at Julliard. "Raymond," she said one day, "you have already been through this material several times," but I never gave up. When looking for something specific, it is possible to miss other material which can be discovered on a second and third search. With the new information, reviews, and photos, I did complete the choreography. The set was reconstructed by one of my Vassar College students. When all the work was completed, Ann's company performed the work in Philadelphia in 1990. One valuable lesson I learned from doing this research was to never be satisfied.

Encouraged by Mickey, then the Director of the Julliard Dance Division, I started to finish my incomplete score of

Humphrey's *Ruins and Visions*. When retired Limón dancer Ruth Currier commenced to restage the work for a group whose name I have forgotten, I offered to notate the work unsalaried. Adding to my Labanotation score of Ruth's uncompleted reconstruction, I finished the score from a silent film on salary as I staged the work for Julliard dancers. I invited Selma Jean Cohen to see a studio run-through of my work, and when she realized that I did most of the notation for free out of my love for Humphrey's work, she sent me a check. When I finished teaching three casts, the work was brought to life in 1992 with a Juilliard performance accompanied by live music.

The final work I undertook to research and have performed by Salt Lake City's Repertory Dance Company was Humphrey's *Fantasy and Fugue* set to Mozart's music. Working from a silent film in which the musical and dance phrases were a perfect match, but with the middle section missing, the notation was completed and set to music, including the middle section which I choreographed based on an image of mother and daughter provided by original cast member Pauline Koner. I was paid for the rehearsal period when I restaged the dance but not for the notation. If later restaged, I was to receive payment for my choreography from Humphrey's son, Charles Woodford.

What was to be a one-time project turned out to be two projects. Gerald Arpino, choreographer for The Joffrey Ballet, asked Mickey, who at that time was Director of the DNB, if there was somebody who could notate his new ballet to be premiered in 1968, *The Clowns*. She suggested that I do it. Rehearsals were in one of the large studios at City Center where the ballet was to be performed. Because of all the props involved and the large cast each person doing something different at the same time, the score was never finished. Several years later Arpino wanted to revive the work, but many of the dancers had left the company and there was no video. He called me to see if I could teach what I had. Without taking my mother's advice to "think before you speak," I said, "Of course, but there will be two salaries—one to teach what I have, and one to finish the score." Without hesitation he said, "Okay." I think this is the only time that ever happened.

There are other dances that I wanted to notate, especially the works of Lester Horton whose technique I had studied when taught by Alvin Ailey and my friend James Truitte, both of whom had studied with Horton and performed in Horton's company. When Truitte was asked by Arthur Mitchell to teach *The Beloved* for Dance Theater of Harlem, the Bureau sent me to Harlem to notate the work. Truitte was pleased with the live performance. Pointing to the unacceptability of a visual moving image from which to recreate a dance was the later performance for television. The dancers were overacting which could be seen as "mugging." Truitte gave the performance a thumbs down.⁵ There are other Horton dances I wish I could have notated, and I even started a project to notate the Horton technique, but it was never completed and my notation has disappeared.

To fill the need for publications in Labanotation for use by notation students in the 1970s (a need which continues still), I took the initiative and wrote and self-published at a cost of \$2000 per book⁶ *116 Modern Dance Combinations*, *The Wombat Duet*, and *The Three Ivans* from *The Sleeping Beauty*. I also choreographed, notated, and published *Theme and Variations*, including all the introductory material, which provided a complete dance score using only the theory taught in elementary notation classes. When finished, the dancers could give a studio performance of the dance as at the Paris Conservatory of Music. I also edited and published *Tap Dance* compiled and notated by Sheila Marion and *Modern Jazz New York* with notation by Svea Becker and Laurie Winn.

With my interest in dance history I asked Mickey to let me notate on salary *Court Dances of The Early Renaissance* reconstructed by Dr. Ingrid Brainard. These dances were one of the few items published by the Dance Notation Bureau. Having so many publications bearing my name, I prepared and advertised a Dance Library for the Twenty-first Century.

⁵ Another unfinished project was my restaging of *The Shakers* for Dance Theater of Harlem. During an early rehearsal, Mitchel came to a rehearsal and said, "Is that all it is?" Rehearsals stopped as did the construction of costumes. Perhaps it was just as well because there was a terrible rain storm and water cascaded down the walls of the rehearsal studio.

⁶ This was before computers replaced scores done by hand. All symbols were beautifully drawn in ink by Irene Politis for which service I paid, thus adding to the cost.

Despite the need for more publications, my 200 copies of each of my publications did not sell well⁷ and if not for Odette Blum taking them to conferences to put on view they would have sold even less. My library never came to anything. This experience led me to forget other dances that I thought should be recorded and self-published.

I often told my notation students not to wait for the Bureau to offer you a notation job or a restaging – go and look for work yourself. This definitely works. If you see a work that you feel should be preserved, go to the choreographer and offer to notate it for nothing on the condition that you can stage it and be paid for the restagings. When I saw Lin Hwai-Min's *Crossing the Black Water* from his epic *Legacy*, (PHOTO #6) at a 1990 concert in Hong Kong, I approached him at intermission and said "You don't know me, but I will notate it for free if allowed to restage it with your representative checking my work before it is performed." He agreed, and on my returning to America Mr. Lin sent me a plane ticket to Taipei. I staged the work several times and ended up notating the entire full-evening work on salary and this had its own rewards for me.



Photo #6 Lin Hwai-Min's *Legacy*, a work of epic proportions.

My reward came when an international project was hatched over coffee during the 2000 Feet Dance Festival in Philadelphia. It was suggested by Nanette Hassall from the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts, Tom Brown from the Hong Kong Academy for the Performing Arts, Carol Walker from New York's SUNY/Purchase College and myself that dancers from each of the institutions came together with the Taipei National University of the Arts, that dancers from each institution learned two sections of *Legacy*. In all one hundred dancers were to gather in one place to perform the work in its entirety. It seemed perfect to bring the fruits of Laban's labor back to Germany for presentation during the Global Dance Festival sponsored by the World Dance Alliance Europe to

be held in Dusseldorf. Money was raised by the four departments to bring the one hundred dancers, heads of each dance department, a technical crew from Mr. Lin's company and myself together for the performance. It was an eye opener for the American dancers to see the discipline and energy of the Taiwan dancers. Mr. Lin, who couldn't attend, saw a video and admired the Australian dancers for their rawness, energy, and commitment. If not for my notating *Crossing the Black Waters* for free, I would never have been salaried to notate the entire work, traveled to the three overseas departments to teach the work, and accompanied the one hundred dancers to Dusseldorf. In the following year the entire work was to be performed at each of the colleges. Unfortunately, that part of the plan fell through owing to a lack of finances.

I was offered three jobs that never materialized. One was to work in Cuba. I was ready to leave New York until I learned that any money I received had to stay in that country. The second offer was to be company notator at La Scala. The new

⁷ *The Dance Director* had an enlarged second printing. Together, both sold 300 copies.

artistic director (I think it was David Blair from London's Royal Ballet) at the last moment could not fulfill his obligations - I had even started to learn Italian. The third offer came from Ghana where their ethnic dance was slowly disappearing. "Don't go," said my mother, "you'll get a spear in the back." I don't remember why I never went, but it was not from heeding my mother's advice. Thinking back on these missed opportunities I don't think I would have been ready for the different challenges that each presented.

I did survive through notation, but the time came when I realized that if I continued to dance and work only with notation I would have very little money saved, no health care and only reviews and articles of my work. I applied for a teaching position at Vassar College and was hired, but lacking a degree, I was considered an unpolished gem and my salary was docked to reflect this. I soon earned my BA and MA from City College of New York. During my first year at Vassar College I added repertory to the already named Vassar Dance Theater.

At that time the budget for the Vassar program was \$500 for a year. I pointed out to the budget director that dance was being discriminated against in that the drama department performed the world's greatest playwrights and the music department performed the greatest music while the dancers choreographed three minute dances to the latest popular music. The budget began to be increased and I began to add notated repertory for which the college had to pay royalties. Although dance was not a major, good dancers began to come to Vassar College because company members on returning home told their dance friends of a well-kept secret – Vassar had a great program taught by professional dancers and performed repertory. The company was run as a professional company with a season that culminated in a performance at Poughkeepsie's historic 1869 Bardavon Opera House. The first year saw an audience of 150 in the 960 seat house, but it soon came to be the only performance event on the Vassar calendar for which students left campus to support their fellow students. After several years of filling the opera house, an extra performance was added. In 1996 I was running out of steam for teaching and directing dance, I retired from Vassar College. A few years later, the dance program became a department with its own fully-equipped theater for dance alone.

After my retirement, I continued to do free-lance notation projects I finally added Martha Graham to my list of choreographers which now include Doris Humphrey, José Limón, Anna Sokolow, Helen Tamiris, Alvin Ailey, Michel Fokine, Lin Hwai-Min, Walter Gore, Beth Dean, Cecil Bates, Rex Reid, George Balanchine, Lester Horton, Lucas Hoving, Jeff Duncan, and Dan Wagner.

In Part Two of my story (will be released in the next issue), I will share some of my thoughts on teaching notation outside the box, advice given to me by Els Grelinger when I first began to earn my living with notation—ideas that bring life to theory-only classes.