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Library News

From the Dance Notation Bureau

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Dance Notation Bureau Library

Monday - Friday 10 am – 5 pm
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Symposium on Nijinsky's *Faune* Ann Hutchinson Guest

Organized by Alastair Macaulay, dance critic of The New York Times, the May 15th 2017, symposium on Nijinsky's *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* covered many aspects of that ballet as well as of Nijinsky. As introduction Alastair showed a range of photos and sketches of Nijinsky in *Faune*. These were followed by a selection of early film recordings including: the 1931 Rambert, silent, black-and-white with William Chappell and Diana Gould; the 1970 "Ballet for All" documentary with Christopher Bruce; a brief excerpt from the Original Ballet Russe; the 1979 Joffrey ballet with Nureyev; Charles Jude in the 1990 Paris Opera production; and my and Claudia Jeschke's 1992 revival from Nijinsky's score in Zurich with David Brown. Later that day the Barnard production, in which Michael Novak did an exceptionally good interpretation, was also shown.

Invited specialists from many different fields contributed. Among the musicologists was Simon Morrison, Music Professor at Princeton University who spoke on Nijinsky's use of the Debussy music. Joan Acocella and Lynn Garafola, each of whom had written a book related to Nijinsky, spoke mainly on the sexuality of the ballet. Other specialists contributed information on Bakst's designs; on Rodin's statue of Nijinsky (to my mind unfinished and ugly); and on Edwin Denby's writings on Nijinsky. I briefly related the complex story of how Claudia Jeschke and I became involved in deciphering Nijinsky's notation system, (as described in a previous article published in the DNB Library News, Volume XI, Special Issue 2016). Romola Nijinsky had approached me as a notation specialist to solve the problem of Nijinsky's notation system. She gave me unsuitable materials to work with, thereby preventing me from achieving any result. Romola then met Claudia who was also involved with notation and enlisted her services. It was the same story, Claudia was given the same unsuitable materials. To fill in the picture, I mentioned the brief 1976 black-and-white film at the Paris Opera that shows Leonide Massine and Romola Nijinsky trying to piece the choreography together by looking at the de Meyer photographs of the ballet, this in preparation for producing the ballet at the Paris Opera. Sitting with them is the young Claudia. The result was the 1977 performance by Charles Jude. When I met Claudia we decided to work together. Additional materials came to hand, including Nijinsky's notations of Cecchetti exercises, adage and allegro. With my detailed knowledge of the Cecchetti method, these notations proved to be our Rosetta Stone (Illustration 1). Symbol by symbol we translated Nijinsky's score into Labanotation, which we read more fluently. Regarding Nijinsky's musicality – which has been questioned--I cited the instance when I had conductor John Lanchbery check the place in Nijinsky's score where he has duples within a measure of 9/8 meter. Lanchbery confirmed that it was totally correct. The degree of detail in Nijinsky's score was questioned, how much was it just an outline? As examples of details, I pointed out that he had written the position of each finger holding the flute and also the back-diagonal torso contractions used by the faun and leading nymph.

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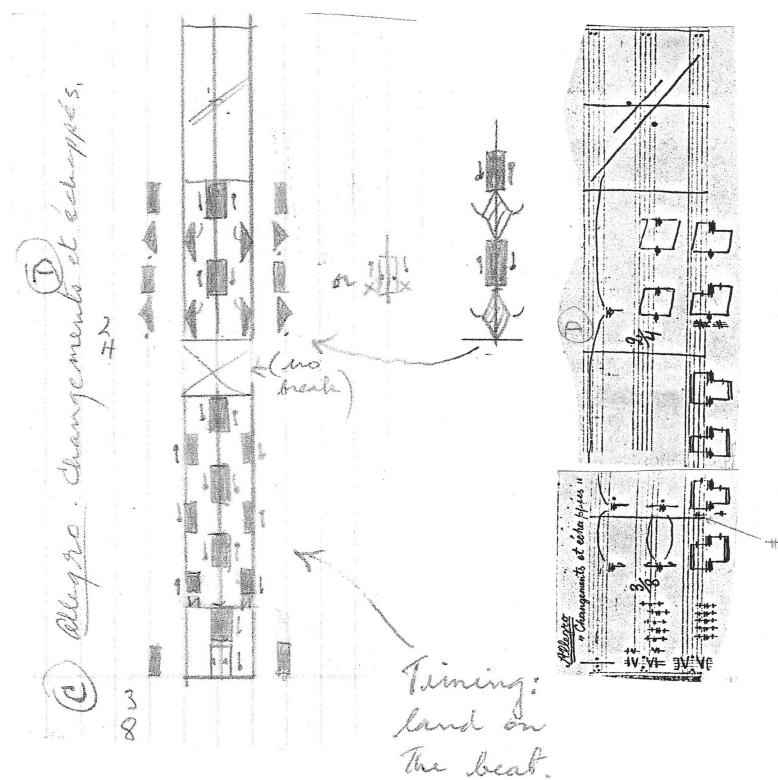


Illustration 1. An example of Nijinsky's Cecchetti ballet notations, written in Labanotation alongside. There are many many examples of his Cecchetti notations, thereby providing us with the 'Rosetta Stone' we needed.

is NOT Ann's version, it is **Nijinsky's version!**" I had the opportunity to read out what The New York Times had published in 1916 when Nijinsky, returning to the company, refused to dance in *Faune*. He stated: "That ballet should not be given as the Ballet Russe is now presenting it. That ballet is entirely my own creation, and it is not being done as I had arranged it. I therefore insist strongly that it is not fair to me to use my name as its author and continue to perform the work in a way that did not meet my ideas." Nijinsky made clear that none of the memory-based versions should state "Choreography by Nijinsky." It should be "after Nijinsky" or some clear wording as to its origin. I understand that some people may prefer the exaggerations of Nureyev's performance, if they think that is what the Faune should be like. Some find Nijinsky's choreography to be too gentle, too subtle. Nijinsky's logical unfolding of the story, the way his nymphs are so human, they relate to each other; two of them come in late (Illustrations 2 and 3). At one point they all get inattentive, wander off, and then apologize and return. When the leading nymph discards the third 'veil' (her dress), she is surprised when the two attending nymphs suddenly run away, scared by the faun who is standing behind the leading nymph who is still unaware of his presence. She looks at the departing nymphs, then at her dress, covers herself, then, lowering to pick up the dress, she again looks into the wing where they had gone. She then drapes the dress around herself and walks into the first unexpected encounter. Nijinsky recorded all these details, details that do not exist in memory-based versions. One detail we found in his score, one nymph grasping another's wrist, we questioned (Illustration 4), then we found the de Meyer photograph that verified his notation, Illustration 5, Illustration 6 is the same in Labanotation.

When the inevitable comments came up later about works revived from notation always being dead, expressionless, Michael Novak spoke up, comparing dance notation to music notation. The notes give the framework; it is up to the performer to embody it, to find the meaning, the intentions and give it their own personal expression. This comes from within, based on the person's understanding and experience. Michael (now a Paul Taylor dancer) spoke about how, as a student, learning *Faune* had been a crucial formative experience. Stephen Melendez, who danced the faune in the recent New York Theatre Ballet's production, also contributed valuable thoughts from his experience.

Dance critics and historians have in the past doubted the validity of Claudia and my work, questioning how much had it become our "version." I made clear that what we produced is exactly what Nijinsky had written, nothing added, nothing left out. That is unlike researchers such as Pierre Lacotte in Paris and Dina Bjorn in Copenhagen who use the historical source as a basis and then modify it to what they feel will suit today's audiences.

From my point of view, I was satisfied that I had covered the important aspects and brought home the fact that it is not "Ann and Claudia's version," but Nijinsky's version. At one point Simon Morrison spoke of "Ann's version." I rose, with index finger pointed and stated, "It

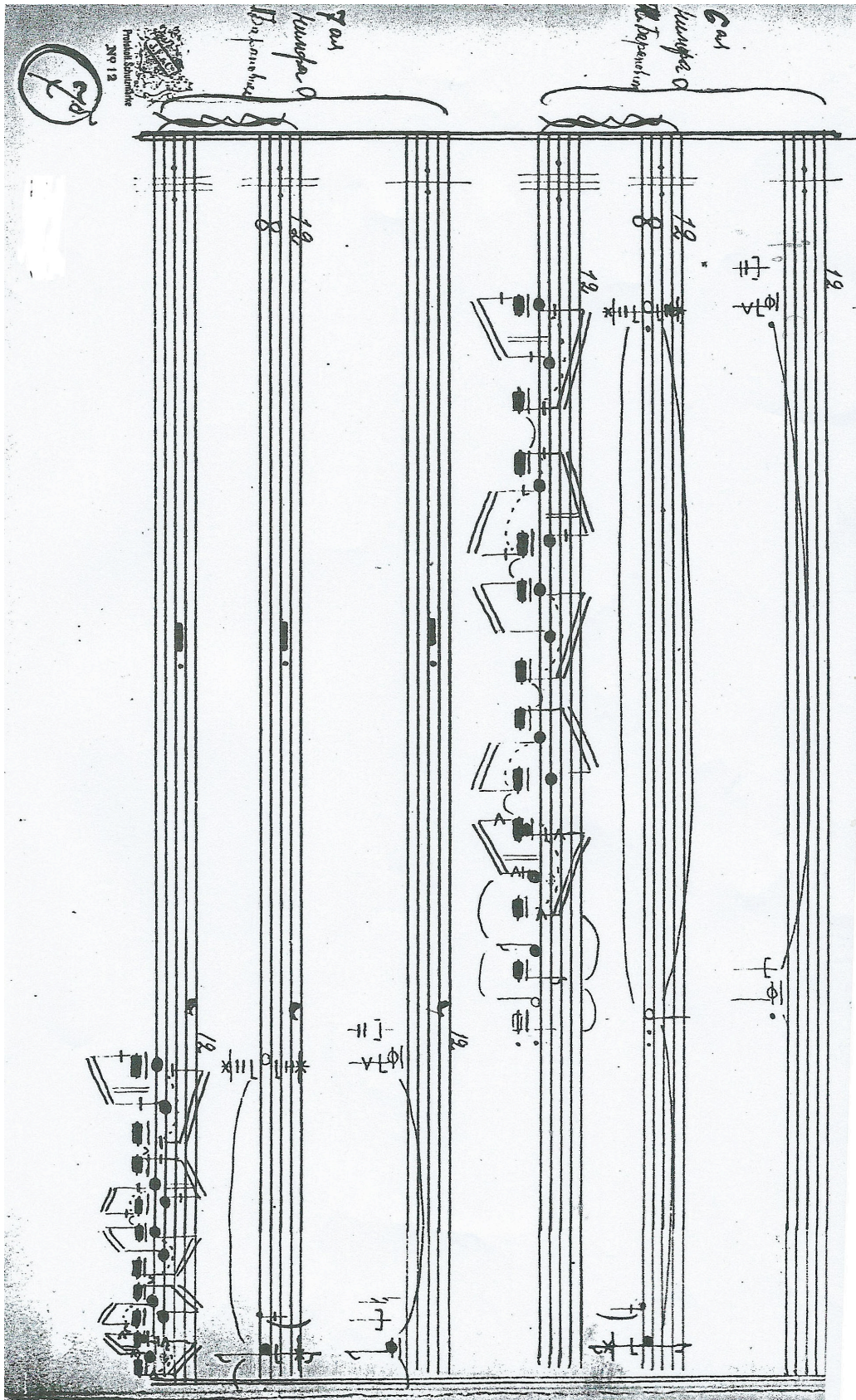
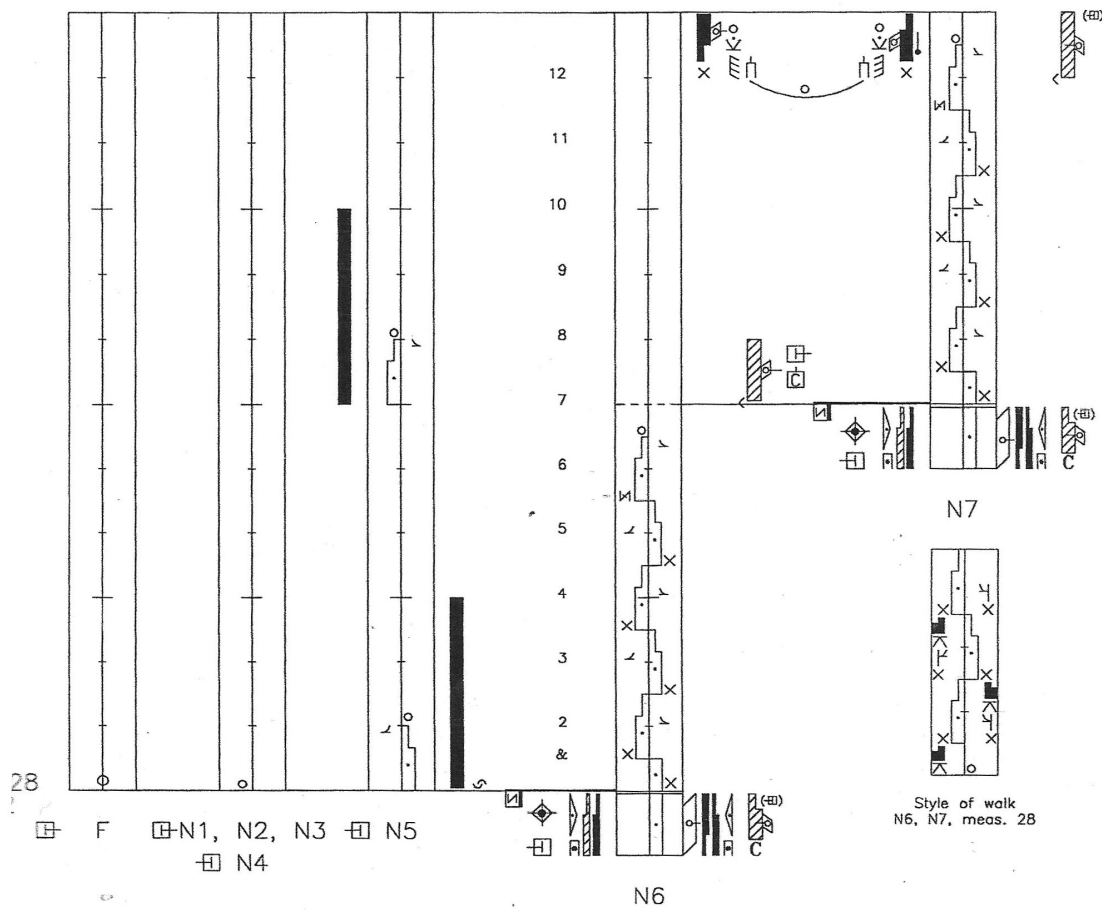
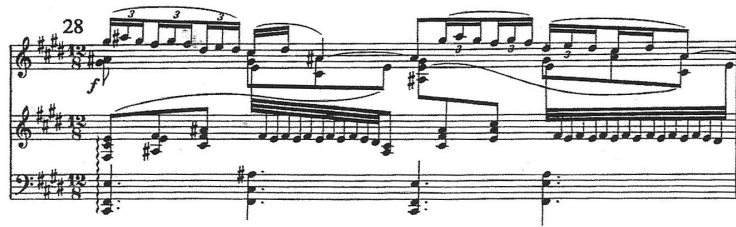


Illustration 2. Nijinsky's score showing the entrance of the two late nymphs, No. 6 and No. 7.

THE CHOREOGRAPHIC SCORE

83



Style of walk
N6, N7, meas. 28

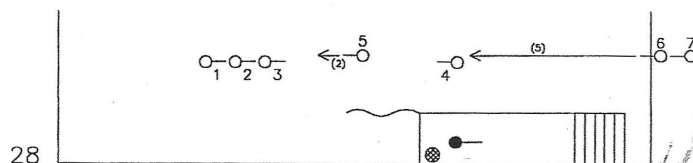


Illustration 3. The same
in the Labanotation
score, meas. 28



Illustration 4. Nymph No. 2 grasping the wrist of nymph No. 6 (shown at the left).



Illustration 5. The photo of this moment.

NIJINSKY'S FAUNE RESTORED

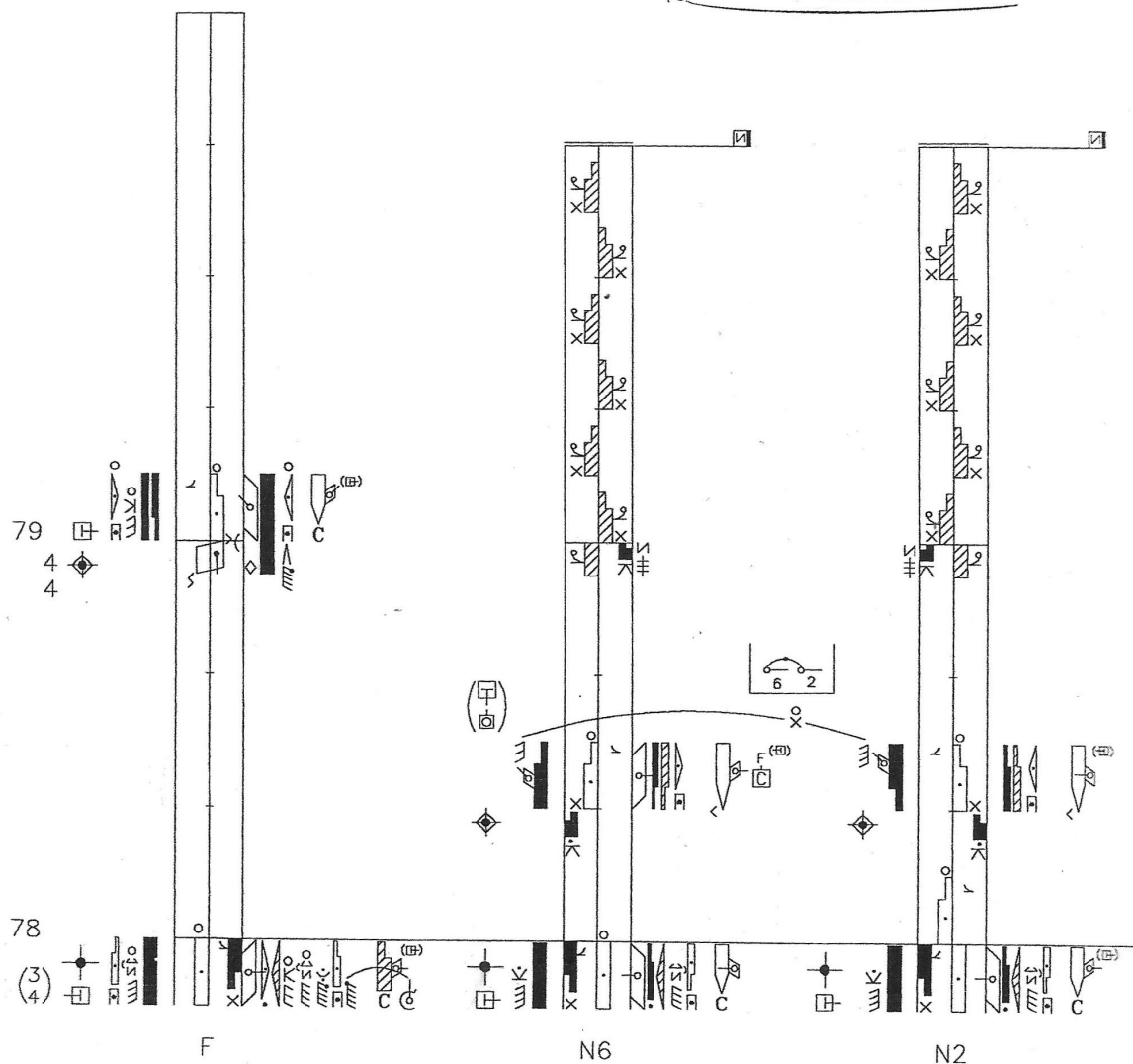
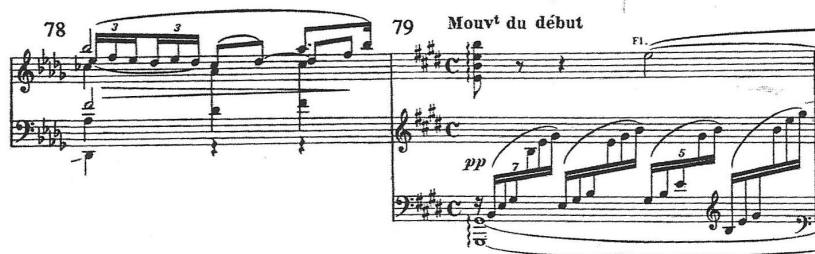


Illustration 6.
The same in the
Labanotation
score, occurring
on count 2.

