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# Library News

From the Dance Notation Bureau

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### Dance Notation Bureau Library

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Website: [www.dancenotation.org](http://www.dancenotation.org)

**Library News is published twice  
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## What It Takes to Produce a Score

by Mei-Chen Lu

People often wonder why a dance score is not finished when rehearsals are “wrapped” so we thought it might be helpful to explain more about the whole process of creating a Labanotation score. The score contains not only the dance movements themselves, the relationship of these to the accompaniment, and the floor patterns in the space, but also information about the work: description, history, choreographer, style, staging, casting, music, costumes and sets, lighting, program credits, supplementary material on file, electronic recordings, bibliography, etc. Creating a score from beginning to end can take from three months to several years, depending on the number of dancers in the cast, length of the work, complexity of the movement, and any other work the notator may be involved with. Work begins before rehearsals of the dance and finishes long afterwards. To assist in understanding the process, we divide it into three stages: before, during and after the rehearsals.

**Before the rehearsals**—Before the notator sets foot in the rehearsal studio, s/he conducts substantial research into the choreographer’s style, movement vocabulary, background and history of the dance, as well as the dance itself. This may require searching online or in libraries and watching videotapes of various performances, if available. The notator also gathers as much music information as possible, such as the music score and CDs, if available. This enables the notator to become familiar with the music, so that the dance steps will be properly placed on the score in relation to the music. If the dance is newly commissioned, the notator prepares the same way, except there is no videotape/DVD to view and possibly no recording to listen to.

**During the rehearsals**—The notator normally sits at the side of the studio with note pads, pencil, eraser, the music score, and sometimes a camcorder. A camcorder is useful when the rehearsal moves very quickly and the notator needs to take away a reference to work from at home.

The ideal notating situation is when the work is taught to a completely new cast. This ensures the notator capturing the essence of all the movements, intentions, images, and word descriptions in detail for the score, which will assist future readers in constructing the choreography. While the choreographer teaches, the notator scribbles notation symbols on a note pad as quickly as possible. Notation symbols are abbreviated in simplified forms, like writer’s shorthand. The notators call this scribbling “Speed Writing” (see illustration next page), and from this they later make their first draft.

In the beginning of the rehearsal each dancer is assigned a letter by the notator, so that it can be shown in the score who will be performing the solo, duet, or group sections and in the floor plans which dancers travel where on the stage.

Notating new choreography poses more challenges than notating an existing work as the choreography may change frequently. The notator may end up recording many pages of movement that are not used.

During the rehearsal period, the notator also tries to acquire a performance-quality CD, programs, photographs, and production information, such as light sets, and prop designs, in addition to costume information from the choreographer or the dance company where the work is set.

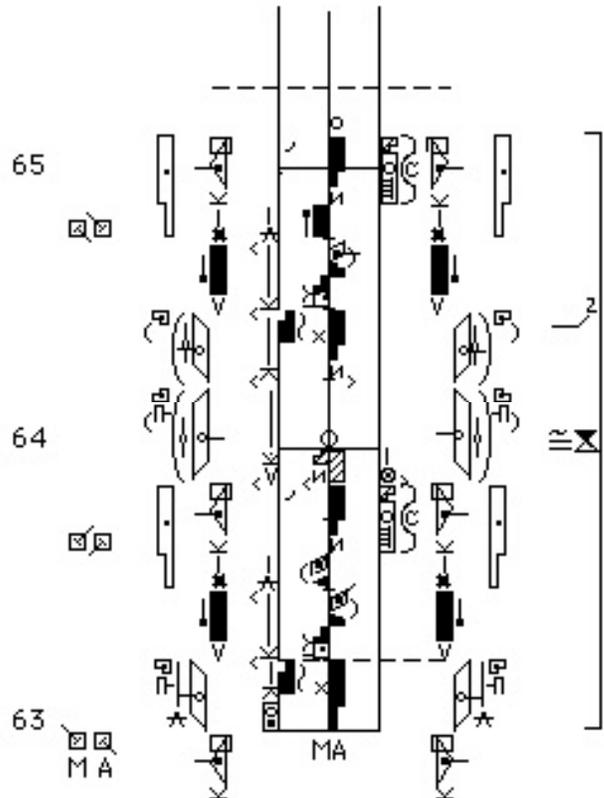
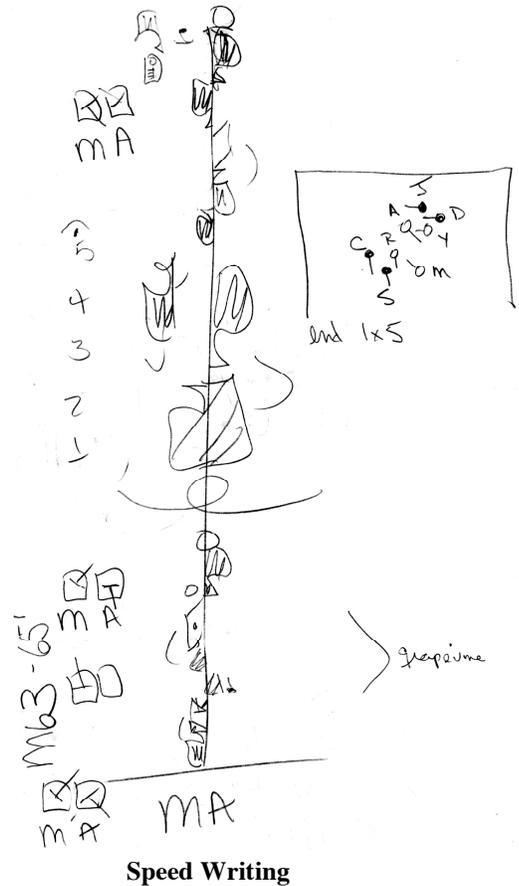
**After the rehearsals**—This final period is the most time consuming for the completion of the score. With the notation and all the information collected during the rehearsals in hand, the notator must decide what goes into the score, what goes into the introductory section, and what belongs in the supplementary material. For example, a whole set of costume patterns will not fit into the introductory material and, thus, will be submitted as supplementary material to be included along with the score for staging later on. The introduction to the score must be filled out with any additional new information on casting, production, music, videotapes/DVDs, photographs, and notes to the stager.

Most importantly the finished score must be correctly, clearly and fully written in order for the reader to be given accurate information in an easily legible form. With this in mind, the notator turns the abbreviated symbols from the first draft into detailed notation in appropriate columns with actual timings on a notation staff where each body part has its specific column, and adds sufficient floor plans to make the space patterns clear. The notator also adds the choreographer's verbal descriptions or images used in the rehearsals along the side of the staff, to help the reader understand the motivation behind the movements (see illustration).

When new or unusual movements or forms of partnering have been choreographed, the notator will want to have the score read back (performed) to check that the outcome is the intended one. It may be necessary to research the way to write something unfamiliar or seek advice from a colleague. Several attempts may be required to produce a successful outcome.

Currently, most notators are writing this first version of the score on LabanWriter, a computer graphics program that functions like word-processing for Labanotation. Previously, all scores had to be recopied by hand if changes were made. Since corrections and editing are greatly simplified now, changes for the better are made more frequently. The notator may write multiple drafts to reach satisfaction with the final product. During this process, s/he constantly self-checks the notation grammar, for clarity and legibility of notation passages, and for any discrepancies where different people are performing the same movement. Finally, the score goes to a certified checker who marks his/her comments directly on any problematic section to assist the notator in making the score as clear and accurate as possible. The notator receives the feedback and completes any necessary changes.

Indeed, notating a score requires much patience and dedication. The next time you read something from a score, please remember to pay tribute to the notator who enables you to enjoy the dance again or for the first time, and to forgive him or her for any little errors you may encounter. There are always a few!



Notation excerpts from Mark Morris' *All Fours*.  
Courtesy of Mark Morris Dance Group

## Life of a Score – Once It Arrives at the DNB Library

by Lucy Venable

When a newly written Labanotation score is presented to Mei-Chen Lu for the DNB Library, it does not lie unattended. In fact, it probably becomes exhausted by all the attention that it receives due to the important information that must be stored in various cataloging databases: introductory material about the dance, the dance itself, and supplementary materials useful in recreating the dance.

First, the score is assigned its Dance ID number. Next, a copy is made on archival paper that becomes the Master Copy and the original score is filed away safely in an archival box to ensure the longevity of the score. If there is an electronic copy of the score, it is stored on a CD-Rom.

Information regarding the score and supplementary materials is then entered into the **Database of Dance Scores (referred to as the Dance Database)** which offers an overview of the dance: title, choreographer, date choreographed, date premiered, notator, date notated, composer, music title, revisions and transcriptions of the dance score, if any. It also gives a general description of the work, running time, length of score, level of notation, style of movement, original cast, notated cast, casting requirements, number and technical level of dancer(s), additions needed (2 children, dog, actor, etc.), production requirements and any sources or instructions for props, sets, lighting, and costumes. It is noted if a music score, CD, music tape, LP, video, or reel to reel tape is housed at the DNB Library as well as any photographs, digital images, reviews, articles, programs, flyers, and press releases. This database gives Lu access to detailed information to answer questions related to the dance quickly and accurately.

In addition to the existing Dance ID number, each item submitted is given an individual Master ID number and placed in the appropriate archival folder: Labanotation score, music score, articles and reviews, photos, costume information, lighting information, etc. The folders are filed by title of dance in cabinets containing the Master Collection. These items are used for circulation reproduction, as needed, and the information enclosed in each folder is carefully entered into the **Database of Master Copies of Scores and Supplementary Materials (referred to as the Master Database)**. This database is more descriptive in nature. Besides listing the dance title, choreographer, notator, item type, number of items per folder and the condition of item, a detailed description of the content is listed such as hand written score or LabanWriter score; score with or without introduction; corrections done by whom; funder; stager and/or performer(s), date and location of performance and company; title; author, and publisher of articles and reviews; comments related to the materials. If restrictions are placed on any of these materials by the choreographer's and/or copyright owner's wishes, these will be noted here.

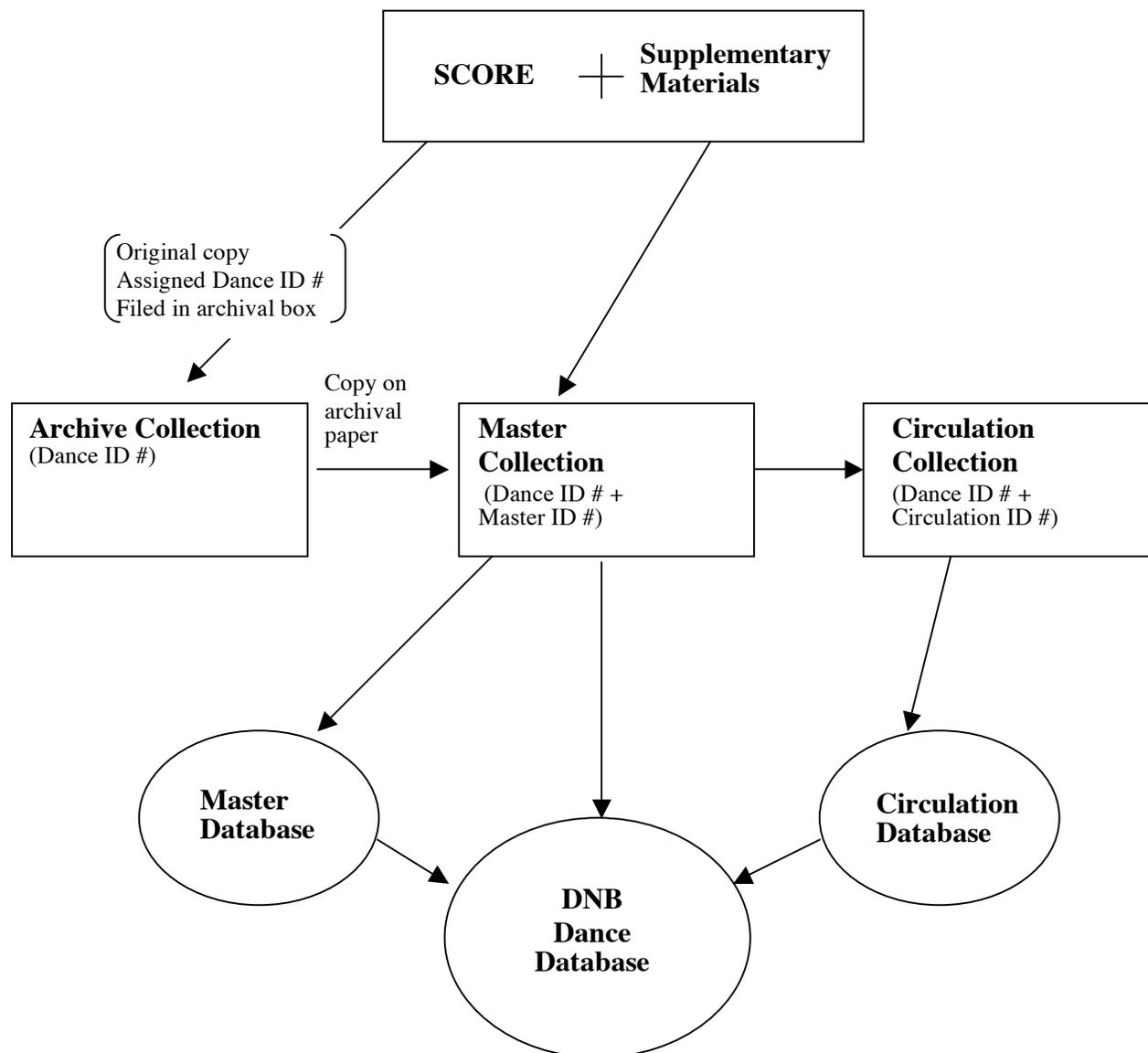
After information is entered into the databases, Lu makes copies of the dance score, the marked music score, audio tape or CD, VHS tapes or DVDs to send to score checkers who in turn check the notation and the movement. After this process is completed and any necessary changes have been made to the original and master copies, the score is ready for use.

Periodically, microfilm copies of the introductory material and the notation of new scores are made for offsite storage in the Jerome Robbins Dance Collection at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts and the Lawrence and Lee Theater Collection at The Ohio State University.

## DNB Membership Drive

We are in the middle of the 2008/2009 membership drive. We thank you for your past support and ask you to join or renew your DNB membership now. Your membership dollars help the DNB's general operating support; money not linked to a specific notation or staging project. Any contribution is also welcome.

The membership information and form are available at the DNB website:  
<<http://www.dancenotation.org/DNB/member/index.html>>



### LABANOTATION SCORES

- *Daughters of the Lonesome Isle* (1945)  
Choreographer Jean Erdman  
Notator Jennifer Garda, 2006-07  
Notation revision J. Garda, 2008
- *Lamentation* (1930)  
Myra Woodruff Version  
Choreographer Martha Graham  
Notator Mira Kim, 2007

- *Lamentation* (1930)  
Peggy Lyman Version  
Choreographer Martha Graham  
Notator Mira Kim, 2008

### TRANSCRIBED LN SCORE

- *The Beloved* (1948)  
Choreographer Lester Horton  
Notator Ray Cook, 1971  
Notation Graphics Mira Kim, 2007

### BOOKS

- Guest, Ann Hutchinson. *The Cecchetti Legacy: An Analysis and Description of the Cecchetti Method of Classical Ballet*. Alton, England, Dance Books, 2007  
Gift of Ann Hutchinson Guest
- Jordan, Stephanie. *Stravinsky Dances: Re-Visions Across a Century*. Alton, England, Dance Books, 2007