

Volume IX
No. 3
Spring
2015

Library News

From the Dance Notation Bureau

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- Restaging Knusts's *Walzer*

Dance Notation Bureau Library
Monday - Friday 10 am – 5 pm
Advance Notification by Phone/Email
Recommended

111 John Street, Suite 704
New York, NY 10038
Phone: 212/571-7011
Fax: 212/571-7012
Email: library@dancenotation.org
Website: www.dancenotation.org
Facebook:
www.facebook.com/dancenotationbureau

Library News is published four times a year
in New York

Editors:

Senta Driver
Mei-Chen Lu
Lucy Venable

Labanotation Editor:

Sandra Aberkals

Director of Library Services:

Mei-Chen Lu

Advisors:

Jill Cirasella, Associate Librarian for Public
Services and Scholarly Communication,
Graduate Center, The City University of
New York

Nena Couch, Curator

Lawrence and Lee Theatre Research
Institute at The Ohio State University

Patricia Rader, Retired Cataloger
New York Public Library for the
Performing Arts

Libby Smigel, Executive Director
Dance Heritage Coalition

The DNB gratefully acknowledges funding support from:

New York State Council on the Arts, New York
City Department of Cultural Affairs, National
Endowment for the Arts, Alphawood Foundation,
Capezio Ballet Makers Dance Foundation Inc.,
The Harkness Foundation for Dance, The
Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Jerome Robbins
Foundation, The Antony Tudor Trust, Jody and
John Arnhold, and our individual contributors
and members.

Restaging Knusts's *Walzer* by Mara Penrose



Figure 1. *Walzer* performance at Denison University, 2013. ©Denison University Communications

No one had quite anticipated that the ground would be covered with slushy snow for the November 14, 2013 outdoor performance of Albrecht Knust's *Walzer* at Denison University in Granville, Ohio. At the climax of this movement choir performance, arrayed across the lawn on a carpet of slushy, slippery snow are 59 performers holding hands in a massive pinwheel formation. A line of demarcation (Figure 1) has formed where the sun's rays slipped over the roof and warmed the ground to reveal a sliver of tractionable green surface along the north end of the performance space. Eight spokes formed by lines of five to eight dancers radiate outward towards the edges of the commons from a shared center point. In this formation, each dancer travels in a forward waltz step along a widely spiraling path, first away from the center, then back in towards the center. This creates an expansion and contraction in the overall formation from a bird's eye view.

Having joined the ranks of dancers for the massive performance, I can tell that their attention is sharply focused on step size and direction relative to each other. They are also trying hard just to stay upright, dancing as they are in an inch of melting snow. The sound of the audience's applause triggered by the accomplishment of this massive formation temporarily disrupts their focus as they trade smiles.

After the 4 minutes and 15 seconds long performance ends, there is a sense of triumph among the performers. The 59 student, faculty and community performers hug and take selfies in the matching blue rain ponchos they wore as costumes. A core group of eight Dance Department students, those of Professor Gill Miller's Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) class, are particularly proud. They were each

required to learn the movement material, understand the formation changes, recruit volunteer performers, and act as leaders and rehearsal directors for their group of recruits.

When Miller invited to me to come to Denison University as a Vail Guest Artist in Autumn 2013 and stage *Walzer*, I felt excited by the prospect. Miller had attended a performance in July 2013 of an eight person arrangement of *Walzer* I had staged at the Ohio Statehouse Lawn Summer Friday Performance Series. Miller felt sure she could help gather a larger group at Denison to create a spectacle. I was skeptical that we could get a large enough cast—the *Walzer* score prescribes 40 dancers—but was convinced by Miller’s confidence in the enthusiasm of the Denison students. (The score uses the group notation method of specifying number of dancers.)

Walzer is a movement choir, a simple dance for a large cast, popular during the rise of physical culture and the early days of Modern Dance in Germany. Group notation symbols that we do not see very often today were used in movement choir scores. For example, group notation symbols clarify the casting and initial formation of *Walzer* on the front page. The floor plan on the front page shows the dancers are divided into eight groups of five (the number within the double circles), labeled A-D and E-H (Figure 2). Large right and left direction symbols indicate that these groups, each made up of 20 dancers, are arranged at the two sides of the performance space as shown within the box.

Each group of five has one leader and four followers. For the Denison performance, the leader parts would be played by the small group of LMA students, and their recruits would act as the followers. At the beginning of the staging process, I taught the movement material to the core group of LMA students and explained the formations. They then met with recruits on their own to pass on this information. Dance ability among the recruits ranged from beginner to advanced dancers. After the LMA students had met with their individual teams, I met again with the full cast for a single rehearsal and coaching session.

Movement choirs like *Walzer* were popular educational dances in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s. At that time, Laban was still in the process of developing and sharing his theories. Amateur dancers studied theories of movement, Labanotation, and participated in movement choirs.

Seeing *Walzer* performed with a large cast was personally gratifying for me. It was the culmination of a research process that started in 2008 while I was still a graduate student in Laban Studies at The Ohio State University. As a Graduate Assistant in the Dance Notation Bureau Collection, housed in the Lawrence and Lee Theatre Research Institute at Ohio State, I began with a general interest in the history, culture and politics surrounding movement choirs. I had many questions; primarily, what did a movement choir performance look and *feel* like? Furthermore, how did movement choirs relate to the propaganda dances of the Nazi party in the 1930s? I found that movement choirs demonstrate an egalitarian aesthetic, in which dancers share responsibility for creating an organized, yet fluid effect in contrast to the monolithic aesthetic of Nazi propaganda dance. The notation score, with its capacity for disseminating choreographic information, lies at the foundation of a distribution of power into the hands of dancers.

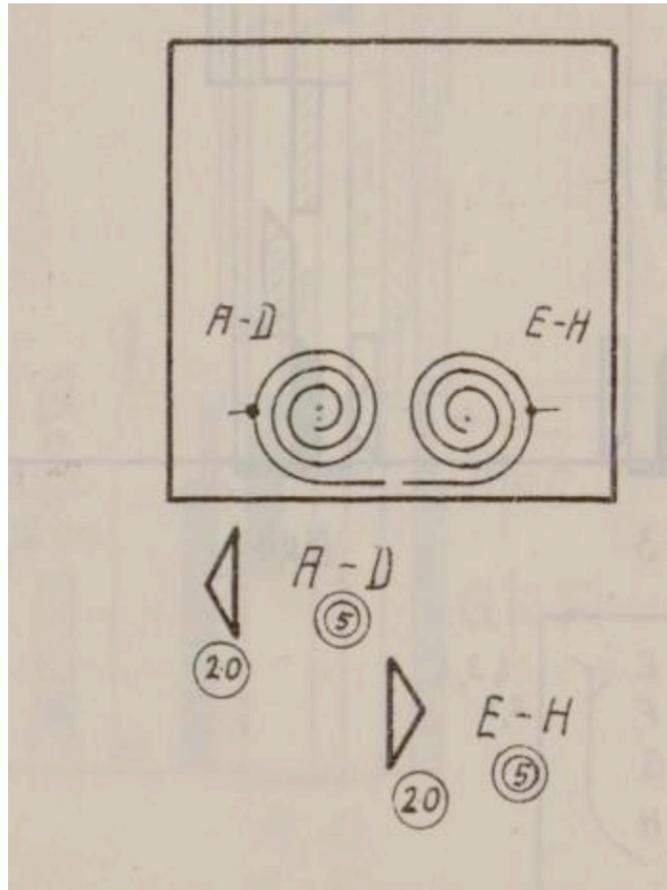


Figure 2. Kinetography Laban score *Walzer*. The floor plan shows number of cast and placement

For my graduate project I chose to reconstruct and restage *Walzer*, a section of the larger work “der Titan” (the full title is *Walzer aus dem Reigen des “Titan”*). I conducted historical research at the Laban archive in London and the National Resource Center for Dance at the University of Surrey in England to better understand the dance culture surrounding movement choirs.

I determined that it is important to make a distinction between the genres of ‘choral dance work’ and ‘movement choir’ to best understand *Walzer*. There are important differences between these two types of dances. Movement choirs were an activity for amateur dancers, created for the edification of the participants themselves. Choral dance works were theatrical performances, to be performed on a stage, for an audience. (I wrote more extensively about how I came to draw this distinction in my paper “Re:What? Investigation of a 1930s Movement Choir from the Notation Score”, published in the ICKL 27th Annual Conference proceedings.) The cast of a choral dance work used casts of professionals in main roles, supported by large choruses of amateurs. While both choral dances and movement choirs had massive casts and made use of the ample supply of recreational dancers in Germany at the time, movement choirs were special because they emphasized the *Gemeinschaft*, or group feeling, created among the performers through the act of dancing together, rather than the communication of a narrative or thematic idea, as the choral dance works did.

One of the reasons I chose to reconstruct *Walzer* and not *Der Titan*, was because as a movement choir, it is essentially a non-presentational work. While the spectacle of *Walzer* may be entertaining, the primary purpose is the effect on the dancers themselves. An important element of the content of *Walzer* is the shared experience of executing complicated formations and movements. There is no “front” to the floor plans of a movement choir, which are square rather than rectangular. Dancers are oriented to all directions, and most importantly, to each other.

The background research I did for my Master’s project served as the foundation for the staging at Denison, where with the enthusiasm of the Denison community, *Walzer* was able to truly come to life again. The clasped hands, lilting Gounod score, and upbeat tempo create a joyful experience of movement for the dancers. The sense of cooperation and community that are required to execute the dance successfully build a temporary social group. The massive formation changes create a sense of spectacle.

This is at the heart of what inspires me about staging dance from the notation score—the chance to join with a community not only in the present, but reaching back to the past, formed around the joy of dancing.



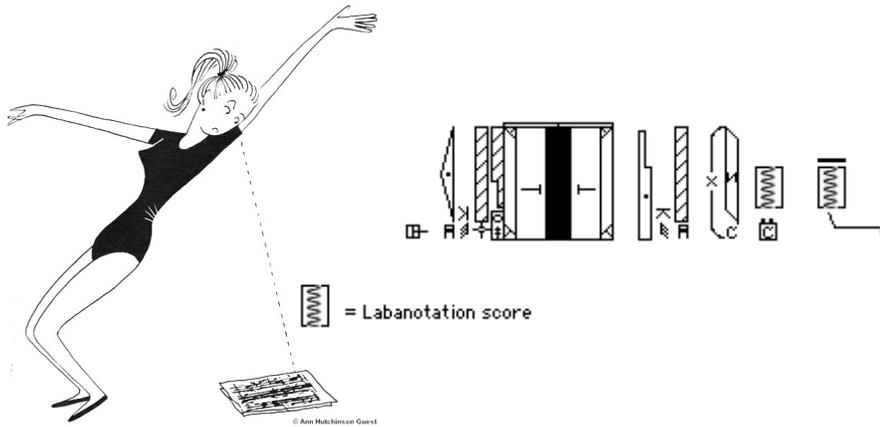
THE DANCE NOTATION BUREAU

Two New Course Offerings

Elementary Labanotation Workshop in NYC!

June 15-26, 2015

Learning Elementary notation is the first step in being able to read scores by some of the greatest choreographers of our time. It will also enhance your movement observation skills that can be applied in both the classroom and auditions. Many colleges will give 3 credits for this course.

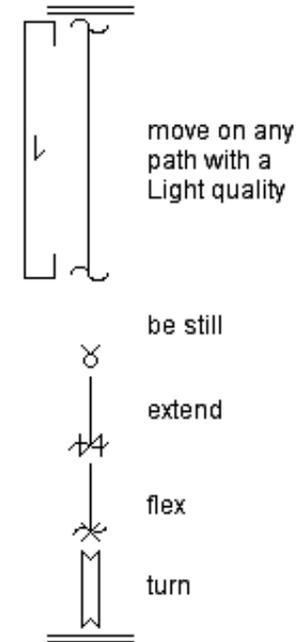


Course fees:
\$925 by April 30 (\$985 starting May 1)
\$100 non-refundable deposit
Exam \$45

Movement Observation & Motif Notation

24/7 Online Course

Motif Notation is a method of documenting core elements and leitmotifs in movement. It can be used by anyone who observes, discusses, analyzes, teaches, or creates movement. This course is equivalent to a 3-credit college course and meets 45 hours of Dance Therapy credit.



Course fees:
Introductory course \$799
Exam \$75

For registration or questions, please go to:
dnbinfo@dancenotation.org
or call us at 212-571-7011
and visit us anytime at www.dancenotation.org