

# DNBulletin

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## Contents

Saving Dance Treasures .....	1
www.dancenotation.org .....	1
Runup to the 60 <sup>th</sup> .....	2
Realizing the Full Value of Scores.....	2
How Has LN Served You?.....	2
The Library .....	3
Extension News .....	3
Hoffman's New Technology .....	4

## DNBulletin

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## Saving Dance Treasures

The Dance Notation Bureau is pleased to announce Congress has approved \$250,000 for the DNB to document important 20<sup>th</sup> century American dances with notation and video. Congress has made a one-time new millennium allocation for a program entitled *Save America's Treasures*, designed to preserve nationally significant intellectual and cultural artifacts and historic structures and sites. The initiative, administered by the Department of the Interior through the National Parks Service Heritage Preservation Program, made grants to 12 Federal agencies for 62 projects, including the award to the National Endowment for the Arts for the DNB initiative.

After receiving the guidelines, Douglas Sonntag, Director of Dance for the NEA, contacted DNB Executive Director Ilene Fox with the idea for the project. Over two years, the DNB will undertake notation and video documentation of up to ten works by choreographers of special national importance. The artists, with whom negotiations are now underway, represent Broadway and tap dance as well as classical, modern and post-modern dance. Ilene Fox stated that this will make an important new contribution to the record we are building for the future.

## www.dancenotation.org

Matthew Sheehy has strengthened the DNB's Web presence with an expanded and improved site, now located at the above address. Visit our site and you can join in motif discussions at a bulletin board curated by Charlotte Wile. The bulletin board has been designed so discussions can include symbols and notated examples. Anyone unable to e-mail notated examples can participate by mailing or faxing in notated submissions and they will be entered onto the website.

Our catalog of Notated Theatrical Dances can now be downloaded from the site. Soon it will be available online in a searchable format. The initial posting will include 12 fields of information, 7 of them searchable. Sheehy will add additional fields as the information is added to the master database.

A listing of solo dances and excerpts available in Labanotation is now available on the website. Leslie Rotman produced it with input from Muriel Topaz, Maria Grandy and many others. Scanned photographs will be added soon, notably some remarkable originals recently loaned to the DNB by Daniel Nagrin. The listing includes the level of technique and reading ability required to use the score.

Among new bibliographies that are now posted are a motif-

related list compiled by Charlotte Wile, and a bibliography of Judy Van Zile's articles with notation content on non-theatrical dance.

## Runup to the 60<sup>th</sup>: Profile

*a series on DNB staff whom you may know only by phone or e-mail*

He was born into a theatrical household, son of a dancer and a father who supported his musical interests. He has studied music composition to the Bachelor's level. His interest in dance permeated his compositions; they were written with movement in mind. He's worked in a bank and as a technician troubleshooting biomedical equipment and systems. He even has operating room experience, though he confined his professional efforts to the tables and not the patients. Now he is the DNB Librarian.

Matthew Sheehy left biomedics to return to the world that he loves, the arts. He entered SUNY Buffalo's graduate program in music history, and became fascinated by a course in music bibliography. This became such a compelling attraction that he added one more area to his resume: he entered Library School as well and in 1998 earned simultaneous Master's degrees in music history and Library Science.

Matthew joined the DNB staff just in time to help prepare for the move. While helping to design the new library and archives space, pack boxes, and take apart furniture,

he still managed to keep the library open on all but the actual moving day.

In just one year's time Matthew has made great strides towards cataloging the collection, including creating the design for the database; built up the website (see related story on page 1) and continued to meet the needs of DNB patrons. His current focus is on preservation of the archive, especially the magnetic media.

He believes there are useful resources at the Dance Notation Bureau beyond its impressive collection of notated theatrical dances, and wants to make the holdings more public. He notes that the DNB is a name with cachet in library and special collection circles, although he would like to make it more fully known. Getting an on-line searchable catalog onto the website is one of his strategies to this end.

He now lives in Ronkonkoma with his delightful two-year-old daughter Frances and his wife Rebecca, a PhD in Psychology who is currently working towards licensure and as a consultant while expecting their second child.

## Realizing the Full Value of Scores

At a *2000 Feet* panel in Philadelphia Ilene Fox raised the issue of "Bringing the Past into the Future" and called attention to the range of advantages gained by preserving a dance in notation.

Panelist Ray Cook later observed "The fact that it's notated is only the first rung on the ladder." Once a score is completed, it is the many ways that it can be used that makes the score truly valuable. One vital result is, of course, the ability to restage and present, or (as a dancer) experience, an intact work with its original movement material. Another gain is access to the history and aesthetic arc of dance over long periods of time. Cook observes that serious criticism often focuses on the performance of dance rather than on choreography. Through use of the scores, choreographic development can be more fully assessed. Notation protects the values as well as the factual legacy of artists who shaped the present dance field. As student Tobie Barton said at the Philadelphia panel, performance of Lester Horton's *The Beloved*, restaged by Cook, gave her insight into a 1948 perspective on domestic violence, so much a contemporary issue.

## How Has LN Served You?

As another part of our preparations for year 60, we are collecting information from you on how you have used Labanotation over the years and what you see as the value of what we are doing together. We ask you to send in comments from you and your students or colleagues, reflecting on what we get out of what we are saving.

Goucher College, for instance, got a dance major.

Department head Crystelle Bond reports that in 1975 there was demand from students and even from applicants to Goucher for more dance courses, including a full major. The then Dean demurred, stating that dance had no body of knowledge and command of its history, and did not qualify as a discipline on the College's terms. His specific objection was that the master works of the field could not be preserved accurately, as was possible in music. "You can't get at your classics," he said. When Bond introduced him to Labanotation, including a trial class, his scientific interest was satisfied and he opened the way for the recognition sought. "Labanotation did it for us," Bond reported.

## The Library

Two generous donations have arrived to expand the Library's capacities. Dennis Diamond and Video D Studios have contributed a VHS deck to replace the DNB's elderly equipment. This will make the current effort to review and assess the condition of our videotapes much safer and easier.

An anonymous donor has provided a replacement for the Library computer and a new notator's computer. This, along with a series of gifts from Alice Moorhead and the provisions of the NIPAD grant, have magically transformed the DNB's computers from a set of historic Apple antiques. It will facilitate desktop publishing of a new brochure for the DNB, and the expansion of the on-

line database and website.

Scores received include Daniel Roberts' LabanWriter version of Merce Cunningham's *Totem Ancestor* in Lena Belloc and Ann Hutchinson Guest's; Leslie Rotman's score of Martha Graham's *Diversion of Angels*, and two older treasures, Els Grelinger's pencil draft scores of Doris Humphrey's *Partita V* and *Shakers*.

## Extension News

Veronica Dittman received a Dance Preservation Fund award from the OSU Department of Dance for production of a small book with notation and text titled *Loveliness*. This work, a visual musing on Chase Angier's dance *Lemons for Loveliness*, is intended to supplement the performance and will be offered for sale at performances of Angier's Chase Dance Theater, to benefit the company.

Undergraduate Daniel Roberts is following up his restaging of Merce Cunningham's *Totem Ancestor* from score with a summer on scholarship at the Cunningham School. He is also set to work with Charles Atlas, performing the early solo in Atlas' documentary in progress on Cunningham.

Stephanie Ray will present a paper at ICKL entitled "Erika Milée: One Step Further". She is believed to be the first undergraduate student to have work accepted by the Congress.

(Hoffman, continued from back page)

could use a different program, Adobe After Effects, to link the score and video. Her design places a work's video, Labanotation and floor plans all in one window, rather than three, as was done at OSU. The result is that it is simpler to make, less programming is involved, and it uses less memory.

Dancers using her tool to learn a piece while knowing little about notation can easily become familiar with the floor plans, and soon may be able to gather information from the symbols. A help button will offer aids in reading the score or explanations of movement issues. She observes that while she reads little music notation, she can learn a substantial amount from following the written score as she listens, and expects dancers will be able to do the same with Labanotation. This may prove a useful way of nudging dancers towards literacy, while providing video and spacing information they can immediately use.

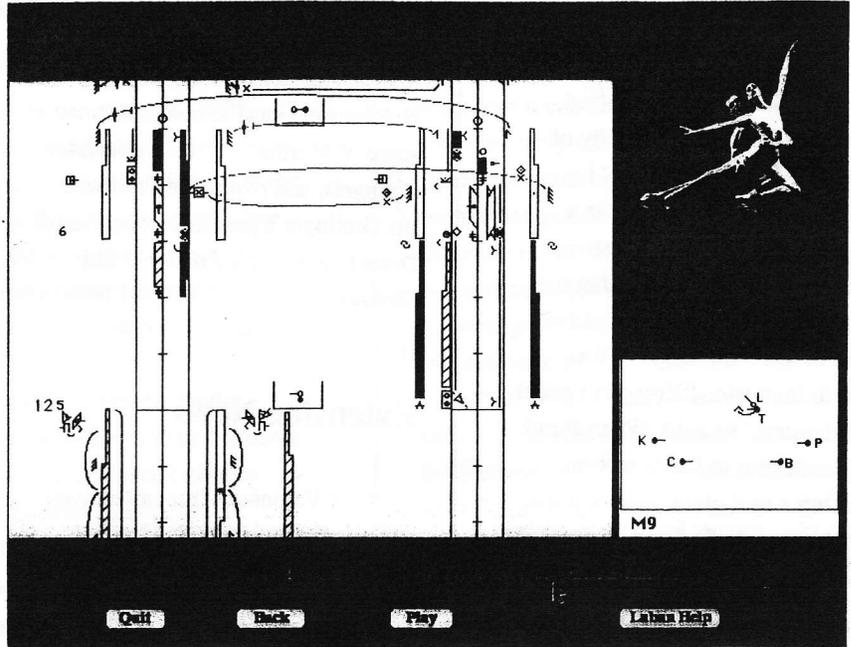
The project could assist dancers learning roles, create work opportunities for dancers between jobs in programming and production of new CD-ROMs, and enhance the quality and completeness of Labanotation scores. The subject of Hoffman's prototype, which she has been demonstrating to DNB visitors and patrons, is a duet from Bruce Marks' *Lark Ascending*. Marks and Paul Taylor have taken an interest in her work.

So has *Time Magazine*. Hoffman was the subject of a July 1998 story about her computer training and its value in notation.

## Hoffman's New Technology

Robin Hoffman has spent her spare time over the last three years working on a prototype CD-ROM with the working title "Multimedia Dancers' Score". She attended the DNB Extension at OSU multi-media workshops two years running, and then sought advanced training at NYU in multi-media technology, design and production.

Hoffman says her focus is on a tool for professional dancers in rehearsal. Joukje Kolff, working at OSU on a team headed by A. William Smith, first created a prototype program to link a notation score and video. In trying to teach herself how it was done at OSU and to customize it for dancers like herself who want to learn a role, Hoffman realized she



*(see page 3)*

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