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**NEH Funds Interface**

The National Endowment for the Humanities awarded the DNB \$243,493 over three years from May 2001, for continuing development of the Interface software to translate between LabanWriter and the animation program Life Forms.

This is the DNB’s third NEH grant; it supported notation of Tudor in 1981 and Balanchine in 1984. The Interface has also won \$151,880 from the National Initiative to Preserve America’s Dance and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Rhonda Ryman, a member of the project team (which also includes Ilene Fox, Thomas Calvert and Credo Interactive Inc.) calls the process “intriguing,” while ruefully noting the effect of its complexity on the rate of progress. She brings to the work her fluency in both LN and Benesh, and her expertise in creating Life Forms animations. With Fox she is painstakingly evaluating phase I and the best approach for phase II. By analyzing the programming decisions and their implications for future writing, they will design maximum efficiency into the next stage.

It is a fascinating collaboration to observe. Sharing a laptop, Fox and Ryman push solutions at each other, debate notation conventions, question the implications of a definition or what is

lost or gained by a programming choice, and laugh over their stumbling blocks and occasional attempts to operate mouse and trackpad simultaneously. The intellectual challenge is to craft a translator that will accommodate, within the technical demands of two software systems, undreamed of movement choices. It is like getting to watch the founding members of ICKL work on LN itself; or being there to see Lucy Venable’s team hammer out LabanWriter.

**Spotlight: Enhancing Effort in Ailey Scores**

As Sandra Aberkalns proceeds on Alvin Ailey’s *Quintet*, a *Save America’s Treasures* project, she has determined a need to expand her usual use of Effort notation. Often word notes and the natural influence of the movement and its rhythm will produce the desired quality; here Aberkalns is finding dynamics an issue separate from characterization.

One element raising this question for the notator is Ailey’s setting of strongly accented movement on undulating musical phrases with no strong stresses of their own.

Sylvia Waters made the necessary Efforts specific in her demonstrations and notes, particularly for one passage with an action in three differing

**DNBulletin**

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dynamics. “In so many scores we don’t have to write Effort; it evolves of itself,” Aberkalns observed. “If I took the Effort out here, it would be naked somehow, not fully dressed.” She is consulting Charlotte Wile on nuances of the Effort writing for *Quintet*. In some cases they noted a need for symbols still under debate, such as those suggested for “markedly” Strong and “slightly” Strong.

## More to Honorary Board

Ann Wilson Wangh was accidentally omitted from the new Honorary Board in the last issue. She learned notation at the very beginning of the DNB’s work, and as a dancer for Eugene Loring it was she who persuaded him to allow the scoring of *Billy the Kid* in 1942. We appreciate her commitment.

## Notators Onward, Upward

Four experienced professional Notators were asked how their practice has changed over the years. They give an encouraging picture of how far LN has come in artist acceptance and labor-saving technology.

Ray Cook, Leslie Rotman, Mary Corey and Sandra Aberkalns all see their notating shaped and refined by restaging scores, especially their own. Cook now describes his Sokolow scores as “simple”, and after directing many productions is tempted to add in more information, particularly word notes: “Run faster than is possible here” came to his mind. Aberkalns would now add more nuance to one of her scores. Rotman puts “more style notes in my scores than I used to...I add symbols to show the approach to the result, though I don’t try to teach the technique.” Corey’s restaging work sensitized her to where

questions may arise and need heading off. “I now try to avoid complication, in service to the reader; keeping the material accessible but not subject to misreading. For instance, I may not choose the most complex System of Reference, even if it is theoretically the most accurate, if a more commonly used one is adequate. I try to find another way to write it.”

Another change Cook appreciates is “the big advantage that you leave the rehearsal with videotape and can check it later.” Rotman agrees that “video changed the way I notate. It used to be life-or-death in rehearsal then...it was very stressful.” For Corey, permission to use a camera allows shooting actions she wants to examine, sticking points, and key demonstrations that could be helpful supplementary score material. She was also greatly aided by LabanWriter, which has changed *her* notation practice. With formalist work, LW aids the perception and handling of repeated themes.

All commented on greater artist receptiveness to the notator’s presence. Cook said “then we were [to be] a fly on the wall. Now we are fully accepted.” Rotman notes that while “we were trained not to be noticed, it was part of the etiquette,” she finds she now is given more authority, invited to sit with the choreographer or to call with questions. She feels “A lot of quality [LN] work is speaking for itself. More choreographers have familiarity and experience with notation.” Corey and Aberkalns felt accepted on the team from the first; Aberkalns’ Benesh training had already taught her (and the artists she scored) that the notator’s place was up front.

Aberkalns sees a major change in the amount and level of research, a “tenfold increase in the overall quality of analysis and the introductory material” in scores. She adds in the influence of recently developed advanced theory. Rotman now seeks restaging information

from the choreographer: who has the rights, who is to handle coaching, who is permitted to see or use the score. These all point to real progress over the decades.

## Ambassador in Asia

At Juilliard Carl Wolz says he found notation of “obvious” value. Under Muriel Topaz, Lucy Venable and Ann Hutchinson Guest he mastered Teacher and Notator training. One day Wolz was approached by fellow students from Asia to notate their national dances. This launched his unexpected but long and influential career in the Far East, for which he acquired fluent Japanese and some Chinese. It gave him 20 years running the dance program at the University of Hawaii; and 10 more as founding Dean of Dance at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts.

Wolz identifies the challenges in notating Asian forms as prop/costume management and the range of facial movement. “Asian dance often has more undulating and curvilinear moves; ballet is more in the octahedron,” he observes. “In the Asian folk traditions there is not only one right way. Notation can be too specific; so we use motif writing to get the correct level. A major problem in notation here is the insider/outsider [issue]...There is a need to train notators from within the local tradition.”

Wolz meets this summer with teams translating the *Elementary Study Guide* into Chinese, Japanese and Korean. This will support the training of local notators who speak languages other than English. He notes there are now handfuls of adept notators at work in Malaysia, Korea, the Philippines, China, Japan and Taiwan. One or two students in India have begun to study LN.

Wolz believes those used to looking at pictograph images in their

own languages find the symbolic nature of LN familiar, in contrast to some Westerners who encounter it.

He points out the pioneering work of Dai Ai-lian, the first to go into Chinese villages collecting folk material, and Anis Nor, an active LN promoter in Malaysia. One must add recognition of the pioneer Wolz has personally been in this hemisphere and for this huge, complex and gorgeous dance heritage.

## The Library

Jill Cirasella responded to a call in 1998 from Librarian Matthew Sheehy, for volunteer help after the move to 30th Street. She was then a computer science and dance major at Amherst; now with professional credentials in Library and Information Sciences she holds the job herself. Jill came on staff April 20, and with career advice from Matthew and from Leslie Kopp she hits the ground running.

Beverly Jensen has nearly completed 15 years of work on a group of Tudor scores with *lacunae* of various kinds. Directed by Leslie Rotman, she compiled earlier research for score introductions and supplemental information, reorganized master files and edited texts. The respective notators and Gina Jacobs completed glossary questions. Renters of these scores will now see a much broader range of information, with a handsome new appearance.

Jacobs has transferred *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, *Folksay* and *Negro Spirituals*, among others, onto LabanWriter to improve the legibility of circulating scores. She has been working for 2 years under a DNB grant from the National Endowment for the Arts which has just been renewed.

## OSU Extension News

The OSU Dance Department's spring concert featured two works directed from score. Along with Paul Taylor's *Three Epitaphs* (part of the DNB 60th Anniversary Repertory Project), Lin Hwai-min's *Crossing the Black Water* was restaged by Sheila Marion. Yang Mei-jung of Taiwan's Cloud Gate Dance Theatre, founded by the choreographer, coached the production. Ray Cook went to Columbus under a Dance Preservation Fund grant, for earlier work with the dancers, and to correct and add to his score from the lighting and spacing rehearsals on stage.

More restagings were on the spring OSU schedule. Undergraduate Anne D'Aversa, a Certified LN Teacher, gave Don Redlich's *Passin' Through* its first restaging from score. She arranged to be coached in New York by Redlich, and will add timing corrections to the score, along with compiling her coaching notes for a permanent record in the DNB Library. Another Certified Teacher, MFA candidate Ligia Pinheiro, directed Charles Weidman's *Brahms Waltzes* at Wittenburg University, with Valarie Mockabee as advisor and coaching by faculty member Rosalind Pierson, a former Wiedman dancer. MFA candidate Karen Klaverkamp presented Catherine Turocy's version of the *Passacaille d'Armide*, learned from Turocy and the Feuillet notation. She will document Turocy's important performances and research into gestures, which are not recorded in the Beauchamps-Feuillet notation system, in her thesis.

Two more restagings were included in classes: Doris Humphrey's *Variations and Conclusion from New Dance* with coaching by Lucy Venable, and Yvonne Rainer's *Chair Pillow*.

Most of these, and restagings by

Valarie Mockabee (Valerie Bettis' *Desperate Heart*), Katie Teuchtlar (Isadora Duncan dances) and Peter Levai (Hungarian dances) will be performed at the ICKL conference at OSU in July.

## LN for Anthropology by guest writer Brenda Farnell

Labanotation is now an official "research tool" in the Anthropology department at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Doctoral students working with Dr. Brenda Farnell are using it to record all kinds of human action in both Western and non-Western cultural contexts. In their "movement literacy" seminar this year, students worked on movement systems as diverse as Brazilian Capoeira (a martial art), Greek Orthodox ritual and everyday gesture, Plains Indian Sign Language, and movement disorders among American autistic children and patients with Parkinson's disease.

"Concepts of the body, space and time differ enormously across cultural and linguistic boundaries," said Farnell, "but we find LN flexible enough to accommodate this fascinating variety in our ethnographic research."

Rudolph Laban wished his notation system to be used in "the accurate recording of all human movement" (Juana de Laban, 1969:108). These new developments not only fulfill Laban's vision but ensure a healthy, diverse future for Labanotation.

## Broadcast News

Ilene Fox was interviewed on Rhode Island Public Radio in February on the subject of choreography and its preservation.

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*excerpt from Alvin Ailey's QUINTET*

*notation in progress by Sandra Aberkalns  
 (see story, page 1)*