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DNBulletin

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May Benefit

The DNB is raising funds this year for vital operating support and a new project, the Contemporary Readings Collection. The benefit features choreographer Robert Battle presenting some of his work and discussing his role in this new plan to create notated excerpts from the repertory of the artists most requested by students today.

The notation will be made available for educational use, and will bring dancers deeper contact with contemporary voices in dance, including more artists of color. They will be able to read and learn material that is being made in their own time. The first round features choreography by Battle and Homer Avila.

The event takes place Monday 10 May at 7.30, at the City Center rehearsal studios where Battleworks is based. Contact the office for tickets to join this special evening and help support the Bureau and the new Collection.

Spotlight: Building LabanDancer

When Lucy Venable and her Ohio State Extension colleagues were first developing LabanWriter software, for notating on the computer, they held hundreds of hours of meetings in Columbus. Notators based in other cities consulted, and testing was carried out widely, but the central effort was done face-to-face.

A LabanDancer team separated by most of North America is now crafting stand-alone software that can automatically translate notated material into animation on the screen. A score in

LabanWriter is entered, and as it scrolls up, an animated figure performs the written action. The viewer can choose to look from any perspective. The group anticipates release next fall of a Beta version that covers almost all the concepts in the Elementary syllabus, for testing by the notation community.

The team members live in New York and Vancouver and Waterloo, Ontario (near Toronto). Ilene Fox collaborates with Lars Wilke of Credo, Tom Calvert, an original designer of Dance Forms, and notation expert Rhonda Ryman of the University of Waterloo. They meet in person a couple of times a year in Canada or the U.S. for several days, but the bulk of their collaboration is electronic and by phone. This is a remarkable method for such sophisticated work, which is funded by a 2001 National Endowment for the Humanities grant to the DNB. The notation experts send digital video electronically to the programmer to illuminate points of notation theory. Fox can shoot material to make precise points with her own movement and words, and e-mail it to her colleagues. They exchange animation on-line made with Dance Forms software [formerly known to the dance community as Life Forms Dance, and developed by Credo Interactive] of a model moving exactly as the notation requires. This provides a check against what the translation software should be producing.

At group sessions Calvert likes to time how long it takes in a discussion for Fox to jump up, cast off her shoes and demonstrate for the others. (It is also said that Wilke, the programmer known for his intuitive feel for dance, does occasional jumping up of his own.) Apart, the members discuss issues by telephone, and e-mail verbal descriptions of movement. Ryman and Fox test new

elements of the software as Wilke creates them, operating as a unit from their separate offices. They call up matching test files on their computers, each running LabanDancer on a PC and LabanWriter on Macintosh. Linked by speaker phones, they can direct each other to a given minute and second on a timeline, or a symbol on the staff, and send files to each other or back to Wilke through Credo Interactive's FTP site. They share everything except the pot of coffee. Calvert adds in advice and response as needed.

The advantage of showing immediate, animated realizations of notated material will be significant. Artists not fluent in LN will be able to see at once what has been written, and to appreciate the possibility of preserving their work with all the detail they crafted.

Profile

a series on DNB's people and allies

Hillary Gal is a model of the deep loyalty that people trained in LN so often retain. She is also an example of the careers achieved by Notators in other areas.

Gal, a Certified Notator and Treasurer of the DNB Board of Directors, is Managing Director and Head of Technology Control for Citigroup. She oversees all aspects of computer and Information Security, and Continuity of Business. During the Northeast blackout of 2003 it was her responsibility to organize the Citigroup Corporate and Investment Bank's response that provided the business a functioning electrical supply, allowing the staff to use offices, equipment and systems nearly as usual. This was a priority she valued from personal experience on September 11, 2001, when she had to walk north to safety from the financial district, staying in contact with her family and colleagues by grace of a company BlackBerry pager.

Born into a show business family, with a mother who went to the School of American Ballet, toured in musicals and taught children's modern dance, Gal lived in Texas, Hollywood and (briefly) New York before the family settled in Michigan. She was a synchronized swimmer in high school when she realized her interest in dance. In the first of several striking coincidences, her family hosted Jimmyle Listenbee, now a CMA and leading figure in the Language

of Dance Center, as a young college teacher in its East Lansing home. Gal entered Eastern Michigan University for its dance program, and found there a gifted teacher named David Roche whom she found so impressive that when he moved to the faculty of the respected dance program at Florida State University, she followed right along.

FSU offered the BFA and MA, an active musical production schedule, and notation taught by Patty Howell Phillips. As other Notators have found, LN did not at first make a direct impression, and she took only the basic required course. But the fuse was lit. What Gal wanted then was to dance, and she found FSU so rich in attractive opportunities that she still describes the environment in glowing terms. She earned two degrees in dance, with a minor in math; "I loved logic," she recalls.

The logic of dancers drew her in 1976 to New York and the traditional waiter's job. Another coincidence brought Muriel Topaz into her restaurant; "I know who you are!" she says she told Topaz at once. One can imagine Topaz, with her keen eye for talent, seizing the opening. One conversation led to another, and notation was, for Gal, now the right fit. She began classes at 19 Union Square West, studying with Jane Marriett and Ray Cook, and recalls "I was ready for it then. I loved, *loved* notation." Her certifying score was Donald McKayle's classic *Games*.

She went on to freelance for the DNB as a restager, mounting *Negro Spirituals*, *Soaring* and *Icarus* among other pieces, and remembers her instinct that "dances [themselves] have lives." By 1983 she had begun to think about a career shift into business. "One of my students came to class in a suit and briefcase; she advised me to look at computer technology as an entry point. I wish I could find her now, to thank her." It took her one semester of study at NYU to land a job with Drexel Burnham Lambert. Six years later she was with Salomon Smith Barney, now part of Citigroup.

Asked how she found her way back to the DNB after so many years, she cited the invitation to the 60th Anniversary celebration in 2000. "I love notation. I find it interesting: important. So I went to the party and asked, 'what can I do to help?'" Gal was invited to join the Board, and succeeded Lynne Weber as Treasurer when Weber became Chair.

Gal is exploring new ways to

expand the use of LN. "I ask, how can we make this valuable enough to people who *are* able to pay for it? How can we be useful to the animation industry; use notation to develop better dancers? How can we be of help to the memory-based restagers? How can we become needed?" She found a use in a new career for aspects of her notator training, with its precision, and accurate observation, and logic; now she brings back the benefits of a new profession to enhance the work in which she has enduringly believed.

'Smart' Software Summit

DNB Executive Director Ilene Fox and Sheila Marion, Director of the OSU Extension for Education and Research, have announced a plan to bring a select international group of experts in LN programs, LabanDancer, motion capture, computer science and dance research to an April meeting in Columbus. The mandate is to explore a so-called "intelligent" notation program for LN: how to create it and what could be its possibly revolutionary research uses. The conference is jointly sponsored by the DNB Extension and the DNB, and has been funded by The Ohio State University's Battelle Endowment for Technology and Human Affairs. Fox and Marion are joined on the planning committee by Lucy Venable of the LabanWriter development team.

This ground-breaking advance on LabanWriter might add into its current powers such things as the capacity to recognize the grammar of the notation, for example that certain columns indicate the movement is for arms. It might enable searches for a group of symbols denoting a phrase that recurs in one or many scores, such as the personal trademark or "Fred step", (actually choreographed by Pavlova) that Ashton embedded in all his ballets.

Scott Marsh, Chair of the Dance Department, called it "exciting to bring together this community of intellects; I'm so glad it's happening soon, and here." He called a smart version of LW "a luxury and a necessity." DNB Chair Lynne Weber said, "this is a continuation of DNB's long commitment to using technology with notation."

For the first 2 days 26 participants are expected, of whom John Giffin, Valarie Mockabee and Vera Maletic come from the Extension faculty. Some other

key figures are Norman Badler, Professor of Computer Science at the University of Pennsylvania; Thomas Calvert and Lars Wilke of LabanDancer; Mira Kim, the DNB's Notation Associate and resident expert on LW 4.5; Judy Van Zile, dance anthropologist at the University of Hawaii; and, from Hungary, dance ethnologist and notator Janos Fugedi and programmer Gabor Misi of the Institute for Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Multi-media specialist Marion Bastien will come from Paris, and Calaban programmer Andy Adamson from England.

On day 3 a small group will meet to take the ideas generated and frame a work plan to bring a smart program into reality.

Dean Karen Bell of the OSU College of the Arts, a supporter of notation and the Extension when she herself was Dance Chair, said of the planned meeting, "the Dance Notation Bureau/Ohio State partnership is moving with lightning speed to a new universe. This milestone conference will revolutionize movement recording and analysis in a number of fields. It is an honor and a point of pride to host such a distinguished group of researchers, practitioners and technicians."

Robbins Foundation Requests Encore

The Jerome Robbins Foundation and the Robbins Rights Trust have approached Ilene Fox with a request to have the choreographer's *Afternoon of a Faun* notated. The score will be funded through donations made by the late Robbins patron Sondra Albert and others to the Foundation honoring her commitment to Robbins' repertory. Christopher Pennington of the Foundation noted that *Faun* was a particular favorite of Ms. Albert's.

This will follow on *Dances at a Gathering*, notated last year by Mary Corey and Sandra Aberkalns. It builds on the approaches to Robbins made by Ann Hutchinson Guest and Francis Mason over many years. The DNB is pleased to see artists and their representatives asking for notation, the single best resource for protecting dance's heritage, and believes Ms. Albert would be proud to secure this ballet so effectively.

The Library

Librarian Mei-Chen Lu is reorganizing the physical structure of both the Archives and the DNB research files to improve conservation and accessibility. She is also completing the database redesign as drafted by former Archives Consultant Joey Smith, in preparation for the next phase of professional consultancy.

Faced with a mounting number of scores being kept out beyond their due date, the Library will begin to enforce loan policy more carefully, so as to make scores available to members who need them. Overdue charges are now \$20 per month.

The updated catalogue of Notated Theatrical Dances, revised from the 2001 edition, is now up on the website for downloading or ordering in hard copy.

OSU Extension News

MFA graduate Vicki Watts is a Lecturer in Analysis and Performance Studies at the Royal Academy of Dancing in London, dealing with both LN and Benesh and developing Information Technology for dance graduate and undergraduate students. Also in London, Shelly Saint Smith has become principal assistant to Ann Hutchinson Guest. Joukje Kolff continues to work with Guest and on media projects, and is finishing the notation of Yvonne Rainer's seminal *Trio A*.

Rainer has recently become exceptionally involved with LN. Last March at Arizona State University, under the National College Choreography Initiative, Valarie Mockabee staged and updated the score of *Chair Pillow Dance* and *Couples* from Rainer's *Continuous Project—Altered Daily*. She developed such successful rapport with the choreographer during the coaching process that Rainer asked her "Do you have time to do something else too?" and added *We Shall Run* (1965) into the restaging, just so Mockabee could notate that as well. The administrative triumph of sudden scheduling was carried out by OSU graduate student Mila Parrish, now a member of ASU's dance faculty and the DNB Professional Advisory Council.

Mockabee has just set Anna Sokolow's *Steps of Silence* on Utah's Repertory Dance Theatre as part of a large NEA grant to document the dance and its

coaching on DVD, with 50 photographs of Sokolow rehearsing the company for the 1968 premiere.

Notators in Print

Articles on notation by two senior Notators have appeared on opposite sides of the world. Ann Hutchinson Guest published "And the Choreography Is By . . . ?" in the Winter 2002-2003 issue of the British journal *Dance Now*. Her argument made adroit points about the creep of changes into memory-based restagings and the "prevalent theory that any performer who has danced in the piece is a better source [than the score]," and she quotes Nijinsky's objection to the loss of choreographic detail in *Après Midi d'un Faune* after he left Diaghilev, which led him to demand removal of his name from the ballet. Guest has mounted the ballet from Nijinsky's own notation on the Royal Ballet. She also revealed a proposal for a Society for the Prevention of Cruelties to the Dance Classics (Alicia Markova, founding member), for which the need is increasingly apparent.

Ray Cook considered film v. notation in "Black Symbols on a White Page" in the June 2003 issue of the Australian dance journal *Brolga*. He identified drawbacks to film that are not usually appreciated: the lack of information on offstage preparation and how partnering is achieved, no way to specify music cues and other timing controls, the fact that "the viewer cannot know what is improvised and what is set." Cook reminds readers that "Choreography copied from the moving images becomes no more than a reflection of a reflection."

Funds for Restaging

The National College Choreography Initiative announces a 3rd round of funding for 2005-6. NCCI has previously funded restagings from score or in connection with creation of a new score at the University of Minnesota and Arizona State University. This is an ideal opportunity to get support for a notation-related residency. Application information is available on the website www.danceusa.org/programs_publications/choreography.htm and from Project Manager Suzanne Callahan at 202/955-8325.



*LabanDancer's modern woman performs a test phrase
(see story, page 1)*

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