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DNBulletin

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Ohio Notation Summit

Reports from the extraordinary meeting of notation experts from around the world held at The Ohio State University were glowing. 29 leaders in dance research and technology spent two days together in April discussing what they wanted notation software to be able to do, and the part that coming innovations in information processing could play. Present and past DNB staff in attendance included Mira Kim and Siân Ferguson, with Valarie Mockabee, John Giffin and retired professor Vera Maletic from the Extension. The planning committee was made up of DNB Executive Director Ilene Fox as facilitator, Sheila Marion, Director of the DNB Extension for Education and Research as host, and Lucy Venable in her familiar role as intellectual leader and prime mover.

The proceedings began with demonstrations of three LN software systems currently in use; Calaban (for the PC), Labanatory, in development in Hungary (also for the PC), and LabanWriter (for Macintosh). Lars Wilke, whose comment started it all ("If you're doing all the work to transfer LabanWriter to the PC, why don't you make it an intelligent LW?"), presented LabanDancer, which is currently able to translate most of the movement concepts in the Elementary LN syllabus on a computer-animated figure. Lorenzo Torresani of the NYU Center for Advanced Technology demonstrated a project using Labananalysis to inform motion capture data, for more dynamic computer animation.

The dance researchers explored and listed capabilities they needed. All wanted similar new features, including

capacity to search and perform analyses similar to spell- and grammar-checks. Ease of transferring information among notation programs, animation, motion capture and video was declared a priority. Achieving these goals means creating a way to represent data which allows interchange and contains information about the symbols, such as timing and body part. This interchange format has been dubbed *interlingua*, and may be one of the first goals of future research.

The meeting was underwritten by the Battelle Endowment for Technology and Human Affairs Program at OSU. The Extension and the DNB hope to collaborate on further joint fundraising as this project is developed.

Marion said after the conference, "It was very exciting. The most amazing aspect was the electricity in the air on the first day, when everyone realized the caliber and diversity of those who were around the table." Wilke relished "the process of taking all of the blue-sky ideas and converging onto some achievable tasks." The participants have an idea whose time has come.

Delmas Foundation Supports Two Scores

The Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation has made a second generous grant to the DNB, of \$25,000 for two scores by artists not yet fully represented in the collection. The first project is for Pilobolus' *Alraune*, a work for two dancers made in 1975. It is in the capable hands of Patty Harrington Delaney, who became a Certified Notator in the fall of 2003 (see Spotlight story).

The second score will be a piece to be determined by the popular young

choreographer Robert Battle. This will be the first Battle work the DNB will notate. The choreographer is also a participant in the Contemporary Readings Project, which will collect notated excerpts from the work of leading younger artists and make them available for classroom and studio use by dance students. Battle is one of the artists most admired by young students, according to the Professional Advisory Council, which suggested the project.

With Delmas' funding the DNB can now address a new artist and expand the collection in its archives of a seasoned company. The grant was secured through Fox's recent expansion of DNB fund-raising, strengthened by development consultant Janine Veto.

Spotlight: Pilobolus' Second, Delaney's First

Patty Harrington Delaney produced a score of Jose Limon's *La Malinche* to qualify as a Certified Notator. Now she is on her first professional assignment: *Alraune*, a duet choreographed by Moses Pendleton and Alison Chase, two of the founders of Pilobolus, to a score commissioned from Robert Dennis. The dance department of the University of Georgia at Athens is host to the restaging, by Emily and Matt Kent of the company.

Like many people now very involved with notation, Delaney started out in an introductory course that didn't quite seem to take hold. LN teachers should never despair. Notators regularly speak of encountering the work, leaving it cheerfully behind for a time, and then rediscovering it as a major career interest. Teachers may not realize which of their students will walk away still carrying the spark. For Delaney the damped fire flared up when Jill Beck became her new chair at Southern Methodist University. Beck's passion for the material, and her question to students, "what are *you* going to make of LN?" illuminated how Delaney could make use of notation as a teaching tool for technique and choreography. She says, "I try to watch students' technique and introduce any problem they have into an LN class, asking how they would write it. I see LN as a tool to dance better." She has given choreographic assignments such as doing a piece about palm facing.

Along the way she has made

SMU a lively center for notation-related restagings. She was a trainee notator with Leslie Rotman on Leni Wylliams' *Sweet in the Morning*, and has submitted revisions and notes from the coaching by Eleo Pomare to the score; now she hopes to restage the work at SMU and put together additional support materials. Earlier, Shelley Berg and Nathan Montoya had arranged the SMU restagings of Agnes de Mille's *Gold Rush* and Martha Graham's *Diversion of Angels* at which both dances were scored.

Alraune offers Delaney an opportunity to work with the composer, which is one of her particular interests. She focuses on details of musical interpretations and cuing where applicable, and values input from the musicians when a score is being prepared.

Delaney approach is that the Notator's "intimate relationship with the choreography makes me curious about the artist's experience, and how it continued on in a career. When someone experiences a score, it makes it much more rich if [biographical] information is readily available," she has said. To this end she created for *La Malinche* an expanded packet of supporting materials, including a DVD, to accompany the score. This made it possible to present 3 hours of information on the choreographer and composer, visual imagery and video of the work, interviews with cultural historians and a notation section that discusses the score and the role of props in the dance. She hopes to make this a regular practice: "I'd like to do this for every score I do. That's the beauty of working at a University," where these resources are available. Her DVD carried off a silver medal in the educational section of the 2004 Houston International Film Festival.

Delaney looks also to the score as a valuable biographical source. She notes that it is invaluable to someone researching the artist's life. Her expanded view of the Notator's role will enrich the historical record for artists and deepen understanding of what they have achieved.

Profile

a series on DNB's people and allies

For years there has been a DNB Library legend about correspondence from Rudolf Laban that had gone missing from the Archives. It was Ann Hutchinson Guest's particular regret that these

irreplaceable letters could not be found and might have been thrown out. Four or five years ago Guest mentioned the lost trove to Senta Driver during an interview for the 60th Anniversary newsletter. This April Driver made a routine request for Library news for this publication, happening to add that a special prize is given for the most unusual find excavated from the history files, which Librarian Mei-Chen Lu has been thoroughly reviewing and reorganizing for the first time in decades.

Lu asked if the prize category would include something she had come across, a set of letters, stamped "Archive Laban", exchanged between Rudolf Laban and Guest and Eve Gentry, two of the four original founders of the DNB. She was somewhat surprised by the amazed celebration that followed. There was a general rush to notify Guest in London that the prodigal treasure had been safe, if hidden, right at home for the last 35 years.

The letters are dated between 1941 and 1951 and contain discussions of notation theory and how it should be developed. Many were written during the World War II embargo on sending drawings and notation symbols through the mails, lest they contain spy information abetting the enemy. All the concepts had to be described in words. Symbols did not appear in the letters until 1948. Laban assesses proposals by Irma Betz, Sigurd Leeder and Albrecht Knust with approval, or the reverse. At one point he genially allows, "On page 7 example H, both of you are right and at the same time wrong." Variations in direction suggested by someone named Tinkel were, on the other hand, not approved at all.

In 1945 Laban lamented what he called "this dreary business" of copyright and royalty agreements [and disagreements] covering his notation system. The subject was destined to remain a vexation for the next 40 years.

The letters are candid about the recurrent tensions among Laban, his daughter Juana, Lisa Ullman, Knust and Guest, exacerbated by the limited chances they had to meet personally. He would not accept positions in the various notation organizations, saying, "I do not want to give to any of my spiritual children any preference," but he did write Guest in 1951, "I must be grateful that I live to see this almost miraculous uprising of Kinetography and I know, and say it also to the others, that this fact is

mainly due to your personal gift and exemplary diligence of your associates. I have thus a cause for personal gratitude to you, and I assure you of my continued wholehearted support.” Guest’s reply conveys the insight and graceful diplomacy with which she approached Jooss, Knust and Laban himself, as she argued the value of competing views in improving the system. “The best thing that ever happened to us here was that we did not see eye to eye. I was not allowed to develop things the way I felt inclined; each of us modified the viewpoint of the other, and in trying to prove our reasons we would see the strength or fallibility of our arguments...it has made our foundation that much firmer.” She repeated a commitment to practicality and to a notation “easy to learn, easy to teach, easy to use.”

Eve Gentry’s diploma as teacher and writer of “Kinetographic Laban” is in the collection, signed by Laban and Ullman. In sending it to the DNB founders, Laban added his “admiration for your courage and endurance with which you are pursuing the good cause.”

The letters have been copied onto archival paper, fully labelled, and restored to their place as a priceless heritage of the DNB and all notation. The prize was duly presented to Lu.

As for Guest, now she is asking about correspondence she remembers with Ninette de Valois, concerning the possible introduction of Labanotation at the Sadlers Wells Ballet school.

The Library

In addition to her other skills Mei-Chen Lu is a Certified Teacher of Elementary LN. As such she has joined the reviewers who grade correspondence course exams. Her ability to read scores enhances many aspects of the Library work.

Two art students have separately become aware of notation and asked Lu how to obtain score excerpts that they wish to include in design projects. One is preparing a commemorative brochure, as might be suitable for use by the New York City Ballet, and was guided by the DNB to the Balanchine Trust, which granted permission to give her a selection from *The Nutcracker* to incorporate in her design.

The second is a fiber artist who is working on a visual interpretation of

music. One of her instructors showed her some beginner-level notation, and she was attracted to the imagery. Lu was able to provide her with notation from Norman Walker’s *Variations from Day to Day*, which the artist will use as a visual element in what she calls a stationary fiber format.

OSU Extension

The Extension is host to a Fulbright Fellow this year. Beatrice Ayi is a graduate student from Ghana and has been working at the Extension for two years on her Master’s degree, now completing a thesis that documents the dance of Ghana. She has selected and notated dance themes from her own and other West African countries to illustrate key movement concepts. The notations are initially intended for use with the existing LN Study Guides, but Ayi also envisions creating new study guides, so that students of African dance can learn LN from the perspective of their own movement styles. She completes the Teacher Certification course this summer and will then return to teach at the University of Ghana.

Ayi is the second Fulbright Scholar to choose the Extension for their work. Vickie Watts did an earlier project on dance and technology.

Giyong Lee, an expert on the fan dance of Korea, is finishing a thesis documenting Buchae Chum. Marion sees in the work of students like these the value of responding to multi-cultural dance forms and the possibility of creating a wider range of movement examples to enrich LN teaching.

Dance Treasures on Tour

The Dance Heritage Coalition has assembled a touring exhibition scheduled for the San Francisco Performing Arts Library and Museum, Jacob’s Pillow, The Ohio State University in Columbus and the New York Public Library. Curated by Lynn Garafola and Norton Owen and titled *America’s Irreplaceable Dance Treasures*, it uses artful technology to display information on 100 nationally identified artists, movements and organizations which have shaped and advanced American dance from 1840 on.

The installation is designed for

flexibility. Its most intriguing element is an interactive kiosk with a touch screen that runs text, photos and video on all 100 constituents, and provides links among them where appropriate. Calling up “Dance Notation Bureau”, for instance, displays a description of our work, a graphic image of the LN symbols, and links to each of the artist constituents whose work has been notated. A separate monitor shows a videotape loop on all the treasures.

Ilene Fox said after seeing the exhibit in California, “The curators did an impressive job. Exploring the links on the kiosk display, I found relationships between artists, styles and genres that I had not realized.”

I’ll Just Phone the Score

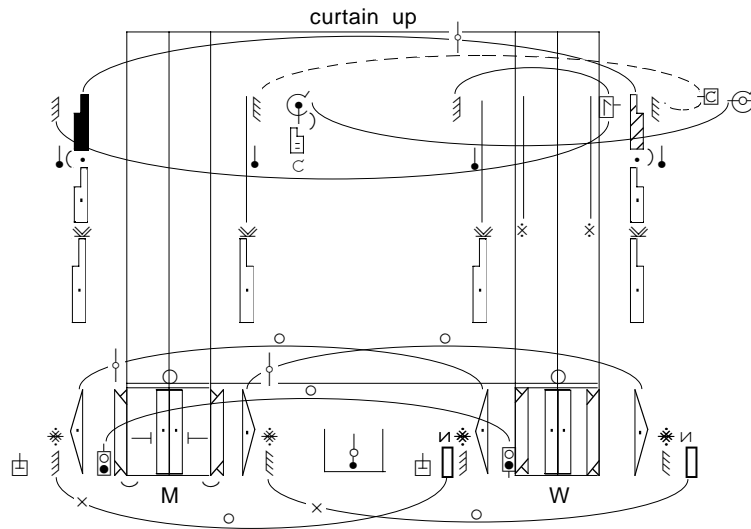
[part 2 of *Better Living through LN*] Donald Mahler, the Tudor specialist, was preparing for a restaging of *Pillar of Fire* for American Ballet Theatre when he encountered a classic problem with his videotape sources. He was equipped with fully 6 different recordings of the ballet, but he came to a point where, in every single version, one performer was hidden from the camera. He placed a call to Librarian Mei-Chen Lu and said, “I can’t see the dancer at this point. Can anyone there look at the score and show me what she’s actually doing?” Mira Kim read the material from the notation, and Mahler came to the DNB to have her demonstrate for him the obscured phrases. Lu commented that blocked camera views are not uncommon in video, and hopes others will think to turn to the DNB as did Mahler, who is an experienced friend of notation.

Send Me a Card

The line of Note-8 cards, created by staff and notators and available for sale, includes images for holidays and all days. One satisfied user reports a near-addiction to several designs. Her family is amazed and delighted by her now frequent mail. The best-selling design is *Snownotation Man* by DNB staff daughter Hannah Silverman.

The range of designs is posted on the DNB website. Get yours today.

The imagery here is that the man is wearing a necklace that is created by the arms of the couple. The four elbows should be aligned vertically. The woman's head is hidden by the arms. Depending on body types, the woman may have to adjust her head in order for it not to be seen.



getting into the starting position

excerpt from Alison Chase and Moses Pendleton's ALRAUNE , notation in progress by Patty Harrington Delaney (see story, page 2)

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