

# DNB Bulletin

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## DNBulletin

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## From Ilene Fox

I keep hearing how bleak the current environment is for non-profits. And it is. But as former Board chair Earl Ubell taught me, optimists find ways to persevere.

To move ahead, we need new thinking. As a field we need more collaboration. The DNB took this view many years ago, building a partnership to share space and resources. Today we are working with LIMS and LODC to map motif usage through the three Laban communities. In December I met with Claire Rousier and Marion Bastien at the Centre National de la Danse in Paris to discuss how our organizations can work together. Last April the DNB and the DNB Extension at The Ohio State University cooperated on a software conference. We are now developing a joint project to implement the ideas that came out of it.

We need to explore even further what technology can offer the field. LabanWriter and LabanDancer have begun the process. We are also looking at how distance learning could help us reach more dance students.

At the DNB we are survivors: we can do anything. One reason for our survival is our greatest asset: you. It is through your help that we move forward. I would appreciate any suggestions that you might have for the DNB as we navigate the current environment. We have held a series of parties to introduce new audiences to the valuable resources we offer dance. We would welcome the opportunity to meet your friends, and share with them what we do.

When we work together, the glass will always be half full.

## A Lot of Help From Our Friends

The largest DNB fund-raising party in years was given February 28 at the home of long-time supporter Ted Striggles and his wife Deborah Sale. Striggles received the Bureau's Distinguished Service Award in 1997 for his broad range of contributions to dance, and has been a loyal and effective source of strength to notation for some 40 years. Over 80 guests came to his apartment to see Ilene Fox give 6 continuous presentations of LabanDancer and to search respectfully for the (now demolished) wall on which Striggles once painted the notation for an irreverent social gesture, as written out for him by his own LN teacher, possibly the late Carl Wolz.

LabanDancer was funded by a National Endowment for the Humanities grant during Striggles' tenure of its Council. His welcoming speech included a learned reference to the translation of Akkadian and Hittite cuneiform, and quoted a NEH staffer poignantly that with notation "now you *can* tell the dancer from the dance." Through the generosity of his friends Striggles has provided another major boost to its development.

## Spotlight: Afternoon of a Faun

"The most important element here cannot be captured in symbols." said Notator Sandra Aberkals of the DNB's second recent Robbins score. She explains that the ballet's physical actions are unusually simple, with emphasis laid on the dancers' creating intention, motivation and sensitivity in performance. Bart Cook, who set the duet on the Miami

City Ballet, gave great latitude to the dancers on their mood, which he called the most important aspect of the work. To do this justice, Aberkals takes advantage of LN's flexibility in page layouts. She set up the score with the notation symbols all on the right hand pages, and devotes the facing sides entirely to extensive word notes.

Aberkals does painstaking research before a new score. She tries to find out everything about a choreographer's work and methods before going into the first rehearsal. With *Faun* she located early videotapes and audio recordings in which Robbins discusses the piece, demonstrates movement and coaches dancers. One revealing clip shows the choreographer himself doing the male dancer's three closing poses, in a clear physical invocation of the Nijinsky ending. This material becomes an integral support for the record of the dance as Cook taught it to his Miami casts. Aberkals incorporates into a whole what Robbins said, what the stager told the dancers, and what she saw.

She even found an interview in which Robbins talked about LN and other dance notation systems. He required notation of *Les Noces* in his American Ballet Theatre commissioning contract: the score by Lucy Venable and Muriel Topaz is in the Archives.

Aberkals was co-Notator on *Dances at a Gathering*, set by Susan Hendl and the late—sadly missed—Victor Castelli. Having seen 3 Robbins stagings in action, she finds them consistent in transmitting the choreographer's message. In both ballets the dancers were advised to forget about the audience; "dancing for yourselves" was a common element. The *Faun* dancers look out, but see no watchers beyond themselves.

The Foundation's dedication on the score will read "This notation of *Afternoon of a Faun* has been commissioned by The Jerome Robbins Foundation and is dedicated to the memory of Sondra Albert, whose love of the ballet and generosity have made it possible."

## Profile

*a series on DNB people and allies*

Notation has a way of engaging people's interest and loyalty for the very long term, which is the DNB's great strength and good fortune. Dawn Lille

joined the DNB Board in 1997. As with so many others, she had come into the office some 35 years ago, to learn Effort/Shape as a potential tool for dance therapy, and stayed on to master both Labananalysis and Labanotation, help run DNB programs, and use LN in a long teaching career.

Lille also credits her close friend the late Richard Englund for steering her toward LN. Both had studied intensively with modern dancer May O'Donnell. When he started a company in 1968 in Huntington NY Englund hired her, she reports, "sight unseen", purely on her connection with his own trusted teacher. She was to rehearse and coach the modern repertory Englund was building. Having learned LN himself at Juilliard, he told her to take it so he could acquire Helen Tamiris' *Negro Spirituals* and other dances he knew were available through DNB scores. Not only did she take his advice, she formed a lasting bond with the family of Englund and his wife Gage Bush. Lille is godmother to their daughter Rachel Rutherford, now dancing with the New York City Ballet. She hosted a popular DNB benefit party in 2002 where Rutherford talked with Notator Sandra Aberkals about dancing and writing Jerome Robbins' *Dances at a Gathering*.

Lille's professional life has been devoted to teaching at the DNB, Brooklyn College, Borough of Manhattan Community College, the Alvin Ailey School, City College and since 1997 at Juilliard. She has specialized in dance history, along with LN, Labananalysis and Effort/Shape. At City College she was asked by Jill Beck, her former notation student, to design and head a Masters program in Research and Reconstruction, which ran from 1984-89: it counted among its graduates both Notator Ray Cook and her fellow Board member Oona Haaranen. Lille notes she was also Ilene Fox's first LN teacher, at the Bureau.

Her career has arced repeatedly between colleges and the DNB. In 1978-81 she served as Education Director; left and returned in 1983 to be Development Director; left again to earn her PhD with a dissertation on Michael Fokine in America, which became her first book; and returned to serve two terms on the Professional Advisory Council. As Education Director she created a combined program in LN and Effort/Shape of which she remains proud.

Lille is a recognized authority on the neglected history of African-

American dancers in ballet. She came upon a reference to the New York Negro Ballet that intrigued her, and started uncovering the story of this company. One source led to another, and eventually Lille located and interviewed 55 African-American classical dancers. She presented their story in a 1996 exhibit and two seminars at the Dance Collection of the New York Public Library, and when the *New York Times* broke a story on Arthur Bell, who had danced with Balanchine, the paper consulted her. Lille hopes to publish this research as a book, and meanwhile is working on a biography of classical master teacher Alfredo Corvino. She has learned, surprisingly, that Corvino once had 7 weeks of LN training himself from Lucy Venable.

Lille sees LN's value extending beyond the obvious preservation of dance history. "In another sense, it's a way of teaching someone how to look: to look and then be able to *see*. It's applicable to everyone, especially dancers and therapists. It's a training of the senses; and it's so logical. One thing follows out of another, so it's not difficult to teach."

Her contributions to notation thus range from direct DNB staff work in both teaching and administration, through the creation of important new programs, advice from the field and now DNB's governance and fund-raising. She offers a shrewd understanding of issues that face the organization. And her beautiful home has long been offered for special events, Lille being a particularly graceful host.

## The Library

Librarian Mei-Chen Lu has again updated the *Notated Theatrical Dances* catalogue. Readers will now find new and more consistent information added from the computer database, such as the level of dancer and the level of notation called for in a score.

The photograph collection is being reorganized and more completely marked with identifications. Judith Bissell gave a collection of *Dance Notation Record* issues and valuable contact sheets from the 4th National Notation Conference (1964), of which the Library had had only poor quality photocopies.

Evelyn Doerr's book on Laban *Leben und Werk des Künstlers* has been published in CD-ROM format and donated to the Library. Mr. G.L. Shoup has donated his 1951 thesis *Present*

*Trends in Dance Notation*, along with related correspondence from Ann Hutchinson Guest.

Notation Associate Mira Kim has now transferred a total of 12 full scores from pencil or hard-to-read autography into LabanWriter. For stagings of some popular works, such as *Negro Spirituals* and *Variations and Conclusion from New Dance*, life will be easier; the rental scores will be clearer, with old symbols and obsolete rules updated.

An upsurge of interest in the LN correspondence course has more than doubled the number of students, from 7 in 2003 to 17 in 2004. They come from the US and Belgium, Malaysia, England, Canada, Japan and Lebanon.

## OSU Extension

John Giffin is staging Nijinsky's *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* from the Ann Hutchinson Guest score on Ohio State dancers for a special season in May shared with Ballet Met, focused on Diaghilev. OSU has 2 casts of a man and 7 women; a number are reading their own roles. Guest, who translated Nijinsky's personal notation of the ballet into LN, will coach the dancers before they perform. Assisting Giffin is undergraduate Jenn Garda, who is working on an honors project that includes the *Faune* staging and also her own notation of hip-hop.

The Extension will mount a score-checking production of Mark Morris' *All Fours* in 2005-6. Valarie Mockabee will stage the piece purely as written, without preliminary artist coaching, and Morris will come in to see if the notation does in fact produce accurate choreography. This vital step in testing and refining a score is not always permitted by artists, and the Extension is uniquely able to carry it out.

Students in the new Teacher Training design courses to use LN in some aspect of the dance curriculum. Theater PhD candidate Karen Mazingo actually gets to teach hers this summer, on "Women and Exile in Early German Modern Dance". She will combine dance history, theory and notation in examining Gertrud Bodenweiser, Valeska Gert, Lotte Goslar, Erika Milee, Lisa Ullman and Mary Wigman, with score excerpts. The students will also realize, through improvisation and Motif, a dramatic script that Gert called "Exile Cabaret:

Professor Blitz' Strange Journey". Unusually, this dance course is being offered by the OSU Theater Department.

## What Does That Mean By You?

In the Laban community there are several groups making intensive use of Motif. Working in their own areas of concentration, they have evolved usages to serve their specific needs. Now 3 of these groups, the DNB, the Laban/Bartenieff Institute for Movement Studies and the Language of Dance Center, have begun to compare notes on Motif symbols and concepts, to clarify their understanding of each other's work.

A Motif Core Group has met 3 times so far, and in January the DNB walls were covered with charts headed: same symbol/same meaning

same symbol/different meaning  
different symbol/same meaning  
and the ever-popular other.

The coordinators are the DNB's Ilene Fox, Kris Lindahl of LIMS and LODC's Tina Curran, and they are pleased by their progress so far in identifying points of agreement or divergence. They are organizing discussions and meetings for a fluid and inclusive group, with a view to expanding into the larger Motif community.

Fox commented, "The meetings have been very exciting, with a real sense of unity and joy. A great deal of both serious work and laughter goes on. The core group will be a conduit to their larger communities, involving the whole Laban network in this endeavor."

## LN's Activist in Taiwan

Mme. Liu, Feng-shueh is an authority on the Chinese dance tradition, a pioneer of modern dance in Taiwan, and a Labanotation adept. She is an unusual example of an artist/scholar who trained herself to use every available method, old and new, of preserving the work to which she is committed.

Director of her own group, the Neo-Classic Dance Company, she makes original work and reconstructs Chinese classics from the T'ang and other Dynastic periods, such as *The Emperor Destroys the Formations*, which she found in T'ang-era notation (7th century

AD) and had rescored in LN. She has also restaged the dances of Taiwanese aboriginal tribes and Korean dances related to Confucian court ritual, using both film and notation to preserve her findings.

Mme. Liu has personally notated her own choreography [*Dance of the People, Observation of the Moon*], or had it written by other notators. Some of these were trained by herself in Taiwan; Tsui, Chih-Hsiu, who recorded *Vast Desert, Solitary Smoke Rises Straight Op. 115 (Dance Symphonic Poem)*, was a student of Jacqueline Challet-Haas, who with Elena Bertuzzi reviewed and revised the published score. In her 2001 computerized work <*Koala Symbol*> she created a piece using LN to "create and record the movement of imaginary dancers and animals...under a no gravity situation." Some of her hand-written scores are now being converted into LabanWriter at the DNB Extension at Ohio State University.

Mme. Liu has a doctorate from the Laban Centre in London. She studied LN with Knust and Ann Hutchinson Guest, and has used it in every aspect of her creative and scholarly work. She has published papers including "Labanotation of Chinese Dance", "Movement Notation and Non-Western Dance Forms: Problems and Possibilities" and "Integrating Labanotation and Laban Movement Analysis: An Analysis of Banquet Music with Dance, *The Singing of Spring Orioles of the T'ang Dynasty*". The Congress on Research in Dance recognized her as early as 1977, and since that time she has been honored in and outside her own country.

Historians and teachers expect to feel responsible for thoroughness and quality in their documentation, but it is rarer to find active choreographers who do the same. They care just as much about the detail that makes their work distinctive. But they do not always see what Mme. Liu does, that detail can and must be recorded to protect artistic discovery.

Mme. Liu is intent upon expanding the use of LN in Taiwan. She must be gratified that a Teacher Training course will be given in Taiwan in summer 2005 by the DNB's Ilene Fox and OSU Extension Director Sheila Marion. Plans are forming to link Taiwanese notation work with the DNB and continue Mme. Liu's 50 years' work.

"THIS NEVER STOPS" [ROBBINS]  
 "R. HANDS IS THE LAST TO GO" [ROBBINS]

[COO] Lift starts straight up then will  
 tilt as begin to walk

1/2 to lift her ↓ #  
 may have to separate but they have to come together again - however not a

separate action from steps

MR

more around bottom of ribs than around abdomen

1/2 It should look like there's no gravity for her to go against. 1/4 As throat trying to reach the light coming from above.

needs to be leaning U & slightly fwd. into

head also

The image shows a page of handwritten dance notation on lined paper. It features several vertical lines representing musical staves. The notation includes various symbols such as circles, squares, and arrows, some of which are connected to text annotations. The text annotations provide instructions and observations, such as 'THIS NEVER STOPS' [ROBBINS], 'R. HANDS IS THE LAST TO GO' [ROBBINS], and 'Lift starts straight up then will tilt as begin to walk'. There are also notes about physical posture and movement, like 'more around bottom of ribs than around abdomen' and 'needs to be leaning U & slightly fwd. into'. The notation is dense and appears to be a work-in-progress, with some symbols and lines being modified or added.

Rough notes from Sandra Aberkalns' score-in-progress of Jerome Robbins' *AFTERNOON OF A FAUN*, showing coaching notes from four separate rehearsals (see story, page 1)

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