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Spotlight: Cascade of New Texts

A field and body of knowledge like ours rests on a base of sophisticated, precise and constantly growing theory. Such a base depends in turn on carefully crafted and up-to-date textbooks. A good text is a vital part of the identity of a language. It was a landmark day in 1954 for those expanding Labanotation out of Rudolf Laban’s original Schrifftanz when Ann Hutchinson published the first textbook in English.

The period between 2002-2005 has seen an exponential leap in published notation sources, with 3 revised or new textbooks (the count does not include additional books appearing outside the U.S.). This represents a burst of creativity and sheer hard work by Ann Hutchinson Guest, a founder of the DNB and central figure in the development of LN, who is now dancing through her 86th year.

Guest and 3 different sets of collaborators and readers have given the field substantial new editions of the basic text *Labanotation* (fondly known in some circles as the pink bible, for its 1977-edition cover) and the Motif text *Your Move*. In their spare time they also completed the next 6 sections of a new Advanced-level text published in 9 stand-alone issues, each devoted to separate topics.

All these books are enhanced by Guest’s clear and graceful writing style. She has an intuitive grasp of how to orient readers in the complexities of thinking about movement, and how it may be analyzed and logically conveyed to others on paper.

The 4th edition of the LN book, written by Guest, was produced by her

with Cheryl Hutton, Shelly Saint-Smith, Lynda O’Reilly, Helen Elkin, Lauren Turner, Laura Joanne Weston and Andy Adamson, developer of the Calaban software in which all the notation from the 3rd edition had to be recreated. Expert readers for the edition were Ray Cook, Ilene Fox, Sheila Marion, Allan Miles and Lucy Venable; Billie Mahoney contributed reading examples of notated tap. Illustrated by Doug Anderson and issued in a format larger than previous editions, this is still a bible, but now a handsome black-and-peach one.

Guest added a new author’s note on how advances in Motif notation and Effort Shape Description (as used in Laban Movement Analysis) influenced this text revision, and relates this book of basic principles, with some detail added at a higher level, to the Advanced LN series. Useful appendices offer alternative usages from Kinetography Laban, the form of LN prevalent in Europe; a review of old versions and their currently accepted forms; notes on orthography and autography; and a discussion of writing upper body movement.

Your Move, dealing with the younger theory of Motif developed by Guest for her Language of Dance® teaching, is approaching its 2nd edition, rewritten by Guest in collaboration with Tina Curran, director of the Language of Dance Center (USA). Curran said it will reflect “the evolution of the Language of Dance approach...and feature expanded topics and refined Motif theory.” She says the content on spatial aspects, motion and destination, and dynamics has all been further developed, and promises new reading studies and exercise sheets when the text appears from Taylor and Francis in 2006.

The new material of the Advanced texts has been in development

DNBulletin

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since 1991, when Guest and Rob van Haarst published *Canon Forms; Shape, Design, Trace Patterns;* and *Kneeling, Sitting, Lying* as small free-standing volumes. Working with Joukje Kolff and Veronica Dittman, Guest issued 6 more parts in 2002-2003. They are titled *Sequential Movements; Hands, Fingers; Floorwork, Basic Acrobatics; Center of Weight; Handling of Objects, Props;* and *Spatial Variations.*

She is not finished, of course. Guest's profound contribution to understanding and preserving dance is never finished. A 10th part on *Body Variations* is announced.

All the titles may be ordered through barnesandnoble.com or amazon.com.

Other Publication News

The LabanDancer creative team of Tom Calvert (Simon Fraser University), Lars Wilke (Credo Interactive), Rhonda Ryman (University of Waterloo) and Ilene Fox (DNB's Own) has produced an article for the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers that gives an overview on the place of computers in dance and their own work translating LN scores into animation. Through IEEE the notation/technology field can share information and research with a new discipline and community. The piece finishes with a description of the need for an intelligent form of LabanWriter.

Fox and DNB Board member Dawn Lille collaborated on a chapter about teaching LN for the forthcoming book *Teaching Dance Studies*, edited by Judith Chazin-Bennahum. With sections on the basic elements of LN, the history of other systems and the value of notation to the whole dance curriculum, the article emphasizes special contributions LN can make to dancer training: the sharpening of observation and analysis of a move, and enhancement of communication with students. "Notation gives a tool for naming differences," the authors point out. "Notation is not about symbols; it is about ideas..about learning to understand, recognize and perform different movement concepts."

Shelly Saint-Smith, who took her Master's degree at the OSU Extension, has an article on the web site of the Language of Dance Centre giving a

colorful account of the process (and hurdles) involved in producing the new LN textbook. She writes a thought-provoking analysis of how decades of use by a broad community, and the rise of Motif, posed new needs for the text to address. Readers of an LN textbook may now arrive already accustomed to using symbols for movement. In 1970, they were much more often beginning on this concept, save those few who were experienced in Benesh or other notation systems.

Profile

a series on DNB people and allies

Marion Bastien, expert in KIN and Certified Notator, designer of the DNB web site and President of ICKL, lives in Paris, where she grew up. She has become an international leader in dance notation, and runs the useful web site notation.free.fr.

She started dance very young, with Wigman-trained teacher Jacqueline Robinson, whom she calls a pioneer of French dance and someone who planted seeds in her mind for later flowering. After a break from dance, she took up classes again in high school, and became so involved that after graduation she entered the École Supérieure d'Études Chorégraphiques for a three-year course leading to a teaching diploma. She says, "At that time (the late 1970's) this school was a pioneer in dance education, as we had not only dance classes but also many theoretical classes: art history, dance history, anatomy and notation. Kinetography Laban was mandatory the first year. Jacqueline Challet-Haas was giving a weekly course, and I followed all the three years, which corresponded to elementary, intermediate and advanced levels." Later, in 1994, she would work with Challet-Haas translating Laban's *Mastery of Movement* into French.

This was the decisive exposure. "I was so interested by the field that...I went to New York, to follow the Teacher Training course at the Dance Notation Bureau." She returned for another year to do Notator Training under Ilene Fox.

"The first score I did was a piece by Georges Appaix, a young choreographer on the rise. The piece I notated, *Antiquité I*, was the very first piece to give him national exposure, and is considered, still now, a 'signature' piece. The movement material in itself was not

too complex, but I had to deal with a complex choreographic structure mixing amongst other things spoken voice and improvisation.

"The choreographer, interested in languages, agreed to let me notate the piece, but it was not a real need, as he was not planning to build a repertory. However, 20 years after, there is now a project to reconstruct the piece..as well as to create a new piece confronting the old one." Bastien adds, "The possibility...is of course due to the fact that there is an existing score."

Bastien went on to notate work by Christine Bastin and a "working score of a scene staged by Philippe Decouflé for the 1991/2 Winter Olympics, with around a hundred people and the use of canons." She assisted Ann Hutchinson Guest in notating previously unknown Bournonville choreography, as restaged by Knud Jurgensen, for *The Bournonville Heritage* (Dance Books). She goes on poignantly, "My last score was a piece by Dominique Bagouet [*Les Petits Pièces de Berlin* (1988, notated 1993)], a restaged version for a junior company. The choreographer died just before the rehearsals with two dancers of his company started, and I was feeling an immense responsibility...it was clear for me that we were deeply in the idea of keeping a work alive for the future."

In a career expansion that many notators find natural, Bastien next trained in multimedia. She began with an OSU Extension workshop, went on to intensive university training and an apprenticeship, and found "the rigor and capacity to deal with abstraction one gains by learning notation and notating scores was a founding basis" for mastering new multimedia concepts. She cites Sian Ferguson, Robin Hoffman and Rob van Haarst as three notators making the same choice, and relishes that in this field "no one could predict the future, no one could know...how the tools and software would evolve. Everything was going very quickly and you had to be always alert. It was quite refreshing after a few years dedicated to build a heritage."

She is now on staff at the Centre National de la Danse, working on repertory transmitted both orally and by score. The Centre also works to create and foster notators as a professional community, helped along by the presence of both Benesh and Laban training offered at the Conservatoire de Paris.

She created her web site to make

notation more accessible, and now calls it a “two-headed site” with both Benesh and Laban. The 200-300 visitors per month at first have now exploded to over 2000.

Bastien’s generosity matches her broad perspective. She gave up vacation time in New York to redesign the DNB’s on line image. Ilene Fox noted gratefully, “Our web site has been praised as a ‘model of clarity’. Marion deserves recognition for all the time, energy and expertise she gives to dance, and her fantastic organizational ability.”

To Bastien herself, “Most important to my eyes is that people be aware dance has a history, and that this history be kept not only in books, photos, memories but also in bodies, and shown on stage.”

Notation in Russia

Ann Hutchinson Guest reports that Moscow dance historian Elizabeth Souritz visited her and her husband, dance historian Ivor Guest, in London this winter. After a good English tea, the talk turned to Labanotation in Russia. Guest had to hand a spare copy of the recently published 4th edition of the Labanotation textbook, and persuaded Souritz to take it back to Moscow for Nadia Vikhрева, who for many years has taught LN at the Moscow Ballet Academy. Vikhрева has attended two ICKL conferences together with the editor of the Moscow Ballet Magazine, Valeria Uralskaya, who is another strong supporter of LN.

And in Texas, and in Jamaica

Patty Harrington Delaney, the newest Certified Notator, is growing a notation-friendly graduate dance program at Southern Methodist University. LN is mandatory in the program, and Delaney finds ways to use it at graduate and also undergraduate levels, for instance as an instrument to solve technique problems. She uses Motif in composition and covers the Intermediate LN syllabus; all students restage works during the course.

A joyful teacher has great impact. Sparked as much by Delaney’s personal gifts as by the dance department’s support, SMU is producing an increasing number of active LN users. Two taking Master’s degrees this year with a newly spurred interest in notation

are Danna Reuben and Marlon Simms.

Delaney was mounting Lester Horton’s *The Beloved* from score at the National Dance Theater of Jamaica when she cast Marlon Simms as The Man, and found both she and the company’s founding director Rex Nettleford thought Simms ought to come to SMU. There Reuben met him, and each caught such an interest in the LN content of the program from what they call Delaney’s patience, clarity and passion that both went on to earn Teacher Certification at the OSU Extension. Reuben restaged Anna Sokolow’s *Kaddish*, and Simms mounted Leni Wylliams’ solo *Sweet in the Morning* on both another student and himself. He was so successful that Wylliams’ artistic representative Patricia Brooks (who had instigated the notation) gave him blanket permission to take the work back with him to Jamaica. The pair also danced *The Beloved* together under Delaney’s direction, able to read their own roles.

Simms is returning to teach and dance in Jamaica, expecting to train literate students and preserve the Caribbean dance heritage in all its detail. Reuben is opening a dance conservatory in the Dallas area, planning to use both Elementary LN and Motif with her students. She calls herself LN’s “newest cheerleader”, and affectionately describes the mentor who opened this world to her in an immortal phrase: “Patty Delaney loves notation more than cooked food.”

ICKL in London

The 24th meeting of the International Council on Kinetography Laban/Labanotation, scheduled for July 29-August 5 in England, is reporting a record number of registrants this year. The meeting will be hosted by LABAN (formerly known as the Laban Centre) in its award-winning new building in London’s Creekside area. Marion Bastien is the organization’s current President.

Ilene Fox will join Tina Curran to outline the work of the Motif Core Group, which is comparing usage of Motif symbols and language among several of the groups most extensively involved with Motif. With Rhonda Ryman, Fox will present the latest advances in LabanDancer, the software for animating LN scores. Ryman and Fox will also give a theory paper on “Interpreting Timing Conventions in LN”.

The Library

Debra Elfenbein has come to the Library as its new archival consultant after 3 years as Director of Archives for the American Dance Festival. The focus remains on expanding the Library’s ability to be a searchable resource for the whole dance field.

Noah Silverman, son of our late and loved Administrator Beverly Jensen, is volunteering his help to make possible the embedding of LW symbols in text on the web site. This will help the Motif Working Group, among others, by making their results postable on line.

Librarian Mei-Chen Lu has initiated in the score rental process a new tracking of valid membership status, to encourage the growth of the most vital DNB constituency, those who study scores and restage dances using them.

Notation Associate Mira Kim and Administrative Assistant Doris Caravaglia have transferred all 3 levels of correspondence course exams into Laban-Writer and Word. This makes it possible for students equipped with LW to receive the exams by e-mail and take them on computer.

OSU Extension

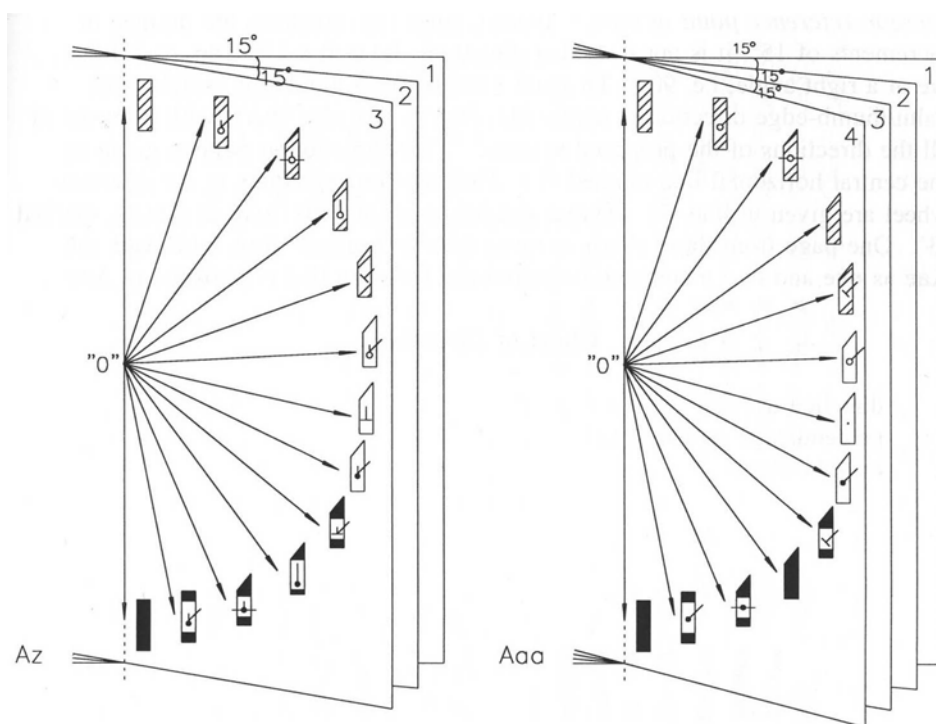
LabanLab has a volunteer, Inma Alvarez, at work translating the web site texts into Spanish, which will support the remarkable fact that Spain’s conservatories have just added LN to their dance curricula.

Ann Hutchinson Guest spent a week in Columbus coaching the dancers of Nijinsky’s *L’Après-midi d’un Faune* in John Giffin’s restaging from her score.

Dance Teacher magazine saluted the graduates of the Teacher Certification course in its May 2005 issue. The article brought a useful description of the new teacher training course to an audience different from LN’s usual one. Quotes from course graduates Hannah Kosstrin, Erin Tisdale and Karen Mazingo gave vivid appreciations of their experience with the faculty from the Extension, the DNB and SMU.

Jenn Garda has notated hiphop material using a music score commissioned from rapper David Blum, son of retired Extension Director Odette Blum.

The Proposed Intermediate Direction System



*excerpt from Advanced
Labanotation volume 9: Spatial
Variations, by Ann Hutchinson
Guest and Joukje Kolff (see story,
page 1)*

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