Volume IV
No. 2
March
2010

Library News

From the Dance Notation Bureau

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- **Laban Restages *Primitive Mysteries*: A Collaboration Between Kinesthetic Memory and Labanotation**
- **The ICKL Conference in Bangkok, Thailand**

Dance Notation Bureau Library
Monday - Friday 10am - 6pm
Advance Notification by Phone/Email Recommended

111 John Street, Suite 704
New York, NY 10038
Phone: 212/571-7011
Fax: 212/571-7012
Email: library@dancenotation.org
Website: www.dancenotation.org

***Library News* is published twice a year in New York**

Editors:
Mei-Chen Lu
Lucy Venable

Director of Library Services:
Mei-Chen Lu

Committee:
Sheila Marion
Lucy Venable

Advisors:
Jill Cirasella, Reference Librarian and Bibliographer
Brooklyn College, The City University of New York
Nena Couch, Curator
Lawrence and Lee Theatre Research Institute at The Ohio State University
Patricia Rader, Chief Cataloguist
Jerome Robbins Dance Division
New York Public Library for the Performing Arts
Libby Smigel. Executive Director
Dance Heritage Coalition

Laban Restages *Primitive Mysteries*: A Collaboration Between Kinesthetic Memory and Labanotation

Susan Sentler, Senior Lecturer
Laban, Creekside, London

For several years now, I have had the pleasure of teaching on the Historical Project, a second year module of Laban's BA Honors Dance Theatre Program. Since the inception of the module, I have reconstructed various works and excerpts from Martha Graham's repertory. In January 2009, for the first time, I had the opportunity to work with a Labanotation score, reconstructing Graham's 1931 work *Primitive Mysteries*. I coupled my knowledge of embodiment (I danced the work in 1984 for the New York State Theatre season of the Graham Company as well as for Louis Horst's Birthday celebration at Riverside Church that same year) with that of the Dance Notation Bureau's (DNB) Labanotation score of *Primitive Mysteries*.

Sandra Aberkalns, notator from the DNB who produced the score in 2007-2008, was extraordinarily generous in helping me to acquire it. It was written from the staging that was directed by Yuriko (Kikuchi) at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, in 2007, and we were pleased at Laban to be able to contribute to the checking process.

I decided to work with a chorus of 14 instead of 12 women to allow for more students to have the opportunity to participate. When I performed the work in 1984 under Yuriko's direction, she expanded the chorus numbers to address the immense size of the stage at the New York State Theatre in Lincoln Center. Though the stage of the Bonnie Bird Theatre at Laban is average size, I decided that it could accommodate 14 dancers. Thus the framework of the spatial landscape of the notation changed somewhat with more dancers.

In addition to the aid from the score, I worked with 3 videos: the 2007 version which was coupled with the notation score; a 1964 version from the Graham Resources in which Yuriko is in the role of the Virgin; and a 1984 version presented at Riverside Church in New York for the Louis Horst Centennial in which I performed. It may be noted that for this performance we were in a chorus of 13 as one dancer was injured, thus I did not have a specific visual reference for the full cast of 14. My normal process is to work from movement memory and from video footage. On this occasion I worked alongside Louise Tanoto, a notator and an alumnus of Laban, and with Jean Jarrell, a senior member of the faculty at Laban and an expert in Labanotation. I was initially a bit daunted by the prospect of working with the notators, but very quickly it evolved into a seamless constructive process whereby information from the score was juxtaposed with visual information and informed choices were made. As the students had studied notation to intermediate standard they too participated in the discussions and were enriched by them.

The information from the score and the accompanying material was rich not only with specific directives, but also with beautiful metaphors and images that guided both the dancers and me in the recreation. Some I was instinctively aware of while others were delightfully new, providing fresh insights into the work.

***Hymn [to the Virgin]* section from *Primitive Mysteries*. Photograph by Lodovic des Cognets. Published with permission from the Graham Resources. Courtesy of Laban.**

I was given three different music scores. Two scores were ones utilized by the Graham Resources and one was marked to correspond with the Labanotated score. This one was excellent in providing details such as when in the final section *Hosanna,* the final note of the piccolo shifts to a flute to allow more duration in sound. We worked with all three, but tended to favor a 'hybrid' version and found ourselves continuously dialoguing on the spot with the dancers and musicians on what would work best for them to be 'in the moment'—we were indeed fortunate in having live musicians from Trinity College of Music, our partner college, to accompany the work.

In the process of reconstruction, despite the wealth of information provided by the score and information packet, there were aspects we considered could be articulated in further detail. For example, the nature of the 'gaze' in the walks—the details of the head are indicated, but the focus is not explicit. If one is familiar with the Graham technique/language this would be quite instinctive, but there are always subtle differences in use within her repertory works, and greater clarity will help this piece to travel into the future. Very clearly articulated in the score, however, is the use of the contraction in the walks and the subtlety of the hands in the 'cup'.

We also proposed some specific changes. For example, in *Hymn*, I shifted the A and B groups towards the inner stage rather than downstage as indicated in the score. This choice (ref: 1984 film) felt choreographically clearer, representing the 'stage within a stage'. I also altered the ending of *Crucifixus* (ref: 1984 video). In the score after the jetés, the group abruptly faces off to the center, establishing the circle before going down. I preferred an extra step, and a subtle curving into the circle before going down. Choreographically, I felt that after the intensity of the stamping like bison jetés, the need for subtlety and change was more appropriate, dynamically enriching the end of this section. I altered the arms of the Attendant in *Hosanna* in her tilts around the Virgin (ref: 1984 video) softening them as had been done by Robin Becker (the Attendant), rather than using the straight arms and cupped hands as in the 2007 version. At the end of the project Jarrell listed and/or notated the suggested additional information and alternative versions which were then sent to Aberkalns for consideration. Some of these were later incorporated into the finalized score, offering optional possibilities for future reconstructions.

I do believe that by having danced the work, I have a clear, embodied understanding of the piece. Coupling this with the knowledge of the score and supporting materials can only allow the director to work at a faster pace, to dialogue more clearly with the dancers of today, to find a greater scope for personal voice within the material – making it a 'living' historical work.

I have reconstructed many works and excerpts from Graham's repertory; this was the most pleasurable and fulfilling experience to date. I was afraid to take on Graham repertory I had not personally danced in, but after this experience I now have the courage to do so with the aid of notation. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Sandra Aberkalns and all at the Dance Notation Bureau who made this collaboration possible.

The ICKL Conference in Bangkok, Thailand

A Special Report by Mary Jane Warner

From August 3-8, 2009, twenty-two members of the International Council of Kinetography Laban (ICKL) representing fourteen countries (Brazil, Canada, China, Denmark, France, Hungary, Japan, Philippines, Singapore, Spain, Taiwan, Thailand, the United Kingdom and the United States), and approximately sixty dance practitioners from Thailand gathered at the beautiful Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University in Bangkok, Thailand, for the 26th Biennial ICKL Conference. This was a special conference marking the 50th year since ICKL was founded in 1959.

The university campus was once part of the Dusit Palace, the royal compound of King Rama V. Located outside the downtown center, this tranquil campus is filled with gardens, fountains and outdoor performance spaces. The Fine Arts building, where most of the events were held, was spacious and convenient. Just outside the campus there is a bustling night market with plenty of tiny booths selling tasty snacks, clothing, electronics and tourist items.

Prior to the official opening, there was an informal gathering on August 2nd that provided an opportunity for both returning and new members to meet and greet. Billie Mahoney (USA), a long time participant and Fellow of ICKL, showed one of the videos from her very successful TV program *Dance On* that she produced for many years in New York City. This particular video was of special interest to delegates since it featured Dai Ai-Lien, an early ICKL member, and an important figure in China as the first principal of the Beijing Dance Academy when it was founded in 1954. She was also instrumental in introducing Labanotation in China.

The conference opened with a formal welcome from university officials and the President of ICKL, Ann Hutchinson Guest. We were joined by many dance practitioners including dance students from the university. The highlight of the opening ceremony was a delightful demonstration of Thai classical dancing by a group of university dance students dressed in traditional Thai costume. They were outstanding dancers, presenting us with several classical dances from northern Thailand that demonstrated the rigorous training required and the beautiful, fluid motion of the young dancers. Following the performance, we were invited onto the stage for a photo opportunity with the dancers and dignitaries in attendance. This gave us the chance to see up close the exquisite costumes made of Thai silk and lovely trim.

Although many of the founding members of ICKL are no longer with us, it was encouraging to see so many new participants taking an active interest in both Labanotation and Motif Writing. Over its fifty-year span ICKL has continually evolved. During the early years, the organization was attempting to unify the system since World War II had isolated people in Europe and North America resulting in some theory developing differently. Initially ICKL concentrated on moving towards a common understanding and usage of the notation symbols. Key figures in theoretical discussions in the 1960s and 1970s were Ann Hutchinson Guest, Albrecht Knust, Sigurd Leeder, Lisa Ullmann, and Maria Szentpál. Issues under discussion often took several conferences to resolve since the differences between the two systems were more pronounced during ICKL's early years, and all decisions were arrived at through consensus, which might take several years to reach. I attended my first ICKL conference in 1975 which was held in an idyllic location deep in the Swiss Alps at the school of Sigurd Leeder and Grete Mueller in the idyllic village of Herisau. At that time new members were invited to observe and act as scribes for the theoretical discussions that were the major focus of the conference. The ten-day conferences offered substantial opportunities to become immersed in the theory under the tutelage of leading notation figures such as Knust and Hutchinson Guest, and long-term friendships developed since we normally stayed in the same accommodation and shared meals together.

Eventually a voting system was introduced with fellows' votes carrying greater weight than the members' votes. However, the Research Panel was always careful to wait until a topic had been discussed thoroughly before calling a vote, and sometimes a topic would be deferred until the next conference because there was not sufficient agreement to bring a topic to a vote. Over many years, the notation system has been unified substantially so that there is less pressure to pursue theoretical issues. Gradually the conferences have evolved to have less emphasis on theoretical papers and more on the application of Labanotation to different aspects of movement. Motif Writing has also become an important addition to ICKL. Now experts in Motif can join the organization and may become Motif Fellows.

This conference also reflected the current trend to focus on the application of Labanotation and Motif Writing to different forms of dance rather than concentrating primarily on theoretical issues. There were a number of interesting presentations and workshops demonstrating how members are using notation, but there were only four technical sessions and no proposals were

brought to a vote. Ann Hutchinson Guest was responsible for providing and clearly presenting the four technical papers: "Distance of Leg Gestures from the Floor," "Revolving on a Straight Path," "Unit Timing – Further Thoughts," and "Indications of Touching Gestures."

Informative sessions were given demonstrating the wide range of applications for the Laban system. Judy Van Zile (USA) presented "Six Considerations Regarding Labanotation" that discussed working with notation in a variety of settings. Marion Bastien and Pascale Guénon (France) explained how they are attempting to define professional standards in France for notators and reconstructors. Our Asian colleagues were also quite active at the conference. Naoko Abe (Japan) commented on "The Application of Kinetography Laban to Studies in Social Sciences." Chommanad Kijkun (Thailand) presented a paper about "Thai Classical Dancing."

There were also papers presented that offered participants an opportunity to read notation examples after the paper presentation. Mary Jane Warner (Canada) talked about her experiences notating the choreography of Patricia Beatty; the talk was followed by an opportunity to read a section of Beatty's work *First Music*. Marien Bastien presented a paper "Capturing Intention? Documenting the EG/PC's Workshop Double Skin/Double Mind," then followed with an enjoyable reading session. A few presenters gave workshops only, such as Warin Tepayanyone (Thailand) who focused on "Culture, Perception and Clinical Assessment in Dance/Movement Therapy."

A substantial number of newcomers with limited notation experience attended the sessions, including a group of dance students from the university. All were keen to learn and many participated in several reading sessions that were offered; they picked up the material quickly, asking questions as needed. Two sessions were designed especially for those with no background in Labanotation to introduce them to the general concepts. The first session, "An Introduction to Notation," was given on the first day of the conference by Shelly Saint-Smith (United Kingdom). The participants picked up the basic concepts with great enthusiasm. Experienced notators also attended and were fascinated by the participants' ability to understand the principles of notation so quickly. Later Susan Gingrasso (USA) offered "An Introduction to Motif Writing," that again allowed participants to learn concepts quite quickly.

There was also a general meeting for all attendees just prior to the opening reception and a second meeting later in the week. At this first session Billie Mahoney gave a useful overview on the structure of ICKL and how conferences traditionally rotate every two years from Asia to Europe and to North America. Both notation and motif fellows held separate meetings during the week to attend to regular business such as vetting applications for fellowship. Members also met once to discuss in small groups the potential future of ICKL. Among the questions considered were: What do you want or need from ICKL? How do you see ICKL developing in the next few years? How can ICKL serve the future of Labanotation and other Laban-related areas?

Although the sessions were intensive, there were opportunities for sightseeing in Bangkok. On Wednesday August 5th, a number of participants went to the Joe Louis Puppet Theatre. The puppets, all created by Joe Louis (no relation to the famous boxer), are about a meter high; they are manipulated by one to three puppeteers dressed in black but quite visible to the audience. The puppeteers are classically trained dancers who imitate the movements of the puppets to literally bring them to life, capturing gestures and nuances. The puppets are beautifully carved and painted making them seem quite life-like as they tell the Indian epic story of Ramayana. Later we visited the Suan Lum Night Bazaar filled with clothing, fabrics, fruits and vegetables and other items. The final official day of the conference ended with a farewell dinner on Friday, August 7.

Following the August 7 close of the conference a number of members stayed on for an additional day of sightseeing that included a visit to the Wat Arun (The Temple of the Dawn). The building with its four smaller towers was started by Rama II in the early part of the 19th century, and completed by his successor Rama III. The tour also included a stop at the Golden Peak Palace, known as the world's largest teakwood building; it served as a royal residence in the first few years of the 20th century, but it fell into disuse and was practically forgotten until the early eighties, when it was rediscovered by Her Majesty the Queen and turned into a museum reflecting the Thai heritage since the reign of King Rama V.

Proceedings for the 26th ICKL conference are in preparation and will be distributed to members early in 2010. The next conference site is still under discussion but two potential sites have been proposed: Perigot, near Bordeaux, France, or alternatively, Budapest in Hungary.

This year's ICKL Conference had an excellent blend of participants from various countries, some with years of notation experience, and others having their first exposure to the potential of Labanotation and Motif Writing. The structure of the conference, the varied papers, our gracious hosts, and the delightful participants from around the world are strong reasons to begin planning to attend the next ICKL conference in July 2011.