

Volume VI
No. 1
September
2011

Library News

From the Dance Notation Bureau

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Dance Notation Bureau Library

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Library News is published twice a year in New York

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A Choreographer Reflects on *Ariadne*: from Life, to Art, to Dance Notation

by Ze'eva Cohen

As an adolescent growing up in Israel, I was fascinated by archeological sites such as those found in Cezaria, where historical relics from Hellenic and Roman periods were buried in the sand along the Mediterranean. A particular sculpture, or rather semi buried fragments representing a woman – a head here, arms there – kept coming back to haunt me.

Who was she?

Why was she abandoned?

Why wasn't she buried with her body intact in a dignified manner?

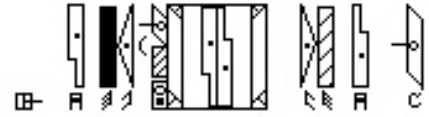
Could she be Ariadne¹, the mythological Cretan princess?

In 1985 I first created *Ode*, a group work for the Chicago Repertory Dance Company to music composed by the Greek composer Vangelis to ancient Greek poems sung by Irene Papas. Later that year I felt a great need to develop a solo, *Ariadne*², inspired by the central figure of *Ode*.

In reflecting on the many artistic media and languages representing Ariadne throughout history, I was struck by the thought of her immortality. The story and fate of Ariadne was first spoken, and then written numerous times in different forms. Since antiquity the collective force of artists: storytellers, writers, sculptors, painters, composers, and choreographers refuse to let her die as a woman abandoned and forgotten on the island of Naxos. Enabling Ariadne to take charge of her own story and empowering her to emerge from the labyrinthine maze of her life into a better understanding of her fate was my motivation in creating this dance. In my dance, the restless spirit of Ariadne comes back to life in order to wrestle with her fate and reassemble her broken body in an effort to find wholeness and spiritual peace.

The choreographic building blocks of the dance are based on 15 poses³ depicting women's daily and ritual activities found on archaic and classical Greek pottery and tombs dating from the 9th to the 5th century B.C. In the dance, Ariadne first appears as a fallen sculpture, the pose being an exact replication of a figure found on an Athenian jar, which portrayed a funeral procession. Haltingly, she attempts to first remember and then connect these 15 poses in an order that would lend a new meaning to her life. Her faltering search leads to false exits. But Ariadne eventually succeeds in stringing these gestures together in an order that guides her, as well as the dance, to a desired resolution. I interpret the 15th and final gesture, which has Ariadne offering the symbolic olive tree branch towards the audience, as one of finding internal peace and liberation. Only in this last gesture does Ariadne allow herself to face the audience in a direct manner. All other 14 poses are performed in a less direct way, more akin to the two dimensionality of the original paintings; legs, feet and head are in profile while breast and shoulders are frontal.

The soft and lyrical dominant tone or quality of the dance can be found in the transitions between the quoted gestures, which are fleetingly performed throughout the piece. Therefore, it is particularly satisfying to the viewer to finally see these gestures performed with confidence and clarity at the end of the dance.



Left: One of the 15 poses from Professor Martin Robertson's book [Greek Painting](#), published by Skira/Rizzoli c. 1979.

Center: Caryn Heilman of Ze'eva Cohen and Dancers (1983-1988) replicating the pose on the left in *Ariadne*, performed at Riverside Dance Festival, New York City, 1985. Photo: Tom Brazil.

Right: Notation of Heilman's movement. Notation by Sandra Aberkalns, 2011.

I often think of the smooth and affirmative progression with which these gestures are performed in the final moment of the dance as isolated music notes “arriving” at their correct place in the scale, or random words finding the perfect phrase.

This thought led me to contemplate the contrasts between the language of choreography and dance notation. I was struck by the differences: One requires an immediate recognition and empathy from its audience regardless of their level of experience as viewers of dance; the other appears to be abstract geometrical symbols unless one has learned to read this language. Furthermore, dance choreography, because of its ephemeral nature, does not survive the performance, and will never be repeated exactly the same. Dance notation captures and preserves dance, so that it can be reproduced and experienced by generations to come.

This polarity led me to further thinking on the changing nature of how human life has been presented by various artists of different media over time and the varying degree of abstraction: The Greek paintings that influenced this dance, evolved from geometrical shapes and human figures resembling children's drawings to more expressive paintings approaching more realistic renderings of the human body. Cuneiform script⁴, one of the earliest known written languages, which developed over four millennia, evolved from a system of pictorial representations to more abstract characters. It symbolizes a reverse progression. Here, the depictions move from the recognizable image to the more abstract representation.

To a degree, and regardless of these differences – either of these languages, including performance and dance notation – depend on the individual's knowledge/literacy and interest in decoding to arrive at the level of understanding and empathy to capture a story or a story's essence.

These thoughts bring me back to the topic of dance performance, Labanotation, and *Ariadne's* recently finished score as well as my legacy as choreographer. Of the approximately fifty works I have created over the past forty-five years, I feel privileged to have been able to preserve two of my works, *Ariadne*⁵ and *Rainwood*⁶ in Labanotation. My main concern is not only the accuracy of future staggers' ability to read and translate the score correctly – but rather that the passion and spirit of *Ariadne* will resonate true and, ideally, in a similar manner to the way it was choreographed.

Can and will the object become the subject? To my view, this seems to be the challenge. It is my hope that present and future staggers will be able to resurrect *Ariadne* and bring to audiences her life as a breathing and living human being whose fragmented parts are integrated into a greater whole as she succeeds in coming from darkness into light.

¹ According to several sources, Ariadne is the daughter of king Minos of Crete, who dealt Athens a humiliating defeat in battle. As part of a peace agreement, Theseus, an Athenian prince and heir to the crown, volunteers to replace one of the youths sent by Athens to be devoured by the Minotaur – a monster whose body is half human half beast, and who is kept at the heart of the labyrinth built by the architect Dedalus. Ariadne and Theseus fall in love at first sight. Ariadne, to assure Theseus' successful return after killing the Minotaur, gives him the Golden Thread, which enables him to find his way out of the labyrinth. Their subsequent elopement to Athens where she would be queen is the agreed upon plan.

While there are several sources telling different versions of how Ariadne's story is resolved, I followed the version that describes Ariadne as eloping with Theseus, only to be abandoned by him on the island of Naxos where she died.

² *Ariadne* was first performed by Caryn Heilman, Ze'eva Cohen and Dancers (1983 -1988), Riverside Dance Festival, NYC, 1985.

³ The 15 figures (illustrating daily and ritualistic actions performed by women) are from Professor Martin Robertson's book [Greek Painting](#), published by Skira/Rizzoli c. 1979.

⁴ Cuneiform script originated in Sumer around the 30th century B.C.

⁵ *Ariadne* notated by Sandra Aberkalns, 2011, as performed by Rosy Goodman of Repertory Dance Theater (RDT/UT). Funding for *Ariadne's* score was made possible by a grant from the Edward T. Cone Fund of Princeton University's Humanities Council.

⁶ *Rainwood* was notated by Aberkalns in 2009 as performed by RDT/UT.

Dance Notation Bureau Collection at The Ohio State University's Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute

by Mara Penrose

Introduction

As a very recent MFA student in Dance at The Ohio State University (OSU), I was fortunate to work with the Dance Notation Bureau (DNB) Collection there. This is one of the larger collections of Labanotation-related archives in the world. Because working hands-on with the materials profoundly enriched my own research, my goal with this article is to inform readers that this collection exists, encourage increased use of it for the sake of preservation of dance history, and further development of Labanotation and its applications.

The DNB Collection is housed in the Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute now located in the newly renovated Thompson Memorial Library situated at the head of the Oval, the hub around which the University revolves. Staff members are Curator Nena Couch, Associate Curator Beth Kattleman, Assistant Curators Kathleen Kopp and Orville Martin, and Director Mary Tarantino.¹ Since 2008, the Department of Dance and the Department's Dance Preservation Fund have generously funded the appointment of a graduate assistantship with Labanotation expertise to work on the collection; it was in this position that I became more familiar with the materials there.

History of the Collection

In 1968 Dance, then housed in Physical Education, was invited to join the newly formed College of the Arts and Helen P. Alkire was appointed the Chair of the Division (later Department). Along with this new development several positions opened up, one of which was to teach and develop the Labanotation courses, which were already part of the curriculum. This came at a time when the DNB was trying to shift directorship from a notation person to someone who has more business and organizational skills. It was the right time for Lucy Venable, then the DNB President, to accept the position at OSU and to become Director of the DNB Extension being formed there. All this came about through the vision of Alkire who saw the value of dance notation in education and who was also serving as a member of the DNB Board at the time.²

During that period there was national discussion about preservation of valuable materials in case of atomic attacks. At the DNB Board meetings there was growing concern about the collection of dance scores of which only one copy existed. Through Alkire's instigation, discussions with the OSU Library began.³ It was soon decided that the OSU Library would house the originals in their Special Collections. Copies would be made and sent back to the DNB for their use. Hugh Atkinson, Assistant Director of the OSU Library in 1969, in a written agreement with the DNB stated, "we would regard this as a long term loan, but would hope that it would be infinite."⁴

In 2006, the DNB officially gifted this original collection of scores to OSU in addition to the other materials the DNB has deposited there throughout the years. With the January 2009 move of the DNB office in New York to a new facility, the DNB gave the OSU Library sixty boxes of additional materials for the Collection. These were mostly uncommonly used old-format video and audio recordings, but also included teaching materials and personal collections of Helen Priest Rogers, Carl Wolz, Richard Holden, and Albrecht Knust. My task from 2008 to 2010 was to integrate them with existing series in preparation for inclusion in the OSU Library catalogue system.

Collection Contents

The collection is divided into eleven subcategories: the four personal collections and Teaching Materials, Dance Scores, Photographs, Microfilms, Audiovisual Materials, Newsletters, and DNB Miscellaneous. The Dance Scores are the original documents of the scores, mostly pencil copies, held by the DNB Library before 1968. Viewing these handwritten originals can be particularly helpful because small detail, often lost in photocopies or transcriptions, is evident. Many files also include first drafts and rehearsal notes with notator's shorthand, sketches, and notes, such as director comments or dancer preferences.

Many of the Teaching Materials series came to OSU in 2009, and some were also added by the DNB Extension. This section contains worksheets and exams from the correspondence course. There are items from notation classes in other venues and personal notes, photographs, images, newspaper articles, and correspondence. This series also includes reading studies. Enormous scrolls used in the early days of teaching Labanotation are particularly interesting items. These were early reading materials that the teacher selected from, carried to the lesson, or lecture and hung on the wall before there were textbooks and

rapid copying facilities.

A series, solely dedicated to photographs, documents of early Labanotation activities such as conferences, meetings, and the Teacher Training Course. Visitors interested in the history of the Bureau and of Labanotation very much enjoy these.

Smaller collections donated by individuals display the personal interests and experiences of the donors. The Helen Priest Rogers series holds memoirs, writings, photographs from Rogers' notation studies in Germany in the 1930s, and many early films of dance festivals and summer workshops, especially works performed at the Connecticut College Summer School of Dance, some of which were notated at the same time. The Carl Wolz series reflects Wolz' interest in and notation of traditional Asian dancing. It includes Wolz' fan notation and writings on Noh drama. The Richard Holden series offers copies of scores written in Benesh notation. The Knust series holds scores of ballet exercises, modern dance techniques, and movement choirs, in addition to correspondence about notation theory and training in the early development of Laban's notation.

The Audiovisual Materials consist of films, early videos, and reel-to-reel music for notated dances, other dance works, music, and lectures. The collection also holds a large series of microfilms of scores of the Notated Theatrical Dances in the DNB Library. The same series is also housed in the Dance Collection at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center.

Access to the Materials

The collection is available for students and faculty as well as researchers and visitors from outside of the University. Materials may only be viewed in the Special Collections reading room, located just inside the main entrance to Thompson Library. To make the most of your visit, contact the Theatre Research Institute ahead of time by phone or email to discuss your research interests and to make an appointment. Contact information is available at <http://library.osu.edu/find/collections/theatre-research-institute/>.

Because the work of cataloguing the collection is still in progress, it is not yet possible to search the full collection online. However, library staff members are eager to help. Viewing of some items may be restricted, so allow ample lead time for the staff to request permission, if necessary. An application is required to use the collection; the staff may send you the application in advance to save time during your visit.

Visitors are asked to leave personal items in a locker just outside of the reading room. Because visitors may only view a few items at a time, it is practical to take detailed notes (only pencil is allowed), including a running list of items to be copied. The library offers research, photocopying, digital imaging and shipping for additional fees; fee details are available on the website at <http://library.osu.edu/find/collections/theatre-research-institute/services/>.

If you have time, visit the inlaid foundation stones in the ground floor as well as those on the elevator doors of the 11th floor reading room; both include Labanotation symbols along with other systems of written communication.

Conclusion

It was among the file boxes and handwritten scores of this collection that I first became fascinated with the earliest of the notation scores and was inspired to research 1930s movement choirs for my graduate project. Movement choirs were dances performed by large groups of amateur dancers that became popular in Germany in 1920s and 1930s. The notation score afforded me a window to a historical dance work, which had not been seen for nearly eighty years.

The DNB Collection at OSU is waiting to inspire and support many more research, notation and staging from score projects. Though it takes planning, the extensive and unique nature of the collection makes visits so worthwhile. The collection is a source of riches, and speaking from experience, the staff are overjoyed to see it used.

¹ Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute home page. The Ohio State University Library. 14 June 2011. <http://library.osu.edu/find/collections/theatre-research-institute/>.

² Lucy Venable, in phone conversation with the author, 17 June 2011.

³ Odette Blum, email conversation with author, 20 June 2011.

⁴ Odette Blum, email conversation with author, 20 June 2011.