

President's Address at the First Annual General Meeting of the Laban Art of Movement Guild - Chichester 27th August 1947

Rudolf Laban



Photograph by Edwin Loeb 1934

As I have the honour to be your life-long President, I am here to-day to welcome you at this, our first General Meeting. I think first of all I would like to remind you of the aims of the Association as they are set out in the Constitution:

“To establish the status of teachers and practitioners of the Art of Movement, whether in connection with education, industry or art.

To foster the exchange of ideas and experiences of those interested and engaged in this work, and to publish any records which may be of general interest to the community.

To inspire inquiry and research into the field of the Effort-Training as used in education, industry and art, as well as the Art of Movement.

To put into effect any practical measures likely to further the ideas of the Guild.

To collaborate with appropriate national and international Associations or to institute work of an international character when and where it appears opportune.”

Our progress as an Association is dependent upon the continual study of the Science of Movement and appreciation of the need for systematic movement training in all walks of life.

If we look back over the history of human civilisation it reveals the rhythm of periods of enthusiasm for the cultivation of movement study, alternating with periods of disinterest and neglect. I will mention in this connection, Jean George Noverre, who, as early as the 18th century, had visions of dispensing with all the artificialities and cramping formalities of movement of his time as he saw it in the dances of the Court circles. He told his pupils to go into the streets and market squares to watch the people in their every-day actions. He was not able to achieve his purposes fully, but he struggled, all those years ago, to reach an understanding of the importance of movement which we ourselves approach to-day.

The trend of our time is, indeed, to foster the awakening interest concentrated mainly on industrial operations. In education we can confidently say it has led to acceptance of the necessity for training of the “body-mind,” while in art the growing enthusiasm points to, what may be called, the renaissance of dance.

Many of you, I am sure, would like to hear how this Guild came to be formed.

A small group of teachers met together, under the direction of Miss Ullmann, to study over a long period, the new approach to movement training. They were joined by industrialists interested in training workmen, and in the observation of industrial rhythm. Then theatrical artists, actors, amateurs and producers paid increasing attention to the recent discoveries in modern movement research. This nucleus of interested people felt the need to form a professional association, both to safeguard the standard of work and as a means of spreading the study of the art of movement in this country. And so a Guild has been formed of people working in these different fields of activities.

I have been asked to give the Guild my name, because of my share in the discovery of the new approach to movement and its use for practical purposes in all these fields. I have warned the Council members that a living man is all too apt to err and to develop, so that his personal opinions might not serve as a definite basis for principles. The first condition of my collaboration is, that you must grant me the privilege to continue to try, and to err, because trial and error is the basis of all healthy development.

I think the first step towards the achievement of the aims of the Guild is an impartial consideration of all trends in the cultivation of movement which can be based on past achievement. The second is an equally impartial acceptance of all contributions towards the future development of the cultivation of movement.

Looking back, we see a very valuable tradition of historical dance, which we shall always treasure. We see also early investigations of the role of movement

in educational methods. In the organisation of work, the traditional form of time and motion study can give a lead to further development. To-day, there is a general endeavour to adapt these traditions and methods to present-day needs. In the future, we must be sure that these developments keep pace with time and so we must not limit our vision by narrow preconceptions and prejudices.

The development of dance notation will be, perhaps, a good illustration of what I mean. As you know, this kind of notation was initiated as early as the fifteenth century. To that simple beginning, and its growth throughout the centuries, I contributed my notation in a form suited to present day needs in education, art and industry.

During the war it was impossible to keep in touch with all the branches of these activities, which have been established in all parts of the world. They did not fade away but went on living, developing. The presence of Ann Hutchinson at this meeting is a testimony to this. The other night, she told us of the recent developments on Laban Notation in America, and we in our turn, are telling her about the modifications and alterations we have found necessary in the intervening years. It happens that we have happily developed on very similar lines which shows the logicity of this method of notation. Ann Hutchinson has already told you the extent to which dance notation has been put to use in recording such ballets as “The Green Table” and such alterations as they have made have arisen from practical needs of the work in America.

Another example can be seen in the early Motion Study which I have developed into what we now call Industrial Rhythm. This new form of work research has also its notation derived from dance notation. In the new form of movement control in which this notation is used the factors of our rapidly growing industrial civilisation have been taken carefully into consideration. Growth consists of a continuous flux and adaptations to new needs makes any stagnation of methods impossible.

All schools or styles of dance in which the basic rules of organised body-mind movement are used should be

accepted in our circle without bias, whether they spring from ballet, modern dance in Europe, modern dance in America, acrobatic, or exotic dance. This principle must also guide us in accepting all schools of motion study in industry and also in the various forms of movement study in schools. I feel it to be my personal task, in all these affairs, to smooth out differences in the various camps and to stress the importance of the common denominator of movement. This principle will also guide me in my contribution, as President of the Guild. Yet another of my tasks is to help, through my international and inter-occupational connections to spread the work of the Guild. This I have already started to some extent, during my last trip to the continent. Bearing these principles in mind I must again emphasise the need for an objective and impartial consideration of all groups so that the Guild may be a centre of encouragement for the people who are dealing with all aspects of movement.

Besides the furtherance of skill and healthy use of movement, there are certain forms of welfare work directed towards rehabilitation, in which modern effort training has been applied. Doctors and nurses have also profited from the knowledge gained in contemporary movement research. Other fields of human activity, which can profit from modern movement research have to be explored.

A further principle, which may sometimes be overlooked, is that the Guild shall not undertake any profit-making courses or schools or enterprises of any kind, nor shall it directly advertise any special method. You will realise that it is thus impossible for any officer of the Guild or its name-giver, to use the Association for the promotion of personal material advantage. As for myself, I look upon my activity as that of a free-lance artist and research worker, who, for many years, has not had a private school or a fixed method of teaching. In my lectures given impartially to such widely differentiated audiences as ballet dancers, modern dance experts, engineers, accountants, workmen, managers, doctors, etc., I stress the central interest which movement has in our time, in all its practical aspects.

I feel this viewpoint could be a guiding principle for the Guild and it is in this sense that I am ready to accept the great honour to be your life-long President and to associate my name with your organisation.



Guild Council in the 1950s

Officers of the Guild in 1947

President: Rudolf Laban

Vice-President: F. C. Lawrence

Chairman: Lisa Ullmann

Vice-Chairman: Sylvia Bodmer

Officers: Marjorie Allen, Lilla Bauer, Betty Meredith-Jones, Diana Jordan, Jean Lindsay, Evelyn March, Jean Newlove, Elsie Palmer, Anthea Platt, Warren Lamb (co-opted in place of Joan Goodrich)

Secretary: G. E. M. Stevens.

Treasurer: Doris Ransom.