

# the laban scales and rings

- a practical aspect of dance technique and training in the art of movement

## Part 1

What is the difference between a movement 'Scale' and a movement 'Ring'? How are they distinguished by Laban in his book *Choreutics*? My first quick answer is a 'scale' is a 'ring' but a 'ring' is not necessarily a 'scale'. These terms are used in a special sense in the study of 'movement harmony'. They both refer to trace-form circuits which return to their starting positions. A 'Scale', however involves a completely balanced use of kinespheric directions, whereas a 'Ring' only utilises part of the kinespheric space. If repeated over and over again, a 'Ring' feels incomplete and as if it needs to be followed by a balancing form.

The technical purpose of practising the 'Scales' is to develop movement accuracy, clarity of direction and shape, range of expression, kinaesthetic sensitivity, and fluent, rhythmic, harmonious use of the body. Practising the 'Rings' I regard additionally as experiencing different types of melodic and harmonic movements fragments, each with its own spatial dynamic character, suggestive of compositional ideas and motifs. In exploring the different 'Rings' one can also discover the forms of many kinds of everyday actions and well-known, named dance movements.

The first 'Scale' I ever learnt was a dance sequence of 12 movements called the 'A Scale' (Figs 1-6). It was taught to us in an evening class by Lilla Bauer (Seiber) and we went through it as part of the lesson each week. As it was rather long and difficult to remember, it was often practised in sections, by repeating, for example, two or three movements or half the scale. This involved using different rhythms. As in all dance classes the movements were practised to both sides. All the movements of the different throughout the scale and could be grouped rhythmically, helping to remember it in this way (Figs 7-8). I later learnt that the right and left sides of the scale were regarded as two separate scales, the 'Right "A" Scale' and the 'Left "A" Scale' ((Figs 11-14), and that there were two other scales of this type called the 'Right and Left "B" Scales (Figs 9-10)'.

The diagrams and notation which follow show the movement sequence of the Left. "A" and Right and Left "B" Scales (Figs 9-10, 13-14), the similarities and differences structure. An important similarity between these four scales is that their trace-pathways form alternately a 'steeple' (acute angle) and a 'volute' (more open arc). Each scale contains 6 'steeples' and six 'volutes' (Figs 17-18, 19-20), each formed by two 'transversals' lying on either the same diagonal slant ('steeples', or two different ones ('volutes')). In each scale one diagonal slant is not used ("the missing diagonal"), determining a dynamic difference between the "A" and "B" Scale'

## THE RIGHT AND LEFT 'A' SCALES

(Transversal, Inner, Standard Scales)

Circuits linking all 12 icosahedral surface points by means of 12 transversal movements - sometimes called the more feminine, minor, defensive, yielding.

### Trace form of RIGHT A SCALE

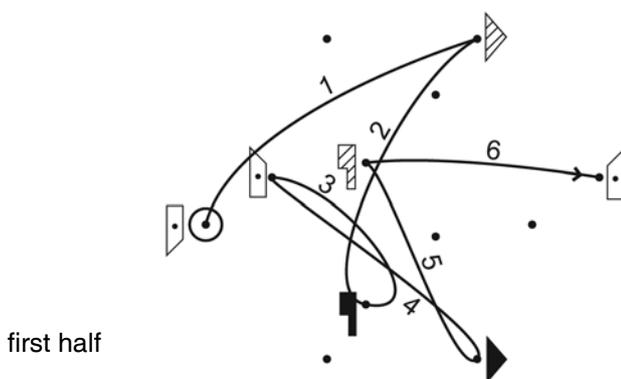


Fig 1

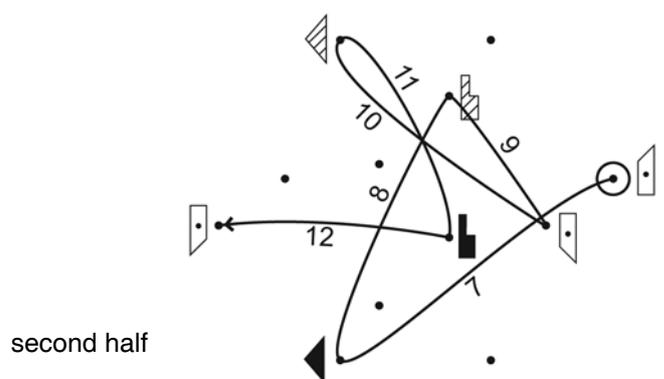
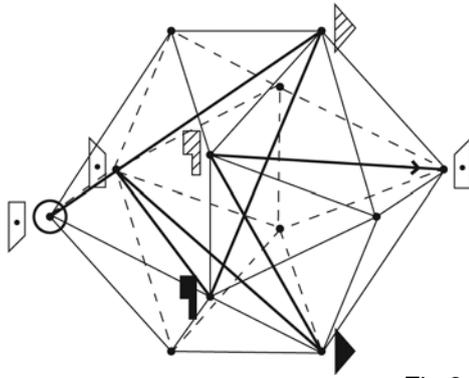


Fig 2

The two halves balance each other using opposite icosahedral surface points and directions of travel.

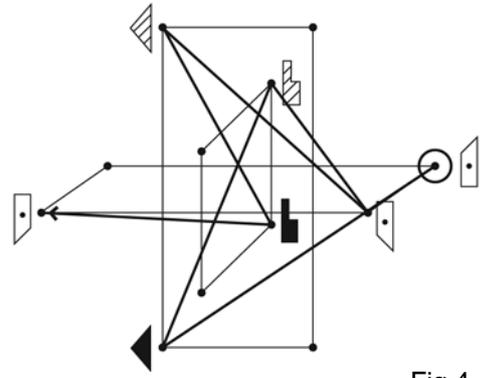
Icosahedron showing path of Right A Scale



first half

Fig 3

Diagram of three dimensional planes showing path of Right A Scale from one plane to another



second half

Fig 4

Pathway of first 6 movements of the Left A Scale

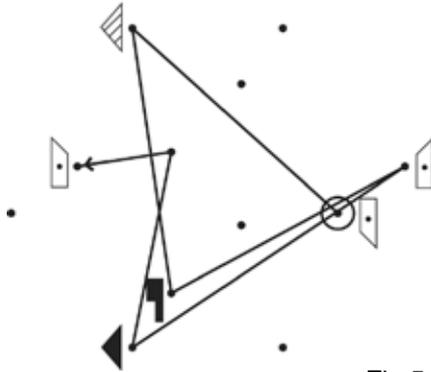


Fig 5

Pathway of second 6 movements of the Left A Scale

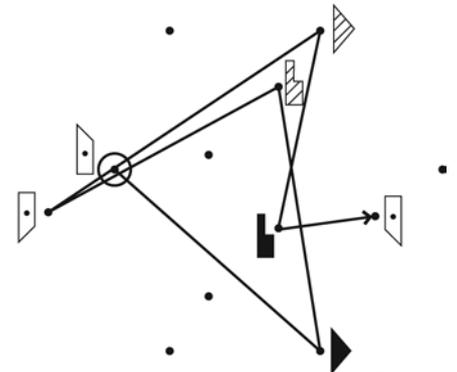


Fig 6

First 3 movements of the Left A Scale showing the 'flat', 'steep' and 'floating' transversals

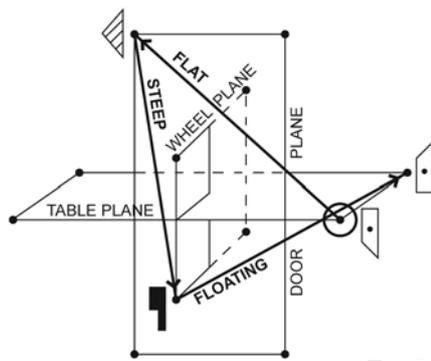


Fig 7

The 4 'steep' movements in the Left A Scale. There are also 4 'flat' and 4 'floating'

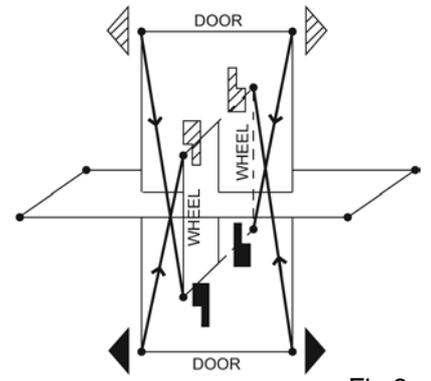


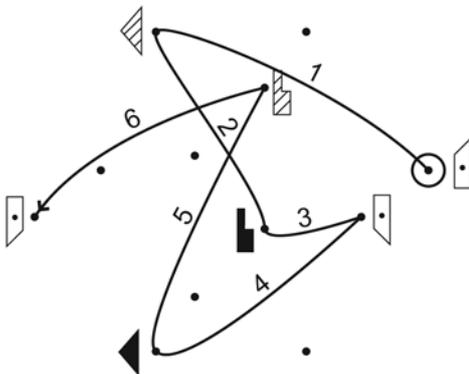
Fig 8

THE RIGHT AND LEFT 'B' SCALES

(Transversal, Inner, Standard Scales)

Circuits linking all 12 icosahedral surface points by means of 12 transversal movements - sometimes called more masculine, major, heroic, attacking.

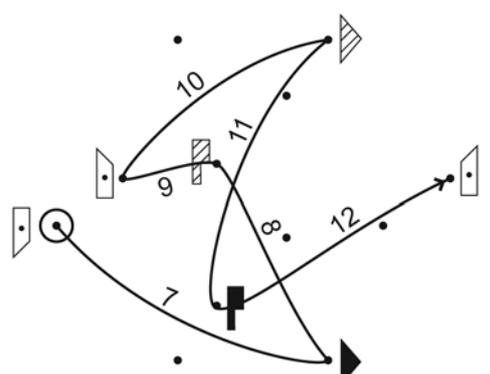
Right B Scale



first half

Fig 9

Right B Scale



second half

Fig 10

Right B Scale  
first half  
Showing the  
'flat', 'steep'  
and 'floating'  
transversals

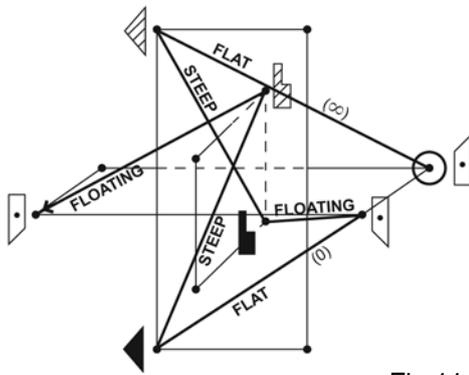


Fig 11

Right B Scale  
second half  
Showing the  
movements  
called 'zero' (0)  
and 'infinity' (∞)

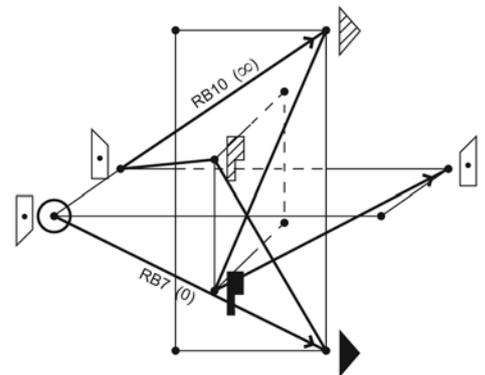


Fig 12

Left B Scale  
first half  
Showing order of  
movements and  
situation of 'zero' (0)  
and 'infinity' (∞)

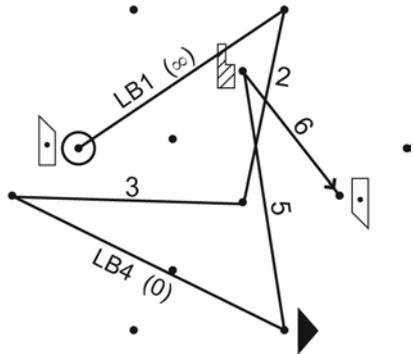


Fig 13

Left B Scale  
second half  
Showing 'flat',  
'steep' and 'floating'  
transversals and  
situation of 'zero' (0)  
and 'infinity' (∞)

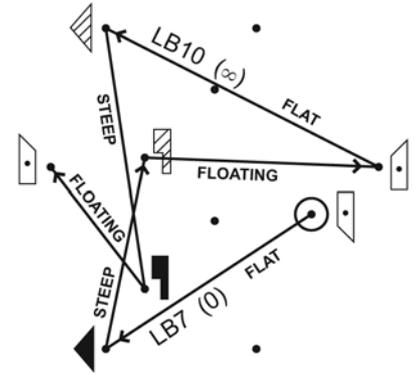
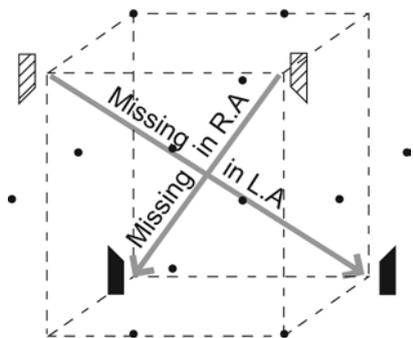


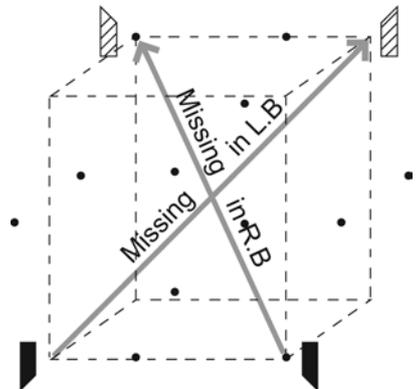
Fig 14

Diagonals not used  
in the Left and Right  
A Scales



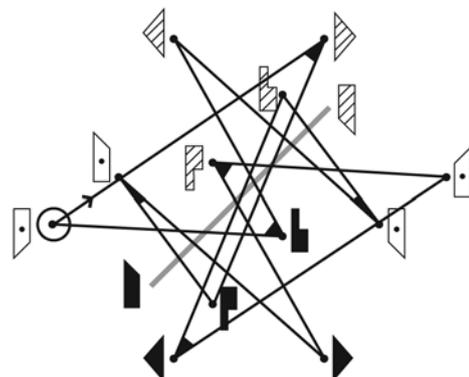
The strongest diagonals Fig 15

Diagonals not used  
in the Left and Right  
B Scales



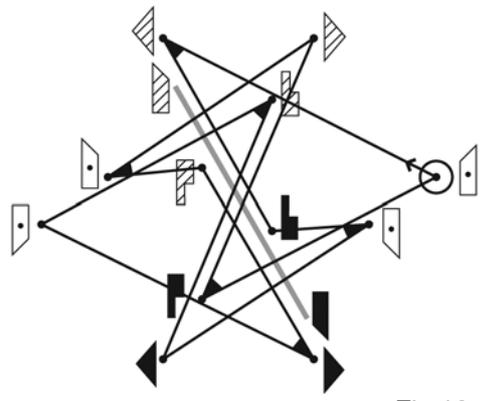
The weakest diagonals Fig 16

Right A Scale  
showing the 6  
'Steeple's and  
the 'missing  
diagonal'.



Scale more feminine Fig 17

Right B Scale  
showing the 6  
'Steeple's and  
the 'missing  
diagonal'.



Scale more masculine Fig 18

Right A Scale  
emphasising  
the 6 'Volutes'  
and showing  
the 'missing  
diagonal'

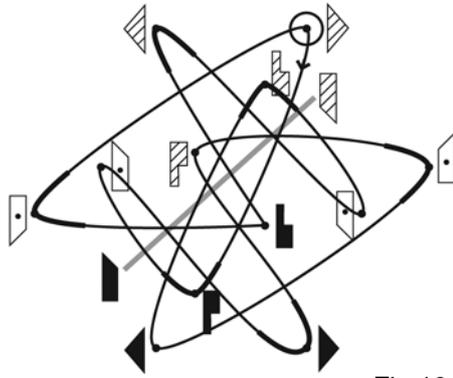


Fig 19

Right B Scale  
showing the 6  
'Volutes' and  
the 'missing  
diagonal'

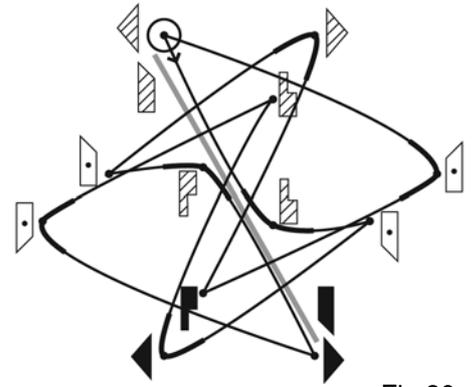


Fig 20

Kinespheric  
surface points  
numbered  
according to  
arrivals of  
Right A Scale  
movements

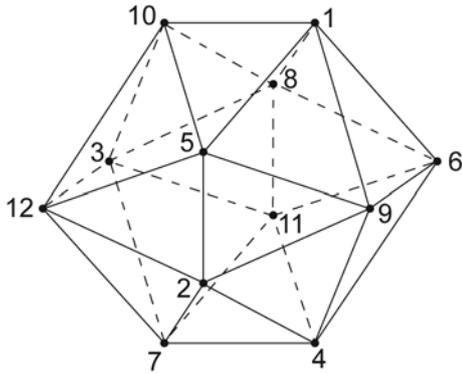


Fig 21

A and B Scales

Numbers of movements parallel but in opposite directions:

12 - 1 & 6 - 7 'Flat'  
3 - 4 & 9 - 10

1 - 2 & 7 - 8 'Steep'  
4 - 5 & 10 - 11

2 - 3 & 8 - 9 'Floating'  
5 - 6 & 11 - 12 ('Suspended' - Laban)

Fig 22

Two Diametrals  
each shown as a  
'deflection' from  
a dimensional  
line

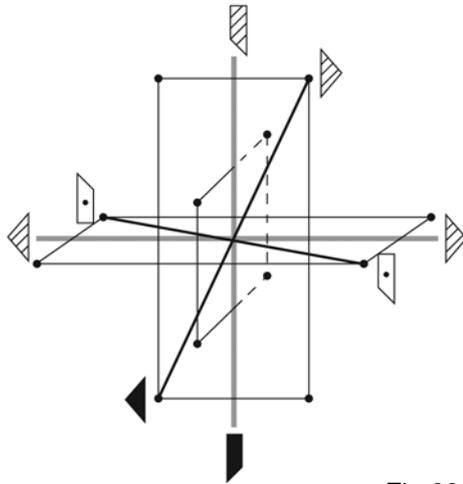


Fig 23

Two Transversals  
both shown as  
'deflections'  
from the same  
diagonal

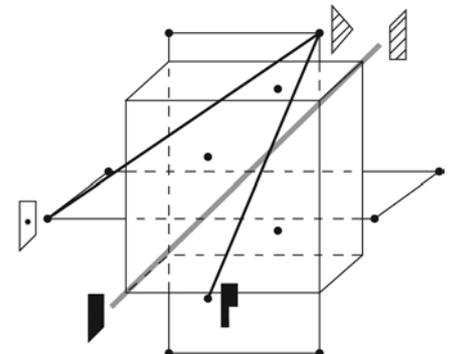


Fig 24

Trace form of  
the Standard  
Peripheral Scale  
- 'The Primary  
Scale'

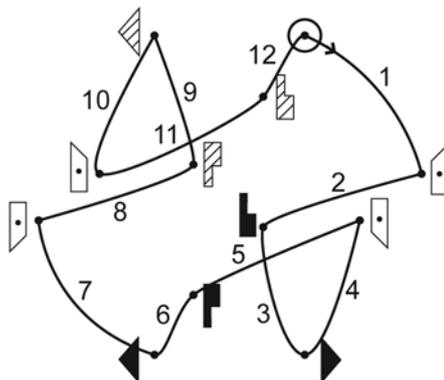


Fig 25

Right side leading

Axis

Trace form of  
the Standard  
Peripheral Scale  
- 'The Primary  
Scale'

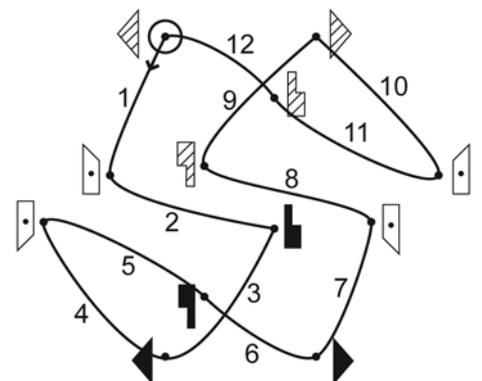
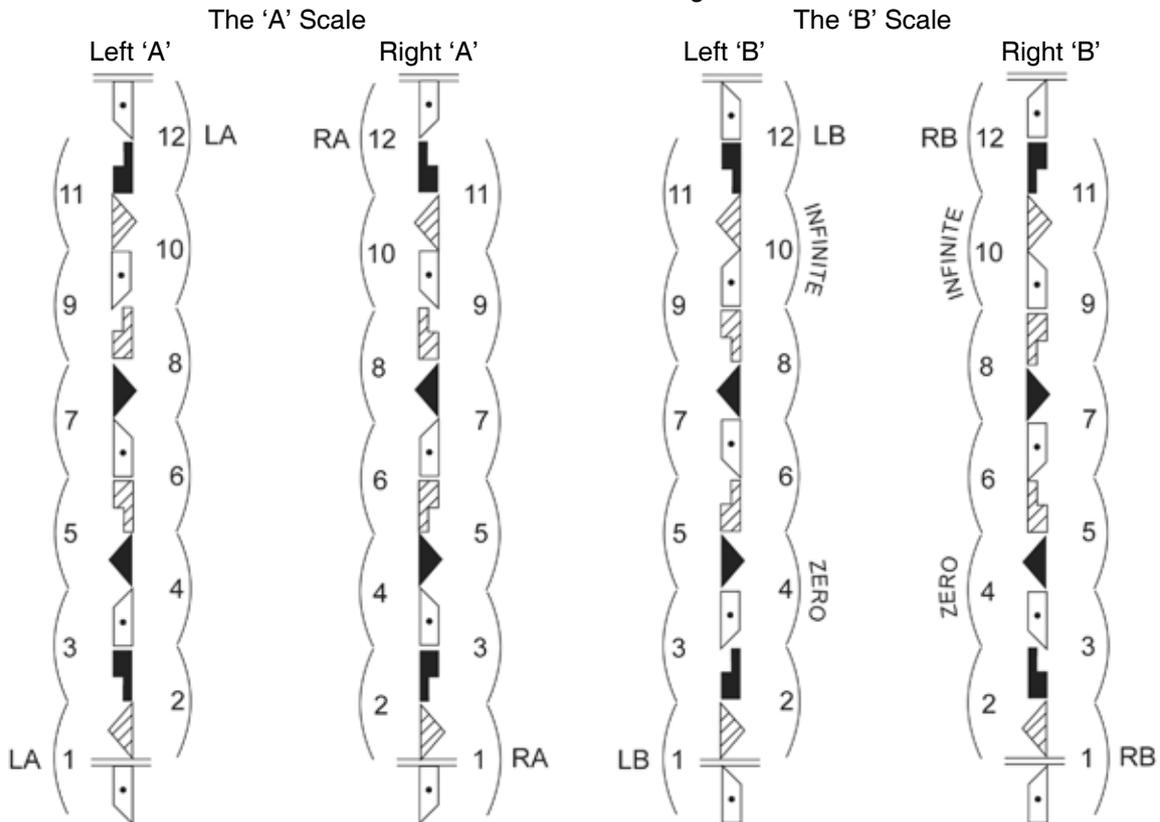


Fig 26

Left side leading

Axis

## Movement Numbering



The "A" and "B" Scales are called "*Inner Scales*" as their movements pass close to the kinespheric/body centre, as distinguished from the. "*Outer Scales*" whose pathways remain on the surface of the kinesphere. These "*Peripheral Scales*", (Fig 25-26), like the "A" and "B" Scales, are also circuits linking all 12 icosahedral of transversals. The "Peripheral " Scale and the "A" and "B" scales were also termed by Laban the "*Standard Scales*", as many forms can be worked out from them. He seems to have regarded the Peripheral Scale especially in this light, and in *Choreutics* he terms it the "Primary Scale".

The word "Inclination" is often used to describe a movement and also the word "Deflection". It is important to understand their meaning and their connection to the term "Transversal". "*Inclinations*" is the term used for all movement lines that are tilted and do not coincide with the vertical cross of axes. There are different types of 'inclinations' for example:

- a) Pure diagonal inclinations (cubic opposite corners)                      Pass through
- b) 'Diametral' inclinations (planar opposite corners)                      the centre
- c) 'Transversal' inclinations (corner of one plane of another in a different zone)                      Slice through space

Another concept used by Laban in *Choreutics* in relation to diametral and transversal 'inclinations' is that of '*Deflection*'. Diametral inclinations are thought of as being deflections from a dimensional line. Transversal inclinations are thought of as being deflections from a diagonal line (Figs 23-24). Dimensional and diametral shapes are thought of as being linked to "*Stability*". They are seen in dance styles where jumping, spinning and balancing skills and control of steps, body shapes and relationships is predominant. Diagonal and transversal movements are seen in styles where there is emphasis on flow and freedom, "*Mobility*", on tilting, tipping and travelling and launching the body into space.

Part II of my account of the Laban Scales and Rings will give more details of the Peripheral Scales (the Primary Scales) and also some examples of the 'Rings' (circuits which do not fulfil sufficient of the criteria of internal and external balance to warrant them being called a scale). First there will be some examples of "6 Rings" and "3 Rings". The number in the title of a 'ring' simply refers to the number of movement links between kinespheric points used in describing the circuit of the ring.

It may seem strange that I have begun my account by introducing the Standard Scales which are the most complex to explain, but for dancers they are very rewarding to work on as a practical discipline. There are other scales simpler and more basic and elementary to perform.

**Sally Archbutt**

**Book List:**

Bishko, L. *Visualising the A Scale* 24<sup>th</sup> ICKL Conference Proceedings Vol.2 London 2005  
 Laban, R. (ed. Ullmann, L.) *Choreutics* Macdonald & Evans London 1966  
 Preston-Dunlop, V. *Point of Departure: The Dancer's Space* Dunlop 1984  
 Salter, E.A. *The Curving Air* H.F.A 1977  
 Winnearts, J. *Modern Dance: The Jooss-Leeder Method A & C Black* 1958

# The Laban Scales and Rings

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## Part 2 Icosahedral “6 Rings” and “3 Rings”, transversal and peripheral, their diagonal axes and relationship to the standard icosahedral scales.

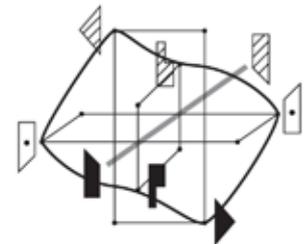
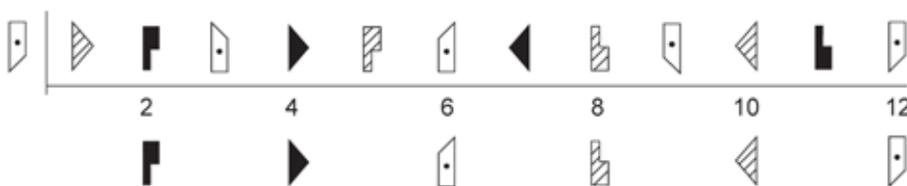
Many different types of trace form shapes are produced by movements of the body and its parts in the kinespheric space surrounding it. Traceform circuits that may be felt and seen as harmonious because they embody different types of balance in their movement structure and relationships, are called movement “rings” and “scales”. These may be classified in various different ways, e.g.

- By the type of kinespheric links of which they are composed, one (“pure”) or “mixed”.
- By the number of links of which they are formed.
- By the shape of the trace forms their movements produce, e.g. curved, angular, twisted, planar, plastic, etc.
- By their orientation in terms of spatial zones and axes.
- By the types of movement their performance can produce.

### THE ICOSAHEDRAL “6 RINGS”

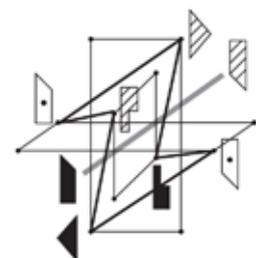
One can discover the location of these “6 Rings” numerically by using the surface locations of any of the standard 12 link scales (“A” and “B” and “Primary”) in the following way:-

If one uses every 2<sup>nd</sup> location of any of these twelve link circuits and joins them up, it results in two six links circuit each with a different character, one peripheral and one transversal. For example, if we take the right “A” Scale and use one set of every 2<sup>nd</sup> locations:



Result – A ring of six peripheral links called an Equator Ring or Scale or “Girdle”.

If we use the other set of every second locations:



Result – A ring of six transversal links called an Axis Ring, Scale, or “Cluster”.

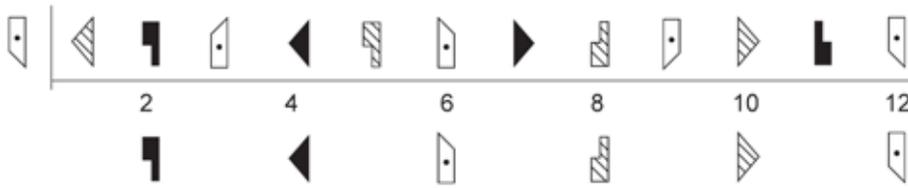
The Equator Ring surrounds the Right “A” Scale Axis  (the “Missing Diagonal”).

The Axis Ring is formed by six transversal steeples lying on the same diagonal slant  as the R. “A” Scale

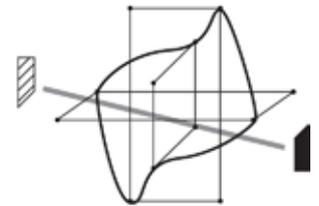
Axis, thus is also surrounded by the Equator Ring.

If one follows the same procedure with the left “A” Scale and the Right and Left “B” Scales, the result is similar, but in each case the axis is different, being the axis of the particular scale.

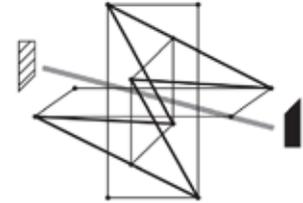
Left "A" Scale



- = Diagonal Axis of Left "A" Scale

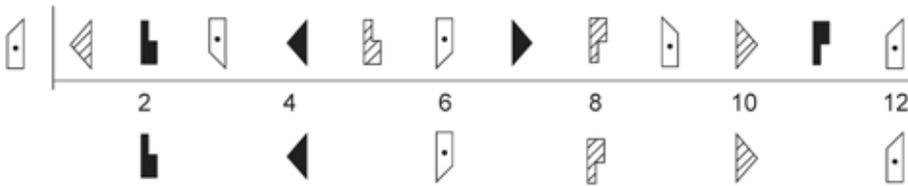


Equator Ring

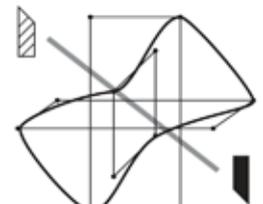


Axis Ring

Right "B" Scale



- = Diagonal Axis of R "B" Scale

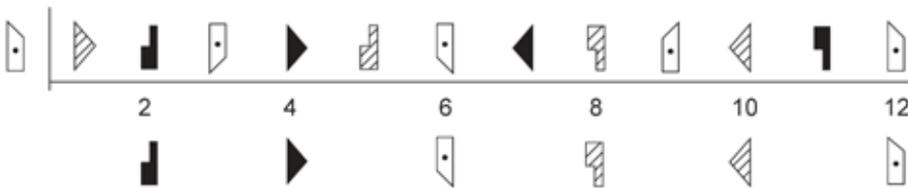


Equator Ring

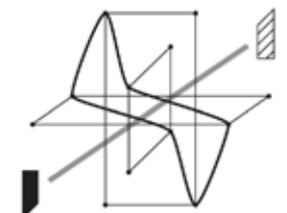


Axis Ring

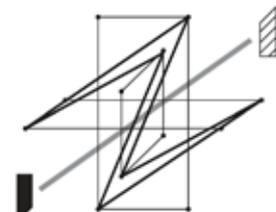
Left "B" Scale



- = Diagonal Axis of Left "B" Scale



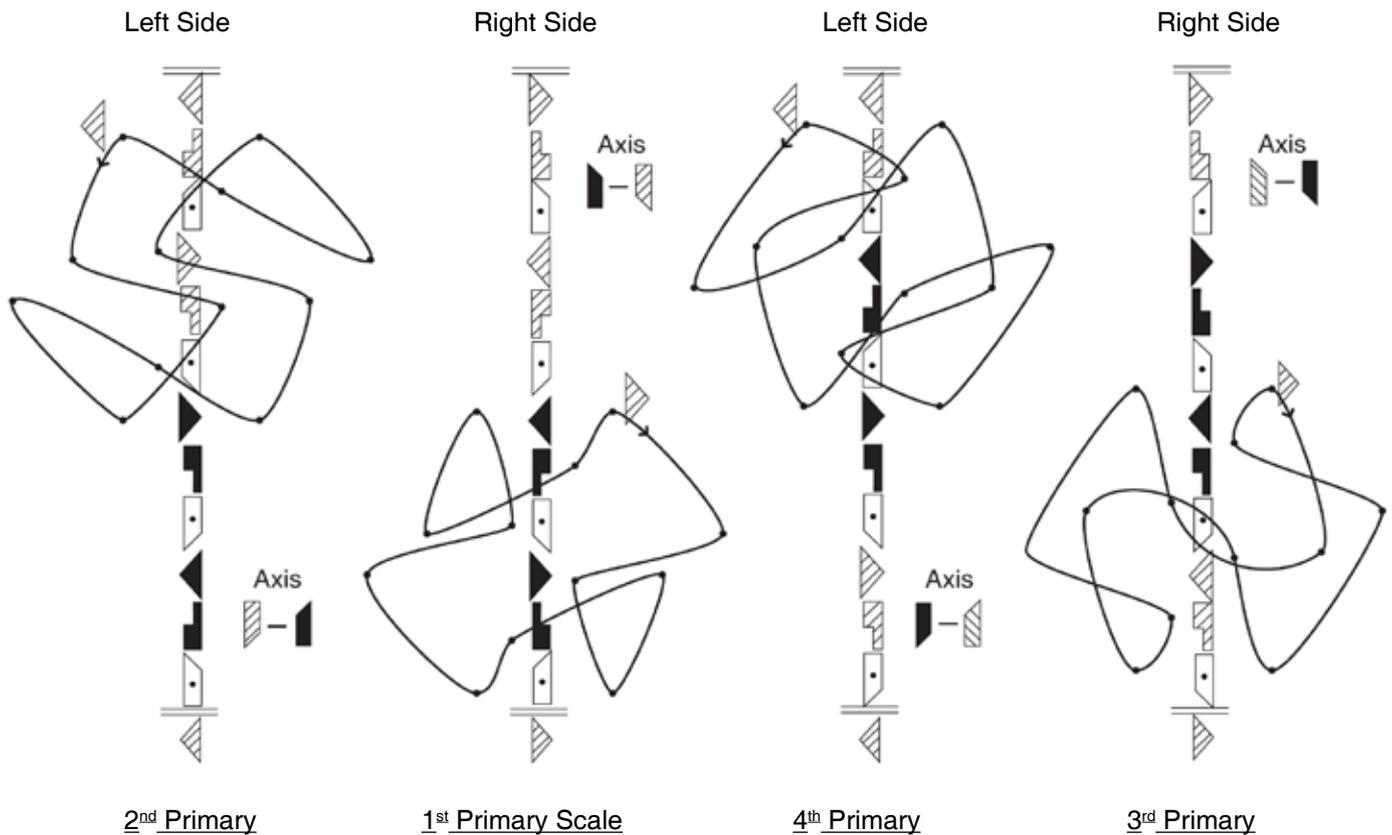
Equator Ring



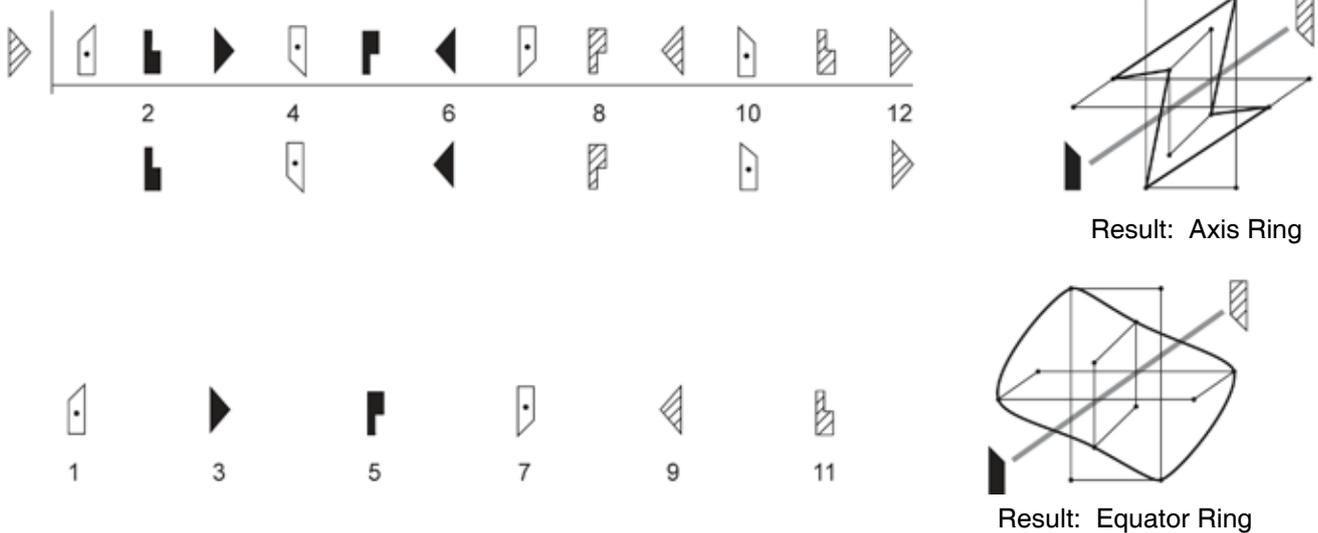
Axis Ring

If one takes each of the four Primary Scales and uses every 2<sup>nd</sup> location of their peripheral paths, it also results each time in two 6 Rings, one peripheral Equator Ring and one transversal Axis Ring.

The Four Primary Scales and their trace forms



The result of using every 2<sup>nd</sup> location of the 1<sup>st</sup> Primary Scale



Each diagonal axis serves one Inner and one Outer Standard Scale. The pairs of scales with the same axis were numbered by Laban 1<sup>st</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup>.

2<sup>nd</sup> Inner L “A” 1<sup>st</sup> Inner R “A” 4<sup>th</sup> Inner L “B” 3<sup>rd</sup> Inner R “B”

This numbering also enables the particular peripheral scale one is talking about to be identified. (NB. These numbers must not be confused with those given to the diagonals in the performance of the Diagonal Scale.)

“6 ring” forms may be seen in the gesture paths of opening turns, turning jumps and arabesques of ballet, figure skating and gymnastics. Usually the axis is dimensional.

‘Equator jumps’ in my experience of Laban based professional training, were usually off-balance round a diagonal axis.

## ICOSAHEDRAL “3 RINGS”

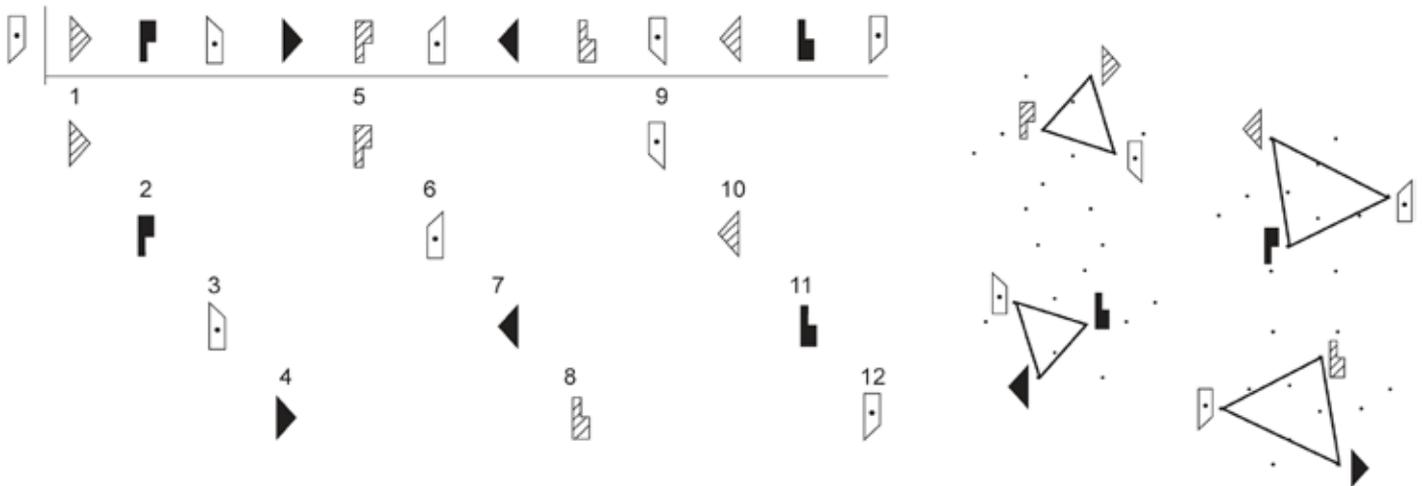
These rings are also of two different types. Each ring consists of three movements, either transversal or peripheral, linked to form unit. Each “3 Ring” includes one ‘flat’, one ‘steep’ and one ‘flowing’ inclination. Each of these three inclinations lies on a different diagonal. The fourth diagonal forms the axis of the ring. There are four “3 Rings”, two transversal and two peripheral, round each diagonal axis.

How may these sixteen rings be located in the kinesphere? In different ways:

- i) In the same way as the “6 Rings”, they may be found numerically, but by using every 4<sup>th</sup> surface location of any of the standard scales,
- ii) The transversal “3 Rings” can be identified by taking each separate volute of the transversal standard scales (R & L “A” & “B”) and linking the end back to the beginning location by what is termed a ‘vol-link’.
- iii) Peripheral “3 Rings” can be found by using the opposite surface locations of the Axis Rings and performing them as two peripheral units called ‘polar triangles’.

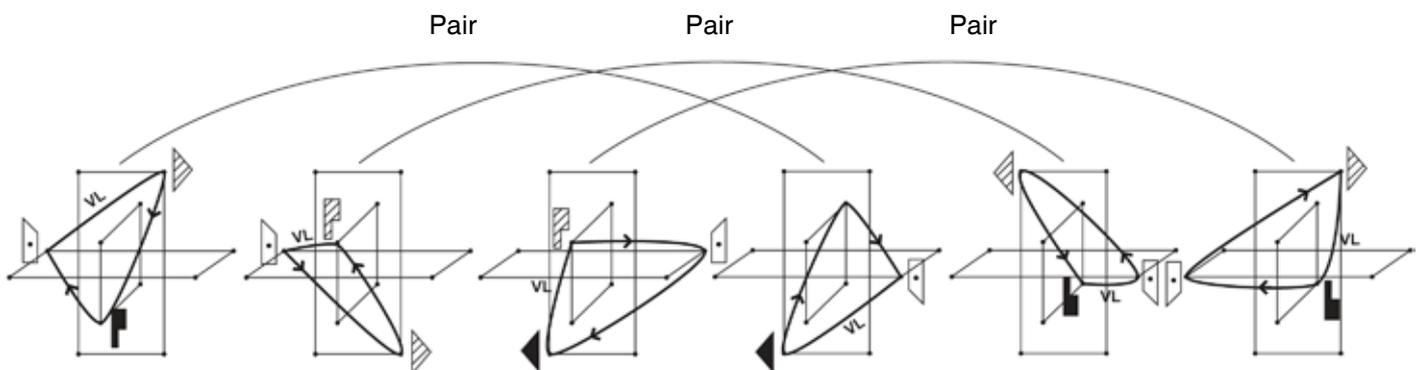
Examples follow:

- i) “3 Rings” arrived at by linking every 4<sup>th</sup> surface locations of the R “A” Scale



Result. Four “3 Rings” around  diagonal. Two inner, transversal, two ‘polar’.

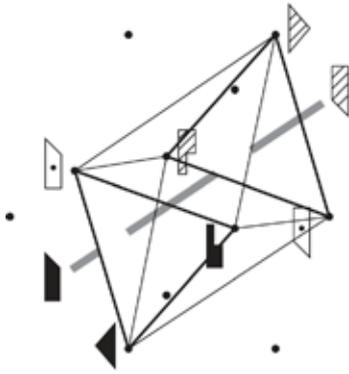
- ii) “3 Rings” arrived at by taking each volute of an Inner Standard Scale (the R. “A”) and linking the end back to the beginning by a ‘vol-link’.



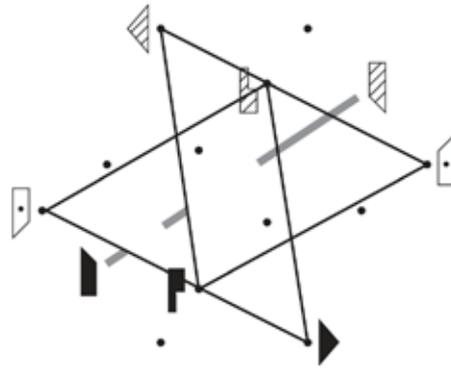
The six volutes of the R “A” Scale showing the ‘vol-links’ (VL)

Which transform them into three pairs of transversal “3 Rings, each pair parallel and opposite and surrounding a different diagonal.

- iii) A pair of polar “3 Rings” formed by using the opposite surface locations or the six steeples forming the Axis Ring (“Cluster”) of the R “A” Scale



Outer (‘polar’) “3 Rings” showing relation to R “A” Axis Scale



Inner (transversal) “3 Rings” showing R “A” diagonal axis

There are four “3 Rings” round each diagonal.

The “3 RINGS” can be thought of basically as triangular movement shapes involving three changes of diagonal direction. Used singly they provide a simple and varied means of providing technical exercises and themes for improvisation or composition. The three different directions each involves may be thought about in different ways, e.g. by incorporating three different types of action in a movement phrase, or dynamically in terms of different rhythms and expressive possibilities. They provide an alternative to always working with simple dynamic and spatial oppositions, and as there are so many “3 Rings” suggest to me precision, restraint, refinement, sophistication, and use of the extremities. Transversal “3 Rings”, involving much larger, more radical changes, using the body centre and bends, stretches, twists, turns and leaning of the trunk, provide more stimulation and excitement.

Part III of my account of the Laban Scales and Rings will concentrate on the “5 Rings”.

“The girdle of a cuboctahedron is flat and lies in a plane. The girdle of an icosahedron is slightly bent and the connections of the diametrically opposite signal-points produce a wave-like shape around the centre in which they intersect. The energy needed for such an unfolding into a third dimension, through bulging and contracting, is characteristic of the organic world.”

Laban (Choreutics p. 109)

*Sally Archbutt*

June 2008

Further reading

Bagley, G. Movement Origins in Evolution Part 1. LAMG Magazine Summer 2006

Laban, R. Choreutics. Macdonald & Evans. London 1966

Preston-Dunlop, V. Laban’s Choreutic Practice. LAMG Diamond Jubilee Souvenir Programme 2006

# The Laban Scales and Rings

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## Part 3

### “5 Ring” Movement Shapes, Locations and Relationships.

Whereas all “2”, “3”, “4” and “6” Ring shapes and locations can easily be shown to be related to the eight Laban Standard Scales (R & L “A”, R & L “B”, and 1<sup>st</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> Primary Scales), the “5 Rings” have no direct numerical relationship to these Scales. They relate more to the dodecahedron with its twelve pentagonal faces than to the icosahedron with its twenty triangular faces.

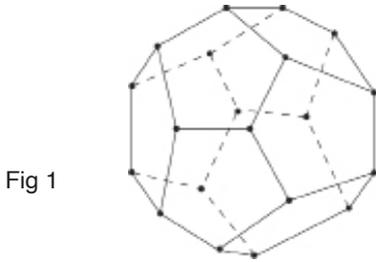


Fig 1

Dodecahedron

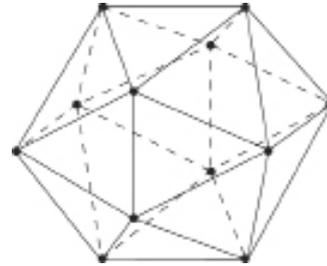


Fig 2

Icosahedron

There are three different types of “5 Rings”

- i) **Peripheral** – (Series A & B) ii) **Mixed** - (“Baskets”) iii) **Transversal** – (Pentagrammon mystikon (star of David).

There are twelve “5” Rings of each type. They can be described diagrammatically using the icosahedral scaffold.

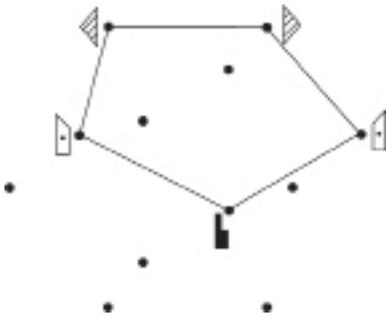


Fig 3

**A Peripheral “5 Ring”**

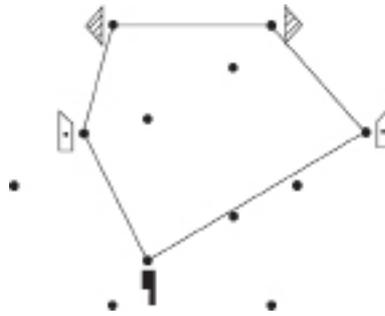


Fig 4

**A Mixed “5 Ring”**

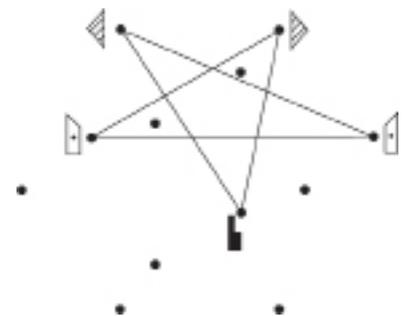


Fig 5

**A Transversal “5 Ring”**

In Laban’s book “Choreutics” it says “.... interesting as a movement experience are the five rings, in which we meet for the first time an inclusion of the dimensional, in harmonic relations.”

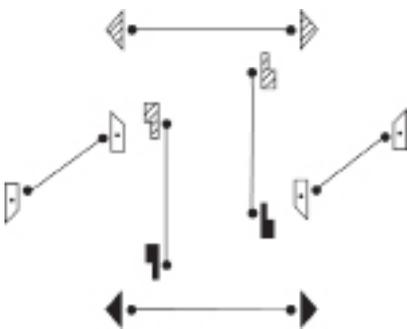


Fig 6

**Dimensional Peripherals**

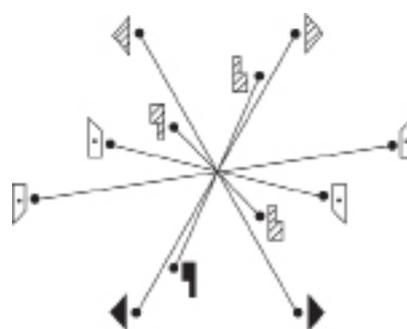


Fig 7

**The Diametral Cross**

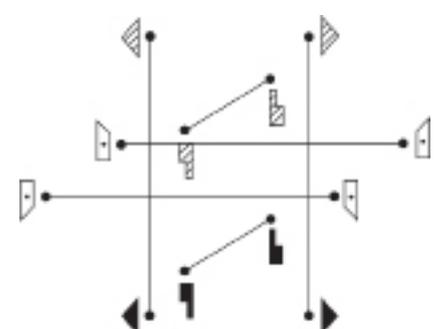


Fig 8

**Dimensional Transversals**

### The Peripheral “5 Rings”

These “5 Rings” are large sweeping circular movements encouraging expansion and fluency. They are associated with pairs of dynamic, spatial, rhythmic opposites, e.g. ‘gathering and scattering’, swings, ‘figure-of-eight’ trace forms, zones of the kinesphere, clockwise and anti-clockwise rotations.

Each ring consists of five peripheral movement links, **one of which is a dimensional peripheral**. Each ring is thought of as having a 'base' and an 'apex'. The base is its dimensional peripheral and this gives each ring its character, either 'flat', 'steep' or 'flowing'. Dimensional peripherals are also known as 'hinges'. According to characters, locations and relationships, the twelve peripheral "5 Rings" are usually grouped in pairs, in either of two different ways:

**Series A**

Pairs connected by **having in common one of the hinges** of a dimensional plane.

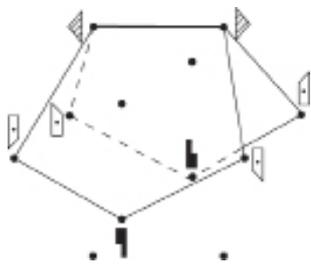


Fig 9

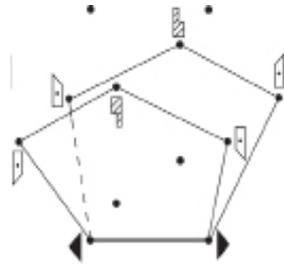


Fig 10

**Four 'Flat'**

**Series B**

Pairs which are **opposite to one another** and which both surround the **same diametral axis**.

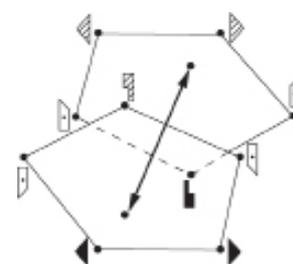


Fig 11

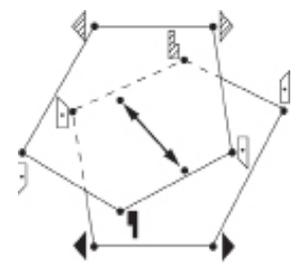


Fig 12

**Five Rings**

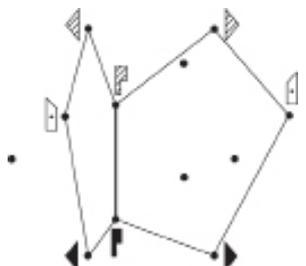


Fig 13

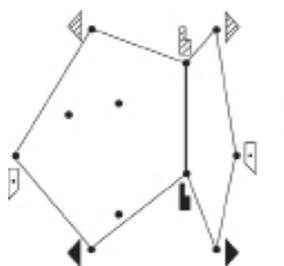


Fig 14

**Four 'Steep'**

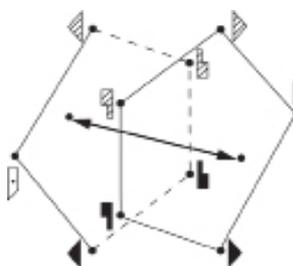


Fig 15

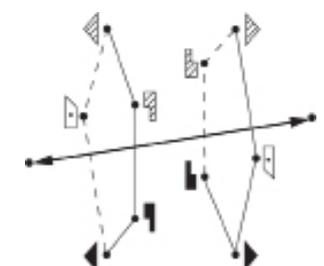


Fig 16

**Five Rings**

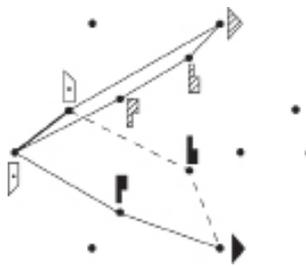


Fig 17

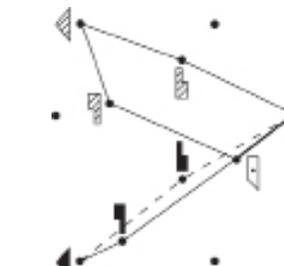


Fig 18

**Four 'Flowing'**

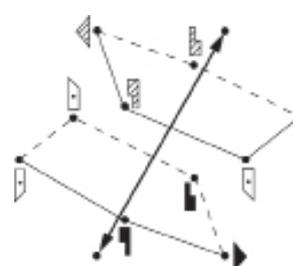


Fig 19

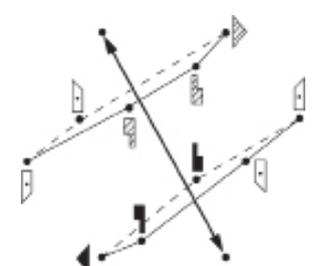


Fig 20

**Five Rings**

Five Ring forms are useful for developing initial confidence to enlarge one's movements and link them rhythmically together with kinaesthetic appreciation. Later they also have an important part to play in developing the use of gravity and momentum, swing, impulse, and centrifugal force necessary for the performance of advanced dance skills.

**Three Movements analysed as "5 Ring" trace forms.**

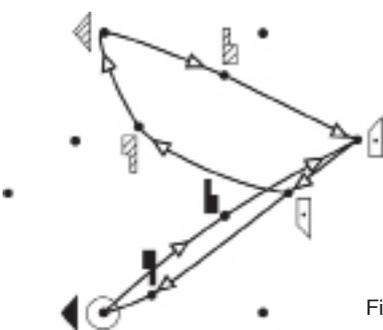


Fig 21

**Renversé**

Turn to R on L. Support led by simultaneous clockwise circular movements of R.Arm and R.Leg.

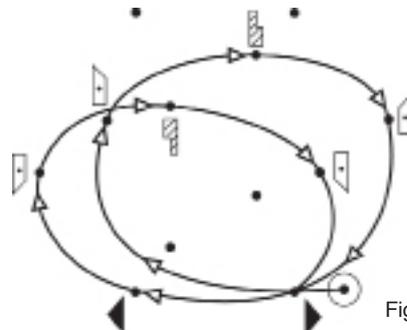


Fig 22

**R.Leg Figure-of-8 Swing**

With outward and inward rotation of leg and outward and inward succession of the limb.

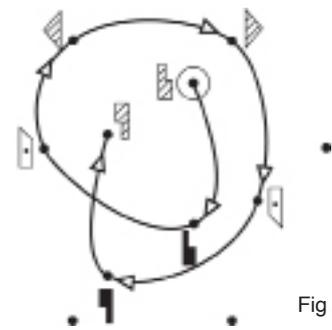


Fig 23

**'Apex Swing' of two flat "5" Rings**

Example taken from "Choreutics" Fig.86, p185

“5 Rings” are a mixture of labile and stabilising elements. The excitement of the encouragement to extend and release the flow of movement is balanced in their form by the dimensional, stabilising elements contained in their structure.

Tensions providing a stabilising element within “5 Rings”. (See Chor.ch.I I.)

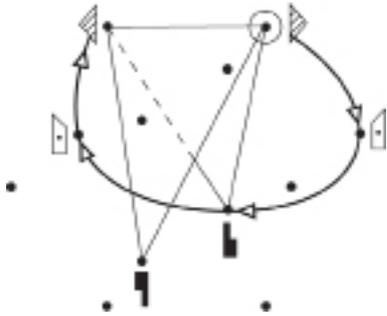


Fig 24 Gathering movt from R-L led by palm surface of R.Arm

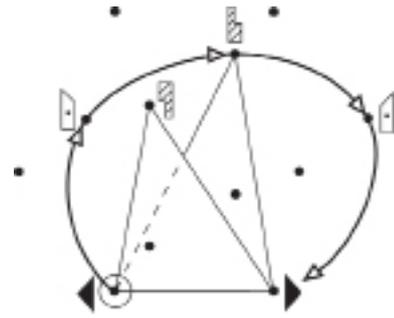


Fig 25 Scattering movt from L-R led by front surface of R.Leg

### Symmetrical tensions within flat “5 Rings”

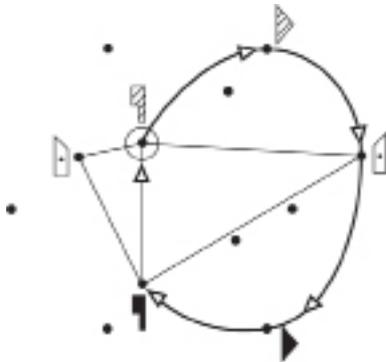


Fig 26 Scooping movt from H-D led by inner surface of R.Arm

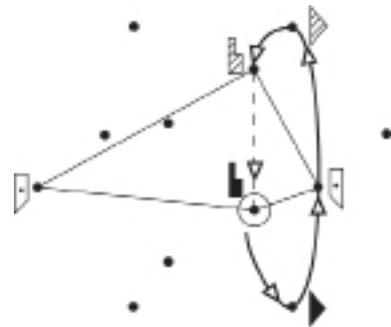


Fig 27 Scattering movt from L-R led by front surface of R.Leg

### Symmetrical tensions within steep “5 Rings”

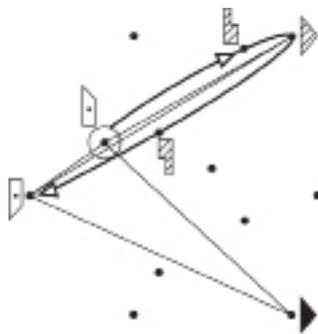


Fig 28 Gathering movt from B-F led by palm surface of R.Arm

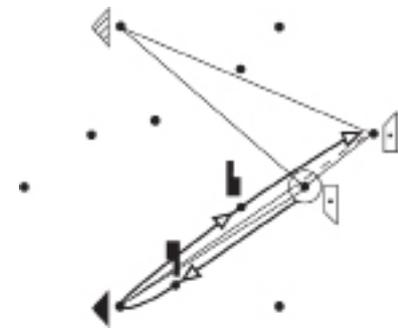


Fig 29 Scattering swing from B-F led by front of L.Leg

### Symmetrical tensions within flowing “5 Rings”

#### The Mixed “5 Rings”

Whereas each peripheral “5 Ring” lies on a plane, the Mixed “5 Rings” are plastic forms. They consist of three peripheral movement links and **two transversal links**.

Their shape is known as a ‘basket’. The three peripheral links enclose the containing part of the basket shape, and from its widest point the two transversal links switch direction and converge to meet and form the ‘handle’.

These rings share many features with the peripheral “5 Rings”, e.g. Each ring is situated in a particular dimensional kinespheric zone; their axes are diametral; they can be identified as ‘flat’, ‘steep’ or ‘flowing’; the stability of the dimensional symmetry of their surface locations; their 2/3 space/time rhythm. But it is the **switch of direction and convergence and divergence of their two transversal links** which gives the Mixed “5 Rings” their unique identity of release versus containment, exposure versus protection.

Interestingly, each mixed five ring uses the surface locations not used by a Mixed “7 Ring”. I will speak about “7 Rings” in Part V.

**Twelve Mixed “5 Rings”.**

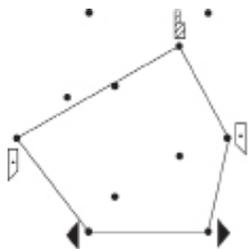


Fig 30

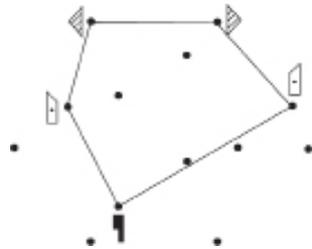


Fig 31

**Four flat' Mixed “5 Rings”**

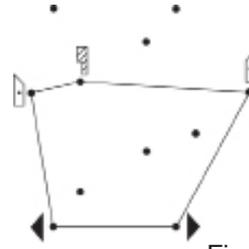


Fig 32

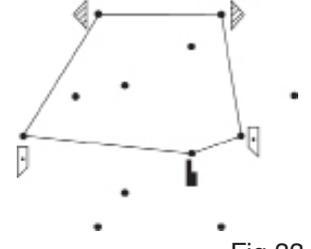


Fig 33

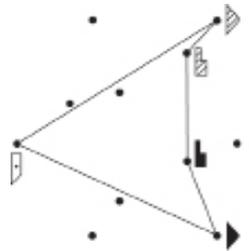


Fig 34

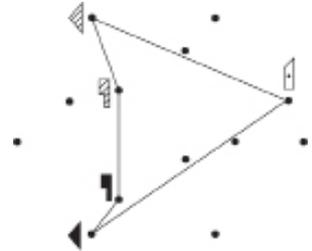


Fig 35

**Four 'steep' Mixed “5 Rings”**

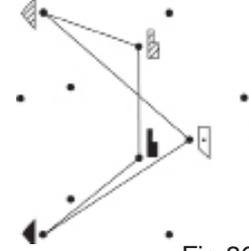


Fig 36

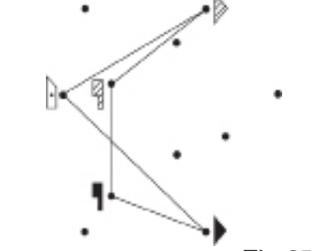


Fig 37

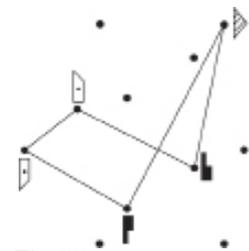


Fig 38

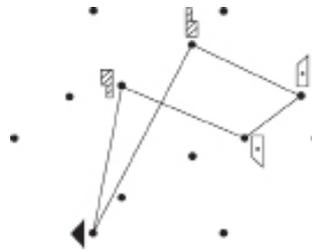


Fig 39

**Four 'flowing' Mixed “5 Rings”**

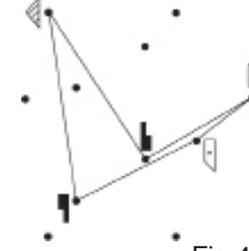


Fig 40

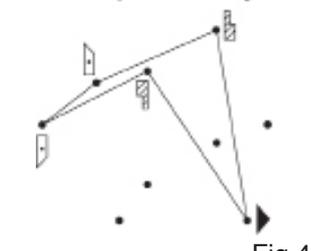


Fig 41

**On Transversal 5 Rings**

I will only speak briefly about Transversal 5 Rings as Laban does not mention these in “Choreutics” as ‘harmonised’ forms. However, some readers might be interested in a small piece of analysis of the so called ‘pentagrammon mystikon’ I began some time ago.

Their form suggests inward focus and emphasis on movements of the torso rather than the limbs. Their movements involve constant changes between **two different diagonals**, quite different from the Standard Axis Scales in which all the movements lie on one diagonal. Effort cube analysis is interesting. They **do not follow the ‘sequential laws’** of Laban’s ‘harmonised forms’, and **each contains two ‘inverted’ transversals**. (See Chor.p.152, ‘Sequential Laws’, and p.165)

**An Analysis of three Transversal 5 Rings**

Nature, Location Orientation of Ring	Type & name of transversal	Diagonal Slant and direction	Effort Cube Analysis	Dynamic Character
<p>Fig 42a</p> <p>Flat Inner 5 Ring</p>	<p>Steep 2</p> <p>Steep L2 rev</p> <p>Flat 10 rev</p> <p>Flat Dim L</p> <p>Flat 1</p>		<p>Main Contrast between  &amp; </p>	<p>Fig 42b</p> <p><b>Missing</b></p> <p>Light Sudden</p> <p>Strong Sustained</p>

Nature, Location  
Orientation of Ring

Type & name of  
transversal

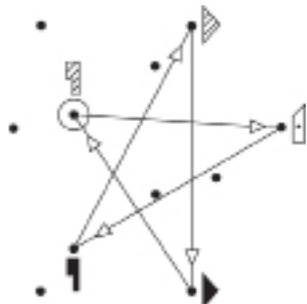
Diagonal Slant  
and direction

Effort Cube  
Analysis

Dynamic  
Character

Fig 43a

Steep  
Inner  
5 Ring



Flowing 6  
Flowing B12 rev  
Steep 2 rev  
Steep Dim D  
Steep 5

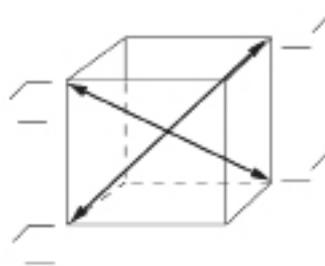
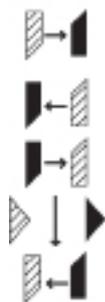


Fig 43b

**Missing**  
Flexible Sudden  
Direct sustained

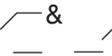
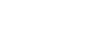
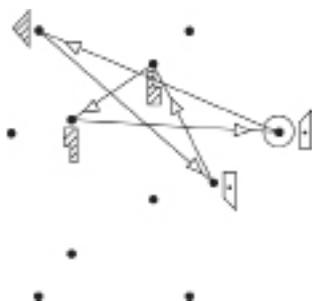
Main Contrast between  & 

Fig 44a

Flowing  
Inner  
5 Ring



Flat B∞  
Flat 10 rev  
Flowing 8 rev  
Flowing Dim B  
Flowing 6

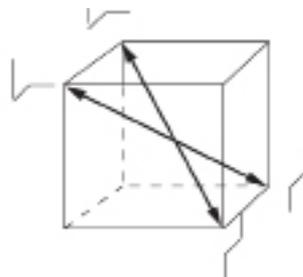
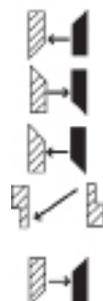
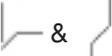


Fig 44b

**Missing**  
**Light flexible**  
**Strong direct**

Main Contrast between  & 

A professional Laban trained dancer can be recognised immediately by possessing, in addition to the assumed level and range of bodily skills, a fluency and knowledge of how to integrate movement into a whole and imbue it with life and significance.

Laban himself had deeper and wider concerns than merely the development of a Laban based professional dance training system, but one definitely exists and contains movements and particular uses of the body unique to it, as well as those which it has in common with other western dance techniques, alongside which it can stand unashamedly with pride.

The study of Choreutics and the Laban rings can only be a useful part of movement and dance study, if **like technique** (in the words of Valerie Preston-Dunlop), **“it is there to serve the art and not overwhelm it”**.

My next article will be about “2 Rings” and “4 Rings” which again have a clear numerical relationship with the Standard Scales.

*Sally Archbutt*

**laban based dance classes**

**Belfast, Crescent Arts Centre**  
Monday:  
4.45pm - 5.45pm Crescent Youth Dance  
5.45pm - 6.45pm Adult Movement and Dance  
Contact: **Brenda McKee** 25 Malone Hill Park Belfast BT9 6RE email: [brendagm@aol.com](mailto:brendagm@aol.com)

**Bromley**  
Wednesday afternoons and Thursday mornings  
Community Dance classes for people with learning difficulties  
Contact: **Avril Hitman** 020 8467 3331

**Cambridge**  
Wednesday mornings Over 55s - open class  
Contact: **Maddy Tongue** 01223 302030

**Swindon**  
Saturday mornings. Three separate classes for 4-5 years, 6-8 years, 9-13 years  
Contact: **Kathy Geddes** 02793 463210

# The Laban Scales and Rings

- a practical aspect of dance technique and training in the art of movement

## Part 4

### “2 Rings” and “4 Rings.” Differences and similarities between them.

Both of these trace form shapes may be thought of as being rectangular, the “2 Rings” as **plane rectangles** and the “4 Rings” as **twisted rectangles**. They are both **Mixed Rings** consisting of **two transversal movement links** and **two peripheral links**. In a “2 Ring” the movement links are parallel and opposite to one another. Not so in a “4 Ring”. The transversal and peripheral links in both types of ring are all ‘**inclinations**’, with a diagonal slant, which is a characteristic of all the Laban icosahedral Scales and Rings. There are also ‘**flat**’, ‘**steep**’ and ‘**flowing**’ types of both “2 Ring” and “4 Rings”.

As both two and four rings have four links in their trace paths, why is one type called a “2 Ring” and the other a “4 Ring”? The numbering of the Rings is not **merely** a simple mathematical device for distinguishing between spatial forms. For Laban the significance of movement lies in its combination of many elements, not only spatial ones. The Scales and Rings are not movements forced into geometric forms, but attempts to describe the flow of movement shapes as actually seen and felt and what gives each trace form its different harmonic character, spatially and dynamically.

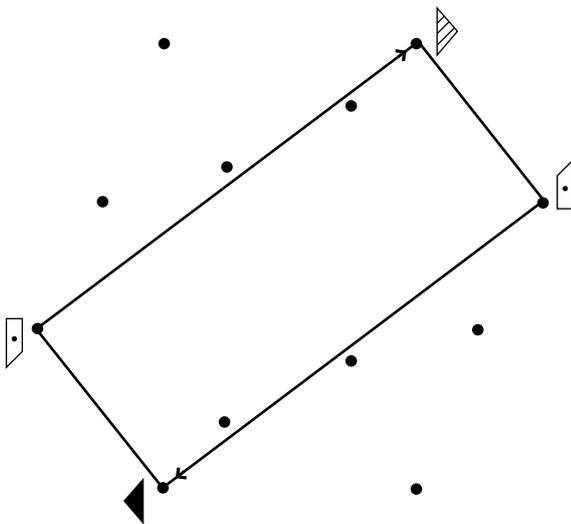


Fig 1 A Laban “2 Ring”

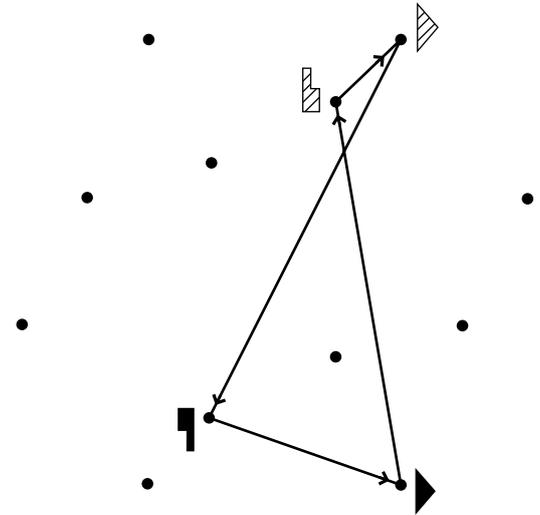


Fig 2 A Laban “4 Ring”

When repeated, the opposite directions of the transversal movements in a “2 Ring” create a **simple rhythm with two main stresses**, “going” and “returning”. This repetitive rhythm is satisfying and releasing and provides a stable space/time base which can be increased, decreased and varied dynamically and physically. The “2 Rings” are useful as dance and movement training exercises. (Figs. 3-8)

The “4 Ring” is a much more complex trace form created by using **four different twists and tilts of the body** to produce a very indirect pathway using **all four diagonal** directions, but only using a restricted area of kinespheric space. This form needs much more energy, control and thought and is much less free flowing than a “2 Ring”.

### LABAN “TWO RINGS” USING THE PARALLEL OPPOSITE TRANSVERSAL OF THE R.A. SCALE

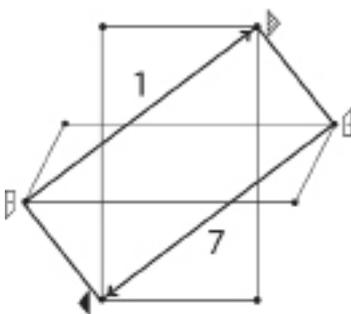


Fig 3

‘flat’ transversals  
‘steep’ peripherals

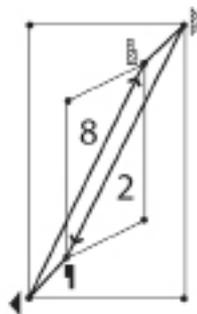


Fig 4

‘steep’ transversals  
‘flowing’ peripherals

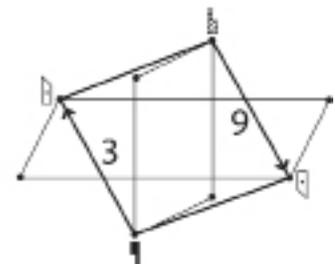


Fig 5

‘flowing’ transversals  
‘flat’ peripherals

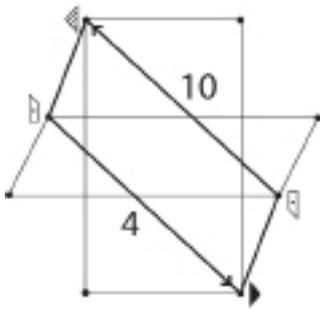


Fig 6  
‘FLAT’ TWO RINGS

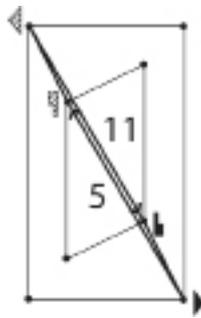


Fig 7  
‘STEEP’ TWO RINGS

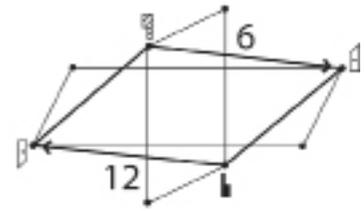


Fig 8  
‘FLOWING’ TWO RINGS

**LABAN “FOUR RINGS” USING THE FIRST SIX MOVEMENTS OF THE R.A. SCALE AND INVOLVING FOUR DIFFERENT TWISTS AND SWITCHES OF DIAGONAL DIRECTION**

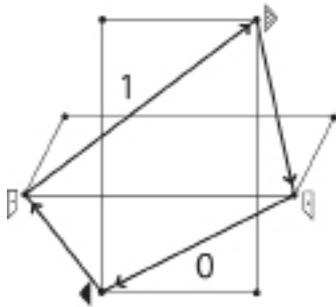


Fig 9  
‘flat’ transversals  
‘steep’ peripherals

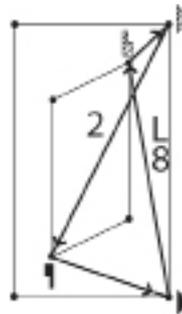


Fig 10  
‘steep’ transversals  
‘flowing’ peripherals

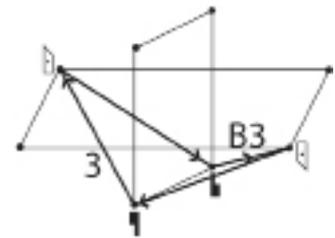


Fig 11  
‘flowing’ transversals  
‘flat’ peripherals

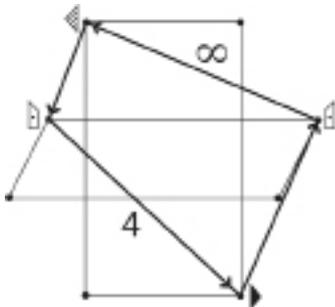


Fig 12  
‘FLAT’ FOUR RINGS

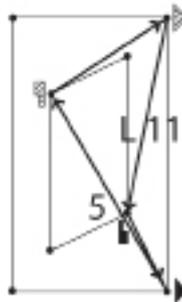


Fig 13  
‘STEEP’ FOUR RINGS

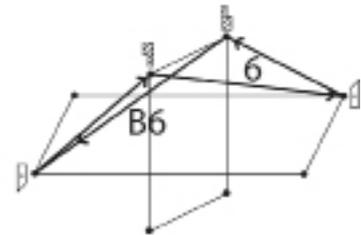


Fig 14  
‘FLOWING’ FOUR RINGS

There are other groups of four movement links which can be performed as a unit but which Laban did not call a ‘4 Ring’. One of these groups he called “**Shears**”. “**Shears**” consist of four transversal movement links and always have a completely symmetrical structure. All the transversals have the same character, either ‘flat’, ‘steep’ or ‘flowing’ and each involves surface locations on two different planes. The transversals converge and diverge and may be thought of as forming either two ‘volutes’ or two ‘steeples’, depending on where starts the movement (at one end of a dimensional transversal or at one end of a dimensional peripheral.) Both volutes and steeples share the same locations. **It depends on how the movement is characterised rhythmically.** The dimensional situations of the “Shears” can be most clearly visualised if they are shown in pairs. (See *Choreutics* p, 165-169.)

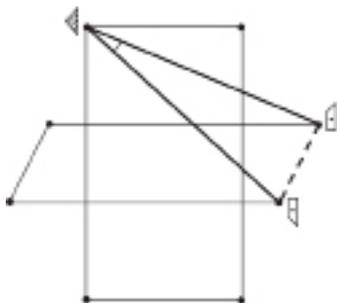


Fig 15  
A dimensional steeple

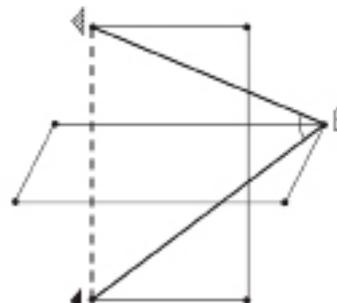


Fig 16  
A dimensional volute

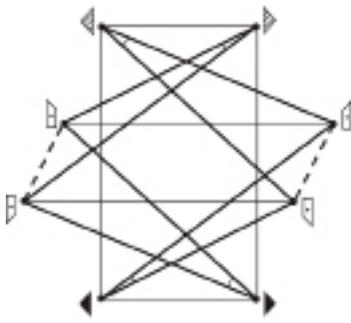


Fig 17  
'Flat'



Fig 18  
'Steep'

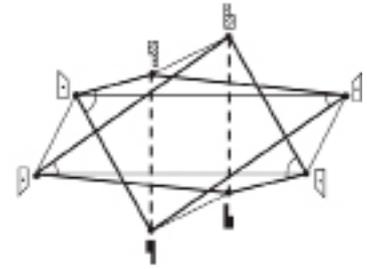


Fig 19  
'Flowing'

**Pairs of "Shears"**

Each pair thought of as two dimensional steeples

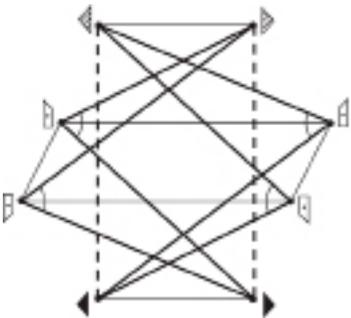


Fig 20

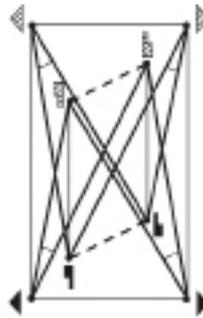


Fig 21

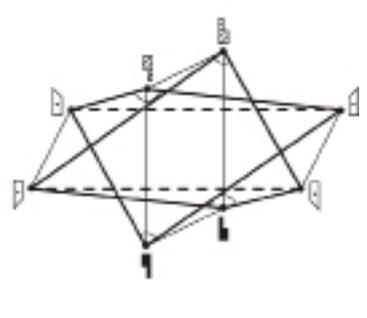


Fig 22

**Pairs of "Shears"**

Each pair thought of as two dimensional volutes

There is yet another group of 4 Rings the movements of which have another rhythm. I have not found it mentioned by Laban in "Choreutics". It is another group consisting of **two transversal and two peripheral links**. Their form is again symmetrical, but not in the same way as the "Shears". I have named them the "**Crossed Swords**" or "**Crosses**". Their two transversal movements cross each other and are both directed towards outer space beyond the same aspect of the kinesphere. They produce an emphatic, insistent rhythm and draw attention to different zones of space.

**"Crosses" – Using pairs of A Scale transversal movements lying on the same plane in the same zone of space**

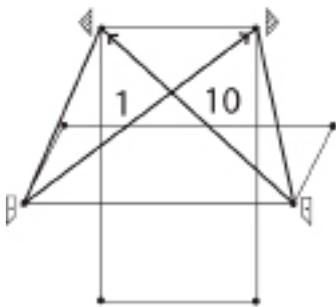


Fig 23  
'Flat' Crosses

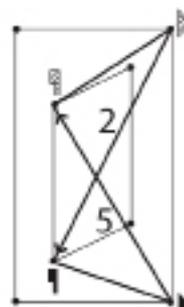


Fig 24  
'Steep' Crosses

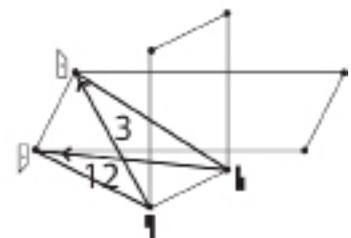


Fig 25  
'Flowing' Crosses

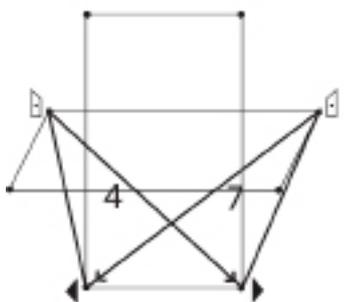


Fig 26

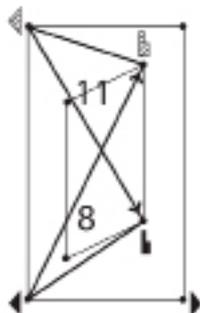


Fig 27

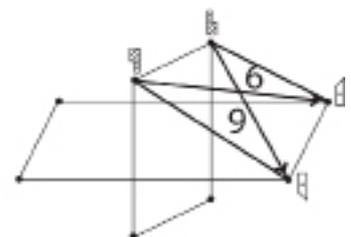


Fig 28

## Summary of different types of 4 Rings

- |    |                      |   |
|----|----------------------|---|
| a) | The Laban "4 Rings". | Stress on continually twisting from one diagonal to another as if striving to get free. Mixed ring. symmetric. Mainly labile. |
| b) | "Shears".            | Stress on meeting or parting relationships, Transversal ring. Symmetric. Mainly stable.                                       |
| c) | "Crossed Swords"     | Emphatic rhythm of repeated striving towards a particular direction of outer space. Mixed ring. Symmetric. Mainly stable.     |

I will conclude this Chapter by considering what is meant by the terms 'Stability' and 'Lability' when applied to movement, and as used by Laban in his book "Choreutics"

**STABILITY** is fairly easy to define if one is thinking about the structure and condition/state of **an object**. It refers to an aspect of its **USEFULNESS**, the capacity to retain its shape firmly connected and unchanged over a period of time and not fall apart, and the capacity to remain still under the pressure of external forces. 'Usefulness' refers to the object's structure and functioning, no matter whether it be a table, ladder, building, boat, kettle, or an ornament. In relation to an object its stability depends upon the materials it is made of, the design of its construction, and whether its intended purpose is fulfilled, its suitability for the task. In relation to objects the word used to refer to the opposite of 'stability' is 'instability'. In an object "**INSTABILITY**" may mean unsafe, shaky, liable to topple over, unreliable, unable to be trusted, rickety.

In relation **to the living world**, especially of people, similar words are often used when speaking about relationships, individual or group, health, physical or mental, skills, innate or acquired, soundness of structure (body and mind) and the ability to recognise, memorise, repeat and learn. Thoughts, sensations and emotions, purpose/motives and questions of suitability and responsibility may not be considered. In relation to **movement** one may think of 'Stability' as the ability to keep one's physical, mental and emotional balance in difficult and dangerous situations.

The word "**LABILITY**", as used by Laban in "Choreutics" is less easy to define. **It is not used as the opposite of 'Stability'** and has a more positive, active connotation than instability. Its meaning is not judgemental. The word "LABILITY" is not used in describing objects, but only in referring to people and to movement. It is regarded as **an ABILITY** (which can be developed) and also as **a facet of movement structure**. The word "stability" is used in the same way. "Lability" may mean mobility, flexibility, adaptability, versatility. Thus we have St/ability and L/ability as **two complimentary human abilities**, attributes, tendencies, possessed by all people in different degrees, and as two components of movement structure present in all movements in different degrees. They may be thought of as two aspects of the 'flow and control' components of a movement ("bound" or "free"). In "Choreutics" the words 'stable' and 'labile' are used in detailed technical movement analysis and we read of predominantly stable and labile transversals and peripherals affecting the character of scales and rings and other movement units. These active concepts are important. They provide distinguishing line between ancient and modern tendencies, between the classical and modern in art, between security and living dangerously, between lifestyles and generations, progress and stagnation, between what facilitates change and what enables things to endure and be studied.

"Lability" – "..... a state which strongly promotes continuity and is charged with movement intensity, thus creating ever-new movements which do not find a conclusion in themselves."

"Stability" - "..... That element which leads movement to quiescence and stillness, which causes a movement theme to fade out and find a conclusion in itself without anticipation of a new theme."  
(Choreutics. Part II Section VI)

*Sally Archbutt*

November 2008

# The Laban Scales and Rings

- a practical aspect of dance technique and training in the art of movement

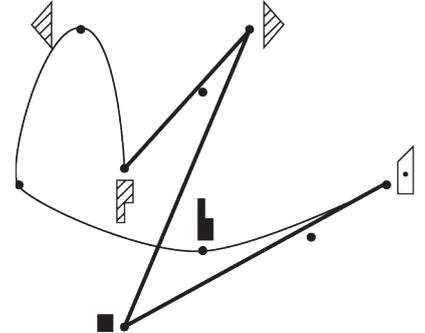
## Part 5

(Sally Archbutt MPhil, continues her well informed exploration of Laban's Choreutics) Ed.

### "7 Rings" – Mixed and Peripheral

I first experienced a "7 Ring" when I was a student at the Art of Movement Studio in Manchester in the 1940s. We were taught by Lisa Ullmann and an important part of our daily body training sessions included learning the correct bodily and spatial execution of different types of movement. Kinaesthetic experience always came first and theory later, in my case much later. Seventy years on and I am still discovering things and having new thoughts!

The shape of the "7 Ring" I first learned from Lisa consisted of a zig-zag, formed of three movements travelling forward and backward, one short and two longer, forming a V shape, and culminating in an 'arabesque'. This was followed by a large, curved, softer, more flexible movement, initiated by the trunk and finishing in the curved position of the start, called an 'attitude'. It was quite difficult to perform, especially the starting/finishing position standing on the left leg, with the body arched and twisted to the right, arm and leg bent and lifted backwards high, the left arm forwards.



On Laban's 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday, as his birthday present to us, we were each given a card printed on both sides with six staves of dance notation. They were the kinetograms of twelve different "7 Rings". Six were called Series A and the other six Series B. Although interested in the notation I had not yet learned how to read the symbols.

These early experiences caused me to think about many things, especially the difference between the Laban way and the Classical Dance way of analysing and speaking about movements, and their understanding of the meaning of the terms 'arabesque' and 'attitude'. Is it most useful to think only of a finite number of positions of a particular type, or a vastly extended or possibly infinite number? For what purpose? For training? For choreographic purposes?



Attitude Croisée

Développé croisé front

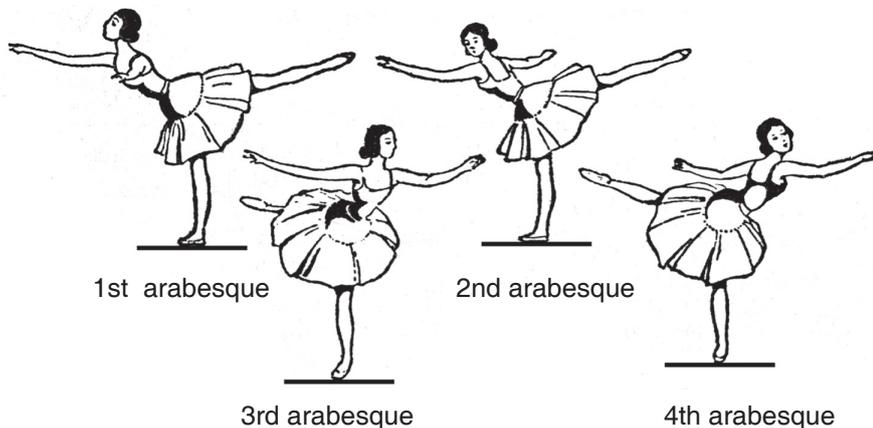
Développé effacé front

Attitude effacée

Écarté back and écarté front

Showing two positions named 'attitudes' in Russian (Vaganova) style Classical Ballet.

A position in one plane diagonally facing the front.



1st arabesque

2nd arabesque

3rd arabesque

4th arabesque

Four positions named 'arabesques' in Russian Classical Ballet

Classical description of the position termed an ‘attitude’ is in terms of how the three gesturing limbs are deployed in the space surrounding the supporting leg, of whether the gesturing leg (bent) is open or crossed behind or in front of the support, and whether the body leans towards or away from the gesture. The direction of the face is also described.

In the position called ‘ecarte’ the limbs and body are described as all lying on one plane which faces diagonally towards the right front corner of the stage. In ‘écarté back’ the leg gesture is directed towards the high, left back corner, the body tilted and face looking away from it. In ‘écarté front’ the leg gesture is directed towards the high, left front corner, the body is tilted towards the opposite back corner. The face looks high left, beyond the gesturing leg.

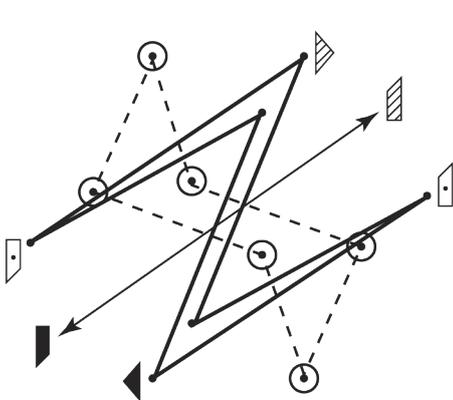
In the four Russian classical positions called an ‘arabesque’, the gesturing leg is always fully extended and lifted 90° the body and one arm reaching in the opposite direction to form a horizontal line. Looked at in profile a distinction is made between whether the legs are crossed or open. The shoulders are kept level and the back firmly held.

After many years performing, teaching and study I gave the “7 Rings” on Laban’s 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday Card more detailed consideration. By then I was able to use a more sophisticated/detailed, descriptive/analytical terminology, and importantly, could read the notation.

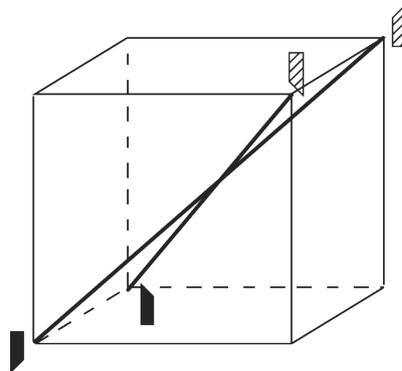
All the Kinetograms are of ‘Mixed’ “7 Rings” consisting of 2 Transversals and 5 Peripheral links. The two transversals form a ‘steeple’ which lies on a particular diagonal axis. The peripherals form part of the ‘equator’ circle which surrounds that axis.

The Series A examples (1 - 6) use in turn the six steeples of the RA Axis Scale, which all lie on the ‘First Diagonal’ (  -  ).

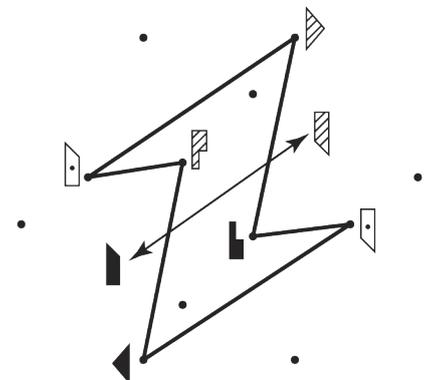
The Series B examples (6 - 1) use in turn the six steeples of the RB Axis Scale, which all lie on the ‘Fourth Diagonal’ (  -  ).



**RA Axis and Axis Scale  
and Equator Ring**



**1st & 4th Diagonals**



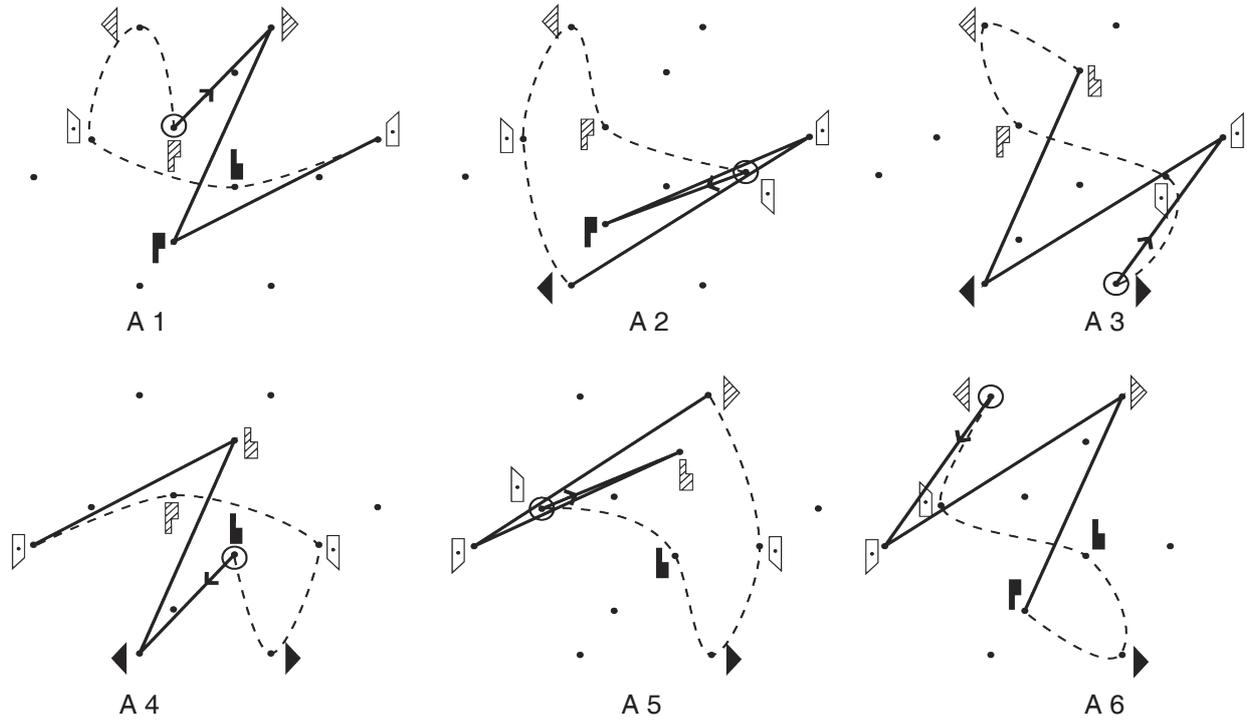
**RB Axis and Axis Scale**

There are twenty four of these ‘mixed’ “7 Rings” altogether. In spite of having the same shape, they look different and in performance feel very different from one another, because the ring shape is oriented differently in the kinesphere.

On Laban’s Birthday Card the first and second halves of both the A Series and of the B Series balance each other, i.e.

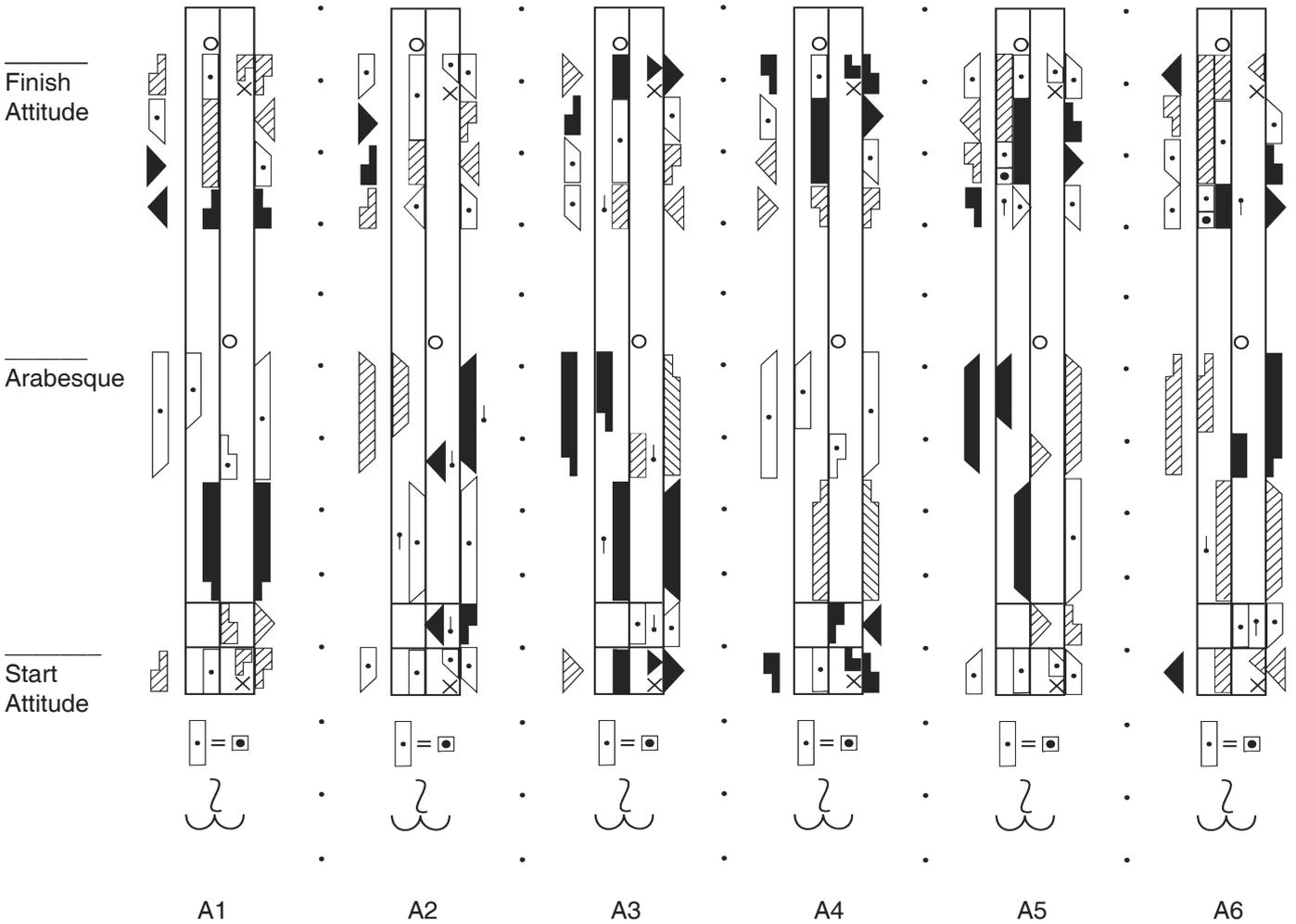
A1 is the opposite of A4,	A2 the opposite of A5,	A3 the opposite of A6
B1 “ “ B4,	B2 “ “ B5,	B3 “ “ B6

**Movement Shapes of Series A Kinetograms on Laban's 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday Card of twelve mixed "7 Rings".**  
 (A1 & A4, A2 & A5, A3 & A6 balance each other.)



The starting positions (  ) lie in turn on the equator circle round the RA Axis

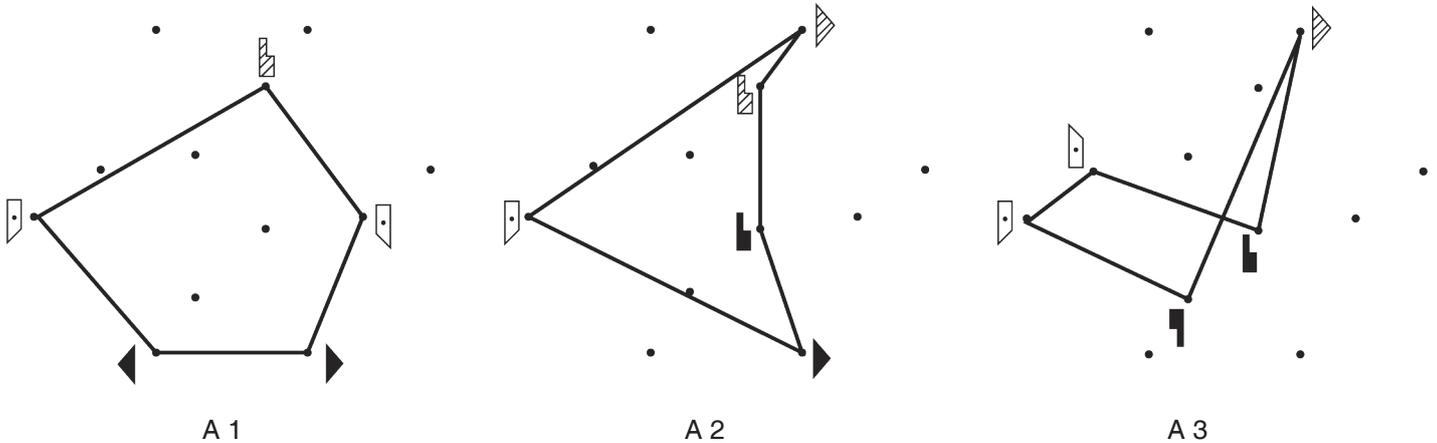
**Kinetograms of the Series A Mixed "7 Rings" on Laban's 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday Card.**  
 (Notation 1949 by Valerie Preston.)



The notation of six different ‘attitudes’ in Series A is shown in the starting position and again at the end of each kinetogram. The signs immediately before the gap in the middle of each stave show the six different ‘arabesques’ resulting from the axis part of the movement.

Although two opposite “7 Rings” (two labile forms) can be shown to balance one another, the labile asymmetric form of the Mixed “7 Ring” can also be balanced by the stable symmetrical “5 Ring” form of what is termed a ‘basket’.

### The ‘Baskets’ balancing Laban’s “7 Rings” A Series 1, 2 and 3



By paying special attention to the shapes of movement pathways and positions one must not forget, as Laban says, that “every action has other inherent qualities apart from creating a new situation in space and time”. The dynamism of a shape differs according to the purpose of the movement and the mover.

When studying the spatial scales and rings one needs to be sensitive to the moods paths carry, especially if one is a dance artist, painter, sculptor, musician or dance teacher and choreographer. Its mood is part of what unites a piece or fragment into a living whole with its own identity and character.

Every different movement trace form (type of or specific example of) can be treated as an inspiration, an idea. What do the Mixed “7 Ring” forms suggest in practice – in terms of dynamic/rhythmic possibilities, different possibilities, of bodily execution and different expressive and symbolic possibilities? There will be as many different thoughts about this as there are thinkers.

For me the “7 Ring” is a symbol that the combining of two opposing ways of thought is possible and gives hope for a less confrontational future in the dance world and society as a whole.

### Book List

- Kipling-Brown, A. & Parker, M. *Dance Notation for Beginners*. Dance Books Ltd. London 1984
- Knust, A. *A Dictionary of Kinetography Laban/Labanotation*. Macdonald & Evans, London 1979
- Laban, R. *Choreutics*. (ed. Ullmann, L.) Macdonald & Evans, London 1966
- Laban, R. *The Mastery of Movement*. (4<sup>th</sup> edit. Revised & enlarged, Ullman, L.) Macdonald & Evans, Plymouth 1980
- Vaganova, A. *Basic Principles of Classical Ballet*. (2<sup>nd</sup> Edit). A. & C. Black London 1965

Laban’s **Mixed “7 Ring”** is also spoken about on the DVA *Living Architecture* published by Anna Carlisle and Valerie Preston-Dunlop in 2008, the Laban Centenary Year.

A set of five **Peripheral “7 Rings”** revolving around a diametral axis and composed of three links of a “5 Ring” and four links of an ‘equator’, is also described in *Choreutics* (ps.185, 187)

*Sally Archbutt*