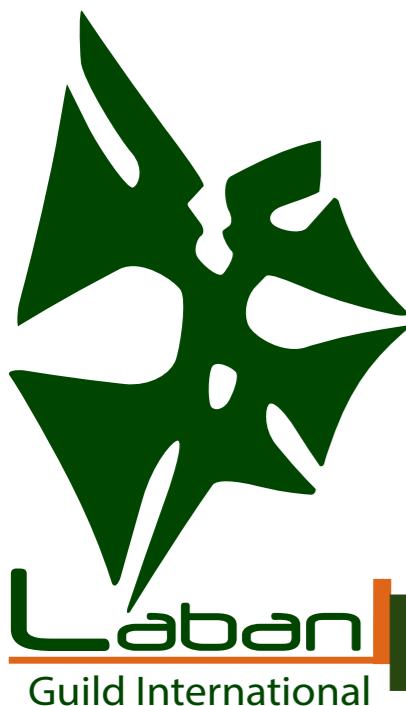


# *Movement, Dance & Drama*





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## Editorial

From this edition of the magazine it is clear that Laban's work is alive and flourishing in the worlds of drama and theatre. There are interesting reflections from tutors and participants in A Kaleidoscope Day of Dance Drama held on Sunday 29th June at The Place, London, with many photos on the cover and in the article. In addition, members of The Moving Actor Hub have written about applying Laban's thinking and practice to their work.

Next year sees the 80th anniversary of the founding of The Laban Guild. It would be good to hear from subscribers about what the Guild has meant to them over the years and/or what contribution the magazine has made to their work or practice. It will be a time of reflection but also a time to look forward to what purpose Laban Guild International has in the future. Let me know your thoughts editor@labanguildinternational.org.uk

## A Kaleidoscope Day of Dance Drama Sunday 29th June at The Place, London

Darren Royston



There was plenty of material to consider with both Movement Choir and Dance Drama occurring simultaneously in different studios, so there was a lot of things to fit into one day. The morning sessions exposed a whole body of work that would really require more hours of study to truly understand fully, but we wanted to show the potential of group projects, and for tutors to share some simple techniques which could be put into application in the studio rehearsals during the afternoon.

Text is very important for a choreographer working in theatre. The text we chose for the Kaleidoscope Day was the first large scale work that Stephenson had staged in 1951 for the York Mysteries: *The Fall of Lucifer*. As choreographer Stephenson worked alongside a theatre director and considered the interpretation of the text with the actors. I knew that theatre director Cecilia Dorland was interested in

## Trustees Report

The Trustees continue to meet regularly by Zoom. The most recent meeting discussed the event honouring Geraldine Stephenson. They were delighted that so many people attended and that the feedback was so positive. The Trustees thanked Darren Royston for all his hard work in organising the event. There was some discussion of how to capture this enthusiasm in a second event next year, probably at Easter – watch this space. There was also discussion about financing such an event; LGI subsidised the recent event considerably and a balance needs to be found between participants valuing the events, by contributing to the cost, and making the event financially accessible to all. Let the Trustees know your thoughts on this as we welcome hearing from subscribers, especially if they are interested in becoming Trustees. Contact us at trustees@labanguildinternational.org.uk

medieval texts, having worked with her last year on a production of *Everyman* Medieval morality play with the students at Lille University in France. We had some major epic themes of the creation of light and dark, so we set out to place the movement choir by the side of dance drama, to consider both harmonic balance and dynamic tensions.

Stephenson had taught me how the Dimensions could be turned into Body Forms:

Vertical Axis (Up/Down) = Door plane = Pin Body  
 Horizontal Axis (Open/Closed) = Table Plane = Wall Body  
 Sagittal Axis (Forward/Backward) = Wheel Plane = Ball Body

Considering the meaning of these body forms became known as “body language” with how we sit, move around and shape our bodies, or hold our limbs in certain ways for example, giving information of the dramatic character of the person. Stephenson used these ideas herself as a solo character dancer, and in his presentation, Dick McCaw had included several photographs of Stephenson in different poses from these groundbreaking dance pieces. Each character she danced had Laban effort qualities choreographed to produce a character with one of these body forms. When she mentored me, she showed how to assign different types to different actors. Ballet dancers often strive to be “pin bodies” but social dancers are all types - evidenced



in our Kaleidoscope Day, when we had such a mix of different participants, some professionals, some students, some retired and some from other professions. All that mattered was that we developed a shared physical language and then applied this approach to the themes and the text.

When the time came to share our work with each other at the end of the day, the screens between the two studios were pushed apart and we had a very special large space. The potential for these simple ideas to grow was very apparent, along with the joy of expanding into a large arena, and full physical commitment to intense extremes. There had to be spontaneity throughout the day; choices were made

and had to be immediately accepted to allow the flow to continue as groups merged for the first time in the movement choirs. In drama performance Lucifer's fall had to travel from Heaven (situated in the light-floored studio) down to the dark floor of studio 2 where Hell took on another force, having a whole new space to explore. The day certainly was brimming with creative chaos, but the Laban Approach allowed us to discover some systems and produce an order that carried a meaning, at least to us as the participants interacting with dance, music and speech.

A good plenary discussion was had towards the end of the day on how this systematic approach is good for training both actors and dancers, and consideration of when a choreographer should introduce narrative into the meaning. The day ended with people thinking how we could continue this work, so that the Laban legacy can involve more participants and shared with a wider public.

#### Reflections from the tutors:

##### Kaleidoscope: Legacy of Geraldine Stephenson Susi Thornton

**A Day** of rich, stimulating, creative movement, dance and drama  
 Keeping Laban's work alive in all sections of the day, And discovering how Geraldine worked with it – on dvd we saw her  
 Long legs moving successively from hip to toe with Effort and rhythm clear to see  
 In her whole body shared by Dick McCaw in his presentation.  
 Drama led by Cecilia and Darren was inspired by her work at York Minster  
 Ominous devils shouting their lines used effort expression in  
 Susi and Maggie's Dance piece: Darkness and Light. It all  
 Came together in a final phrase of Laban's Circles Of Adoration, Benediction and Supplication.  
 Plenty of time to giggle learning steps / tricky moves, in Historical and Explore, improvise, consolidate and reflect on the Joys of the Day.



Well done to Darren for starting this ball rolling, to all the tutors, to Prim the administrator and to Laban Guild International for supporting this important event.

Smiling faces left the Studios, congratulations flying around the room, and so many saying they wanted more of this creative work.

##### Day of Dance Maggie Killingbeck



Despite sweltering temperatures and unreliable trains, Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> June saw over 40 dance/ drama enthusiasts wending their way to The Place. Studios 1 and 2 did not have air conditioning and the fans, thoughtfully provided by Place personnel, overwhelmed the music; we worked without using

them! Regardless of this, participants worked with energy, commitment and imagination. In response to a series of tasks on the dimensions, their work demonstrated understanding, embodiment and intention, while movement generated following tasks requiring the creation of a human sculpture of Lucifer, the corruption of mankind, deception and the interplay of light and shade exemplified total engagement, trust and powerful communication. A notable feature of the workshops was the supportive interaction of all attendees. Given the range of ages, interests, experience and abilities, all worked together constructively and productively. Needless to say, leading workshops was a joyous experience.

Reflecting on the day as a whole it was evident that, whilst Geraldine Stephenson's work informed every session, there was variety, theory and practice and a range of approaches to inspiring/facilitating movement responses. Finishing the day with an opportunity for discussion followed by a fun dance experience to Johann Strauss II's *The Blue Danube Waltz* prepared a number of us appropriately for a relaxing meal afterwards.

From feedback received during the day, attendees enjoyed the event, extending their knowledge, skills and understanding of Geraldine, her working processes and range of applications in the process.

In future events, it would be wonderful to have the opportunity to work with such enthusiastic participants again.

##### Kaleidoscope Day - A beautiful day of thoughtful movement Cecilia Istria-Dorland

I participated in the Kaleidoscope Day in honour of Geraldine Stephenson as a guest tutor, having been asked by Darren Royston to co-direct the drama session with him. I am by no means a dance and movement expert but, as a stage director, I am increasingly interested in the power of movement and keen to explore its possibilities. I knew about Geraldine's work and was familiar with Laban's effort actions through drama school, but it is my close collaboration with Darren over the years that has allowed me to understand more about dramatic dance. I am currently embarking on in-depth work on medieval theatre and, with Geraldine's choreography of the 1951 York Mystery plays in mind, I was keen to see how we could put some life into the first pageant in the cycle, *the Fall of Lucifer*. The energy created by moving actors was astonishing - it brought out the structure and narrative changes of pace beautifully, so much so that the final rehearsal/ performance exceeded all my expectations of the dramatic potential of the text. But, leaving drama aside, the day was rewarding for me on all accounts. I was really impressed and happy to see so many participants, of all ages, take part in Susi's, Maggie's and Darren's guided movement/dance sessions, and the work created was of great quality - without forgetting to be fun. Watching it develop through to the final performances, I felt elated and happy that all worked together so well and gave so much of their creative talent. It seems to me that Laban's heritage is very precious and should live on in dance and theatre training - and the day was all about that. More of the same please, so we can draw new people to experience, learn, practise and, eventually, adopt it for good.



## Reflections from Participants

### Carol Wallman

As a young student at the Laban Art of movement Studio, (1963-65), I was very fortunate to be taught and inspired by the charismatic Geraldine Stephenson. Each week I looked forward with excitement to Geraldine's dance lectures, knowing that as well as being a lecturer in dance she was highly involved in theatre and the wider world of performing arts. Consequently, I felt privileged to attend the Day of Dance in her honour. It is laudable that Maggie, Susi, Darren and Cecilia were so highly committed to the preparation and delivery of the programme.

In the first part of the afternoon, I attended the Dance Drama session directed and facilitated by Darren and Cecilia. It was thrilling to use text from the York Corpus Christi Plays, and inspiring to use God's opening speech as a stimulus for individual, small and group compositions and dancing together as part of a whole, to express the essence of the text. I am reminded of taking part in Geraldine's creation and direction of *The Mask of St Teilo*, which we performed as a college in Llandaff Cathedral in Wales in 1963. Jeffery Sutherland, also a lecturer at the Studio, played the title role. The whole experience was very new to me as previously I hailed from a sheltered local dancing school. Significantly, it expanded my knowledge and understanding of integrated theatre, as the piece synthesised, dance drama, music and narration in the gorgeous and ethereal setting of the cathedral.

The second part of the afternoon was directed by Susi, assisted by Maggie. Susi's extensive knowledge, understanding and experience of Movement Choirs shone through this session. I am reminded of Geraldine's significant piece performed at the Albert Hall in 1970 *Kaleidoscopia Viva*, a seminal work for which she is well known. Susi used music by Andrew Lloyd Weber as accompaniment and stimulus. The set motif melded beautifully with the music and was extremely satisfying to perform. Although it was very hot, Susi paced the worked so that we could have some quieter moments to recover. Susi's concept enabled the development of individual motifs, sensitive response to other dancers in small groups and awareness of the whole group. Susi skilfully managed the continuity, using repetition to enable us to feel secure, perform with conviction and suitably express her key concept.

I was disappointed that more of my contemporaries from Studio days and beyond were not present. However, the large group of students and other dancers present provided an enthusiastic and stimulating environment in which to participate and importantly, create!

Sincere thanks to Maggie, Susie, Darren and Cecilia.

### Marie de Stefano (Student, Lille University, France)

As a French drama student and performer, this workshop was my first real introduction to movement and dance. I learned how important movement is to share and communicate feelings and emotions, how a whole character's personality can be expressed through movement. As I felt that movement was more intuitive and spontaneous than text, I learned how to associate the two and sometimes just dare to try without overthinking. At first, just moving my body without limits was a challenge. I found the parts where I had to create or invent a movement quite difficult. As the day went by, it became most rewarding for me, when we associated dance and text, and I was able to "invent" a dance with my partners that was both fun and efficient. Working in groups was one of the most interesting parts because bodywork was already a challenge, so learning how to collaborate with another body was another step.

From now on, I will definitely try to alternate between working on text first and working on movement first, and to imagine a play and emotions through dance rather than just text. When working with movement, I felt that the text of *The Fall of Lucifer* came to life. Even without a spoken text, I could have understood it. The greatness of the text was conveyed by the number of people on stage and the energy we all created. Dancing my text helped me to understand the rhythm and the intensity.

### Augustin Sauvage (Student, Lille University, France)

Though an eager theatre-goer, I had never paid specific attention to movement in the work. I realise now that it played an important part in my comprehension and appreciation of the shows I have seen in English - not my native language.

When reading the *Fall of Lucifer* script, I found it slightly tedious but saw it as a fun challenge. It now makes perfect sense to me thanks to the workshop - adding movement to the text brought life and meaning to it. Actors need to grasp the intentions of a text to play it correctly, and I think movement is a way to convey or enhance those intentions successfully.

I am inexperienced in stage movement. While it was fairly easy for me to follow precise instructions, it was much more challenging to be inventive when given broader instructions (although I understand they are a great way to let everyone express themselves and lead to more diverse and interesting artistic propositions). One thing I find especially difficult when performing is what to do with my body, with my arms, how to stand, when to move, etc. The workshop gave me keys to help with this by having us linking dimensional movements (up, down, closed, open, front,

back) to the text. It had me thinking that I could implement this dimensional work in future experiences through a good analysis of the text.

### Ophelia Bellio (actor, graduate of RADA, London)

I absolutely loved this day! There really is nothing like bringing speech and drama into dance. It was amazing to see how the dances grew from simple movements into small pieces. I especially enjoyed the historical section, which showed how something that starts with almost nothing can build into a beautiful group performance: in our case, six people moving and working together in harmony and the fan as a prop. I was extremely impressed by how each teacher helped me (and everyone else) move in such an expressive way turning words into action through our bodies. I was so aware of communicating my intention all the way from my mind to the tips of my fingers. Thank you to everyone involved for such a lovely, warm, and expressive day. It was a true gift.

### Nel Echaroux (Student, Lille University, France)

Movement and dance help find the strength of the character's emotion; it makes it more alive, more organic, less artificial. Our voice also becomes stronger by engaging our whole body, as if the energy was coming from the tips of our toes, going up in our body to finally being released in our voice. And it is in this way that our acting seems more natural, because we speak with an energy that we built up in our body while moving with the whole chore. No need to force our voice or an emotion because it comes from the flow of everybody's movements.

I think for me the most rewarding, was combining all that we've learned in the actual play. The most challenging for me was to stop thinking and to just act. To begin with the Movement Choir it was really hard because I was scared to not do the right thing. But then at the end of the day when we did *The Fall of Lucifer* for the last time, I really felt that I wasn't thinking anymore and just moving with the chorus. The next challenge was to still keep some mind on what I was doing - the text I had to say, which was really complicated, so I would need to know my lines to be able to play with it in performance.

### Rebekah McGill (professional performer, 'E15 Acting school')

I learnt about the importance of starting with movement in order to add meaning later, as it promotes an organic product. I also learnt how eye contact and commitment to breath are essential to the flow of movement. I found the dance drama



ensemble work challenging as there were a lot of aspects to think about with so many people at once, so it sometimes felt hard to concentrate on the intention.

### Constance Novis (B Mus Perf, MA DMP)

What a great day and a wonderful experience. Moving spontaneously together with others reminded me of our human connection. Moving in front of other people you do not know can bring up vulnerability and inhibition, but I could see people bonding ever more closely together. This shared experience brought increasing levels of trust and creativity, which in turn brought cooperation and emotional openness. I saw dance/movement shift from being performative to something heartfelt, embodied and authentic. Had there been an audience, they would have felt this and been captivated by it too.

I found the Movement Choir and Dance Drama particularly inspiring. Seeing Darren Royston bring Laban to life by explaining Space Planes as he danced them was thrilling. He demonstrated the connection between personality types and dance movement in an unforgettable way. Laban is not just about choreography and technique. It is bigger than that. It is about exploring the profound, communicative potential of spontaneous human movement and learning to see (and feel) the very precise embodied meaning that emerges with it. This workshop provided a unique opportunity for us each to experience this in our own body.

### Monique Klongtrudrake (professional opera singer and teacher)

I found *A Kaleidoscope of Dance Drama* to be a deeply inspiring experience. I had heard of Laban before, but this was my first full practical introduction to his work, and that of Geraldine Stephenson.

I'm already used to the interplay of voice, text, and gesture in opera, but this workshop deepened my

understanding of the singer's body in space— which is crucial not only theatrically, but also expressively and functionally for the voice itself. This day's experience reaffirmed how physicality should be integrated more consciously into vocal training, so that movement becomes not just expression, but a way to access vocal freedom, presence, and storytelling.

All the different sessions and activities were absolutely enriching for me, and I found the experience of moving in unison in a group particularly

## Moving Actor Hub

The Moving Actor Hub of Laban Guild International was established to unite individuals and groups working in drama, theatre, and acting. In *The Mastery of Movement* Rudolf Laban proposes that actors should "think in terms of movement." This idea is used to inspire discussion and sharing of projects. Here is a report of some of the recent projects which have continued the legacy of the art of movement for the actor.

### Adding Songs to Shakespeare: Texts to Lyrics following

#### Laban's *Tanz-Ton-Wort* approach

Kelly Wilson, Adaptivity Theatre Company, Tasmania

*Kelly Wilson as a theatre director is very interested in how actors use the Laban Efforts to embody character and now credits the Laban approach to her directing methods which she uses to find new ways to present classical drama that engage today's audience.*

Adaptivity Theatre Company's approach to Shakespearean productions reflects its philosophy: insights into modern issues that society has been grappling with for centuries can be found through the exploration of classical texts within a contemporary context. As artistic director of the company, I have sought to present classical texts in a manner that will communicate clearly to a 21<sup>st</sup> century audience. On Shakespeare's Renaissance stage, action unfolded through dialogue, movement and gesture, pageantry and symbolism. In *The Illusion of Power: Political Theater in the English Renaissance*, (University of California Press, 1975, p.24) Stephen Orgel explains that all these performance elements



functioned as a unit; little that was expressed in action did not have its concomitant

fascinating. I've been equipped with new tools and ideas that I can implement both into my own performing practice and into my teaching. I am motivated to gain more insights into Laban's work, and to bring this work to my students also - singers can benefit enormously from this kind of movement exploration.

Photos by Juliet Lemon Photography

rhetoric, few symbols went unexplained by language. . . . the verbal was inseparable from the visual. Then as now, a symbol had meaning only after it was explained. Symbols function as summations and confirmations; they tell us only what we already know, and it is a mistake to assume that the Renaissance audience, unlike a modern one, knew without being told.

This visual and verbal interrelationship in Shakespeare's text is very similar to Rudolf Laban's *Tanz-Ton-Wort*, in which he reflects his philosophy that dance/movement (tanz), music/sound (ton), and speech/word (wort) should be integrated to create a more complete and expressive artistic experience. Like Laban, I see the visual (image, gesture, movement and dance) and verbal (lyrics for music and script text) elements of performance as mutually reinforcing, enhancing the overall impact of a performance.

In *Much Ado About Nothing* the main plot involves a young man, Claudio, returning from war and immediately falling in love with the first girl he sees. He comes back from war as a soldier but, as soon as he sets eyes on the young daughter of Leonato, he becomes a lover. In my production the transformation from soldier to lover were physically embodied by the Laban efforts.

My adaptation of Shakespeare's play as *Much Ado About Not(h)ing*, incorporated dance, song and text. In Act I Scene 1, lines 277-286, I transformed Claudio's response

to Pedro into lyrics for a newly composed song entitled "Soldier to Lover". This provided musical lyrics to which movement and gesture, along with a multimedia animated projection, could be added to heighten the visual and verbal pageantry of our exploration a young man's metamorphosis from

soldier to lover. The "Soldier to Lover" song consists of two verses, with musical interludes after each verse, employing two filmic devices: flashback re-enactments of events from the distant and very recent past and a technique I call 'theatrical voice-over'. Theatrical voice-over is the use of spoken or sung text by a live onstage actor to accompany photographic or digitally animated images, and/or gesture, movement or dance in dumb show to visually represent the imagery or symbols in the text. During the first verse, Claudio's lyrics serve as the theatrical voice-over that accompanies the live marching soldiers that surround him and the visual images of the multimedia animation of soldiers going into battle, projected on the wall behind him. Through theatrical voice-over, the direct, strong and sustained marching of the soldiers and the projected images provide a concrete visualisation which heightens the symbolic language of the text that Claudio sings at this moment,

O sir, when you went onward on this ended action, / I looked upon her with a soldier's eye, / That liked, but had a rougher task in hand / Than to drive liking to the name of love.

This ensemble movement and projected images, carefully selected to provide a concrete visualisation of a soldier's life in Afghanistan, have been designed to coincide simultaneously with Claudio's lyrics. Likewise, during the first musical interlude, a flashback re-enactment of Claudio's near-death experience during his most recent deployment to Afghanistan, extends the visual representation of the first verse.

For the staging of the second verse of "Soldier to Lover", I employed another theatrical voice-over, paired with multimedia projections and a flashback re-enactment of when Claudio arrived into Leonato's home with his companions Benedick and Pedro. This is presented from the perspective of the love-struck Claudio. In order to visually embody the selective quality of Claudio's memory, I wanted to use a style of movement reminiscent of individual snapshots taken by a camera, and to create this I selected different combinations of Motion Factors to create appropriate Effort qualities. Laban's textbook *Choreutics 1* (1966, Macdonald & Evans) gave me guidance. Laban used the same terminology (p.3) to explain my vision for this moment in the song:



living beings, when in quietude may suggest a "standstill" in the big unceasing stream of movement in which we exist and take part. This illusion of a standstill is based on the snapshot-like perception of the mind which is able to receive only a single phase of the uninterrupted flux. It is our memory which tends to perpetuate the illusion created by the "snapshots"; and the memory itself waxes, changes and vanishes.

This description of memory led me to incorporate changes between all of Laban's Efforts during the second verse. First, we selected several physical moments from the soldiers' entrance into Leonato's home that would be significant to Claudio, such as when Pedro kisses Hero's hand as he greets her. These key moments functioned as visual tableaux for the snapshots in the flashback re-enactment of this scene, which occurred only a few minutes ago. Next, since the song is written in 4/4

rhythm, we determined that the first count would be the moment when the 'standstill' for the snapshot would occur. However, as Laban explained, a 'standstill' actually includes a little movement, so we incorporated a more sudden, strong and bound movement into the standstills to create

the snapshots, as if the actors were momentarily caught in treacle. We then realised that, with only three counts between each snapshot, the cast's sustained movement would need to be free and light yet move directly from one snapshot to the next. While this flashback re-enactment occurs physically onstage, the multimedia projection of a fiery inferno, gradually morphs into a fiery heart, then a heart formed by candles on a red carpet, then into the image of a red room, with a black door frame, filled with hundreds of red roses which are spilling through the open door, filling the room. Through theatrical voice-over, the snapshots performed by the ensemble and the projected images provide a concrete visualisation which heightens the symbolic language of the text that Claudio sings at this moment,

But now I am returned and these war-thoughts / Have left their places vacant, and in their rooms / Come thronging soft and delicate desires, / All prompting me how fair young Hero is, / Saying I liked her ere I went to wars.



During the second musical interlude, a fantasy dance sequence between Hero and Claudio extends the visual representation of Claudio's second verse, while also providing the audience a glimpse into Claudio's mind as he gazes at Hero from across the room. Claudio's desire for Hero results in his imagining that he takes her by the hand and dances with her.

In staging Act IV Scene 1, lines 255-332, I also sought to maintain the visual and verbal interrelationship of Shakespeare's text through dialogue/musical lyrics, music, movement and dance in my approach to staging the song "None is Left to Protest". I have always sought to use Shakespeare's text as an indication of when to alternate between the genres of naturalistic theatre and musical theatre. Once I began to explore Laban's experiments with movement, I saw the similarity between my vision for staging "None is Left To Protest" and Laban's experiments in 1913 and 1914 with the inter-relationship of *Tanz-Ton-Wort*, founded upon the expressive powers of gesture, song, and speech, which rejects musical rhythm as the primary inspiration for movement, instead substituting what was naturally produced by the body when inspired by words. Encouraged by Laban's use of text to inspire sound and dance, I examined Shakespeare's text until I perceived music and movement that represented either a character's willingness to risk confessing love or a character's resistance to confess love, as a result of past disappointment. In order to represent this shifting and swaying of Benedick's and Beatrice's emotions, I determined that naturalistic speech would be used when they are resisting or denying their feelings (either with

or without musical accompaniment), yet they could immediately heighten the text by singing and/or dancing whenever they express their love freely and openly. I also requested that a violin be used along with the piano to create a sense of tension between the musical instruments to mirror the emotional conflict within Beatrice. We incorporated waltz to represent Beatrice's swaying emotions throughout the scene, which alternates between musical theatre dance and naturalistic movement from daily life. I believe we successfully used text/musical lyrics, music, gesture, movement and dance to navigate between the genres of naturalistic theatre and musical theatre in a manner that sustained the visual and verbal interrelationship of Shakespeare's text.

Photos: Soldier to Lover, credit Lorna Doon

Dates: Adaptivity Theatre company's production of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Not(h)ing* began in 2017 as an MA Text & Performance dissertation project at RADA in London, was further workshopped in Tasmania 2018, then staged at the Cockpit Theatre in London during June 2019. The current production is touring throughout Tasmania, 13-27 August 2025.

**"Boy who plays Girl who plays Boy who likes Boys who likes Girls":  
Practical applications of Drama School training in  
Laban's approach to  
movement study in the rehearsal room  
Peter Stickney**

*Peter Stickney is director and producer of The Lord Chamberlain's Men, the UK's premier all male theatre company. Having first studied the principles of Laban's approach to movement for actors while a student at the Oxford Drama School, Peter now incorporates these elements in the process of producing productions of Shakespeare's plays, touring to many venues including many open-air performances. The motto of the company is: "authenticity, excellence and magic."*

The Lord Chamberlain's Men is a professional touring theatre company which currently performs a Shakespeare play each year, with a company comprised of seven male actors. These seven actors often portray between fifteen to twenty characters, so this inevitably calls for doubling, sometimes tripling, and in one play there was a situation where one actor had to play five different roles in the same show. The actors identify as male, so some are required to play an opposite gender as all Shakespeare's plays have both male and female characters. In *Twelfth Night*, the story is based on confusion in identity as Viola is a female character who dresses as her twin brother

and uses a male name of Cesario. This appearance creates unwanted reactions in the relationships between the characters and reminds us that there are other things to consider beyond simply "looking the part." The inner life of the character is important, and the characters in a Shakespeare play have many layers. An actor needs to consider how to portray these many layers and, with The Lord Chamberlain's Men, there is also an interest in connecting to the cultural layer of the historical context of when the play was written: the costumes, movement style and staging connects to this 16<sup>th</sup> century period. Within these fixed parameters, I set out each year to create a new production which will entertain an audience of today.

The work always begins with the text. As a director, my preparation will usually give me some strong images for certain moments in the play. These may only be imagined moments, but they are visual and physical. Work really begins when we gather as a company in the rehearsal room, to work together for about a month, exploring the text, creating physical characters and their interrelationships, and finally producing a fixed blocking for the scenes which will be rehearsed as an ensemble piece. Each production usually begins with an opening sequence of group singing and often ending with a finale of historical dance. One magical element is the transformation of the actors into many characters.

Although the first week of rehearsal does require a certain amount of sitting, reading, discussing and being quite cerebral, these ideas are soon explored with some fairly free improvisation work, and getting the actors to move is a large part of this. The ideas from the text must become part of the actors' bodies, and through these physical sessions other ideas often come into being. The actors offer their own interpretations, which may contribute to the direction we follow. In the second week of rehearsals, I ask the actors to consider some character study away from the rehearsal room, to think what type of "animal" their character might resemble. An important part of my training as an actor was a class called "animal study" and it was in these sessions that our tutor introduced me to the systematic analysis of movement proposed by Laban. Exploring these intense contrasts and extremes is important. I do not ask the actors to physicalise as if they are animals as such, but to think of the qualities they might share as a human being and how this expresses their different characters.

We often refer to Laban work more overtly later in the rehearsal process. Having a way to analyse dynamics in movement and voice is important when actors are considering choices in how to play their part, maybe when they are considering some "physical problem" and something doesn't feel right or doesn't seem to be communicating what they want

to express. I have the outside eye as the director, and I look closely at the rhythm and dynamics between the characters in the scene and how this could be understood by the audience. Many actors have had some experience of the Laban approach from their drama school training, and this can be part of a shorthand that I can use with the actors to explore alternative ways to act, consider other options and make some decisions to be fixed as the way we agree to stage the play.

In this year's production of *Twelfth Night*, the Duke Orsino arrives on stage at the start of the play to express how he is feeling having been listening to the fool singing. He says the famous line "If music be the food of love, play on." He is lovesick for Duchess Olivia and the music has affected him emotionally. The actor explained that at this moment this feeling gave an internal quality which he likened to the quality of "wringing." At this point in the play there is also a need to think of the outward show of this character, while not wanting to publicly show this inner turmoil to anyone. This inner turmoil had qualities that felt to be slow, deep and twisting which could be simplified as sustained time, strong weight, flexible space. Keeping these qualities as predominant in this role throughout the play, the actor decided to attach the opposite qualities to his second character. His second character was that of Maria, the lady-in-waiting to the Duchess, so having a different status totally to the Duke. Sudden, light and direct habitual movements then let the character of Maria exist with this "dabbing" effort quality being predominant, and this would influence how lines were delivered and how the actor responded to other characters in the scenes. Sometimes Maria is being subordinate to her mistress and sometimes behaving much less reverently while flirting with Sir Toby, mocking Sir Andrew and joking with the fool Feste. Maria behaves differently with each of these characters, and they share the stage at the same time, so acting with only one fixed mode would not be desirable. Instead, this "Dominant Effort Quality" could be an axis around which the different interactions oscillate – an anchor which could be connected to – a grounding from which to develop and return to if ever the actor felt he was becoming unconnected with the character's physical being. Laban's approach provides a simple way to consider the complexities of human feelings, emotional responses, objectives, drives and interactions with other characters.

So, the use of Laban analysis can be a very private thing for the personal actor, but it can also be part of our shared language for the whole company. This is a good moment to mention the female characters. The historical style does mean that the costumes give this information immediately as there is an easily identifiable male and female fashion which audiences still recognise as Elizabethan man or

woman. Movement within the historical costume is what is called “period movement”: this is a job for the choreographer, to consider issues that would alter the way the actor moves from today’s norm. These are social constructs, and in the Elizabethan period, men and women were trained as courtiers to display different qualities, however as actors they must think firstly of the character, and there is no need to impersonate female movement as such. This is abundantly clear when you see the productions being performed. Maybe at first some of the audience will laugh at seeing a male body wearing a female costume, but as soon as the actor begins to act, speaking and gesturing as the character, the anomaly is removed. As my training at Oxford Drama School taught voice and movement together, so do I ensure that they are intrinsically linked in an wholistic performance. I pride myself on the excellence we achieve, being as authentic as possible.

Of course, the complexity of Shakespeare’s plays is often that characters are not always acting truthfully, so my actors may be asked to act truthfully a character who is pretending to represent another truth. Again, finding ways to negotiate these layers can be helped by the Laban work, and to ensure that as an ensemble we work together to make the story a believable fiction.

The Lord Chamberlain’s Men production of Twelfth Night is touring throughout the UK until September 2025 and touring in the USA during October. [www.tlcm.co.uk](http://www.tlcm.co.uk)

**Shakespeare Play in Day!  
Having your Laban Toolkit ready for Immediate Practical Use:  
“Taking the Effort out of it!”**

Olga Blagodatskikh

Olga Blagodatskikh is the actress playing the part of the Duchess of York in Shakespeare Unstaged: Richard II

(Shakespeare Unstaged is a theatrical project that aims to recreate the conditions of early modern theatre by rehearsing and performing a Shakespeare play within a single day. This initiative was inspired by historical accounts of how quickly plays were staged in the Elizabethan era. The actors have a few weeks to prepare on their own and then arrive to rehearse and perform within 24 hours. The Shakespeare Unstaged: Richard II production was part of a larger series of plays that follow Shakespeare’s history cycle being staged at Theatre Deli in London. <https://www.60hourshakespeare.com/shakespeare-unstaged>)

This was a new experience - doing a whole

Shakespeare play as a one-off event, preparing alone and then coming together to meet my fellow actors on the day of the performance. I didn’t know who other actors would be, how they would interpret their roles, nor how they imagined I would play my part. As Duchess of York, I would meet my husband, son and ruler on the day, and be required to enact a scene from the play where I had to defend my own son from execution for treason. The stakes were high, but before the performance I had to remain in the dark regarding who my stage partners would be, with only the text to prepare privately. I would then be required to suddenly be totally physical, on my feet, rehearsing the scene a few times in the studio, before the public would come to judge my performance, along with the new King in the play. My response as an actor had to be immediate.

Let me begin by confessing that I did not think about my Laban training specifically when this intense day was happening – but now, on reflection, I really can say that this training had prepared me to interact dynamically during the intense process. I see that I have tools that I can use at different times in the intense process. I didn’t speak the language of the analysis that I had learnt at RADA; I didn’t share the process I had undergone alone at home, before flying to London to meet the 60-hours-Shakespeare troupe. I had used my own version of exercises developed from Brigid Panet’s textbook *Essential Acting: A Practical Handbook for Actors, Teachers and Directors* (2009, Routledge, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition). developing tasks from the Laban approach that had worked for me. When I arrived, there was no time, nor need, to explain my process to my fellow actors. I didn’t know what methods the other actors were using. In fact, I felt that was the decisive moment when my strategies had to be best tested. I wanted to succeed myself as an actor communicating the feelings and thoughts of my own character, but I also wanted the whole play to be convincing to the audience, as a story of a community adapting to sudden political change.

The play-in-a-day was the thing that showed the value of my personal process of preparing as a physical actor and being ready to connect to other performers by interacting with the choices they had made in movement and voice. I am glad that I had undergone



training in a systematic way, so that I had options and alternatives. I know Laban’s ideas are taught in different ways at different drama schools around the world, but it is clearly a way of considering how an actor can “think in terms of movement” and consider how the psychological side of the character can be expressed by the body and voice. Actor training for me is about absorbing this knowledge so that you are ready for whatever comes in your career, to be ready to make choices for your own character and yet be ready to develop and change these ideas when you interact with other performers in the process. The immediacy of this project heightens the adrenalin, but also the awareness of what I am doing and how others are acting and reacting around me.

I find that the Laban approach works for me as it allows me to consider what choices are close to my own personality. When I am not thinking about being a particular character, I know my choices are unconscious. My work with Brigid Panet allowed me to understand how I had certain habits and ways of moving that could be harnessed and intensified when I had considered my character from information suggested by the text of the play.

Although this *Shakespeare Unstaged* project brought me into contact with other actors and actresses who had received different training from me, I was still able to use my own approach. I had to be totally confident that I had found what elements were important from the text: I had to know the lines and practice, then be ready to be flexible and able to react to my partners in rehearsal. I must admit I had been a bit worried not knowing beforehand who my partners would be. I was worried because we had a couple of very dramatic scenes requiring strong family interaction. But it all came together astonishingly fast, with a high level of shared energy and mutual support.

Of course, Shakespeare’s text has clues that suggest simple actions and what not to do – for example, when I must kneel to beg, when some character stands or, particularly in this scene, when my character refuses to do what is being asked. The King asks us to stand but we refuse until our objective is achieved. The actor playing the king knows that their character is doing everything possible to remove me from the room. It is a battle of



language and actions, and neither of us know what tactics will be used and how the words and gestures will be physically played to try to achieve this.

Having done all this thinking, all this preparation, then on the day no matter what I have thought on my own, the reality can be totally different. Some things are dictated by the text, so those are things that I must maintain at whatever cost. This makes it feel like a real-life situation, where I must stand up for what I believe the playwright imagines the character to do and in what manner. My analysis of the verse gave me an understanding of my character’s breath rhythm, which identifies the relation with what Laban would categorise as combined elements of Time and Space. I then go deeper and deduce what Force (or energy) my character is using at each given moment because that reflects in the sounds of speech. I need to decide how much I go with the Flow or whether I resist this and therefore remain bound and fixed.

While learning my lines this kinaesthetic knowledge is embedded in my body. Then, in rehearsal, if I am open to your partners, I can enjoy feeling how those energies and flows come together, and how your own individual relationship to time and space occurs alongside the other characters. And that dynamism is super exciting!

In this *Shakespeare Unstaged* project, as there is very little doubling, each actor has to stay true to their own interpretation of being one character for the day of rehearsal. I also have to accept the decisions the other actors have made for their role. I had to adapt to the way the actor playing my husband had chosen to behave with me, as well as the way my son would engage with me as his mother. I had to accept and interact, as the narrative is based on

the fact that we are one close-nit family with internal dynamics between us that make the scene dramatic.

Since COVID, I have continued to do my live playreading sessions of Shakespeare plays online. This brings people together from around the world to read the plays, so this project is similar in that you have not heard the other characters voice until the event. This does reveal a freshness, and again a need to respond to the moment.

Speaking is physical, breathing is physical. So, whatever you do, it is physical. Pronouncing the words is a physical process. That is why for me I must speak the lines when trying to memorise, even if really quietly. However, when you speak them out loud you notice so much more. The action is in the words when spoken. In the playreading sessions, the group have participants from all around the world, on different time zones – so morning for someone is evening for another. We are in the same scene, and feeling different in our real time, but have to connect to the rhythms the other actors present and create the dramatic tension from this energy.

It seems to me that the main premise of Laban's own approach to human existence was that everything is physical. Listening is physical. Speaking is physical. As soon as you speak aloud you start saying your lines the better. I very often start with an exercise similar to Brigid's [Panet] wonderful exercise of reflecting lines (see page 140). It is marvellous if you have a partner to do it with. First you say your line and then your partner reflects it back to you in the shape of a question. For example, if we select the most famous line from *Hamlet*:

A: 'To be or not to be, that is the question'

B: Are you saying, the question is to be or not to be?

A: Yes. To be or not to be, that is the question.

And so on, and each line is repeated three times like this: you give the line, it is reflected, you repeat it. Meisner technique also uses repetitions, but this is quite different as Laban's work relates to the different qualities of effort you can use in the delivery. You watch all the smallest reactions and changes this repetition evokes. It is a very physical process because when you are asked to repeat, it gives you a different layer of commitment to the words. And I always do this exercise even when working on my own, reflecting to myself and then imagining and repeating it again.

When I start working on the role, the physical process of speaking affects me and I discover how the line goes, how the sounds shape in your mouth. All these sorts of things are quite powerful. In this way, that is why I say that my Laban technique has

become an organic part of my training and in my tool kit of skills. You must select things from different tutors, different directors, from your experience, and use those that work for you, these are the tools you will use most. And sometimes it turns out that things that people wouldn't have first thought could help or be connected do come together. The Laban system is an open-ended process for me and, for these immediate theatre projects, being open-ended seems to be very necessary.



Photos courtesy of Olga Blagodatskikh

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Every Sunday at The Place (16 Flaxman Terrace WC1) from 11.00 – 12.30.

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Up to £10 – pay in Studio  
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Taking place on Tuesdays from 12 noon to 1pm at the Primrose Hill Community Centre, 29 Hopkinsons Place, Fitzroy Road, London NW1 8TN

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Contact: 07970 536643  
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