

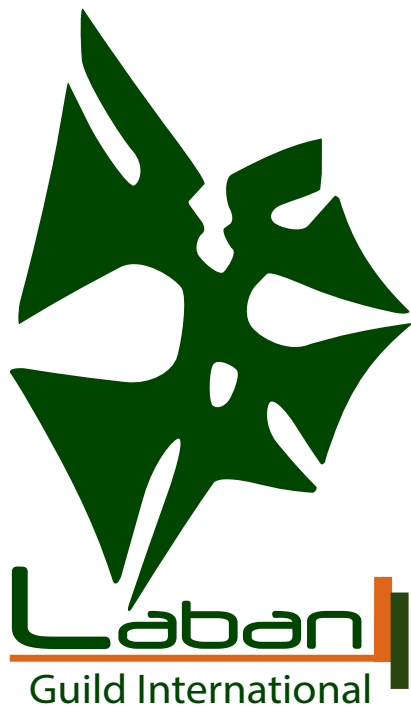
Movement, Dance & Drama



Laban Guild International
April 15-19
2026

80th anniversary event
Trinity Laban, London

Laban's Legacy
in Dance-Music-Drama
(see page 3)



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Editorial

2026 sees the 80th anniversary of the founding of the Laban Guild. Below is a lengthy description of the five-day event the Trustees are proposing to celebrate this achievement. For this event to go ahead they need a clear show of interest – see the end of the article for how to register your intention to attend and/or participate. The magazine also has an obituary for Olu Taiwo, graduate of Trinity Laban, university academic and visionary artist, who died recently. Dr Taiwo spoke about Laban's influence on his thinking at the second LGI forum, Ladders of Laban, in December 2023; you can listen to his talk here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zfqZQUeQRRQ>

It is essential that all subscribers read the Trustees Report (below) as some significant decisions need to be made as the coming year. 2026 is fast approaching; I trust that it will be a good year for all of us.

Trustees Report

The most recent meeting of the Trustees discussed the future of Laban Guild International and whether now, as we approach its 80th year, is the time to bring the organisation to a close. We are aware that in the UK there is very little Laban-based practice in the professional dance and educational worlds and that maybe we just have to accept that Laban's work, which in the past was of great significance, particularly in education, has had its day. Where dance is still taught in schools it is not being taught from a Laban perspective, teacher training courses no longer teach Laban's work and professional dancers do not encounter his work in their education. The majority of Laban's disciples, who taught and shared his work, are no longer with us and, while many second generationers benefitted from and propagated their teachers' practice and research, there is now no-one in the UK leading developments in Laban-based work, and no avenue through which to do so. All of this begs the questions, what is the function or future of LGI?

In the past we have made repeated request for subscribers to make contact with the trustees to share your thoughts on what LGI might do at all or might do better. Similarly, the editor has frequently asked for subscribers to contribute to the magazine with pieces about their Laban-based work, practice or teaching, or memories of their Laban training, but very little has been forthcoming as evident in the content of the magazines over the last five years or so.

Should LGI continue? Why? If you think LGI should continue, what part can you play in keeping it going? Could you be a Trustee? Could you be treasurer or editor of the magazine? The trustees need to hear from you with your thoughts on what purpose Laban Guild International has in the future and what your contribution might be by or if you agree that Laban Guild International has had its day, by contacting us at trustees@labanguildinternational.org.uk Please send your thoughts by 31st January, 2026.

The Art of Movement: Laban's Legacy in Dance-Music-Drama 15-19 April 2026

Laban Building, Creekside , London SE8 3DZ

A celebration of past, present and future

This anniversary event, commemorating eighty years of the Laban Guild, is planned as a celebration of people inspired by Rudolf Laban's work, a consolidation of history, aiming to provide future generations with a renewed energy to keep the legacy alive through events and publications. In recent years the work of the Guild has continued through Laban Guild International with self-managed Hubs, and these diverse areas will be represented at the event, to encourage further networking and sharing of ideas. The international nature of the work means that organisations from several countries are being encouraged to attend or submit video material for inclusion. The event will allow us to work alongside many groups and institutions in the UK and around the world promoting the legacy of Laban. There is already a particular alliance established with LABAN Rio, with a section of the event managed under the curatorship of Regina Miranda and Ligia Tourinho. Professor Katia Savrami is also part of the planning committee, and the link of Laban Guild International to the UNESCO International Dance

Council continues with fellow members of the council attending.

1946 was also the year when the original Art of Movement Studio was established as a training institution in the UK; the current Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance traces its lineage back to this beginning, so we are grateful that Trinity Laban have agreed to host this event, and to allow us the use of their excellent facilities. This event will bring together students, teachers and researchers connected from the early days and over the years, as well as offering an invitation to current students of Trinity Laban to be part of the sharing - to learn about those who went before them, and the work of the Laban Guild. The formation of the current conservatoire connected the Laban Dance Faculty to the Trinity College of Music, and the idea of "trinity" has contributed to the "triadic" theme being used to unite the many strands being woven together for this celebration, not least the idea of the past, the present and the future.

The Art of Movement was the title chosen for a recent publication compiling many of the unpublished writings of Rudolf Laban edited by Dick McCaw (Routledge, 2024). A hundred years ago, in the 1920s, Laban's schools were established with the key concepts of *Tanz Ton Wort* which McCaw interprets as “the dance, sound and word connection” (p.42) forming the basis of Laban's teaching. This idea of three disciplines could be termed as dance, music and drama, and these strands are contained in the conservatoire vocational training at Trinity Laban, for example in the area of musical theatre where the idea of the “triple threat” requires performers to dance, to sing and to act.

15-17th April 2026

During the first three days of the event participants will alternate between these three distinct approaches of dance, music and drama (Tanz /Ton /Wort) while understanding that there are many places where the boundaries between these three performing arts disciplines blur gaining experience of projects with a link to the Laban legacy. In addition, students may also select masterclasses led by practitioners who have developed Laban's approach in very particular performance contexts.

Historical Laban: The Tanz-Ton-Wort sessions

TANZ [*Die Nacht* project]: These practical dance sessions will be led by Alison Curtis-Jones. Ali is an internationally recognised dance artist and leading exponent in realising Laban's dance theatre works, and these practical sessions will refer to *Drumstick* and *Die Nacht*. She is Artistic Director of Summit Dance Theatre and faculty member of the Trinity Laban, and her work has pioneered contemporary developments of Laban's principles and practice, including in the areas of choreological studies and contemporary dance technique. Through practical dance sessions students will explore spatial and dynamic elements of the art of movement.

TON [Orfeo meets Don Juan project]: Music will be explored using the art of movement under the direction of Darren Royston. Darren works regularly as a director and choreographer in opera and is a specialist in historical dance. In both areas the musical score is a vital part of the inspiration for dramatic staging, and these sessions will take inspiration from musical works that Laban choreographed, in particular Gluck's ballet and opera *Don Juan* and *Orfeo*. Laban gave analysis of historical dance material in the 1926 publication *Choreographie* and these sessions will consider how music can generate dance drama.

WORT [*Fall of Lucifer* project]: Recently Cecilia Dorland was involved in the Laban Guild International Kaleidoscope event this year which initiated an exploration of text to generate movement and staging. She works as a stage director, being artistic director of Scena Mundi Theatre, and an international lecturer in Drama and Acting with a focus on Medieval and Renaissance Literature. She trained at the Sorbonne University, Paris, and as an actress at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London.

These practical acting sessions will use medieval drama texts such as *The Fall of Lucifer* from the York Cycle of Mystery Plays as staged by Geraldine Stephenson using a Laban approach.

Masterclasses: Moving Actor Hub / Space Harmony Hub

Masterclasses will be offered on various topics which demonstrate how Laban's concepts and theories can generate new ideas in professional practice. Dick McCaw will share Effort Study sequences taught by Geraldine Stephenson for Actor Movement training. Workshops relating to classical theatre will be offered by Kelly Wilson and Olga Blagodatskikh, who will consider how directors can use the Laban approach in rehearsal and how actors can prepare for a role with essential acting tools. Contemporary choreography will be explored by Vicky Spanovangelis and Monica Koch. Koch has developed the use of the term “ausdrucktanz” from the idea of “free dance” used by Laban and those producing dance theatre, so her workshops will focus on the expressive content of dance, considering rhythm, poetry of space and dramaturgy of the body. Vicky trained as an architect and uses Laban's concept of living architecture in her choreographic approach, having frequently shared these ideas at the Laban Guild International Space Harmony Hub, along with Olu Taiwo, whose work will be honoured at this event.

Those wishing to participate in these three days are not required to have had any previous training in the Laban approach and may be students of any discipline of the performing arts, or simply have an interest in finding out more. When applying, students are invited to give details of their level of technical ability, training and experience, so this part of the event may appeal to new students as well as to experienced performers who may wish to have an opportunity for professional development and explore new ways in a practical way to engage with elements of the Laban legacy.

18th April 2026: Diverse Experiences from Around the World

Saturday will be a day that can be attended on its own, as participants can select to attend many different workshops and presentations from practitioners who have agreed to share their own methods and experiences, demonstrating how they have developed ideas from the Laban approach as part of their own practice. Using many of the studios at Trinity Laban will allow several workshops to occur simultaneously, with film work of professional performance and projects being screened to make connections globally.

Anyone interested in presenting on this day is invited to get in touch, so that we can assemble a diverse array of interdisciplinary workshops to show emerging theory and practice. Please send proposals for workshops (90 minutes max.) and presentations (20 minutes max.) that explore the diverse fields of research, practice and application inspired by Laban's theories to trustees@labanguildinternational.org by January 31st 2026. Submissions should demonstrate a clear understanding of and engagement with Laban's theoretical principles.

It is hoped that this event will reflect on the continuing resonance of Laban's thoughts in today's world. The following themes are suggested as starting points, given their significance within the current global context, but other perspectives are equally encouraged. The importance for this celebration event is to show how practical work has linked to the theories which will continue to help stay connected, in line with the Laban Guild's original purpose when it began in 1946.

- **Revisiting Laban's Legacy:** New readings of movement, Space, Effort and Shape, Notation in contemporary performance and research.
- **Laban and the Performing Arts:** The influence of Laban's principles on theatre, dance, choreography, and dramaturgy.
- **Movement and Society:** Bodies as sites of resistance, transformation, therapy and social expression.
- **Movement, Technology, and Future Directions:** Digital bodies, interactive media, and new frontiers for movement studies.
- **Women, Leadership, and Visibility:** Laban's practice/theories from Feminist and inclusive perspectives in movement practice, education, and the arts.
- **Pedagogical Pathways:** Embodied learning, creativity, and movement analysis in educational contexts.
- **Transcultural and Decolonial Dialogues:** Laban practices in cross-cultural, multi-cultural and global frameworks and the development of ethno-choreology.
- **The Triadic Perspective in the Art of Movement:** Creator-Performer-Spectator as the Interrelationship between creator, message embodied by the performer, and engaged by spectator
- **Dance Film as a medium for preservation and performance:** to screen projects in all stages of development, including short films, rehearsal logs and performance reels.

Laban Cyber Hub: Workshops with VR and Sound Sensors

We have followed the work of dance choreographer and researcher Cora Gasparotti who has been working in Rome in the area of Virtual Reality and Sound Sensors exploring choreutics and eukinetics with new technology. This technology is clearly part of the future and, since Laban Guild International connected with UNESCO International Dance Council, Cora has reported regularly to Laban Guild International as the Laban Cyber Hub. We are pleased to be able to invite her to this anniversary event to share her work with us through workshops and presentations. There will be different options to see how Virtual Reality has been programmed using Laban's concepts, such as workshops in Laban Space and Body Morphing using VR headsets, and the way Sound and Movement can relate to each other as Interactive Sonification.

19th April 2026: Communal Gathering, Movement Choir and Dance Party

Sunday is designated as a Sharing Day in the event. We will celebrate by being part of one inclusive community. The aim is for this to have the feeling of a festival, with some sharing of dance, some opportunity to participate in dance together and a sharing of some rituals to acknowledge the milestone of Laban Guild International including a birthday cake and a party with dancing! We hope to gather as many people connected to Laban's Legacy as we can. You may choose to come only to this day to join friends from the past to reminisce. Please save the date now!

The morning will bring together several groups from around the UK who have been part of the Movement Choir Hub. There will be an opportunity for everyone attending this day to participate in this communal art form, even in a simple way staying seated in the studio theatre. This part of the event is being coordinated by Maggie Killingbeck of the Movement Choir Hub, so please do get in touch with us directly if you would like to be involved in the preparation of this part, and maybe even consider joining a particular satellite group.

After lunch there will be a gathering in the studio theatre. Here the Movement Choir will be performed as a participatory offering along with sections highlighting the Tanz-Ton-Wort sessions of the first three days and a review of the Saturday workshops and presentations. A chance for us all to share together. Afternoon tea will then be offered to everyone, with ample opportunity to chat, debate and ask questions.

The final part of this Anniversary Event will be a dance party. It will follow the themes of this event, even coming back full circle to ancient ideas taking its inspiration from Greek Drama. In Aristophanes' comedy *The Frogs* there is a journey into the underworld by the god of theatre, Dionysos. He is searching for the most appropriate dead playwright to return to the world to restore harmony for now and the future. We will enter this underworld to see a dance-off between different dance styles, and let people offer a request to the DJ for the music that will inspire their own preferred dance – any history and any mode will be considered - including live music, percussion, singing as a Dionysiac Celebration of Wild Free Dancing!

Moving On: Legacy beyond Death

This anniversary event will address the ephemerality of dance and the fact that practitioners and organisations have a limited lifespan, have a responsibility to concern themselves with the legacy and thinking how to pass things on to future generations. The art form of dance is always changing, and historical forms need to be transformed with relevance for the present and give seeds for the future. The trustees of Laban Guild International are acknowledging this current change of our organisation, which began in 1946 and over fifty years ago became registered as a charity in England and Wales on 29 April 1974. It is necessary to consider human mortality and consider our destiny, considering

how to preserve things for the future and accept the loss of others.

The only dance that never dies is the Dance of Death itself. This anniversary event will also consider this theme in the context of Laban’s legacy, acknowledging those who came before and inviting a new generation to explore the same issues. Laban titled his own biography *My Life in Dance*. His choreographic works, and those of his first students, often linked to the idea of the dance of death. This macabre theme became a trope in many dance performances in the 20th century and became typical of “ausdruckstanz” – German expressive dance. From a wider dance historical point of view, it was in mid-14th century Europe when the character of Death actually started dancing. In poems and paintings, the *Danse Macabre* became a recurring motif. In those early representations, Death, the great leveller, sweeps all humanity by inviting them to follow the line dance, from the king and the pope to the humblest of farm labourers.

Death is a complex motif with many interpretations in the medieval dramatic context and reinterpreted by choreographers throughout history. Part of the Laban legacy was a portrayal of death using dance, particularly by those choreographers now categorised as “ausdruckstanz” - expressing emotions through the body in action, even when death appears as a force that stops physical movement in reality. Rudolf Laban’s own works *Agamemnon’s Tod* and *Don Juan* have this explicit theme, as Laban developed Noverre’s concept of ballet d’action to put death back on the stage that had remained “obscene” in Greek Tragedy and to continue Angiolini’s physical language of the underworld to imagine how dancing might continue even when the body has gone. Other choreographers inspired by Laban’s work explored the theme in their own choreographies, including Mary Wigman (*Totentanz*) and Harald Kretzberg (*Paracelsus*). Kurt Jooss has the dancing figure of Death in his seminal dance theatre production *The Green Table*.

Performing death will be an element of this event. Cecilia Dorland will offer a presentation on the origins of this motif and use this to bring things together in the Dance Party as a celebration of past, present and future. Cecilia explains: “In 1420’s the English writer John Lydgate translated text from a fresco in a cemetery in Paris into a new poem where different characters meet Death, and must join a final dance out of the world. The text will be a starting point to explore how different dance drama and music can be created together as a final moment containing the essential element of that character. Each character dances their own style of death dance, which will be created with music and dance style that matches their status, and role in society.”

This will not be morbid however, as this element will form part of the Dance Party created in the studio theatre after the afternoon tea where, with theatrical lighting and a live DJ, we will move between different styles of all histories.

Summary: A concluding celebration

Laban Guild International is celebrating eight decades honouring a legacy that continues to inspire innovation, reflection, and transformation across artistic and academic fields. The conference invites participants from around the world to gather in dialogue, performance, and research — exploring how Laban’s principles of movement, space, effort, and expression remain profoundly relevant in the twenty-first century.

Fees and scholarships

We do not want financial issues to restrict people interested in the Laban Legacy to attend, so there are scholarships available for students and young professionals.

Full event 5 days (15-19 April 2026)

Full rate £120 for participants (scholarships available)
Reduced Rate £80 for presenters, seniors, students

Saturday 18th April: Day only

£60 for participants, £40 concessions – One Day Pass

Sunday 19th April: Day only

Free for Guild subscribers
£20 for non-subscribers (subscription included)
No charge for Movement Choir groups

The application form and payment details are here: <https://forms.gle/rwZYMWxHZvQzNZJW7>

Architecture Students and Labanotation

Clare Lidbury

In September a professor of architecture from the University of Manchester contacted the trustees looking for someone to teach a one-off, three-hour session on Labanotation to his second-year students in the context of a module on architecture and society. I took up the challenge. I have taught Labanotation for many years in higher education to dancers and to those with no dance background. In my experience, students who have some background in music or maths often take to Labanotation more easily than others – perhaps because they are used to symbols representing something. I had a feeling that architecture students might also be used to this, and this was indeed the case.

Some students were not open to the idea of experiencing movement or perhaps could not see the relevance of the class as they did not attend. I had sent some information in advance, eg come in clothes you can move in, so they were forewarned. However, those students who did attend, after some initial hesitation, joined in fully. We began with what I think of my standard introduction to Labanotation¹ – walking in the space, to establish a sense of normality, then adding changes of speed, changes of level while walking at different speeds, walking in different directions (backwards, sideways) with different levels and speeds and finally, ‘walking’ on different body parts, also with changes of speed, and direction. I demonstrated a simple walking phrase (bars 1-4 of “March”, in the *Elementary Reading Studies*) which the students learned and then I invited the students to find a way of writing down the phrase for themselves. This is always as interesting process - some students chose to use foot shapes and tried to indicate a sense of direction, some used sweeps of colour on their iPads, but interestingly none of them attempted to use words to describe the movement. By sharing the examples the students had written I then elicited from them what was missing from their efforts so that they discovered the four elements we need to know in order to notate a movement, that is, which body part is moving, and the speed, direction and level of the movement, and showed them how Labanotation (re)presents this with symbols and the stave. I then gave them a copy of “March” and invited them to read the first four bars which elicited excitement as they realised that they were reading what they had walked earlier. Divided into three groups, each group was invited to read and dance the phrases in either bars 5-8, 9-12, or 13-16 which they all did with varying amounts of support. As a finale to this section of the class the students all performed bars 1-4 then, in order, each group danced bars 5-16; the students seemed delighted with their prowess.

We moved on to look at Labanotation in action by first watching a brief extract of the opening of Jooss’s *The Green Table* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QxJsITxObU4> and then looking at the notation of it. To see the complexity of the score (10

staves, one for each character around the table, plus floor diagrams) was eye opening but, once directed to spotting symbols that they recognised, the students quickly realised what a remarkable movement notation system Labanotation is.² Interestingly, viewing the video also brought up the question of why notate something when these days everyone has a camera on their phone and can make an instant record. This was answered by watching the recording again and observing that at 1minute 12 seconds the director has made the decision to only show what the five dancers from one side of the table are doing, thus we do not have the whole picture as Jooss intended. In addition, this is a recording of a performance which may or may not be a recording of Jooss’s intention, whereas the Labanotation score was written in close consultation with Anna Markard (Jooss’s daughter and the only person who, after close consultation with her father, was permitted to stage his work at that time) so that Jooss’ intentions were captured in how each movement was notated.

The second half of the session began with a brief overview of Rudolf Laban, his work and his legacy. I introduced choreutics (dimensions and planes) and eukinetics (energy, design, effort) and then related these to the work I had invited the students to look at in advance of the session, that is, a brief section of Anna de Keersmaker’s *Rosas Danst Rosas* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQCTbCcSxis>). I also sent them Beyonce’s “borrowing” of de Keersmaker’s work in her music video *Countdown* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yj5Kp38Oz04>) and de Keersmaker’s response to this when she made the work freely available and established a world-wide project, *Re:Rosas*, to gather recordings of performances of the work by anyone who chose to and collated them, a sample of which are here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=winhUUJUGSMg>

I chose *Rosas Danst Rosas* because although the performers in the original film are fine dancers the movement is very do-able and the setting (an old factory?) an interesting building for architecture students. In the *Re:Rosas* extract the dance is performed by many groups, some of whom clearly have extensive dance training and some of whom do not, in a variety of settings (eg on an escalator, a roof top, by the sea). When asked if anyone could remember any of the movement from the extracts one student immediately performed one of the dropping actions with the intended dynamics, suggesting I had made a suitable choice of work. We then watched the short extract of *Rosas Danst Rosas* and identified the dimensions and planes of movement used and the dynamics. I taught them four counts of the phrase (0’49” - 0’54’) which they all performed in unison; it was a beautiful moment which the students seemed quite stunned by.

I brought the class back to where we had started

the session by showing them my notation of the four counts they had just performed and told them how long it had taken me to analyse and then draw neatly enough to make it worth looking at. We concluded with a Q and A session which ranged from questions about other forms of notation to what is contemporary dance? All in all, the students appeared to have taken to Labanotation and to be interested in the detail that can be notated. They joined in the practical aspects of the class with a physicality that surprised them and were pleased, I think, that what was asked of them was within their capabilities. The professor, who had joined in throughout, was amazed at my embodied teaching, but how can Laban's work be taught without such physical engagement? Both he and I were struck by the notion that these students, nearly eighty years on, were learning Labanotation in a seminar room on the University Campus on Oxford Rd., minutes away from where the Art of Movement Studio, opened in 1946.

Endnotes

1 In 1987 I attended the Dance Notation Bureau Elementary Labanotation Teachers Course at Roehampton University. All the students shared their

work with each other; this class may have originated as someone else's lesson plan but has been honed and amended by me over time.

2 Peggy Hackney, Sarah Manno and Muriel Topaz (Eds), *Elementary Reading Studies*, New York: Dance Notation Bureau (1970)

3 Anna Markard and Ann Hutchinson Guest, *The Green Table, the Labanotation score, text, photographs and music*, London: Routledge (2003). *The Green Table* was first notated by Ann Hutchinson in 1938 and was used as an aide memoir by Jooss for many years. A new score was commissioned in the 1970s, funded by the Dance Notation Bureau, which was written by Muriel Topaz and Charlotte Wile. In the 1980s Odette Blum obtained a grant from Ohio State University for the checking and correcting of that score. In 1990, writing my PhD on *The Green Table*, Blum very kindly gave me a copy of the score. It was this copy that I, "spreading pages of the score around [me] on the floor ... checked and queried what I saw in [the Joffrey Ballet] rehearsals" (p.xi). It was an invaluable experience to see Anna Markard staging from memory the ballet on this outstanding company as I studied the score. The resultant proof reading was an additional bonus.

Hop Musical: the online archive for movement study being created in Brazil

Darren Royston

I was invited to an online meeting with José Rafael Madureira who wanted to acknowledge Geraldine Stephenson's work and the contribution she had made to the art of movement, in particular in the area of theatre and training for actors in the art of movement (December 4th would have been her 100th birthday). He also wanted to ask about how my own professional work had been mentored by Geraldine, and how I had become involved in the Laban Guild when she was President.

Madureira* currently produces *Hop Musical*: a scholarly YouTube channel focused on art, philosophy, culture, and education content which includes interviews, documentaries, talks, conferences, radio shows, podcasts, visual essays. While Madureira was researching those who were influenced by Delsarte, Dalcroze and Laban he became particularly interested in the life and work of Geraldine Stephenson. Recent features were created for Hop Musical and to produce this material he consulted *Movement, Dance and Drama*, the magazine of the Laban Guild, extensively, subsequently making a review of the online resources available:

I now know *Laban Guild Magazine* very well; it is a fantastic project. The digital archive you have is a dream for someone like me who researches dance historiography. I read all the 184 issues available in this archive to produce my tribute article to Geraldine Stephenson, which has been published in Portuguese.

I found a letter from Maria Duschenes published in 1980 in the Laban Guild Magazine (number 65). She was a former student of Laban and was responsible for introducing his ideas to Brazil. Without her, the famous *Encontro Laban* would not exist.

Jose intends to translate this letter into Portuguese to share with the disciples of Duschene.

The line of Laban's work in Brazil is very important at this time, and Madureira continues to explore the connections between different movement practitioners and artists who have knowledge documented through their years of practice. Over the past years he has interviewed Dick McCaw as part of the research into the life of Geraldine Stephenson and invited McCaw to present online "Geraldine's Gift, a talk by Dick McCaw, Emeritus Reader, Royal Holloway, University of London" (September 20, 2025) in which he shared his anecdotes and practical experiences with his students.

I was invited to attend the online event, which was attended by selection of students from Brazil and postgraduate researchers in dance, drama and performing arts. McCaw gave a very lively presentation of how he was challenged by learning a new physical approach in his middle-age, and the humour that ensued as the teacher-students relationship developed. There was a discussion between participants about how different movement scales, practical exercises and effort studies had been taught in Brazil, and how a

shared language had become established. There were questions about how the legacy can be developed, and the importance to share the history, to understand the individual interpretations of Rudolf Laban's work and how the physical art can be transmitted to new generations. The importance of recording events, and opinions from those who experience the work in a practical way was an important theme for the event. You can see some of the material produced for Hop Musical, with Dick McCaw's support, in the last months here:

<https://periodicos.sbu.unicamp.br/ojs/index.php/conce/article/view/8678552>
<https://ojs.fmh.ulisboa.pt/index.php/red/article/view/157>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fDkvQQizqvE>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1-fABPGZBgk>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l0x3oWOZjJl>

Dance as a Driving Force: creating choreography in film using Laban's art of movement

Darren Royston

The Witches of Pool Bottom is directed by emerging Leeds filmmaker Ava Bounds. It is a short film that dives—quite literally—into the chaotic world of teenage insecurity. The film features a socially awkward teen, who braves a crowded pool, only to face three "witches"—living embodiments of her deepest insecurities. They meet in a surreal, hilarious battle using dance, before they can tear her apart.

Blending comedy, fantasy, and heartfelt vulnerability, the film uses dance as its driving force. The viewer is transported through time as the choreography styles represent different eras where "poolside beauty" was essential: ancient Roman baths; Viking runic rituals; and swing-era exuberant glamour of the 1930s. Each style becomes a visual metaphor, revealing how beauty, confidence and self-expression have evolved across eras — yet showing how insecurities are universal and timeless.

I would like to focus on two important elements. Firstly, the way that Laban's approach can be a guide to create difference in dance styles, linked to research into historical dance forms but also allowing the dancers to explore the characteristics in an expressive way. Secondly, how music is an important element to inspire movement, to give coherence in rehearsal and filming, but also as something that can then be removed in the post-production phase in order for the actual sound-score to be created to match the filmed movement and dance.

The three dancers are different parts of the protagonist. The casting complied with Rudolf Laban's categorisation of three dance types in his movement choirs: each of the three dancers were suited to each of

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbvx7UdT98>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j2HIKehR6kQ>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R7SHAt87Ulc>

* José Rafael Madureira holds a master's and doctorate in Education, Language, and Art, a degree in Music, a degree in Physical Education, a bachelor's degree in Dance. He completed international internships in dance pedagogy in Europe and studied with Françoise and Dominique Dupuy, Eugenia Casini Ropa, Laurence Louppe, and Tadashi Endo. He has taught at several higher education institutions, both public and private; his research generates material for the Hop Musical events, channel and archive.

the low, middle or high levels. While all dancers could perform all moves, it was seen that each dancer had a preferred mode of operation, and this related to their body-type and how they would feel more akin to move in a particular kinespheric zone.



When the fantasy moment of the film begins, the protagonist character called Rachel has jumped into a swimming pool only to then find that it is entirely empty. There, sitting on the floor, she is clearly isolated and in a self-contained bubble, a restrictive kinesphere.

The viewer then sees what Rachel sees: three bodies standing in front of her, in identical swim suits but different in shape and attitude. Each character represents a different issue she is facing which is preventing her feeling confident in her own skin - Hairz (excess hair growth), Zitz (acne skin condition), and Fatz (ever-expanding change of body shape). At times the director's vision was that they should unite as being all "Rachel" and then at other times they are very individual, with their own postures, gestures, ways of approaching the protagonist. Indeed, in the narrative, Rachel will use a different method to attack each one, trying to kill them off as issues she would rather not have as part of her being.

Low / Medium / High dancers



Movement material was created in the rehearsal studio, and I and the director had gathered samples of music styles to inspire the improvisation session. Certain steps, positions and rhythms were presented from my historical research of dance and art of different periods, although the need was to extract motives that could then be played in the scene: the dancers were using dance to attack the protagonist. Each segment would appear as a fast change, with a different costume, with one of the three dancers seen to be leading the attack. To begin they stand, in one united line, in front of Rachel as in a neutral position. Then as the battle begins, each of the three styles are presented with different choreographic styles, formations, filming angles. In fact, how each style was presented to Rachel became very important: how the dancers were positioned, the shape of the group, the focus on Rachel, the position of Rachel in the dance, and most importantly, the point of view of Rachel.

From the studio work we found certain movement qualities which were attributed to particular Laban taxonomies. Here are some simplified notes to give you an idea:

1930s Swing Era

- Light (dabbing, flicking gestures)
- Closed body positions with knees (the classic Radio City Rockettes move of “the bevel”)
- Lines and precise sharp body poses, including with hands and fingers
- Swing music with bounce
- Facial expressions using showbiz smiling
- Presented frontally as if in a musical movie scene of the era

1930's Swing Era



Viking

- Deep and open
- Lower level postures
- Clench fists
- Elbow and knees bending
- Circling central figure (three dancers around the one dancer, keeping circle closed to trap her)
- Posing with arms lifted above but with gestures towards the ground (thrusting and slashing effort qualities)
- Sudden, strong, bound
- Horizontal plane (confrontational)

Roman



- Roman •
- Peripheral movement
 - Light (flowing and gliding)
 - Sequential flow of limbs
 - Circling periphery
 - Weaving of upper body and arms
 - Head turning
 - Weaving around Rachel's kinepsphere aura, but always staying connected to the other two dancers, weaving under the arms and around as a flowing serpentine pathway.

The second element I would like to focus on is how choreography was created using music but was not determined by the same structural form. I write this as I wait for the theatrical release this month of the Thai musical movie *Dream!* I worked on this large-scale feature film as choreographer with many different tasks. One was creating a musical production number with the children who sing and dance in a classroom and playing field in rural Thailand, another was a solo song where the lead girl imagines a fantasy world of make believe where she dances to the rhythm of syncopated samba, and another task was to stage a duet where the girl meets a homeless man in the forest, who seems to have learnt a courtly danse-a-deux on his travels as he teaches her some etiquette with dance steps of a different culture. The point I want to make is that all these different scenes in *Dream!* required me to choreograph to a musical score that had been fixed, and although orchestrations would be added later, the pattern was fixed, and the steps worked out with the director to interpret the musical structures exactly.

With *Witches of Pool Bottom*, the music was used to create a sequence which would be filmed from different camera angles, and would be edited visually, interspersing the action shots of the attacks and battle moments. The music for this short film would be composed new in post-production, to match the flow of the drama, taking inspiration from the styles of the practice tracks, but produced as a different score with a different quality of orchestration. This is interesting, as this way of using the Laban approach in the creation of the movement means that each style has its own difference, each with a particular choreological identity (as listed above). Each style can be presented as a different dance form on its own without particular music being required. This seems to be one of the ways Laban approached music. I am thinking this particularly after reading Dick McCaw's recent collection of Laban's unpublished writings gathered as “Art of Movement.” Rudolf Laban himself worked frequently as a choreographer with musical scores and traditional and formal dance music forms. Music was part of the training for dancers, and yet the percussion accompaniment and musical score could be created alongside the movement, or even added after the choreography was complete.

Ava Bounds as director has experience herself as a performer, having been a child-actor in London's West End. She is very musical and enjoys dancing herself. Therefore, I was not surprised that the script implied music and a musical structure running beneath the sequence of scenes. In the narrative, Rachel is offered an option to escape from these three dancing creatures. This option is presented as “Perfect Rachel.” A figure appears which is the same actress as first Rachel, but made-up differently, with no blemishes whatsoever. She has poise, holding a larger-than-life “perfection injection” syringe in her hands. This perfect option implies rigidity, a fixed state, stable but therefore not dynamic, and no dance is given to this character. Rachel finally makes a decision along with her three dancing-selves to destroy this fixed image and has a moment to reform as a new dancing figure. Here a new choreography was needed. The new dance was called “mambo” as this was selected as a dance of triumphant celebration with a fun playful quality. The music helped us to feel these emotions, although the tune was too popular to be able to be used in the actual soundtrack. The decision was to create this choreography on location, on the day of filming, once the other scenes had been filmed, and to let a spontaneous wild energy take over. The choreographic intention was clear: expand through space, connect pathways, project lines, ricochet back from the swimming pool walls making a “criss-cross” choreography: it was a dance of a “Released Rachel.” The diagonal scale presented as labile by Laban (in *Choetics*) was paired with moves led by the shoulder and extended arms led

Rachel's confident body language once she had been victorious and felt strong in her own self. At this moment in the film, she can leave the fantasy world of her imagination and face the people in the real world where there is water in the swimming pool and her boyfriend stands ready to love her as a pubescent teenager, whatever her size, hair and skin condition. Dance has been the driving force to help her come to terms with herself, and jump confidently into a social world, no longer feeling insecure with her body image.

This short film will be submitted for international film festivals and is planned to be shown as part of the 80th anniversary Laban's Legacy event in April 2026.*

Credits for the film

Cast

Anja Cilia – Rachel
Anastasiya Ador – Zitz
Sydney Miede – Hairz
Georgia Baines – Fatz

Crew

Written, Directed & Produced by Ava Bounds
Director of Photography: Ben Saffer
Editor: Ava Bounds
Production Design: Camille Hewitt
Costume Design: Zy Bull, Ambre Keraudren, Tia Beddington
Choreography: Darren Royston

*Subscribers or past members of Laban Guild are invited to send filmed examples of how Laban's theories are put into practice which may be shown at the April 2026 event also.

Olu Taiwo (1965 - 2025)



It is with great sadness that we report on the passing of Olu Taiwo who held the post of Reader, Performing Arts, at the University of Winchester. Olu studied the ideas of Rudolf Laban as part of the MA in Dance Studies at Trinity Laban (1996) alongside trustees Sara Houston and Darren Royston. He became associate professor in acting and digital research at the University of Winchester and was a founding member of the European Federation for Education and Training in Street Arts (EFETSA) and a member of the Digital Research for the Humanities and Arts (DRHA). For Laban Guild International Olu was instrumental in forming the Space Harmony Hub, to consider the themes of Living Architecture, Spatial Structures, Sacred Geometry, and Harmonic Principles.

Olu provided a summary for the purpose of this Hub:

The Space Harmony Hub is a place of gathering to explore and create new ways of interpreting Laban's philosophy-practice of Body-Space relations, Movement and Architecture in the wider context of 21st century new social realities, technology embodied practices, arts, culture, and design. Movement, as Laban says, is the basis of all things – everything moves (*Choreutics*, 1966), where stasis is an illusion. In this sense vibration, dynamic equilibrium, balance, and resonance are crucial in this exploration of living architecture, spatial structures, sacred geometry, and harmonic

principles as starting point to interrogate and invite a new curiosity of embodiment, movement, and space in the 21st century.

Olu worked very closely with Dr Kiki Selioni on the Makings of the Actor, with conferences, workshops and symposia in Athens and Marathon in Greece. In February 2022 a conference co-organised by the American College of Greece was entitled *Rhythm in Body on Stage: interfacing with our interface* and Olu presented his specialist topic of The Return Beat. A future Makings of the Actor event is being planned in his honour, and we will honour Olu at the 80th anniversary event of the Laban Guild International at Trinity Laban.

Olu coined the phrase “the return beat” while writing his master’s thesis and this became the title of his book *The Return Beat – A Spiritual Approach to the Golden Triangle* referring to a metaphysical experience of West African Rhythm from a performer-centred approach. This approach draws attention to modes of rhythmic perceptions that highlights certain shared resonant experiences in a group that are cyclical in nature. The Golden Triangle refers to the use of rhythm through: Song/spoken word, dance/movement, percussion/drumming. These perceptions are used as starting point to discuss individual and cultural practices of “being”, “becoming” and “performance” as part of a perception underpinned by a plethora of living forces on planet Earth.

Olu’s research objective was to investigate performatively, how as ‘individuals’ we interface with the increasing digital complexity with regards to our experience in the twenty-first century, through his technique that he has been developing called ‘Urban Butoh’ which he developed as part of his performative involvement in Johannes Birringer’s Dap-lab project, Ukiyo.

His publications include:

The Return Beat in John Wood (Ed.): *The Virtual Embodied: Practice, Presence, Technology*, London: Routledge (1998).

Music, Art and Movement among the Yoruba: in Graham Harvey (Ed.): *Indigenous Religion: A companion*, London: Cassell (2000)

Art as Eudaimonia: Embodied identities and the Return beat in Susan Broadhurst and Josephine Machon (eds.), *Identity, performance and technology: Practices of Empowerment, Embodiment and Technicity*, London: Palgrave Macmillan (2012)

The Return Beat – Interfacing with Our Interface, A Spiritual Approach to the Golden Triangle: Oxford: Peter Lang (2021)

Kiki Selioni writes:

In Loving Memory of Olu, Member of The Makings of the Actor

Olu was more than a colleague — he was a friend, a companion in vision, and a soul of rare depth. His presence shaped our work, his spirit lifted our days, and his integrity anchored our path. In every project, he gave more than effort, he gave heart. We carry forward his legacy not only in what we create, but in how we live: with courage, with kindness, and with the quiet strength he embodied.

Olu was mentoring Vicky Spanovangelis, Architect-Choreographer, on her PhD study at University of Winchester. She writes:

Living / Architecture
Laban’s / Body Space Movement
Legacy / A Tribute to the Work of Dr Olu Taiwo

In Memory of Dr Olu Taiwo

Dr. Olu Taiwo was a visionary artist, educator, and cultural thinker whose work was profoundly shaped by the legacy of Rudolf von Laban (1879-1958). As a graduate of the master’s programme at the Laban Centre, he carried Laban’s ideas into new artistic, philosophical, and technological territories, making them relevant to the complex world of the 21st century. He drew deeply from Laban’s choreosophy, choreutics, and the relationships between ‘effort’ and ‘performative action’, adapting Laban’s work not simply as a system of movement analysis but as a living philosophy of embodied experience.³

These ideas found full expression in his doctoral thesis proposal, *The Return Beat*, which he later explored in his 2021 book *The Return Beat – Interfacing with Our Interface: A Spiritual Approach to the Golden Triangle*. In this work, he developed an original framework in which the “return beat” symbolizes reconnection—with ancestry, with embodied knowledge, and with the rhythmic flow of contemporary life. His contribution to performance studies extended Laban’s spatial and energetic theories into transcultural and digitally attuned perspectives on embodiment.

Beyond his research, Dr. Taiwo was an inspiring pedagogue and collaborator. As my doctoral supervisor and long-term colleague within my company, Nomads & Urban Dwellers, he offered unwavering support, insight, and generosity. His work on projects such as *Diaspora Dialogues* reflected his lifelong belief in the arts as a transformative bridge between cultures, communities, and generations. His influence continues to resonate through the many individuals, students, and creative communities he touched.⁴

A significant aspect of our shared work was the creation of the Space Harmony Hub, developed after an invitation and dialogue with Darren Royston of Laban Guild International. We conceived the Hub as a gathering place to reinterpret Laban’s philosophy-practice within contemporary conditions shaped by new technologies, evolving social realities, and emerging forms of embodied and spatial practice. Inspired by Laban’s assertion in *Choreutics* (1966) that movement is the basis of all things, we approached the Hub through concepts of vibration, dynamic equilibrium, balance, and resonance. Our early conversations identified fertile ground for exploring living architecture, sacred geometry, harmonic spatial structures, and new ways of understanding embodiment in digital and hybrid spaces.⁵

Dr. Taiwo’s life and work remain a vital expression of the Living Laban Legacy, and his visionary approach continues to guide my practice today, as well as the ongoing development of the Space Harmony Hub. My hope is to continue evolving the integrated practices of movement, choreography, and architecture through my current doctoral investigation into spatial corporeality and the *Kinaesynthesis* proposal—an approach that seeks to cultivate embodied practices for designers and performance practitioners.⁶

Vicky Spanovangelis, a UK qualified architect and dancer-choreographer and researcher. She holds a master’s degree from the Laban Centre and is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Winchester UK, and Artistic Director/founder of the creative company Nomads & Urban Dwellers www.nomadsurban.com.

Endnotes

1 Olu Taiwo, *The Return Beat – Interfacing with Our Interface: A Spiritual Approach to the Golden Triangle*, Oxford: Peter Lang (2021). See Foreword, pp v-vii,

by The Rev June Boyce-Tillman, Professor Emeritus of Applied Music, University of Winchester.

2 Dr Taiwo's Academic Links – can also be found on the company website: www.nomadsurban.com
<https://www.returnbeat.co.uk/>
<https://winchester.academia.edu/OTaiwo>
<https://drolutaiwo.com/>

3 Rudolf Laban, *Choreutics* (Ed.) Lisa Ullmann, London: Dance Books (1996)

4 The Kinaesynthesis proposal – a contribution to new knowledge draws upon the idea of 'kinaesthesia' the dynamics of embodied experiences and 'synthesis' as the making of space with and through the body - integrating choreography and architecture as creative practices. The proposal forms part of the current doctoral thesis 'Spatio-Corporealities: Choreography as Spatial, Emergent and Creative Modes of Practice'.



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