

**IN  
MEMORY  
OF  
LISA ULLMANN**



Lisa Ullmann. 1950

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## **“Laban is coming, Laban is coming to talk to us and to watch us dancing!”**

*Edited transcript from an article by Lisa Ullmann, 1979.*

This was, one day, the call through the Laban School of Herta Feist in Berlin, where I had recently entered the layman's course and movement choir. The entire school was assembled in the smaller studio, which had only skylights, and there were some candles flickering in the background. Laban spoke, we listened, we moved, we asked questions; everything seemed rather awesome to me and I don't think I understood much of what it was all about. I was too new to it, had only just left school, and my ambition was to become a painter.

However, being interested in the Arts there was something in what Laban said and did which evoked a sympathetic response in me. This was then my first personal contact with Laban, many more were soon to come. I had followed the advice of my teachers to drop, for the time being, my courses at the Academy of Arts and to enter the professional training at the Laban School. I chose to go to Lotte Wederkind's school in Berlin as her way of working suited me.

It was 1927 when I stood in front of Laban trying to prove that I was worthy to hold his certificate as a teacher of dance. I succeeded. Somehow I must have impressed him, probably because I had studied his book "Choreographie I", which had only just been published. He had not expected this, but I was able to decipher the symbols he had introduced and could also perform some of the sequences thus notated and even use the material when I was asked to give proof of my teaching ability.

After this second eventful meeting there were many, and increasingly more, occasions when I was exposed to what I should like to call Laban's treatment.

I worked for my Diploma and, during the two years of studying and teaching, I experienced another side of the Art of Movement to which Laban introduced me and my colleagues. It was the listening inward, the becoming aware of one's heart beat and breathing. This increased our sense of the flow of movement with its inward and outward streaming between the poles of meditation, contemplation and concentration at one end, and at the other action, efficiency and practical achievement.

In the summer of 1929 came the culmination of my efforts in the form of a dance play for movement choir, which I had to prepare for my Diploma. Of course I had informed myself about Laban's idea of dancing in a movement choir.

Laban distinguished clearly, although the borders are blurred, between dance as an artistic activity and art dance. The one is the dance of the layman, the other the professional. Both are aiming at the achievement of an artistic whole, but they serve different functions.

In the four weeks intensive course which Laban himself gave us, the diploma candidates, prior to the examinations, he led us deeply into choreological considerations. I had never before experienced such a sense of fulfillment as I did after Laban's sessions. It was then that I decided not to go back to my painting studies, but if I gained my Laban Diploma, which I did, I would devote myself to practising the art of movement and try to introduce others to the world which had given me so much...

Soon after I had gained my Diploma, Kurt Jooss invited me to become a member of his teaching staff. I stayed for 10 years. In 1934 I came to England, with him and Sigurd Leeder, the Jooss Ballet Company and a number of students, where we worked at Dartington Hall until the war dispersed us all in the summer of 1940.

Apart from a weekly session with a movement choir which I had established in Plymouth under the aegis of the Workers' Educational Association, a teachers' class in Exeter and a children's class at Dartington Hall, I worked entirely with professional dance students. My subjects were Training, Choreutics, Eukinetics, and what we called Dance Script.

Through all these years of training others, I began to digest what Laban had given me earlier on. His thoughts and concepts, the factual material and the experience of producing significant movement expression toward which he had guided me were gradually finding a cohesion in myself. But I longed now to penetrate deeper into the psychological implications of movement. Fate brought Laban to Dartington Hall early in 1938 and I was able to start my third period of apprenticeship with him. This was, of course, very different from the previous ones and it led also to our close collaboration for the rest of his life.

I do not think I have a particular gift for dramatisation but the different types of character which Laban incited me to represent through movement, stirred my imagination and I could respond. All

this was also connected with work with a group of people who were in charge of mentally disturbed patients and who had come to study with Laban, which I called movement psychology. Just what I wanted.

My apprenticeship with Laban has never ceased. Although my personal contact was terminated by his death in 1958, I continued to draw on the rich inspirations which I have received through studying and operating with him.

In my own work I have endeavoured to follow his incentives and to develop and apply them in a variety of spheres. His writings and drawings testify to the great vision, understanding and knowledge of movement of the human being which he had gained during a lifetime. Within my limited capability I have tried to spread as much of this as I could. Most of all I have wanted to share with others the all-important experience that through moving and dancing we can become aware of the structural forms and rhythm-dynamic qualities which are at the base of all impressions and expressions of our life.



Lisa Ullmann. Summer. 1956

## Reminiscences of Lisa

*by Geraldine Stephenson, Member of Art of Movement Studio Staff, 1947*

I had never seen anyone move as Lisa did. Anatomically her body was squat, broad-hipped and unlikely material for a dancer. When she moved her whole being was transformed, her joints didn't exist anymore and she was transported into another realm – on to another plane. I was fascinated and bewitched by this phenomenon. When she was with Laban, he being tall, straight, decisive and authoritative, Lisa “flowed” in all directions and commanded your attention in a completely different way. She had a mystical, magical quality which compelled people to watch her and to listen. I suppose she was in her mid-thirties when I first saw her, but her age was totally immaterial, one never thought about it, she was timeless and eternal. It was a shock to realise that she was 77 years old when she died. To me she was still “Lisa” in Manchester.

I went to Manchester as a gauche student in the very early days of the Art of Movement Studio. As for many others, it was a revolutionary experience. I was bombarded with impressions all day and every day. It was a seething mould of effort dynamics, space harmonies, dance studies, dance-drama, percussion, music. We worked in a semi-slum area of the city in two terrible rooms where the floor and walls did not meet at one point. Raggle-taggle bunch of students as we were, from many different countries, we never thought to question these conditions. What did a few holes matter? To me the place was a second home where I was finding another “me”. At the end of one year I knew I had to stay on. But how? I had no money. Discussing this with Lisa in that dark pokey office at the back of the crumbling building, I shall never forget leaving the session dazed and unbelieving. Lisa actually wanted me to stay. Later I learnt that Laban had also been behind that decision. So I traded my knowledge of Anatomy and Physiology, of Music Appreciation and piano accompaniment. Lisa agreed I should stay on, teaching some of these things and joining in as many classes as possible. The next year I was given some movement classes to teach. I was thus a full-time member of staff with Lisa, Laban and Sylvia Bodmer, and very much under their guidance.

The “Lisa/Laban” method was to give you as much freedom as possible to work as you felt appropriate within a very broad framework. The analysis of it all came after half-term and end of term “sharings” of student work. Every piece was discussed. Every student was discussed, most likely at Lisa's house after supper. These were great sessions for me to hear them gradually expound on what had been going on, they disagreed frequently! This was

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their way of feeling towards how the work should continue. For me learning how to do better, to comprehend more, to be more aware. Certainly they both believed in learning by "doing". "Try it Gerry" was Laban's frequent cry. How I wish these sessions had been recorded. They would make an incredible journal of creativity.

In the early days there was no question of training to be a teacher, performer or therapist etc., we were all exploring Movement. As the years progressed Lisa became more involved in the educational world as teaching courses were initiated and developed. For me her magic was still in her dance studies and her space harmonies. No one has ever been able to teach this work as Lisa did. She was unique in this field.

When Laban was suddenly struck down by typhoid fever, I was despatched (terrified) to take his classes of acting students at the Northern Theatre School in Bradford. Lisa felt this gave a much needed outlet for another part of "me". As I became more interested in the field of drama and theatre Lisa accepted this. She was less sure at first (though she never said it) of my Solo Dance Recitals, but she offered the studio "big" room for my first Dance Recital. A gallant gesture. Some little time afterwards, when I auditioned some of my solos for the B.B.C. television, and one of them was chosen, Lisa supported me up to the hilt, giving me time off and encouraging me all the way. Sometimes I think she wondered what on earth I was doing, but she kept it to herself and suffered my periodic absences on various theatrical pursuits with stoic patience.

Apart from these occasional jaunts, I was at the studio "full-time" which meant, in effect, very full-time. My life there gave me an insight into how Lisa devised her courses and classes. These involved hours of preparation, always with Laban agreeing or disagreeing at her shoulder. When venturing on a "course" together, a theme might arise from a mere droplet of an idea, something that had happened perhaps in a session that week. From that droplet of an idea came streams, rivers and torrents. I was frequently one of the tributaries, Laban often turning a fountain into a waterfall or vice-versa.

The Saturday Y.W.C.A. courses were major events. After studio classes finished at lunch-time, we would get together for the weekend. We spent all this time in preparation, ideas were put forward, jettisoned, reappearing in a different guise. It was a fascinating process, a tremendous education for me for my future work in the theatre. I did not know at the time how much I was learning. Laban's ideas grew more and more lively, some might say more and more crazy. Lisa and I struggled to find sections where we might contribute something more meaningful! There was much laughter,

much shouting. Does anyone remember, I wonder, Laban's fantasy "on the other side of the moon", this was long before man landed there, but I think the first sputnik had just popped up and come back again.

One must remember all this in the light of the climate of the early fifties. The post-war era could not have been easy for Lisa and Laban, after all, they had come here from Germany to find political difficulties as well as the fact that nearly all dance was based on "Swan Lake" and most gymnastics on the Swedish system. What a relief it must have been for them to meet people like Betty Meredith-Jones, Joan Goodrich, F. Lawrence, Elsie Palmer, Margaret Dunn, Diana Jordan, Gladys Stevens, to mention only a handful of English movement pioneers. These were the people who managed to capture something of Laban and Lisa's magic and begin to translate it into a language for this country. I am bold enough to believe that I too, in my way, helped to do this at the studio. Was that why Lisa agreed to keep me there? I like to think so.

I believe that it has never been generally appreciated that Lisa developed the studio from a tiny private concern to a Centre of national and international importance. Considering the disadvantages under which she started in this country, it was indeed, a remarkable achievement. When she and Laban moved to Addlestone I have always thought that some of the original passionate drive went out of the studio work. Exciting as it still was, in many ways it became subject to set hours, fixed subjects, educational measures of "contact time" with students etc. Nevertheless Lisa found, perhaps, more personal happiness for a while; beautiful buildings, spacious gardens, more peace and contentment than she had known for many years, and a certain measure of security. Laban was able to write and write, Lisa to look after him during his numerous illnesses. When he died I do not think she ever fully recovered. In addition, administrative work overtook her and she found fewer occasions to teach. Like all of us from time to time, she lost confidence in her own abilities.

It was after she retired from the studio that she found a new energy which took her with all her knowledge and experience to many different parts of the world; she was greeted there with open arms. In between her travels she continued to work devotedly on the mammoth task of sorting and annotating Laban's thousands of papers, a task she was involved in right up to her death.

I shall always remember her staggering capacity for work, her strength of purpose, her unswerving loyalty to Laban's ideas. If she isolated herself during the last year or two of her life, I think it was in an effort to concentrate all her remaining energies into illuminating what she felt was so vital in Laban's movement analysis.

Lisa was a brilliant teacher, serious about her work and with a great capacity for enjoying the lighter side of life. Her birthday "jamboree" was a renowned event in the studio year. What a privilege it has been to know her, to work with her, to work sometimes in spite of her. There must be thousands of people who have been inspired by her and who are the richer for her life's work.

Lisa was unique. There will never be another.

## Extracts from a diary

*Written by Veronica Sherbourne, then Veronica Tyndale-Biscoe, in her first year at Bedford College of Physical Education in 1941.*

- July 8th Miss Ullmann, who took our dancing this evening, wrote a dance for us on the board. She is rather like Elizabeth Bergner, small, dark, slight, with very well developed legs, and has large bright eyes, and a laugh with her mouth wide open. She looks very natural and attractive, though not at all pretty.
- July 10th We had another lesson after tea from Lisa Ullmann, mostly balancing on one leg while carrying out complicated body movements. It was mostly a lesson in pointing in different directions using the whole body. There is something very important about this dancing, not only because of the two people who teach, Laban and Lisa, but the way they teach, and the movements and combinations of movements which they pull out of us; and they are so informal and friendly making jokes and encouraging us lumps to terrific heights. Really the dancing is more advanced than anything we have ever done. After each lesson, as well as feeling physically exhilarated, one feels mentally uplifted as though one had done something of great importance, or had a glimpse of a world one only reads about. To think that after to-day our lessons will be over.
- July 11th Two more dancing lessons, alas the last. Must have lost pounds in weight with all this exercise. How I wish this glorious dancing wasn't over. Had a very interesting discussion on dancing. Laban and Lisa spoke a little on the history of modern dancing, and the trends in

America, (too angular). Everybody thanked everybody, and honestly I felt like crying with emotion because it really has been a wonderful experience. How sad now it's all over. I do hope they come again. This seems to have been a very full day, and I've lived every minute of it. Life is really worth living during weeks such as this.

.....

These few days affected my whole life. In pursuit of Lisa and Laban, each Christmas holiday while I was teaching at Cheltenham, I went to their vacation courses at Sheffield. After the first course I abandoned what I had learnt at Bedford and taught what I had learnt from Lisa and Laban. In 1946 I went to the Studio in Manchester. I shall always remember seeing Lisa dancing in Denmark. Her dancing was inimitable. She had complete mastery over her body and great inner power, so that her dancing had a compelling quality and a radiant, lyrical joy. Age did not diminish her ability, and I can hear her voice now making everyone work to his or her utmost. Her enthusiasm was infectious.

In more recent years I noticed how interested Lisa was in new scientific discoveries. Her Christmas cards always gave news of extensive journeyings and a variety of work she was doing. She had a great zest for spreading Laban's work. I think she wore herself out, but she had completed her task.

I myself have never ceased to be grateful for the insight that was given to me and in the last twenty-five years I have, through trial and error, slowly found 'my own way' and now that Laban and Lisa have died, I feel particularly responsible for passing on what I have learnt from them.

## Tribute

*by Marion North, Director of the Laban Centre for Movement and Dance.*

Lisa Ullmann kept in touch with the Laban Centre until her death this year. She visited us as often as she could make the journey from Addlestone to New Cross. Her last visit was to give the first lecture to our students who were registered for the new Advanced Laban Studies Course in 1984. No-one was more appropriate for this task, and no-one has been more faithful to Laban's work and ideas throughout her lifetime. Many people have paid tribute to Laban's

undoubted genius, but his work would be less known, and certainly less "applied" if Lisa Ullmann had not been working with him over these many years since he came to England.

Lisa Ullmann had the kind of dedication, strength and tenacity to face and overcome obstacles which would have daunted most of us. She did not falter. She had the capacity to attract friends and supporters through her own undoubted drive and enthusiasm — influential supporters who amazingly opened doors for her to develop the work in movement and dance studies which she loved so passionately. Many of these friends and colleagues found a new meaning and purpose by working with and for her. They were greatly enriched by their experiences. Her influence on generations of young people — many of us now nearing the end of our own careers in dance — was widespread and provocative. We all, I think, went through the stages of awe, admiration, attempted emulation, criticism, challenging, rejecting and re-creating, in our own special ways. So should all students if they are to gain independence and add, what is the greatest tribute to a great teacher: new ideas developed from a sound initial training, new achievements where they equal and sometimes even surpass those of the teacher.

Lisa Ullmann was a unique and outstanding leader and teacher, and the many of us who are indebted to her, remember her in love and gratitude. Her name will always be remembered at the Laban Centre which she founded. The establishment of the Centre's archives, a section of which will be dedicated to Lisa Ullmann will ensure that her influence is felt into the future.

In making this statement on behalf of the Laban Centre, I pay my personal tribute to Lisa Ullmann, who influenced my life so creatively.

## LISA ULLMANN

by Ann Hutchinson - Guest  
*Language of Dance Centre*

How and when did each of us encounter Lisa for the first time? There must be as many stories as people. Lisa was teacher of the second year students at the Jooss-Leader School at Dartington Hall, and thus it was that, during my second year there in 1936-37, I got to know her. It was a very rewarding year, a fine preparation for the third year which was with Sigurd Leeder. My second year class was a

happy group who collaborated to express our appreciation of the year by giving Lisa the gift of a pale blue tea service, a service which she continued to use through the years.

I and hundreds of others enjoyed the Laban Guild meetings, the days of dancing led by Lisa's rare ability to evoke positive response and enjoyment. Having become a teacher myself, I always marvelled at how she shaped movements, developed progressions and led people harmoniously into the swing of the whole group event. She herself moved wonderfully (as I write these lines I think of how many other people will be saying the same things — forgive the repetition!). She had a rare fluency, free flow was her 'domain' and it came out also in her infectious laugh, the laughter rippling out like a feather tossing around in a light breeze.

In the years since 1962 when I returned to live in England, it was matters concerning notation which brought us together. It was Lisa who, in 1959, not long after Laban's death, initiated the formation of the International Council of Kinetography Laban, realizing that some concerted effort should be made to guide the future development of the system which Laban had originated. Laban had specifically designated four people to have the authority and responsibility regarding the future of the system; they were Albrecht Knust, Sigurd Leeder, Lisa and myself. It became clear that an international body needed to be established and we have always been so grateful to Lisa for setting this idea in motion and taking such an active part in various ICKL activities. These included not only the biennial conferences, but also for several years, periodic meetings in London to discuss new ideas and applications, particularly in recording the essence of space harmony sequences and movement qualities. Whereas many dance styles and dance cultures focus on destination movement (i.e. arriving at a position), Lisa fought constantly in the notation for indication of *movement*, of the 'going', the 'passage through space' and not just the landmarks of positions. As a result the system has been much enriched through the addition of indications of motion of one or another kind. The balance which she gave to many of our discussions will be much missed. I am grateful that over the years I have had the pleasure of knowing and enjoying Lisa. I know that I am but one of hundreds.



Walter Ullmann.

## A Tribute to the brother and sister, Walter and Lisa Ullmann

by Helmuth Christian Wolff.

Lisa Ullman came from Berlin where she was born, the daughter of the lawyer Dr. Alfred Ullmann, on 17 June 1907: I was a great friend of her brother, Walter Ullmann, with whom I had established a very close contact through studying drama. Walter was born in Berlin on 2 December 1902 and lived with his parents in Berlin-Charlottenburg at No. 5 Rückerstrasse. Walter's home was, at that time, a centre for poetry-readings, rehearsals, and meetings; it was there that I fleetingly met Lisa. Actors like Bernhard Minetti, Alice Treff, the lyric poet Rudi Tesch, and many others, belonged to this circle of students. At that time Walter studied drama with Professor Max Herrmann and had already directed plays within the framework of a working-group. My first appearance in Berlin as an actor was in his production of Max Mell's *Apostelspiel* in a large auditorium at the University of Berlin; at that time I took the role of the grandfather in the play, which was repeated a number of times. An important personality of this circle was the young German scholar, Hans-Joachim Weitz, who later became the authority on Goethe, and who was very helpful to Walter in his profession. In 1931 Dr. Weitz obtained the post at the municipal theatres in Dusseldorf for him, where he supervised many productions (operas and plays). In 1938 he followed his director, Bruno Walter Iltz, to the Deutsche Volkstheater in Vienna. Here it became possible for Walter to produce more than 20 productions by directing modern plays to which he was able to add classical works, like Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Richter von Zalamea* (Calderon), and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in a treatment by Gerhart Hauptmann, as well as a large number of modern pieces, among which the Viennese comedy *Kleines Bezirksgericht* (Otto Bielen) had a particular success; the play was in the repertoire of the theatre from 1940 to 1944. I was able to prepare a more detailed appreciation of Walter Ullmann's role as stage director for the Austrian professional stage journal, *Maske und Kothurn*, in an article with more than twenty stage photographs which will be published this year (1985). Unfortunately, Walter Ullmann's stage activity had to be interrupted when all theatres were closed in 1944 because of the war.

During the last days of the war, Walter Ullmann unfortunately met his death in a mysterious way; he dressed up as a woman, to be safe on the streets, but was discovered and apparently shot as a spy. In spite of all attempts to find him — also by Lisa — he was not heard of again. He left a son, Bernd, whose whereabouts it was also

impossible to discover, after Walter's second wife, Mrs. Edith Müller, remarried within a few years. His first marriage to Elfie Bade in Düsseldorf remained childless.

In conclusion, I must mention Walter Ullmann's academic works; in 1931 he graduated in Erlangen with his book, *Adolf Müllner und das Weissenfelder Liebhabertheater* which was published in 1934 in the publications of the Society of Theatre History. Some other, small works also appeared in print which are mentioned in my article in *Maske und Kothurn*.

Finally, I want to commemorate my personal connections with the Ullmann family which also included Walter's father, Dr. Alfred Ullmann in Berlin, whom I visited many times in his son's absence. Father Ullmann was a keen painter in the impressionist manner. Walter also visited me a number of times in Halle where I lived at that time. Lisa visited me in Leipzig in 1984, to sort the Laban archives which are being carefully preserved in the *Tanzarchiv* (Dance Archives) of the German Democratic Republic at 16 Gottschedstrasse, Leipzig 7010. At that time nothing at all of Lisa's illness was evident, she seemed as active and optimistic as ever. I carried on a lively correspondence with her — I have also kept a number of letters written by Walter Ullmann between 1927 and 1943. The memories of our mutual friend were supplemented by Dr. Hans-Joachim Weitz, who became particularly well known because of his publication of the diaries of Goethe's friend, Sulpice Boisséré.

## Funeral Oration at the Grave of Lisa Ullmann

by Roland Laban

Deeply moved, we stand at the grave of Lisa Ullmann, a significant woman, who was suddenly torn from a full creative life and called to eternity.

When I visited my father, Rudolf Laban, in Addlestone in the summer of 1957 and first met Lisa Ullmann, she was already a widely and well known teacher of Movement. My father was at that time perhaps the spiritual centre, but Lisa was the power and the



Lisa Ullmann and Rudolph Laban. 1955

soul of the "Art of Movement Centre", the educational centre, which Lisa established together with Laban in Manchester and which she had later consolidated into one of world-wide importance at Addlestone. Lisa Ullmann escaped from Germany when times were difficult. Soon afterwards she brought her former teacher, Rudolf Laban, who was taken ill and who had also come under political pressure, to England. From then on, after his death, and for the rest of her life, in loyal co-operation and continuation of his work, she remained as one with him.

We all knew Lisa Ullman as a lively, untiring, and cheerful personality, who had taken upon herself the demanding task of head of the Laban Institution, bringing to it a serious sense of

responsibility, an intelligent serenity, and all her strength.

But this strength which was tied to the work and her consistent and willing cheerfulness were only one side of her extraordinary being. The other side was her loneliness. The loneliness of a brilliant human being. Anyone who had experienced her teaching, was immediately touched by this genius, inflamed and thrilled by it. Through the penetrating harmony of her body-language, everything she taught became clear, right, self-evident. It was not only the many decades of experience, the full acknowledgement and continuation of the teaching of Rudolf Laban — the certainty gained from an all-embracing knowledge — it was her artistic personality, her educational and artistic genius, which made every lesson, every interpretation of Laban's works, yes even every conversation with her, such an unforgettable experience.

But what appeared easy and clear and self-evident, was in reality a continuous fight against misunderstanding, it was pitiless self-criticism, hard work to the point of exhaustion, it was the loneliness of the genius.

After Laban's death, she sincerely devoted herself to the families of Rudolf Laban's children. Again and again this loneliness, this search for affection and security was evident in the much too sparse conversations and in all the many loving letters. But in spite of occasional signs of over-exertion and tiredness, particularly in later years, there was never a word of resignation or bitterness. In the last few years I have frequently suggested to her that she should look after herself, and retire. I proposed that she spend the evening of her life with my family. But she repeatedly said and wrote, that her mission, her destiny, to preserve Laban's work and to pass it on to others, was not yet completed.

Let us now all bow our heads as a sign of our infinite sorrow, in deep respect and in never-ending gratitude before your grave, dear Lisa, taking leave for ever and yet richly rewarded by everything that united you with us. With us, who were permitted to gain strength, harmony, and joy from Laban's work and your immeasurably valuable completion of it and your work as mediator.

These are not only the tears of our sad grief, to have lost you for ever, which overwhelm us here at your graveside, they are also the tears of joyful and everlasting gratitude for what you have given all of us: restless inquiry, knowledge, and the ability to pass it on to others. To all your students, your colleagues, and friends, who went before you to their death, and all, who everywhere in this world grieve for you, you have devoted your entire life. It was a beautiful, great, fulfilled life, Lisa! You will live for ever in our grateful memory.

## A Tribute to Lisa Ullmann

by Margaret Dunn, President of The Laban Guild.

Lisa Ullmann was a very great person who devoted her life to the study, understanding and dissemination of the discoveries and ideas to which Rudolf Laban gave his life and energy. As a young art student she joined a Laban Movement Choir and was immediately caught up and so excited by the work, that she decided to change from her studies in Art to learn more about Laban's work and to train as a dancer. In the professional world she performed and taught and then came to Dartington with Kurt Jooss and his company of dancers as teacher and trainer. There, she was later joined by Laban who also had to leave Germany.

At the beginning of World War II, Lisa and Laban had to leave Dartington under war-time regulations and it was then that she began to meet teachers and educators who welcomed her approach to the teaching of dance and offered her the challenge of working in education. In this field and as a teacher, she made her greatest impact. Just as she was excited and inspired by her meeting with Laban's ideas, so she excited and inspired her students. She said

"There was always a spontaneous element of wonder and surprise, they anticipated the work eagerly and when it was finished there was an afterglow."

In all her work this spontaneity and wonder shone through. She had an infectious enthusiasm which sometimes ran away with her and through it she gave great enjoyment. At the same time she made considerable demands on those she taught. In sharing her deep knowledge and understanding of movement and human development, she demanded, from each student, a wholeness of response so that all learned and grew as individuals. There was nothing sloppy or vague in this; the precision she asked for and the endurance to persist were, sometimes almost more than could be given but when, on occasions, her demands were met, students were rewarded with a glorious sense of harmony and wholeness. This was not only a physical achievement, not only an intellectual understanding but a whole experience which can only partially be explained in words.

In those early days of teaching, Lisa travelled all over the country visiting schools and colleges and teaching at holiday and weekend courses. But she needed a permanent centre and in 1946 she founded the Art of Movement Studio in Manchester. There she was able, with Laban who joined her, to concentrate on her work with students, teachers and lecturers who came for training. They

themselves were pioneers in the study of movement and from their training, they continued to develop the influence which Lisa had already begun to make in schools and colleges. Eventually, the Manchester Studio could not accommodate all who wished to learn and Addlestone became the centre for Lisa's work and of Laban's researches also. She continued there until her retirement and the studio's move to the Laban Centre at Goldsmiths' College in New Cross.

To use the word retirement for Lisa is, however, a misnomer. Her energy took her all over the world, teaching, lecturing and just talking about Laban, his dance and movement studies. When she was not travelling she was at work on the vast quantities of notes, models and writings which Laban had left. Her task was stupendous but with her usual zeal she achieved much. She translated some of the earlier writings, she wrote articles on his researches and she wrote from her own knowledge and experience. She, more than any other in this country has made Laban's work known and available, including his system of notation.

It would be wrong not to mention the Guild which Lisa and Laban founded. Those who attended the early courses, struggled to use the knowledge gained were individuals. Then in 1947, the Art of Movement Guild came into being which brought course members together and gave them a sense of purpose and status. The Guild became recognised throughout the country and its work continues to-day "to promote and sustain Laban's work."

So much has come from a life lived so fully. Lisa will be sadly missed but her influence will and must continue.

## **A Tribute from Elma Casson**

### *Former Principal of Lady Mabel College of Physical Education*

I am glad of the opportunity to speak about Lisa on this Commemoration Day in her honour because like all those of us present here, I held her in most affectionate regard and have reason to be very grateful to her.

I first met Lisa at Moreton Hall during the New Year Holiday Course 1941/2. I had seen a single demonstration of dance influenced by Laban's Principles of Movement and I wanted to learn more, so had

taken myself off to this early Holiday Course in answer to an advertisement in the press. Ill-equipped as I was even to join the beginners' group, I was slightly better prepared than some who had come in good faith to what they thought from its title "Modern Dance" was a course in Ballroom Dancing and had consequently arrived in high-heeled shoes and long evening dresses.

I still remember vividly our first lesson with Lisa. We had worked hard and long at curling and stretching in all directions, which I managed reasonably well, but when we began to work on a precise movement study and be required to contort ourselves into weird and excruciating positions, I realised I was in for a totally new experience. Even the familiar curling and stretching took on a new emphasis as we were invited to curl up "into our little houses" and then to step "over the threshold" with a wide spreading movement to "enjoy the world outside". Nothing quite like that had been asked of me before. My reaction to Lisa's first lesson was a sense of utter ineptitude on my part only partly offset by the feeling that Lisa's demands on my body were quite outrageous and that in any case she was slightly mad! After all I had been put through a pretty demanding course for three years in a physical education college, hadn't I? Yet here I was, struggling to achieve impossible positions and movements which Lisa herself managed with graceful ease, her lithe body seemingly able to do anything and to be made quite differently from mine. Already I sensed in watching her something of the harmony between body, mind and spirit which characterised her movement and gradually some of this wholeness began to develop in my own movement and the deep satisfaction and exhilaration which resulted be part of my own experience.

Later on, after I had embarked with very slender knowledge of Laban's principles, on teaching my own interpretation of them, Lisa came to see my work and gave invaluable help with her comments and criticism. One of the things I learnt that day was the importance of "attention", from a simple explanation of the difference between concentrating on bending and stretching the elbow joint or thinking instead about the path of the hand and forearm through space made as a result of that movement — a very helpful distinction for someone teaching both gymnastics and dance at that stage.

Later still Lisa acted as External Examiner for dance at Lady Mabel College for two or three years and stayed with us, so that we got to know her well. Her acute observation and instinctive sense of what was educationally good helped us to enrich the work we were doing.

About this time I was a member of the Council of the Laban Art of Movement Guild and remember many happy meetings at Sylvia Bodmer's house in Manchester but in particular the first meeting to be held at the new Studio at Addlestone. What a meeting that was!

Lisa greeted us all with great excitement and in pouring rain proceeded to show us over the house. Then, about an hour late the meeting began with Lisa in the chair, but after half-an-hour the rain stopped. Our chairman rose declaring that we could now go and see the gardens. The meeting was abandoned much to the consternation of our two Secretaries. Much later that afternoon the Secretaries seized Lisa firmly, propelled her upstairs and set her down in the Chair whilst someone quickly proposed and all agreed that a filing cabinet be bought for their use. That achieved, we gave up any further pretence of a meeting and resigned ourselves to just enjoying Addlestone.

Life with Lisa was never dull, often unpredictable and always rewarding. She was impulsive in her affection for people and her enjoyment of life and movement. How many of us can clearly remember seeing her demonstrate some difficult phrase of movement in front of us with that precision and artistry which were the hallmarks of her own dance movement, holding the final position for a moment before suddenly turning to face us with an infectious merry laugh whilst spontaneous applause burst from us. Then to the job of trying to help us to reach the best that we could do inspired by what we had seen.

We know, of course, that there were sad times too, but I am sure that our chief memories of Lisa will be of her vital and penetrating teaching and the warmth of her personality. We miss her very much but shall not forget her nor the impact she had upon us.

## **A Personal Snapshot from an American Student**

*by Carole Crewdson*

The first time I met Lisa Ullman was during the Laban Centennial Celebration that was sponsored by the Laban/Bartenieff Institute of Movement Studies in New York, in June 1979. Laban luminaries such as Sylvia Bodmer, Martin Gleisner, Irmgard Bartenieff and Lisa Ullmann gathered to share their reminiscences of Laban. Jackie Schmitt (another student of Irmgard's) and I were assigned to pick up Lisa at the International Arrival Building at Kennedy Airport. Jackie borrowed a bright red pick-up truck and waited inside the cab as I went to look for "a short elderly woman with white hair wearing thick glasses." I was amazed by the number of ladies fitting that description, but like a magnet I was drawn to only one. Yes,

that woman turned out to be Lisa and we just hugged each other like old friends.

I participated in Lisa's workshop called "Group Dance" and was so inspired by her that I decided to leave my home and family and follow this Pied Piper to Dartford, England to attend the 1979 and 1980 Laban International Summer Courses.

Lisa Ullmann was the foremost disseminator of Laban's theories. Diligently and tirelessly, she translated, edited and annotated his books into English. She lectured, wrote, taught and danced his work in an articulate and expressive style. Although short in stature, Lisa had an imposing and commanding manner. I will always remember Lisa dressed in a long sleeved black leotard and black dance skirt. A cinch belt circled her waist. Her feet were like tree trunks that gripped the earth and her hands expressively moved through the air translating her words. Thick owl-like glasses magnified her animated eyes. Lisa taught an advanced course that was based on Laban's space harmony material. Her expectations of the students were high and we would go over and over a movement phrase until she was pleased with the results.

"Down, down on the floor ... on the floor ... touch the floor, touch it. Go down another inch or two. Splendid. Now repeat the whole unit."

"Dive under the table plane. You are moving secretly. Slowly pass your opposite hip and twist your whole body. Don't lean forward. Keep upright. Now pull back and let go! Marvellous, once more on the right side."

I concentrated intently and tried to get my limbs to comply. I would leave the class wringing wet and exhausted but exhilarated. Sheepishly, I told Lisa that we students fought to be in the back row instead of the front.

Lisa used her voice as an instrument and would sing out the phrases, "Ta de tah! Yum ta-ta tum," she would chirp in her crisp English accent that was seasoned with German inflections. I don't remember Lisa writing down any notations in this class. We learned experientially and watched with wonder as she demonstrated by bending way down in back low and then immediately perched herself on one foot in forward high. One day Lisa casually mentioned that the sequences we were struggling with were a "study in Counter Tension/Confluency using Steeples, Equator, Three Rings, Right B Scale and Axis Scale." We quickly scurried to our books to check it out.

One afternoon at teatime, Lisa and I shared a quiet moment of conversation. Lisa said that "This course should lift you out of your daily drudgery. You may work hard and gather more material but

you should take something spiritual away with you that will carry you through the year. That is my intention and strong belief."

The last time I saw Lisa was right after the death of Irmgard Bartenieff in 1981. Lisa came to the Laban/Bartenieff Institute to help welcome the new certificate students to the programmes. A ritual that Irmgard always did. She provided the students with a feeling of continuity and a sense of connection to the Laban traditions. Generations of students throughout the world have that link thanks to Lisa's dedication and inspiration. We thank you, Lisa.

## LISA

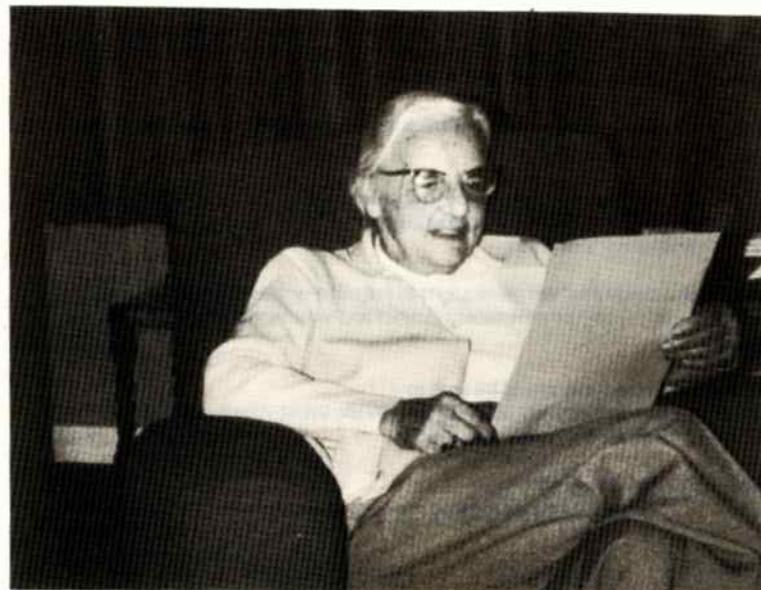
*by Claude Perrottet, grandson of Rudolf Laban*

How can I describe her in a few words? Lisa taught me many useful things, for instance, how to mow the grass, or, how to wash up. Of course, I knew how to do these things before I got to know Lisa, but watching her at work and being told to work in this way was a unique experience. And then the letter of application which she helped me write before I left the Art of Movement Studio: I got the job which was at a London College. Altogether her life seems to me to be filled with having accomplished useful things, things and tasks useful and important to other people.

And Lisa taught me the Primary Scale. Not that I particularly liked the Primary Scale but liked so much to be taught it by her. I remember us sitting around waiting for her, our teacher. She was late. And I sat there sadly feeling that those precious minutes were lost forever. And, I was expressing myself in dance in her very narrow kitchen where we had supper together and an idea was so pressing that there was no time left to go in a bigger room of the flat to move. So I learnt what it means: "Movement is everywhere" and I practice it now.

I am not at all the hard worker Lisa was and I have not met anyone like her. This difference in temperament would bring about conflict, a change of feeling between us, only in order to come together again and start exchanging fresh signals of respect, love and understanding — that is life. At times she could be very funny and I sometimes wish she would have put more of her fun into her

choreographies. But Lisa was better, and a great one indeed, at letting the fun come out of people she lived and worked with. Now she has left us physically I know that I am joining in with others by simply calling her our Mother.



Lisa Ullmann. 1984

## ***The LISA ULLMANN travelling scholarship fund***

This fund has been set up to provide assistance with expenses incurred travelling in the United Kingdom or abroad to attend a conference, course of study or to pursue a research project in the field of movement and dance.

The aim is to award the first scholarship in June 1987, to mark the eightieth anniversary of Lisa's birth.

Applicants will have to apply to the administrators of the fund who will consider each individual case according to merit and need. The amount awarded will be at the administrators discretion.

Successful candidates will be required to submit a written report on completion of the conference, course or research project and where applicable provide proof of attendance.

Donations to the fund should be sent to:-  
Athalie Knowles, 9 Smuggler's Walk, West Worthing,  
Sussex BN12 4DP, England.

Cheques made payable to:-  
The Lisa Ullman Travelling Scholarship Fund.

\* \* \* \* \*

The fund is entirely dependent on voluntary contributions,  
please give generously