



routledge performance practitioners

Rudolf
LABAN

Karen K. Bradley

emerges. The artist/researcher devises layered, honest, new work that frees us from standard beliefs or expectations. As Laban saw from his mountaintop in Ascona, and throughout his life, the horizon holds all the possibilities we need

FINAL THOUGHTS

From the day that Mary Wigman sought out Rudolf Laban on Monte Verita, theory and practice, analysis and innovation met, and created a dance of reason and joy, improvisation and craft, together.

From that time, we know that the movement moment is a propeller and a touchstone, dynamic and stabilizing. We have a choice to careen about the world, unconscious and habituated, or to practice options, try out new patterns, experiment, innovate, choose, with consciousness and reflection. We can live our life as victims of time and space or as a work of art.

Evelyn Dörr (Interview, July 9, 2004) points out that "We have mapped DNA and we think we now know what 'life' is." It is not the analysis of movement that makes the dance happen; it is the access and range that dancers develop through the practice of discrete aspects of movement that, when combined with the soul and passion of the dancer or choreographer, create dance.

Laban understood how the individual spirit participates in and shapes community and constructs culture. No one really gets to be top banana in a true commune. Community is all about co-leadership and listening, not directing. But too often we believe we risk losing place and role and power when we start to participate in a communal effort. For people trying to create their own lives, building a community can be a struggle or an experiment. Actually, it is probably both, and the question becomes: who can practice differently enough to risk changing?

Laban's experiences at Ascona and Dartington show us that life is a construction. Through the "Yes, and ..." approach to improvisation that is still a part of our work, people have options and are empowered to create. Life and art are manifested through a process of conscious choices and happy accidents.

Movement itself allows people to reconnect to what they produce: dance as well as vegetables. Dance is something we create that can never be taken away. From the speech that Laban gave in Berlin in

1936, we can understand how dance, in the end, reveals the true nature of our aspirations, which includes the desire for an individual voice within a larger healthy community. From his work with movement choirs and the Vienna Festival in 1929, we can remember that through analysis and synthesis, through science and art, we can become masters of our crafts, and we can fall in love with our work again.

Movement is behavior, is communication. Movement reveals who we are and how we are. Because of Laban's contributions, performers, therapists, educators, athletes, community leaders, anthropologists, coaches, somatics practitioners, choreographers and directors have a tool with which to observe and adapt, to research and practice, to understand and to interpret, and to create and define.

The body speaks: we can know ourselves; we can sense changes and we can grow. Effort reveals: we can communicate with each other; listen, adapt, attune, express clearly. Space is palpable: we can occupy, define, and we can find patterns in complexity. Shape brings us into relationships: we can take care of ourselves, we can bridge to others and we can accommodate, sculpt, and share.

If we followed Laban's lead, we would honor the planet and ourselves more richly and more clearly. We would dance with the birds and the stars, yes, but more importantly, we would dance with each other. In a world of pain and strife, that would be miraculous.

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