The Unforgettable Legacy of Rudolf Laban: An Interview with Dick McCaw (Emeritus Reader, Royal Holloway, University of London)

O inesquecível legado de Rudolf Laban: Uma entrevista com Dick McCaw (Emeritus Reader, Royal Holloway, Universidade de Londres)

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Abstract

Interview with Dick McCaw, Emeritus Reader in Performative Practices at Royal Holloway, University of London. Dick McCaw was a disciple of the dancer and choreographer Geraldine Stephenson (1925-2017), a former student and assistant of Rudolf Laban during his exile in England. This affiliation places McCaw in the second generation of Laban's disciples, which guarantees legitimacy to his original positions on Laban's thinking and its relationship with the teaching of the Art of Movement. The content of the interview, which is preceded by a biographical overview of the interviewee, was organized into three sections: i) Laban's unpublished writings recently translated and published by McCaw (2024a); ii) clarifications on the controversial historical period in which Laban, under the auspices of the Third Reich, in addition to coordinating a network of dance schools, was ballet director of the Berlin Opera House; iii) the teachings received from Geraldine Stephenson and the reverberations of Laban thinking in the present.

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Keywords

McCaw, Dick, Laban, Rudolf (1979-1958), Historiography of Dance, Teaching-learning Process, Performing Arts

Resumo

Entrevista realizada com Dick McCaw, *Emeritus Reader* em Práticas Performativas da Royal Holloway, Universidade de Londres. Dick McCaw foi discípulo da dançarina e coreógrafa Geraldine Stephenson (1925-2017), ex-aluna e assistente de Rudolf Laban durante o seu exílio em Inglaterra. Esta filiação posiciona McCaw na segunda geração de discípulos de Laban, garantindo legitimidade às suas perspetivas — bastante originais — sobre o pensamento labaniano e a sua relação com o ensino da Arte do Movimento. O conteúdo da entrevista, precedido por um panorama biográfico do entrevistado, está organizado em três seções: i) os escritos inéditos de Laban, recentemente traduzidos e publicados por McCaw (2024a); ii) os esclarecimentos sobre o controverso período histórico em que Laban, sob os auspícios do Terceiro Reich, para além de coordenar uma rede de escolas de dança, foi diretor de ballet da Casa de Ópera de Berlim; iii) os ensinamentos diretamente recebidos de Geraldine Stephenson e as reverberações do pensamento labaniano na atualidade.

Palavras-chave

McCaw, Dick, Laban, Rudolf (1979-1958), Historiografia da Dança, Ensino-Aprendizagem, Artes da Performance

Introduction[1]

At the apogee of his 70 years of age, recently completed, Dick McCaw has a fascinating life trajectory. His academic studies began in 1974 at the University of Cambridge (Trinity Hall), where he obtained, in 1978, a Bachelor of Arts with Honors in English Literature. His remarkable achievements must have surprised many people because academic excellence was not necessarily expected from someone born in Carlisle (Cumbria) who worked part-time as a bar-cellarman[2].

In his first year as an undergraduate, McCaw was invited to join the *Cambridge Medieval Players*, a troupe of amateur actors and acrobats led by Carl Heap (a fellow senior undergraduate at the time). The group performed on the streets of Cambridge for all kinds of audiences, especially tourists and townspeople. The idea of staging morality plays and comic interludes (among other genres) with minstrels, jugglers, fire-breathers, and stilt walkers was almost heretical to Cambridge's austere theatrical tradition. Fortunately, no one at the university knew about the existence of his *medieval players*, which prevented an inquisitorial prosecution.

The *Cambridge Medieval Players* concluded their activities in 1977 after a short tour of East Anglia and Oxford, followed by a five-week season at the monumental *Edinburgh Festival Fringe*[3]. The following year, McCaw joined the newly founded *Actors Touring Company* as a stage musician (classical guitarist). During his time with the company, he not only learned to play banjo, mandolin, and vihuela, but also embarked on his professional career as a producer.

His success was guaranteed with the *Actors Touring Company* (which remains in full activity). However, driven by a desire to recapture the "cosmic dimension" of his former university troupe (McCaw, 2001) and to research a

1 The information presented in this introduction was primarily drawn from the first part of my interview with Dick McCaw, in which we discussed some biographical aspects of his career from its very beginning. Due to the length of this section (59 min), it will not be included in this production.

2 McCaw remarked that people from the North of England are often discriminated against by Southerners, who perceive them as lacking culture or intelligence (a situation that closely parallels the social context in Brazil).

3 See Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society (2025).

more innovative and experimental scenic language, McCaw decided to leave this company. He founded, along with Carl Heap, in 1980, the *Medieval Players*. Everyone around him thought he was crazy for leaving a secure and prestigious job to create a new company in uncertain times. Nevertheless, he was confident that Margaret Thatcher's political ideas would demolish the obsolete cultural structures at the time and open up new opportunities for emerging groups.

The bold decision proved to be exceptionally successful. The *Medieval Players* became part of the country's cultural agenda, enabling McCaw to ensure his livelihood, while contributing to the development of an innovative scenic language. For some time, he remained on stage playing the lute. However, as the company's success grew, it became increasingly necessary for him to take on full responsibility for production, a position he held until 1990, when he left the group to pursue other projects.

Between 1989 and 2001, already established as a producer, McCaw assumed the role of director of the *International Workshop Festival*[4], an artistic event featuring workshops, talks, presentations, and demonstrations (but never performances) led by prominent figures from the international contemporary scene (actors, directors, dancers, choreographers, circus artists, puppeteers, and martial arts masters). Whenever possible, he tried to participate in the workshops, a very intense experience that remains alive in his body.

During the pre-production of the penultimate edition of this festival, McCaw met the dancer and choreographer Geraldine Stephenson (1925-2017), a former student of Laban and his assistant at the renowned *Art of Movement Studio* in Manchester, opened in 1946 by Lisa Ullmann and Sylvia Bodmer. This encounter marked a turning point for McCaw. Between 2001 and 2007, under Miss Stephenson's guidance, he immersed himself in Laban's aesthetic-pedagogical world, attending 211 private classes, each lasting three hours, all provided free of charge.

McCaw became an assistant to Geraldine Stephenson in workshops and seminars, and she, whenever possible, supervised his teaching work, which he began in 2000 at the Royal Holloway, University of London (RHUL). The commitment and generosity of his master, whom he met when she was 75 years old (and he, 45), still amazes him today. This is not surprising to us because Geraldine Stephenson with her "genius" (McCaw, 2009), recognized that her young and "flat as a door" student – as she would say, referring to his physical limitations in the dance field (McCaw, 2024a) – had tremendous potential. She also knew that a fertile mind like his would be worth nurturing. All this investment of time, love, and energy has yielded and continues to yield very fruitful results.

It is important to mention another person who had a decisive influence on McCaw's research and who taught him how to think about movement: Warren Lamb (1923-2014), a former student of Laban, with whom he maintained an ongoing conversation for 12 years[5] (by the way, it was Geraldine Stephenson who introduced him to Lamb).

Being in charge of the production of the *International Workshop Festival* as its artistic director allowed McCaw to organize the participation of Dominique Dupuy (1930-2024), one of the most emblematic figures of French contemporary dance[6]. By coincidence, we both had the opportunity to study with *Monsieur* Dupuy at the *Mas de la Danse*, a contemporary dance research center located in the South of France (Fontvieille), directed by him and his life and artistic partner, Françoise Dupuy (1925-2022)[7], between 1996 and 2007.

McCaw was so impressed by the French master that he wrote the essay *Flying not Falling: Dancing with Dominique Dupuy* (McCaw, 2000). I became aware of McCaw's academic work through this publication. I sent him a message a few months after *Monsieur* Dupuy's death (May 1, 2024), and McCaw promptly responded, accepting my invitation for a virtual chat. Unexpectedly, and to

4 For more information about this Festival, see McCaw (2014).

5 Fortunately, a part of this lengthy and delightful conversation was published in a book (McCaw, 2006).

6 A part of this workshop accomplished by the International Workshop Festival is available in McCaw (2024c).

7 For more information about Françoise Dupuy, see Madureira (2023).

my delight, this first meeting led to several more, and we were able to record a lively interview and produce some audiovisual works.

McCaw abandoned his career as a producer in 2001 to dedicate himself entirely to his doctorate in English Literature, Language, and Translation Studies at the Department of Drama and Theatre at RHUL. His thesis, *Bakhtin's Other Theatre*, was defended in 2004 and later published as a book (McCaw, 2016)[8]. McCaw emphasizes that his doctoral research began with the experiments and research conducted alongside Carl Heap at the *Medieval Players*, a time marked by great complicity and enthusiasm (McCaw, 2001).

McCaw has worked as a visiting researcher at several universities in England, giving seminars and workshops. Between 2007 and 2024, he served as a *Senior Lecturer* in the Department of Theatre, Drama and Dance at RHUL. At the end of 2024, McCaw was appointed *Emeritus Reader* at the same institution.

The insatiable desire to explore the secrets of the art of movement – specifically its teaching – led McCaw to pursue other fields of study (not necessarily academics). In 2007, he became a Feldenkrais Practitioner, and in 2016, he became a Tai Chi Chuan instructor (under the guidance of *Sifu* Gary Wragg), a martial art that he practices daily and sometimes teaches. In a way, both studies were integrated into his classes, seminars, and writings on body movement.

Dick McCaw is a prolific writer. Over the past 20 years, he has published numerous articles, essays, book chapters, editorials, and five books: *An Eye for Movement: Warren Lamb's Career in Movement Analysis* (2006), *The Laban Source Book* (2011a), *Bakhtin and Theatre: Dialogues with Stanislavski, Meyerhold and Grotowski* (2016), *Training the Actor's Body: A Guide* (2018), *Rethinking the Actor's Body: Dialogues with Neuroscience (*2020), and *The Art of Movement: Rudolf Laban's Unpublished Writings* (2024a).

This latest book, which is primarily discussed in the following interview, results from his passion for archival research, specifically the Laban Collection, organized by John Hodgson and housed in the Brotherton Library at the University of Leeds[9]. For McCaw, searching through an archive is like crossing a minefield: perhaps nothing will happen, and we will be overcome by ennui, but maybe we will inadvertently trigger the explosion of a "cultural bomb" (McCaw, 2013).

The way McCaw systematizes and interprets the original manuscripts of Laban (and other sources), influenced by the teachings he received from Geraldine Stephenson and Warren Lamb, challenges the establishment of the official Laban institutions. This perspective, a kind of hermeneutic operation, corroborates the notion of Walter Benjamin (1940/2020), for whom we must "brush history against the grain."

With McCaw, besides being captivated by his charisma, we realized there is still so much to learn about Laban and his thoughts, which motivated us to produce the following interview, warmly welcomed by the editors of this journal (RED). We organized the material into three sections, each covering a major theme: *i*) Laban's unpublished writings, recently translated and published by McCaw (2024a); *ii*) clarifications regarding the controversial historical period during which Laban, under the auspices of the Third Reich, served as ballet director at the Berlin Opera House; *iii*) the teachings directly received from Geraldine Stephenson and the repercussions of Laban's thought today.

At the editor's suggestion, Professor Maria João Alves, in order to make the production more accessible to worldwide readers, we did not translate the interview transcription (into Portuguese), which McCaw kindly reviewed (Figure 1).

We hope this production inspires many dialogues between artists, educators, and researchers not only in the dance field but also in theater, music, physical education, and among all those interested in the legacy left by Rudolf Laban, which is undoubtedly unforgettable.

8 This book was translated into Portuguese by Larissa Cavalcanti and published by Hucitec in 2024.

9 McCaw became aware of this archive through playwright Donald Howarth (1931-2020), a former student of Laban, who was introduced to him by Geraldine Stephenson.

Figure 1
Dick McCaw and José Rafael Madureira

Note: Screenshot taken some days after the interview (Zoom platform, Jan. 20, 2025).

[Part 1 - October 21, 2024]

José Rafael Madureira: Hello *maestro*! I'd like to thank you deeply for this opportunity to talk to you. I want to start this interview by asking why weren't the astonishing texts by Laban published in your latest book, *The Art of Movement* (2024a), published before? It makes no sense.

Dick McCaw: I think that must come down to archives. This material was in an archive. First of all, you remember I talked about North and South. Well, the archive that I've been working in is in the north[10]. And although it seems very silly, I think precisely because it's not near London, it's 200 miles from London, and it's a little bit further for people to go. People simply haven't looked into the archive. I think that's one reason. I think the second reason is the feeling, certainly in England, that what has been published about Laban and by Laban is sufficient, and we don't need to know anymore. We know what we know. Why would we need to know anymore? Especially when it's in German. Laban wrote five books in English[11], with the help of some people[12]. And that's established a kind of canon. There is a pedagogy based around it. There are still people teaching that kind of Laban, and any other kind of Laban doesn't really fit in. So, it might have been more sensible to have gathered the texts, most of which are in German, but some start in German, going to French, then coming back into German again. It might have been better for it to have been published first in German because they haven't been seen in Germany[13]. But I think the second point is possibly, certainly in an English context. I'm interested in what an American would say because they haven't built their concept of Laban around, as it were, the canon of those books written in English. I think because of Irmgard Bartenieff and her Laban Institute of Movement Studies in New York, they have a different perspective on Laban. So, possibly there might be more of a market in the U.S., there might be more interest in these unpublished works. But I think that is an answer to

10 Brotherton Library, University of Leeds (Hodgson & Laban, 1891–2001).

11 These five books are: *Effort* (1947), co-authored with Frederick C. Lawrence; *Modern Educational Dance* (1948); *The Mastery of Movement on Stage* (1950); *Choreutics* (1966); and *A Vision of Dynamic Space* (1984).

12 Especially Lisa Ullmann, Laban's former student in Germany and his primary assistant in England.

13 Four books by Laban remain untranslated: *Die Welt des Tänzers* (1920), *Choreographie* (1926), *Gymnastik und Tanz* (1926), and *Kindes Gymnastik und Tanz* (1926).

your question. First, cultural snobbishness, second, well, what do we need them for anyway? And thirdly, nobody's taking the time to go into the archive in the first place, so nobody knew these texts existed. So again, it's just something, once I get my teeth into something, I can't let it go. And I am going to continue working on translations with Pat Lehner, who did most of the translations in *The Art of Movement*. I'm going to continue working with Pat while I can find funds and have energy because there's a lot more. There's certainly another book's worth. I will probably create a website and post other unpublished writings by Laban on the website. And then maybe we'll be able to create a bibliography of everything that Laban wrote.

JRM: By the way, you dedicate your book *The Art of Movement* to Viv Bridson[14] and Everly Dörr. I didn't find much information about these two women. Could you tell me who they are and why did you pay this tribute to them?

Dick McCaw: Viv Bridson is the older woman of the two women. She's a German speaker. She worked at the *Folkwang Schule* in Essen, and without her administrative activity, without her ability to read and write German, John Hodgson[15] never would have been able to do anything in terms of gathering the material in his archives. At the beginning of *The Art of Movement*, I do mention and pay huge tribute to Viv because not only did she do all that work and not only did she was absolutely essential to John Hodgson... I don't think it's an exaggeration to say scandalously she was never, ever acknowledged as being this hugely important figure in Hodgson's archive. I just feel, again, women have been erased from the history of activities by men, by selfish, egocentric men. The case of Evelyn Dörr is quite different. Evelyn is somebody who has tirelessly searched through the archives, both in Cologne, the archive there, and also in Leipzig, and archives in Switzerland. She has produced volumes of Laban's letters. She has produced a comprehensive and beautifully illustrated volume about all the performances that Laban did and, of course, she did a kind of biography of him as well, which was actually published in English[16]. So, she's an incredibly important scholar, in my opinion, or maybe not so much a scholar, but as a researcher, an archival researcher. If a book is coming out about materials drawn from an archive of Laban materials, for the two reasons I've just given, these two women deserved to be remembered, applauded, and recognized. That's why I've dedicated the book to the both of them.

JRM: When you talk, we can see how passionate you are with the ideas of Laban. Why does he still rouse and thrill researchers and artists all over the world until today, more than one hundred years after the launch of his first book[17], not yet translated?

Dick McCaw: I would love to say that he does. I think the only person I can really speak for is myself, because apart from you and apart from Pat Lehner, with whom I translate, I don't meet many people from, let's call it *Labanland* (Hahaha!) The people I knew in terms of Laban are Geraldine Stephenson, my teacher, Warren Lamb, and there are others I can mention, but they have all died. There is an initiative at the University of Surrey called The Labanarium[18]. They have a very particular approach to Laban, as someone who is interested in Rosicrucian thinking. Now, I know that still have resonance with people. It's not something that hugely interests me, so that's not a dialogue I can really take part in. What interests me... I'm not answering your question, I'm afraid, because it's not really a subject that I know much about. I'm a bit of a solo researcher here, and the people who supported me in my research have sadly died[19]. And I haven't found many interlocuters who have shown any interest in my work at all. As I say, there's a school of thinking about Laban which doesn't really engage me, so that's not a

14 A rare interview with her is available in Bridson (2006).

15 *John Hodgson* (1927-1997) was an English researcher responsible for the Laban collection housed in the Brotherton Library archives, which took 32 years to complete. He published two books: *Rudolf Laban: An Introduction to his Work and Influence* (1990), co-authored with Valery Preston-Dunlop, and *Mastering Movement: The Life and Work of Rudolf Laban* (2001).

16 Döor (2008).

17 Laban (1920).

18 For more information about this initiative, see Labanarium (2016-2025).

19 Reference to Gordon Curl, Lorn Primrose, and Walli Meier.

conversation I feel like I can take part in either. So, I'm sorry, that's not a very comprehensive answer (Hahaha!), because all I can say is I can't answer that question!

JRM: As you mentioned in your talk about your book, the audiovisual review we produced together[20], that there are many different Labans (you mentioned 15 or 16), in other words, many perspectives about him as a teacher, as a choreographer, as a thinker, as an artist and so on. Well, which one do you like most and why?

Dick McCaw: What continues to fascinate me about Laban can be summed up in a story that Warren Lamb used to tell me, which was set in Manchester in the 1940s. Remember, the Art of Movement Studio opened in a town which had been really heavily bombed by the Germans, and it was very poor. Laban had got this tiny studio on Oxford Road in Manchester. He was already involved in his industrial work[21], which was absolutely fascinating. His eye for movement has been developed since 1910. So, here we've got a man who for over 35 years had been fascinated by looking at how people move. He's looking at these men who are stacking things onto the back of a lorry, and they see him watching. They must have seen that the way he was looking at them was very critical. And they said to him, "Well, can you do any better?"; and Laban said, "Yes." Remember, he was an old man, really, almost broken physically. So, this old man saying to these young, rough workers, "Yeah, I could do better than that", and he suggested how to pack the back of the lorry more intelligently. There must have been something in the authority of his voice or the obvious sense of what he was saying, or both. They tried it. It worked. He was happy. They were happy. This, for me, is the Laban that intrigues me. I know that there's another dimension to Laban's thinking, more abstract, certainly more spiritual. That's not quite my bag, but Laban's feel for intelligent movement is what intrigues me. You get this also from Laban's cartoons. Laban's feel for the works, the peculiarities of human movement, because I think that's what a caricature is, it's just grasping a certain bodily posture or way of holding yourself that just is that person. And he could just get it perfectly. While I marvel at the draftsmanship of Laban's geometrical experiments, they leave me slightly cold. I mean, I admire them, yes. I couldn't dream of doing them. But what really fascinates me, what I would have wanted to talk to him about would be that, and his feeling for the shades and color of movement. The poet Dylan Thomas talked about *the color of talking*[22]. I think Laban would have talked about *the color of moving*. And he was an artist. He started as an artist. The part of him that I love and admire, that I am endlessly fascinated by, is this feeling for movement, this eye for movement that he has. Not surprisingly, that's why I want to call my next book *An Eye for Movement*.

JRM: You said in the dedication of your *Laban Source Book* that Geraldine Stephenson, who introduced you to Laban in the practical aspect of movement, taught you *how to learn to move*. I think this is precisely the foundation of Laban thinking. Why can we say that Laban teaches us *how to learn to move*?

Dick McCaw: Because he's passionate about movement, I think. It's very interesting when you think that Laban was born in 1879, and everybody thinks that he was born in something like, I don't know, at least ten years later. But, in fact, he was 31 years old when he started his first movement studio [c. 1910]. There's much thought about what he did in Paris at the turn of the century when he was with his first wife [Martha Fricke]. But there is one piece of proof I have, which I've quoted in *The Art of Movement*, which is he definitely acted in a play by Maurice Maeterlinck[23]. It fascinates me that one of his first movement tasks was him being an actor in a play (Hahaha!). Normally, we think about him only doing dance. I think his first real artistic gift was as an artist, as a visual artist, not as a mover. So, when he came to movement, first of all, he was an untrained mover, somebody who instinctually

20 Available in McCaw (2024b).

21 Reference to the study and analysis of body movements performed by factory workers.

22 Reference to the poem *Once it was the Colour of Saying*, published in the poetry anthology *The Colour of Saying* (1945), edited by Ralph Maud.

23 *Maurice Maeterlinck* (1862-1949), Belgian playwright and poet.

felt something about movement. And, you know, maybe it's that that gives him his slightly messianic approach. Because, I mean, for him, if you look at the title of the first book, *Die Welt des Tänzers*, *The World of the Dancers*, it's almost if the dancer was a philosopher … and it's certain he did read Nietzsche. Not a lot is certain about Laban because he mythologized himself and allowed himself to be mythologised by others, which is even more dangerous. But he certainly believed that movement was about more than simply moving, more than simply dancing, I mean, in your fascination with Dominique Dupuy and bringing up that article that he wrote[24], it is, in Dominique's words: "Making visible something which is invisible", and I think the invisible thing that Laban was after was, and I know you are going to ask further questions about this, but *the joy in movement*. I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that he thought you will become a better person if you become more connected with yourself through movement. And he didn't make a method of it, he didn't make a theory of it. Again, I use the word messianic because it is about a belief rather than some systematic study, do you know? Which means he'll come out with some extraordinary comments sometimes and some extraordinary claims, which really unbacked up by facts. But I think however critical one becomes of Laban, and certainly in my dialogues with one his students, Warren Lamb, although our dialogues sometimes could be quite critical, we always came back to the fact that we wouldn't be talking about this or like this without Laban... he was the person who started, certainly in my mind, a whole lot of conversations. I think a lot of people look to the sheer astonishing achievement of a man in his 60s, when he became to England, adapting his ideas to a completely different field of activities: industrial movement, and effectively so. His conception of movement was really quite vast, and I think he wanted to share it, especially in the case of children's education... He had a big influence on the education of primary school children in England. Joan Russell wrote a book based on Laban's approach to the education of primary school children[25]. He had a big influence on English theatre, especially the work of Joan Littlewood of Theatre Workshop. And then from her, that went into drama schools, particularly and continuingly, the drama school East 15 in London. As I say, there wasn't a program, but there was... It's even more vague than a vision. It's just he saw movement in everything, and he saw everything in movement.

JRM: But Laban is mainly known as the pioneer of modern dance, isn't that so?

Dick McCaw: Yes, but if you look at maybe one of the people most influenced by him, arguably Pina Bausch, and you look in her mature works and in her movement vocabulary... I can imagine, that... I mean, they're very simple movements, sometimes very pedestrian movements. And certainly, from some of the descriptions of his movement choirs, the movements were very, very simple. So, it was an art of movement rather than formalized dance. But he did turn his hand, when he was head of dance at the Berlin Opera, to ballet. And looking at some of the reviews, quite successfully so.

JRM: I see. Well, you just said that Laban was after the joy of movement. Could you elaborate a little more?

Dick McCaw: Why Laban would have focused upon the joy of movement, or the art of movement or free dance is anybody's guess. I certainly have no evidence. I found no letters or recorded conversations where Laban talked about his childhood. It seemed to be if *A Life for Dance*[26] has any bearing on the subject. He loved being in the hills around Bosnia Herzegovina, around Sarajevo, and had quite a joyful childhood. But again, what was he doing in the hills? Moving. You could almost say he was already dancing. And when he saw the dancers of the dervishes, it's very interesting how Mary Wigman also talks about the joy of turning and of jumping. I don't think Laban technically could have been much of a dancer because he had no training. It was too late. So, I would imagine he was quite earthbound in his dance. But I think if he's talking about free dance, if he's talking about the joy of

24 Reference to the essay *An impulse from within* (Dupuy, 1996) and the audiovisual production narrated by Dick McCaw, available at Hop musical (2024d).

25 Russell (1987).

26 Laban (1975).

dance, again, he's talking about that general vision. And I don't think it... I've no evidence at all that it relates to him using this vision of dance to get over something in his childhood. I think probably quite the reverse. He always loved moving. He loved moving as a kid. He wanted to see kids enjoying movement. It was, as I say, part of a... a really deeply... I hesitate to say the word philosophical belief in the benefit of dance to the whole person, but I think I am going to say it. I mean, why does he quote Nietzsche quite so much? I think because Nietzsche also saw in the figure of the dancer this person who was free in every sense of the word. And Laban certainly was, certainly in his early years, quite unconventional as well. I mean, now we might call him a complete sexist in that he was quite happy to have two children by two women at the same time and cheerfully tell them he was going to have nothing to do with the children's upbringing at all. But I would imagine he would have defended that by saying: "Well, this is me also being free". Laban would state that everybody has some kind of dance. I remember Geraldine Stephenson, my first movement teacher, describing the first gathering of what became the *Laban Guild of Movement*[27] And she said there were just so many different people there, including a psychologist with a really outrageous waistcoat. She always remembers that waistcoat. But the idea was that everybody can move. And I would go further and say, not only can they, he knows they can, but they *should* move. And he's going to do everything in his power to help them so that they realize it's not something specialist just for dancers. It's about being a human being, then that brings us back in a loop to the fact that it's something like a philosophy.

JRM: And what is the most important lesson you have learned from Laban's legacy?

Dick McCaw: I think I've almost answered that question already. It's Laban who could adapt his thinking about movement to a completely different field. Apparently, his work in industry started when he was in Dartington. People picking plums were after a certain while they started picking green plums rather than red plums. And there was just an instinct he had that they probably just needed a rest. They were actually functionally going colorblind. He suggested that they come down from the ladder, have a five-minute break, and then go back up again. It worked. When you think of the work that he did... In *The Art of Movement*, I have given some of the reports, toward the end of the book, that he did for various industries, and what fascinates me is the detail he goes into in describing and analyzing the movements of the workers. What also interests me is his teaching at that time in the *Art of Movement Studio*. He worked with skittles. I got that from an interview conducted by John Hodgson with Jean Newlove[28], who talked, I think, about those 'bloody skittles' (Hahaha!). So, she clearly found it a little bit tiresome. But for Laban, there weren't categorical differences between, let's say, teaching somebody more interested in theater and helping somebody who was working on a production line to find a better way of doing something. And that's not just about movement, that's about really understanding human behavior and recognizing when looking at somebody, they are *that* kind of a mover. And certainly, in publicity that was produced for Laban's industrial work, it was about the right job for the right worker, it's about matching one to the other. And I think that's a fantastic application of his insight into the human movement. So that, I think, is the thing that really appeals to me. I would not go along the line which certainly was suggested in the late 1940s and early 1950s of movement psychology. Laban was a great opener of boxes, Pandora's boxes as well. Although there is, I think indisputably, a field of study called Movement Psychology, which is about how we can tell from somebody's way of moving, what's going on in their head. I honestly don't think Laban had quite got it (Hahaha!). He was interested in it, and we ought to be intelligent and realistic enough to realize what he left us in terms of that subject wasn't enough to say that he did movement psychology. It was an interest; it was never really followed up. But it's something that certainly Fran-

27 Association founded in 1947 in which McCaw is an honorary member (Laban Guild International, 2025).

28 *Jean Newlove* (1923-2017). English drama and dance teacher. She was the first to become Laban's assistant in England, initially working to observe factory workers. She published two books: *Laban for Actors and Dancers* (1993) and *Laban for All* (2004).

cis la Barre[29], who is a psychologist, developed. It's certainly something that Warren Lamb recognized in Francis la Barre's work and which had a very, very close relation to Laban's field of interest. But we mustn't say, I think it's silly to say, Laban was a movement psychologist. He wasn't. He was somebody with an incredibly empathic feel for other people's movements.

[Part 2 – November 8, 2024]

JRM: Good morning, *maestro*! In this second part of the interview, I ask for some historical clarification about these dark times, this controversial period from the Weimar Republic to the Third Reich. In the novel *Mephisto* (1936), Klaus Mann makes a very accurate description of the circumstances and the horror that artists - and everybody else who was against the dictatorial government - were facing during the Nazi take over Germany. It was a very complex social and political context; it was not a simple decision: accept the new regime or go into exile; it would be silly to judge the artists who supported the Nazis (like Mary Wigman) without a deep analysis of the situation, case by case. If someone is in a very high position, just like Hendrik Höfgen, the protagonist of Mann's novel, it is not easy to give up everything and start a new career, from the very beginning, in a foreign country. So, did Laban have a chance to stay in the *Staatsoper Berlin* as a ballet director and make a huge success under the patronage of the Nazis, or he got fired and, because of that, he left Germany?

Dick McCaw: It's recorded that Laban left his post at the Berlin Opera, I think it was in 1932, and he certainly wasn't fired. He just left. Now, of course, one's working from documents and there's nearly 90 years between then and now, so one doesn't quite know, but I didn't get the impression that he was sacked. I would hazard a guess that it became a less and less attractive proposition for him to be there because although his first and second seasons were successful, I think there was a sense that he had done what he could with ballet. As for his relationship with the Nazis, Martin Gleisner[30] does report that Laban and he had a conversation and Gleisner said, "Look, you stay, but I, as a social democrat and as a Jew, absolutely have to go." There are other accounts which I've mentioned in my book *The Art of Movement*, where Laban turned a very strategically blind eye to the employment of Jewish people in his office. I've forgotten the name of the person, but she said, "He knew I was Jewish. He knew I had a doctorate." And why on earth would a woman with a doctorate be working in a secretarial post? It doesn't make sense. But as long as she didn't say anything, he didn't ask any questions. There's also an anecdote that there was swastika bunting, little flags, around one of his summer schools, and he told them to tear down the swastikas. And he was told, "Tear down the swastikas and you'll be imprisoned today." I think my general impression about his decision to stay indicates how there's something childlike about Laban, that he was absolutely obsessed with what he was doing, and anything that fell outside the field of what he was doing was of little interest to him. And he was fantastically busy at that time. Consider how, certainly in the 1920s, and still to a degree in the 1930s, he had a vast network of Laban schools which, although he didn't teach in them, he monitored them. Gleisner helped him monitor them. He was still developing dance notation. He was still a practicing choreographer. He was still interested in developing his theories of movement. He never stopped. So, all this to say, he was fantastically busy and while the Nazis didn't disturb him, he was happy to continue. He wasn't interested in what was going on around him. There is one document by Felicia Sachs[31], who said that, having had dinner with Hitler and Goebbels, Laban phoned her up at something like 10:30 at night, and said, "Can I come round?" She said, "It's late." He said, "I need to come round." He

29 American psychologist and psychoanalyst, author of the works: *On Moving and Being Moved: Nonverbal Behavior in Clinical Practice* (2001) and *The First Year and the Rest of Your Life: Movement, Development, and Therapeutic Change* (2011), co-authored with Ruella Frank.

30 *Martin Gleisner* (1897-1983). German actor and former student of Laban. He specialized in working with amateurs (lay dance). After leaving Germany in 1933, he never taught dance again. He published: Tanz für Alle (1928).

31 Laban's friend and former student. Part of her testimony about the Holocaust, recorded in 1986, is available at United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (1986).

came round to her house and said, "These guys are mad. They are killing people and talking without any sense of it being obscene and wrong. They're talking about people being killed, people being wiped out." So, the expressions were belittling of the act of murder. It was like they had the power and people could just be, well, let's use a word like "taken out." And certainly, that is proof that Laban at a certain point was aware of what was going on and that they were evil, which makes the decision...

JRM: And what could you tell us about Laban's movement choir performance created for the Olympic Games opening ceremony that Joseph Goebbels hated but it was made to perfection by Leni Riefenstahl two-part film Olympia (*Festival of Beauty* and *Festival of Nations*, 1938)?

Dick McCaw: He agreed to do this massive movement choir – *Vom Tauwind und der Neuen Freude* (From the Spring Wind and the New Joy) – to celebrate the opening of the Olympic stadium, the Dietrich Eckhart stadium. He made the decision to stress the individual, the person, the personal, the idiosyncratic in movement, so as to say, "Look, this man is taller and is younger than that other one and he'll have a different way of interpreting this movement vocabulary, this very simple movement vocabulary. But that's as it should be." I can't make you dance like me or make me dance like you because if I did, neither would enjoy it. That *Freude*[32] that you mentioned before would be completely lost. But also, the humanity of the movement would be completely vitiated by any imposition of a rule. Now that's precisely what Goebbels hated about this massive 1000-strong movement choir. Choirs were drawn from across Germany, all of whom had been practicing for months for this huge occasion. But if one looks at the program – and there is the original program in the Leeds archive – which was entitled *Wir Tanzen* (We Dance), Laban's comments are almost suicidal in that he stresses the personal over the collective Nazi aesthetic. And that's, I think, why Goebbels without any hesitation canceled it ... I mean, his diary entry is very, very brief. His diaries are published and translated into English as well[33]. It may have been Laban's vision of Germany, but it certainly wasn't Goebbels's. I would consider it not unreasonable to say Laban's last hurrah was a doomed production. How could he think for a minute Goebbels would accept this? I mean, it would have been magnificent. It would have been so spectacular. But I think by that time Laban was alert to the fact that the Nazis and he weren't actually going to be able to work together. I mean, it's the only way I can explain him writing something that was so sure of upsetting the Nazi authorities.

JRM: So, he was naive, or he intentionally was trying to provoke the Nazis with this performance, a sort of political statement through the dancing movement?

Dick McCaw: You can interpret his aesthetic and his philosophy as being a political act. In its content, it wasn't political, but it was in the fact that it flatly contradicted the vision and values of the Nazi Party. Obviously, as an act of publishing, it was political in that it must certainly have been provocative. He cannot have known that would incense Goebbels. I mean, the Nazis weren't ambiguous about their policy. It was pretty clear what they believed in. Everything has to be for the Party, has to be an expression of the vision of the Nazi Party. Their aesthetic was really quite clear. I might have accused him of being naive in the early days, let us say in 1933 and 1934, maybe even 1935... but in 1936? No! This was somebody who I think knew precisely what he was doing. And he wouldn't have done it in isolation. I mean, you know, people would have looked at this and said, "Are you sure you want to publish this?" It was a big public event. What surprises me is that *Frau* Lieschke, his secretary, his very faithful secretary with whom he stayed after his disgrace, didn't advise him against publishing *Wir Tanzen.* By the way, we have that from *Frau* Lieschke's visitors' book that he was there after his disgrace, in 1937. But she was a member of the Nazi Party. And I don't know why she didn't say something, because she knew she was a signed-up member of the party. But I don't think it was naiveté. I think it was a conscious provocation. I think people forget also the irony of the title of this massive movement choir: *From the Spring Wind*, *The Thawing Wind*, *New Joy*. It was pretty clear af-

32 *Joy* (noun) in German.

33 Goebbels (1983).

ter *Kristallnacht*[34] and his own experiences that the wind was a harsh bitter East wind that cut your bones and there is no new joy coming at all. So, again, I come back to the point that I've made earlier. The value of interviews like this is they make you think. One thing this interview has made me think was: what is the nature of Laban's approach to dance? And I'm finding it hard because It's... I've used the word 'philosophy'... 'vision'... It's beautiful to think that he did see an alternative in movement. But I don't think there was anything but irony, a real sad irony, that as the Nazi party gained greater confidence and control of the German people, things are only going to get worse and there was no thawing wind of spring, and there was no possibility of a new joy and yet, as I said earlier, there's something gloriously, stupidly human about hope that despite every indication, despite of it running right in front of our face, we still say: "No, no, honestly, things will get better. It can't be as bad as it seems..."; and yet, of course, it got worse and worse. But I haven't written this anywhere or thought about it, but you brought up the word *Freude* and now, think about that word *Freude*, that word joy... I remember, of course, Beethoven's Ode to Joy: *Freude, Freude!*[35] It makes me cry. I think about the bravery and the stupidity of that cultural gesture. I don't see people saying that. I don't understand why they can't see what Laban was doing there. I mean, for fuck's sake, it's obvious, isn't it? That wasn't him siding with the Nazi party in any way. And you have to be ideologically completely blind to see it as some kind of appeasement to the Nazis.

JRM: Definitely! But what do you mean when you talk about Laban's disgrace? I think I didn't get the picture. Did the Nazis start to persecute him or something like that?

Dick McCaw: It meant the closure of every Laban school. It meant that mention of Laban was really discouraged hugely. I mean, I think the big thing was the closure of the schools and it was said that Laban was imprisoned in a place, somewhere in South Germany, called Schloss Banz. And that's not true. There's a letter from him written from Schloss Banz, saying that he had a really... He was having a really nice time there and he was designing children's toys. Again, a man's ability just to turn an awful situation around and turn his hand to something quite different. But he wasn't imprisoned. And the next account we have of where he was, was, as I say, in *Frau* Lischke visitor's book, his secretary's visitors book, where he did a beautiful drawing of himself overwhelmed by books and papers[36]. And this was him working, he was obviously working on his archive. This was in April 1937 and then he got out of Germany in June 1937 because he was invited to Paris to be a judge in a dance competition.

JRM: So, after Laban's brutal cancellation, Mary Wigman takes over the orchestration of the Olympic Games ceremony, right? What really happened?

Dick McCaw: All we have is what he wrote in *Wir Tanzen* and anything else would be... We'd just be speculating. So, I honestly don't know. But yeah, I mean it's very easy for modern German scholars to attack Wigman and attack Laban for staying and not going immediately like Kurt Jooss did and like so many other dancers. But I don't know... Let me return to Felicia Sachs and her husband, I've already mentioned her as a great friend of Laban and a Jewish woman. In the correspondence with Laban and in interviews with John Hodgson, she said, "We didn't leave until 1937 because we just thought this guy is an idiot, this guy, Hitler, is an idiot. I mean, there's no way that he's going to be able to take power." Even though Goebbels had confiscated her husband's massive collection of film posters, they still stayed. I mean, I suppose there's something rather delightfully admirable about the human capacity for hope against every bit of evidence that's thrown at you. But I think if you knew you were definitely a target, like... like Jooss knew that he would be impriso-

34 Reference to Kristallnacht, or Night of Broken Glass, a violent attack organized by the Nazis on November 9th and 10th, 1938, in Germany. The event targeted synagogues and businesses owned by Jews. Approximately 90 Jews were murdered by the *Sturmabteilung*, under the command of Ernst Röhm.

35 Reference to Beethoven's 9th Symphony (Ode to Joy) and the beginning of the baritone solo, answered by the choir: *O Freunde, nicht diese Töne! Sondern laßt uns angenehmere anstimmen und freudenvollere. Freude! Freude!* [O friends, not these tones! Let us rather strike up more pleasant and more joyful ones. Joy! Joy!].

36 Reference to *figure 1* from the book *The Art of Movement* (McCaw, 2024a, p. 1).

ned or like say an artist like Kurt Schwitters[37] who knew that his son was any day now going to be arrested. Kurt Jooss got out within hours of the Gestapo arriving in the theater to arrest him. Laban, I don't think, had that immediate threat. Felicia Sachs and her husband, though her husband was imprisoned while Goebbels stole all those posters, still didn't feel that it was sufficient to make them leave. I mean, it's unbelievable, really, but I think they had some kind of sympathetic understanding of the situation of that time... It's so easy to be wise after the event and make harsh judgments, you know. I don't know what I'd do. I know I'd be frightened. I know I'd be very frightened, but possibly so frightened I wouldn't say or do anything. I don't know. Just thinking about it makes me very frightened. But to leave my family, to leave all my friends, to leave my house. Schwitters didn't leave until the last minute, until he knew his son was going to be arrested, so, he moved with his son, leaving his wife to look after his house and his collection of paintings. It's so easy to be wise 90 years after the event.

[Part 3 – December 16, 2024]

JRM: Good afternoon, *maestro*! I want to start our third and last part of the interview with a question about Laban, the teacher. It is rare to see Laban's dance teaching principles in dance schools, especially in Brazil, which has an extensive network of private dance schools. The only educational environment that dialogues a little with Laban's approach to dance, to learn dance without being restricted to mechanical and pre-defined steps, is at university (undergraduate courses in Dance, Theater, and Physical Education). Besides, just two books written by Laban have been translated into Portuguese: *The Mastery of Movement* and *Modern Educational Dance* (they had just one unique edition, which was published many decades ago). Why don't most dance teachers worldwide know anything about Laban's Art of Movement, or if they know something about it, they deny it, considering it unfashionable?

Dick McCaw: You should bear in mind that I'm not a dancer, first of all. And the other thing is, I'm a really rather poor mover. When I had my first lessons with Geraldine Stephenson, I didn't think she could believe that somebody could not understand movement or dance, seemingly completely, as I did. When I proposed to be her assistant, she said, "You can't be my assistant because you're as flat as a door, you don't know how to move." Well, she certainly found out how little I knew how to move when she started teaching me. But what she taught me was a joy. I'm unapologetic about agreeing with you about this word *Freude*, because my life was completely changed by her. Not only do I take joy in the not wholly beautiful or fluid or by any means aesthetic movements that I made, but I do believe that if dance is for everybody, even somebody like me has some capacity for movement. And the job of Geraldine was to find how I could move and to encourage that movement. She gave me 211 three-hour lessons, towards the end of which when I improvised for her, I delighted in it, and she delighted in my delight. When I started teaching at Royal Holloway, University of London, she would come to my classes, and she would come to my workshop after the class. So, she would be there for something like 10 hours. I think she was so delighted to find that her vision of dance teaching was being continued. She got this vision from Laban himself, because she was taught by him at the Art of Movement Studio, which opened in 1946 in Manchester. Then there was the Northern Theatre School, which was opened in Bradford by Esme Church. And Laban was invited by Esme Church on Thursdays to teach her drama students. But: A) Laban hated getting up in mornings and, B) he was quite often ill, he had typhoid over 1948 and 1949. So, Geraldine had to take his place. I've interviewed people who were taught by her and one educationalist said: "Laban gave me the eyes to see human beings in all their manifold variety". That's Dorothy Heathcote[38]. And Dorothy just loved Laban because he would bring pictures in and put them on the floor and say: "Dance that!" He would just make the

37 *Kurt Schwitters* (1887-1948) was a German visual artist known for his work in Dadaism and Merz art. Persecuted by the Gestapo, he fled to England, where he lived in obscurity and poverty until his death.

38 *Dorothy Heathcote* (1926-2011) was an English drama teacher who created several approaches to teaching theater in schools, most notably the "*teacher in role*" and the "*mantle of expert*" techniques.

most extraordinary propositions to his students to see what they would make of it. I mean, sometimes he would drill you, particularly on the diagonal scale, which I have learned from interviews with both Geraldine and one of his other students of the Art of Movement Studio, Warren Lamb, with whom I worked for 12 years. Both told me how Laban got completely fixated. One session on the diagonal scale, which is very hard to do. And they said we could hardly walk the following day. So, it wasn't all play and adventure. There were sometimes when he was quite strict. And there was once an American woman who, when working on the A scale, came to Laban and said: "I understand what it is you're doing. So, you go one and then two and then three." [in a very mechanical way, like a fitness workout]. And Laban went mental. He completely lost it. Because actually, what Laban wants is that sense of rising up here [high-right] and then that sense of finding the center line behind you and going as deep as possible [deep-backward] and then, from that, sculping up and coming up cross yourself on table plane [left-forward] and it's that feeling of these *felt lines in space*, that's my expression, not his, but probably very influenced by Warren Lamb. But really your question is less about these models of good practice and how Laban has been subjected to a kind of a stereotype approach. Now, I think this must happen a lot with people who are multiform, who think across a variety of disciplines, but disciples who follow have to make it simpler. They have to make it something that can be easily repeated I mean, I think... (Hahaha!) I'm not a religious man, but you just think of the Gospels. In English when you say it's true, you say '*It's Gospel Truth*'. But each of the four Gospels are quite different to each other. I am all for embracing all the possibilities that Laban had, and that Laban offered. I am against trimming off the bits of his thinking that you don't like, in the same way you trim off bits of a vegetable to make them look nice. Now, I didn't experience that with Geraldine, I didn't experience that with Warren. And from the interviews I conducted with people who were taught by Laban, they didn't experience that either. There was, again, that sense of an interdisciplinary approach. And certainly, thinking about some of the accounts of Laban teaching in England, his industrial work, some of the experiments he did trying to help people to work on glass factories or whatever. He would adapt his knowledge of movement to the needs of those people in that particular factory. And it was that adaptive sense that is really hard to capture and to make into a system. I think it's sad. I have seen certain lessons by certain people in England and read books by them where the Efforts[39] are now reduced to, "this means that; if you do that, it means this." Well, that kind of... It doesn't actually... (Hahaha!) To put it simply, it's reductive. And you say it's a worldwide phenomenon and I certainly have no idea of that. But I can say that... Let me just make a little sidetrack. I was talking with a colleague recently who works in the field of psychology, and he talked about his *community of practice*; and that expression made me slightly sad because, apart from yourself and very few other people... I don't feel part of a *community of practice*, precisely because my sense of Laban isn't one that is confined and boxed and limited and reduced. If I don't share with you your pessimism about the fact that there's a worldwide narrowing of the possibility of Laban teaching, it is because my experience of it was quite the reverse (Hahaha!). And my practice, such as it is, is quite the reverse as well. So, again, maybe I'm sort of laughing in the face of fate when I should be being more miserable. But to be honest with you, a lot of people in England choose to follow an approach that is informed only by the books in English and that has been shaped in a way that makes it quite easy to pick up. I just chose not to go that way. And I think with... I've documented the work and the thinking of Geraldine and the thinking of Warren. So, there are examples of good practice. And I know one woman who works in the Laban Centre. I saw her teach once. I can't remember her name now, but it's a German name. And she certainly isn't confined and reductive. She was quite a revelation to me in how she approached. So, I don't think the picture is necessarily as gloomy as you paint, but... (Hahaha!) it's only 90% bad, there's still 10% that's good (Hahaha!). And to be honest with you, some-

39 The eight basic efforts are: Float, Punch, Glide, Slash, Dab, Wring, Flick, and Press.

times it's that 10% that makes the difference, because that 10% will live on just as certainly as the 90% as well. And it only takes somebody like you to pick up that 10% and start sharing it. And the people who support the 90% will be angry with you because you're making them work harder than they would like to do, and you are challenging the authority, the canonical approach. I can put my hands beside my eyes to make blinkers. It's like saying "I don't want to see anything except the thing that I'm focused upon." But I'm not pessimistic. The reason I put all this stuff out is to say there is another way of thinking about Laban.

JRM: You know that I came upon your work for the first time many years ago through a video shared by a great friend of mine, the dancer and choreographer Andreia Yonashiro, uploaded on the Vimeo platform in 2013 and entitled *Three Perspectives on Rudolf Laban's Dimensional Scale*[40]. In this video, besides demonstrating this scale, you comment on the different approaches that your teachers Geraldine Stephenson, Warren Lamb, and Walli Meier had to this essential space harmony exercise. You said that Walli Meier's approach, which was so sensitive and profound, made you cry. What can you tell us about it?

Dick McCaw: I think I might have mentioned before that Geraldine Stephenson was a very, very generous teacher in many ways. First of all, there was the six hundred hours of her time she devoted to me, to someone who was really hilariously ungifted as a mover. She was generous also that she wanted me to meet other people in the Laban sphere. So, she sent me out to learn from various teachers. She introduced me to Warren Lamb. She also introduced me to somebody she worked with called Walli Meier. She was at the Art of Movement Studio in Addlestone. I can't quite remember when, but I would say it was in the early 1960s. She took the Laban line which went down therapy, so she worked more in movement therapy. I really took to her. Geraldine was very, very clear that there were certain things that interested her in terms of Laban's work, and certain things which didn't. Laban, for his part, was very good at recognizing: A) "You will be good at this!". So, for example, he somehow knew that Warren Lamb would be brilliant at the industrial work, at the notation and observation of people in the factories. He knew that Geraldine would be brilliant at large-scale dance works. I don't know if you have ever heard of the York Mystery Plays. They were performed in this Northern city of York, which is formerly a Roman town and then a very important medieval center, and as a medieval center, created a series of plays to celebrate the festival of Corpus Christi. These plays were performed from dawn to dusk. They were… let me say 'reinvented', because they were cleaned up by a person called Canon Purvis[41], and they were put on almost as an example of the first English poetic drama in York. Geraldine did the movement, and really, there's no doubt at all that had it not been for her doing the movement, the thing would have died the death. I think they're done every four years now, but she did the recreations in 1951, 1954, and I wouldn't mind betting 1957 as well. I have got photographs of them. If you should be interested, I could share those with you. That's what Geraldine was into. She was into the Efforts, and she was into, let's say, movement choirs. She never used the expression herself, but pageants were what she called them. That's what she was interested in. She wasn't really interested in choreutics and even less was she interested in notation. Walli Meier, however, was interested in basic choreutics. What I learned from Walli was not simply the dimensional scale, but the six rings of the octahedron, which basically is a peripheral version of the dimensional scale. I had my movement pattern analysis done by Warren Lamb, as I've already mentioned, another of the people whom Geraldine introduced me to. Warren said, "You go down, you don't really go up. You're very narrow when you go forward." So, in terms of my movement pattern, it doesn't include a lot of expansion; it includes retreat and going down. I mean, probably a viewer looking at me can see that constantly I'm going up and down, but really, I'm going up to go down. And I've always been a rather channeled mind if you will. I'm a specialist in certain

40 The video was produced by Campbell Edinborough (McCaw, 2011b).

41 *John Stanley Purvis* (1890-1968). British clergyman, archivist, poet, and artist.

things. Now that I'm 70, I'm making connections between things, but it's after having made various deep, narrow channels for pretty much all of my life. When Walli Meier asked me to spread and be open, and because of the way she invited me to do it, it was almost the suggestion, "Try this out, I know you can do it." So, I did. And I found the experience of opening incredibly moving. The video that you're referring to is one that Campbell Edinborough[42] did of me. I like the fact that actually the same as Warren Lamb, Walli Meier saw movement as a process. Rising isn't just a question of "go up," it's a process of "rising" and then "sinking down". It's not "up-down". Which is exactly, I'm sure, what Laban was about. I have to come again into that story Warren Lamb told me about that American student performing the 12 scales of the icosahedron [mechanically] like 1, 2, 3, and Laban exploding with rage. Because it's the passage *between the points*, it's the process of the movements *between points*, not the arrival at a particular point. It's not that at all. That's how I came across Walli Meier. I think she only gave me about eight or nine lessons. It was quite a journey to get to her. But she did make an indelible impression upon me because, well, it was just connecting the movements with feeling, connecting these movements in the dimensional scale with feeling. And so, I'm hugely grateful to Geraldine for introducing me to her, and I'm really so grateful to Walli for giving me her time. All the teachers, all the Laban teachers I've had, have never asked for a penny. It's all been free; it's all been a gift. Next question (Hahaha!)

JRM: Sure. Let's go! In this video about Laban's dimensional scale, you said that Warren Lamb did not distinguish much between Effort and Choreutics; he used to work with both simultaneously. I find it very interesting because dancers and dance teachers tend to overvalue the movement qualities studies over space harmony studies – remembering that I, being a dancer and a musician, am passionate about this more Apollonian and geometrical field. Well, could you speak a little about it?

Dick McCaw: I can speak about Warren Lamb and his approach. I think it's important to talk about Warren and his work on Space and Effort. And I don't think I'm exaggerating here, that's how Irmgard Bartenieff developed BESS [Body, Effort, Shape, and Space]. Warren had a very close relationship with the Laban Institute for Movement Studies (LIMS) in New York [USA] with Bartenieff. Warren Lamb was pretty certain that in the very late 1950s when he was talking with Laban, that Space and Effort, Choreutics, and Eukinetics should be studied together. Incidentally, Laban wanted to charge Warren Lamb a percent of any earnings that Warren made, because in Laban's eyes, Warren was doing Laban's thing and therefore Laban should be paid for it. Warren joined the Art of Movement Studio in Manchester in November 1946, after having been de-mobbed from the Royal Navy. Very soon the Laban decided, as I already mentioned earlier, that Warren should be immediately coopted into doing the industrial work. Warren was also very keen on actually being a dancer and worked more as a producer, I think, on an emerging dance theater company. But from the moment Warren started learning with Laban, he also started picking up on contradictions, wanting to try and find a more systematic, let's say, methodologically systematic approach, to the observation and notation, indeed to the whole concept of what is movement. And Warren would just say, very matter-of-factly, "I mean, of course, Dick, you cannot have a movement which doesn't take place in space. It's not possible (Hahaha!)." You can focus just on movement qualities, but you have to acknowledge every movement has a certain shape. Warren was also insistent about the harmony between certain effort qualities and certain shapings. So, already by the very late 1950s, after he had been working for 10 years with Laban, he had decided that "You could not separate shape and effort. There are two aspects of human movement, of human working movement or expressive movement." Warren said this to me. Sometimes, I must write about this but, well, you're documenting it now. So, this is out in the public for the first time. But Warren shared with me that he did have a conversation with Laban about this. Warren's feeling was that Laban agreed with him that there shouldn't be this almost categorical and certainly aes-

42 Campbell Edinborough is a *Lecturer* in Writing for Performance at the University of Leeds.

thetic distinction. Now, what do I mean by an aesthetic distinction? What I mean is the assumption that Effort is something that should be studied by actors and Choreutics is something that should be studied by dancers. And almost never the twain should meet. So, earlier in this conversation, I mentioned that Laban was very good at supporting a particular person's interest. So, if you were interested in choreutics, he would tell you everything about choreutics. And if you weren't interested in Effort, he wouldn't talk to you about Effort because it wasn't of interest. This means that people have a rather imbalanced take on Laban because, yes, they worked with Laban intensely, but they really have worked on the things that Laban knew they were interested in. I told you already that Geraldine was interested in Movement Choirs and Effort. She worked with actors all her life. She worked on huge pageants for much of her life. She also worked on many of the BBC's television costume dramas which in the 1960s and 1970s were very big earners. She worked on the great Waltz (so-called 'Natasha's Dance') in *War and Peace*[43], where she also had to choreograph these huge cameras as well. So, she had this fantastic notion of a whole space in motion, like in a movement choir. And she also worked on a Stanley Kubrick film. Is it Ryan? No, it wasn't. I can't remember...

JRM: Barry Lyndon [1975].

Dick McCaw: Barry Lyndon! That's right, yes. Thank you. And there is [in this film] a huge dance in a meadow[44], and that was her again. So, we return to this feeling for dance. But coming back to your question. So, for Geraldine, if I wanted to learn about choreutics, which didn't interest her, she'd send me to somebody else who was interested. There was another lovely lady who I've met only once in wildest Wales called Lorn Primrose, as in the flower. And she had a lovely way of going about understanding the A scale. She just had cushions everywhere. So, if I, in the second movement, plunged too far, deep back and I fell over, I would just fall over on cushions (Hahaha!). So, that was her way of making it really fun and actually harmless. But I think this disciplinary distinction between Effort and Choreutics is quite artificial, and it is the case in England that actors do Effort, and dancers do Choreutics or Shape. I think it was therefore America that took on Warren Lamb's idea. So, if you look at his movement pattern analyses, you have a graph for Effort and a graph for Shape on the same page. It was that... So, as I've already said to you, when he did my movement pattern analysis, he noticed that I advance, I sink, and I retreat but I'm very narrow and I don't rise very much. So, I don't expand out or I didn't expand out. He would argue that you can't change your movement pattern hugely. I found and have written about it, that in fact it (i.e. his movement pattern analysis), like Walli Meier's lesson, had quite a profound effect on me. And, so, Warren Lamb conceded that it may be possible that some people can change their movement patterns. He said no more than 10%. I would say he having introduced this expansion it has fundamentally changed my mental outlook. I'm still more interested in researching in-depth than in-width but certainly agree with Warren Lamb's conception of movement, and that movement patterns integrate both Effort and Shape.

JRM: My last question, perhaps a silly one, but how can we still promote these ideas concerning Laban's Art of Movement, these poetic and revolutionary principles, in confrontation with the takeover of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and, because of this process, the decreasing or even the absence of the body in human life and human connections and relationships? Dominique Dupuy used to teach us something that he called *l'acte de la* presence (*the act of presence).* Now, hunched over our gadgets, we are developing *the lack of presence*. As was beautifully said by our dance master, if you allow me to read some lines from a text published almost 30 years ago:

> Dancers are physically normal people who stand apart from the passivity of everyday life and the tension of sporting achievement. [...] A dancing body establishes a relationship with the universe and becomes a point

43 Reference to the iconic scene from the film War and Peace (Sergei Bondarchuk, 1966), based on the eponymous novel by Leo Tolstoy, available at Trinks (2012).

44 Scene available at IRoboTic Cinema (2023).

> of contact with energies, forces and flows. [...] Today people tolerate their bodies, reluctantly accept their weight and maltreat their vertebrae They may become restless as they passively consume sounds and images, but they avoid real movement. [...] The dancer has and is a sacred fire. (Dupuy, 1996, pp. 11-12)

Dick McCaw: I don't think that's a silly question at all. Indeed, I feel it's possibly the most fundamental question that anybody who works in, could I say 'the movement arts', in the art of movement? In fact, that's what Laban used to talk about, *Die Kunst der Bewegung*, *The Art of Movement*. I don't think the battle is completely lost, but I do think... I am reading right now for my next book *An Eye for Movement*; I'm reading about how children develop cognitively, and how movement is an essential part of cognitive development. We must remember we're not taught how to walk. We teach ourselves how to walk. We figure it out through trial and error, we figure it out how to roll from back to front, from back to front, to sitting, from sitting to kneeling, from kneeling to crawling. All these things we are taught - you just talked about Space, Shape, and Effort - I think it's so clear, reading the literature on child development, that our whole sense of self is about relations with our environment, our immediate environment, our material environment, our social environment; how we walk through that environment. And the more remote we become, the more mediated we become. The less we feel, the less we will be human beings. But as I said, I don't feel the battle is completely lost[45]. But I think your question, far from being stupid, I mean, you almost apologized for asking it, is the central question that any of us today should be asking. Those who lack any understanding of our *kinesphere*[46], of Shape and Dimension, will become less human, less social, less aware of their surroundings, less able to be changed by their surroundings, sensitive to changes in their surroundings. It's crucial that we don't give up.

JRM: Wonderful, *maestro*! I'd like to thank you again for your time, for your generosity in sharing your thoughts and your astonishing views upon Rudolf Laban, his thinking, and his teachings, in such a sincere and lovely way. How wonderful it is to know there is still so much to know about the work of this great artist. I'm sure people around the world will love this interview as much as I did. Let's keep in touch!

45 In the interview, McCaw spoke off-camera about a stick game that is a hallmark of his teaching. This game awakens a collective state of presence and readiness, recruiting the full physicality of the body. A scene of his students playing this game is available at RoyalHollowayDrama (2023).

46 For Laban, the *Kinesphere* is the sphere of movement circumscribed by the body from its center of gravity; a personal, intimate space that always accompanies us, anywhere and anytime.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

This study was conducted in line with ethical procedures.

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