

The mazy circles of the dance

Notations in the manuscripts of the Lowe collection

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Several books and manuscripts in the Lowe family collection are dance masters' manuals containing instructions and descriptions for the performance of actual compositions, as opposed to discussion about dancing as a desirable social activity, and how to dress up and behave politely.

Two different kinds of notation are involved in the dance descriptions. In *A Work Book by Kellom Tomlinson*¹ the steps and floor patterns or 'figures' are conveyed in detail through the symbols of the French baroque dance notation – solo and couple dances in his own compositions as well as in copies of other publications of the day. In the manuscript titled 'Dance Book' and written by T.B. in the year 1826, (illustration two) the notation shows couple and group dances; the starting positions and floor patterns are still graphically rendered but the actual steps are no longer shown in symbols. These appear instead in the accompanying word notes simply as names; elsewhere in the manuscript there are verbal descriptions of how they should be done.

Joseph Lowe's *Journal*² is a record of the lessons of the princes and princesses but it was not intended as an actual dance instruction book. In *Lowes' Ball-Conductor and Assembly Guide*,³ however, the Lowe brothers do include descriptions of the steps and figures of various dances. Their phrase, 'the mazy circles of the dance',⁴ recalls the intricate detail of many figured dances world wide but especially the court dance tradition of France. We are reminded that the 17th-century French delight in garden mazes matches, in aesthetic continuity, if not literal geography, the figures of the minuet and forlana, the passepied and gavotte – with perhaps some hint of the dalliance, the teasing chase or the final sweet resolve of such travels.

There exist various notations or renderings of dance from Egypt, Japan, medieval Europe, Italian and French Renaissance, and the French baroque. Celtic traditions have their own representations in the silver brooches which trace out the figures of spirited jigs and reels. Then there are various 19th- and 20th-century systems of notation – Russian, German, English, American and Israeli, whose principles and conventions and varying degrees of accuracy make for intriguing comparison.

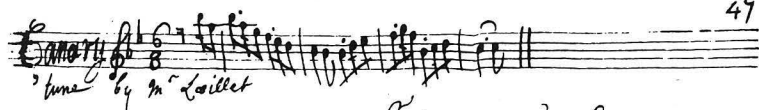
FRENCH BAROQUE DANCE NOTATION

The French Baroque Court was perhaps the most 'literate' period in dance history, from the point of view of the practical use of a standardized notation being incorporated into actual teaching practice. Louis XIV had commissioned Pierre Beauchamp to create a symbolic dance notation. Together with Jean Baptiste Lully he developed from the 1660s a rich and intricate relationship of music and dance in the baroque technique and repertoire. The notation was not published by Beauchamp but was clearly of his devising. When Raoul Auger Feuillet published the notation system as well as compositions from the repertoire, Beauchamp sought in a legal case to have his invention recognised; the law suit was unsuccessful, except in the sense that dance scholars have known ever since the source of the ingenious conventions and symbols of the system.

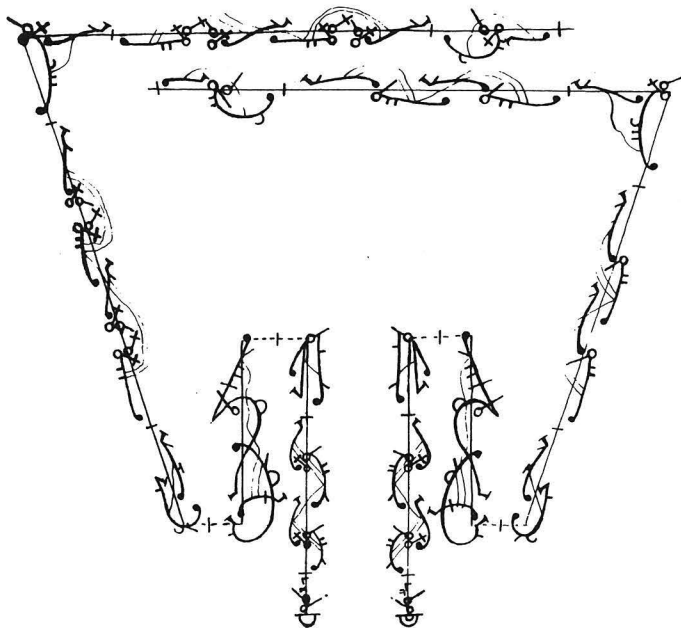
The publication of the notation in 1700 was a turning point for the dance profession; immediately it gave access for the middle classes to what had formerly been the preserve of the upper classes; dance masters and composers flourished in the increasing trade this brought them.

The figures or floor patterns are a highly attractive feature of this notation. The stave winds, weaves and turns its way about the page as though the paper were itself the floor, with the dancers leaving silver shining snail trails wherever they have been. The scripts vary with 8, 12, 16 or 32 bars written onto one page; and whether solo, *à deux*, or larger group dances are depicted. A staggering *danse à neuf* produces an intricate maze of pathways which despite appearances are in fact relatively easily danced out.

The number of actual steps in the extensive baroque dance repertoire is curiously limited. There are only some twenty units each of which has a symbol, with occasional variations. There is also approximately the same number of dance types in the repertoire which are defined by their rhythmic/metric structure and tempo: *bourée*, *menuet*, *gavotte*, *gigue*, *courante*, *chaconne*, *loure*, *sarabande* amongst them. The content of the dances is thus more an art of combining known steps than proliferating novelty with new ones, and yet each



the Dance Compos'd M^r Henclm Tomlinson writt
by him in y^e Year 1721 & twice perform'd on
y^e Stage.



The first page of Tomlinson's composition Canary, to a tune composed by Loelliet. The inconsistent spelling of Tomlinson's name and his frequent collaboration with the Belgian musician Loelliet are discussed in the Introduction to the Work Book; the illustration is from page 88.

The starting positions for the man and woman are shown in symbols at the foot of the page. They face the audience and dance towards them. The bar lines are shown by small lines across the central tract. The page has 8 dance bars, and 4 music bars with repeat. The dance in 6/8 metre has a lively tempo and contains many springing steps and swift beats.

composition is a unique permutation. One is reminded of the mathematical dictum that infinity lies in both directions; in the case of baroque dance one is dividing rather than multiplying towards it. There are contrasts of mood and affect from one dance type to another, which the performer must accomplish in interpretation – cheerful rigaudons and bourées, lively spacious gavottes, swift passepieds, stately minuets, elegant chaconnes, regal courantes, tender and yearning sarabandes.

The performer also incorporated the movement of the hands and arms, which are not typically indicated in baroque notation (although symbols did exist for that purpose). Castanet

rhythms – where relevant – were similarly given as examples in a treatise, but the performer was required to devise a suitable sequence of rhythms for any particular dance.

KELLOM TOMLINSON'S NOTATION
baroque notation is an ingenious and elegant system; some pages are works of art in their own right, and Tomlinson was one of the most skilled and adept users of it. Illustrations from his book *The Art of Dancing* (1734) were also sold separately; in them he had taken the artistic licence of drawing an actual dancer upright on the pattern of symbols on the 'floor'. (see illustration back cover)

Tomlinson was scornful of those who taught dancing 'without book', thus denying their students a literacy which was shared by composers, teachers, pupils and the audience as connoisseurs. The equivalent of music scores existed for dance in these published symbolic notations; they were widely and well used, and provided for the performer, then and now, a wealth of original dance compositions.

19TH-CENTURY DANCE

By the time of the manuscript T.B. 1826 the detail and extent of information in the symbolic dance notation has considerably diminished. Floor patterns and positions for groups of dancers are depicted, and most elegantly too, but the actual steps to be executed are not included as symbols and are found instead in the accompanying word notes. The apparent decline in the detail of the notation in fact mirrors the great divide in dance history between the noble court dance tradition (including the development of professional theatre dance) and social dance claimed by a wider population of practitioners.

The range of dances notated in the T.B.1826 manuscript is wide – quadrilles, hornpipes, waltzes, jigs, gavottes . . . Jane Austen's eloquent writings evoke the dancing life of

19th-century England; journals and diaries of colonial life record the somewhat more adventurous and robust practices in the colonies.

Although we are familiar with the names of many of the dances from this period, an authentic recreation of them requires research and skill and a particular empathy from performers and audience. In a recent reconstruction of the waltz from the T.B. manuscript (the only dance from it which has been so treated in modern times) Elizabeth Aldrich had the audience leave the theatre to view the dance in the foyer of New York's Lincoln Centre making them 'feel like party guests in a ballroom'.⁵ This waltz did not have a conventional 'waltz' appearance, as Elizabeth Aldrich explains in the programme note for this performance by students of the Juilliard School :


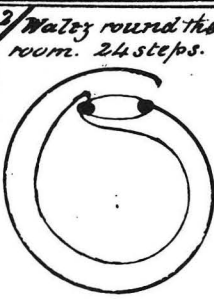
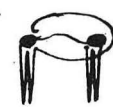
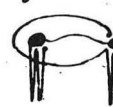
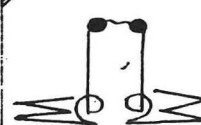
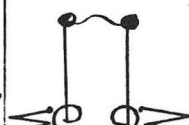
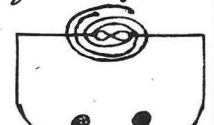
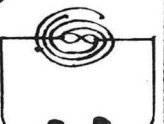

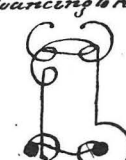


The waltz was first danced in the late 18th century as a figure in *contredanses françaises* and English country dances. It broke away from these contexts at the very end of the 18th century, but, save for some existing music, very little information about [waltz performance] exists. With the recent discovery in New Zealand of an unknown dancing master's manuscript bearing the initials 'T.B.' and the date 1826, it is now possible to glimpse into the world of the early 19th-century dancing master as well as to consider for the first time this very early example of a dance entitled Waltz.

The choreography combines facets, especially arm positions, of the late 18th-century *allemande* with steps and figures of the early 19th-century *quadrille*, including the figures *balance* and *tour de main*. Additionally, the steps provided for the Coda of the waltz are reminiscent of *quadrille* step combinations found in contemporary French sources.

This waltz was prob-

ably created somewhat earlier than its manuscript date of 1826, and it may have been used as a teaching piece well into the 19th century. Curious to today's spectators will be the lack of dancing in what is considered the standard round dance position, not used exclusively until the 1830s. In fact, there is no indication in the manuscript as to which waltz position to use. Missing also is any suggestion of how to perform the waltz steps, although three figures specifically call for partners to 'waltz'. Therefore, this reconstruction uses instructions set forth by English dancing master, Thomas Wilson, in his 1816 *A Description of the Correct method of Waltzing*. In the dance manuscript Mozart's *Ländlerische Tänze*, KV 606, in piano arrangement, is noted as the music for this early waltz'.⁶

By the time of Joseph Lowe's professional career (circa 1830 - 1860) even the graphic figures so beautifully drawn in the T.B. manuscript have almost disap-

 <p>(8 ME)</p>	<p>2/ Waltz round the room. 24 steps.</p>  <p>(24 ME)</p>	<p>3/ Promenade fig. with Balance forward & back.</p>  <p>(8 ME)</p>	<p>4/ Fig 3 repeated. Commencing.</p>  <p>(8 ME)</p>
<p>5/ (8 ME)</p>  <p>After advancing turn under the arms alternately & balance sideways</p>	<p>6/ Repeat the figure the one on the left turning under first.</p>  <p>(8 ME)</p>	<p>7/ Waltz round & join in the centre of the room. Turn round alternately, breaking the hands.</p>  <p>(8 ME)</p>	<p>8/ Fig 9 repeated finishing in 1st situation.</p>  <p>(8 ME)</p>
<p>9/ (8 ME)</p>  <p>After advancing, we turn still keeping hold of both hands the arms behind to round the waist when facing the front. viz that it is on balance for waltz & back</p>	<p>10/ Fig 9 repeated for the one at the L. to turn at the beginning quite round the stand of advancing to retire</p>  <p>(8 ME)</p>	<p>11/ See reverse waltz round the room. 16 steps</p>  <p>(16 ME)</p>	<p>12/ Pass aside & back 1st forming before then better right hands to be given. Two steps forward succeed and Balance.</p>  <p>(8 ME)</p>

peared; the word notes and the names of figures – the Chain, the Square, the Arch, the Bridge, the Wheel – are sufficient to evoke the dance pattern for the performers. The whole glorious achievement of a graphic symbolic notation, with steps fully drawn, known to masters and pupils alike, has passed.

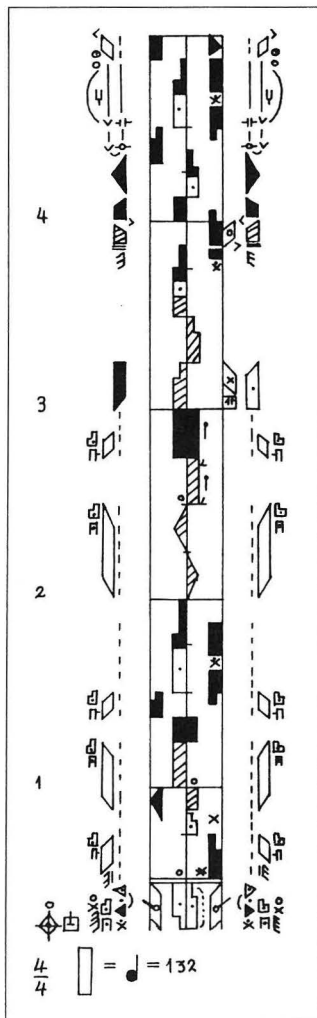
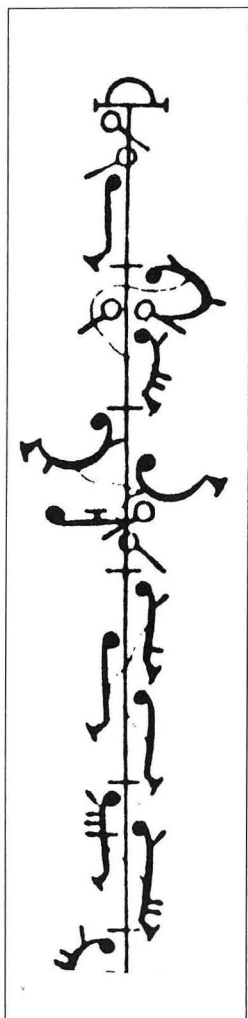
RUDOLF LABAN : A 20TH-CENTURY NOTATION

In the early part of the 20th century Rudolf Laban studied existing systems as he developed the conventions for his own notation which was to become known as Kinetography Laban. It is interesting to note that he adopted a number of features from the 18th-century baroque system – the notion of a dance bar to equal a music bar, with the movement itself being described in symbols, (as opposed for example to a 'shorthand' of positions such as in the Benesh notation, another method devised in the 20th century). Laban's system (see illus-

tration three⁷) is based on a vertical stave which runs from the bottom to the top of the page, with the dancers' paths of diagonal or curve and turn shown in symbols within this fixed, rather than fluid stave. This divides movement into laterals of left and right steps and gestures, and includes, as does the baroque system, symbols for much musical information.

Laban's notation describes movement rather than a specific style of dance. Because it can incorporate many details it is a scholars' tool for the rigorous analysis or reconstruction of dance rather than a pupils' learning method or performers' *aide-memoire*.

Baroque dance is ingenious and elegant; pages from it recapture some of the intriguing mystery of the dance itself; Laban's notation is rigorous, workmanlike and ugly; it is a powerhouse crammed with precious information which allows beautiful dances to be preserved for study and reconstruction. But whether anyone notates them or not, men and women continue to turn in 'the mazy circles of the dance'.



FOOTNOTES

¹ Shennan, Jennifer (ed), *A Work Book by Kellom Tomlinson...*, (New York, 1992)

² Thomas, Allan (ed), *A New Most Excellent Dancing Master...*, (New York, 1992)

³ Lowe, Messrs.[J., R., J., and J.S.], *Lowe's Ball-Conductor and Assembly Guide*, (Edinburgh, circa 1830, 3rd edition)

⁴ *ibid*, 93

⁵ Anderson, Jack, (Review) 'Dancing Never Stops in Celebrating Mozart', *The New York Times*, (Monday 11 November 1991)

⁶ Aldrich, Elizabeth, Programme for Juilliard Dance Ensemble's Mozart Bicentennial presentation at the Lincoln Centre, New York, (8 November 1991)

⁷ Eshkol, Noa (ed), *Tomlinson's Gavot written in Labanotation*, (Israel, 1984), 6

Opposite: The Waltz notated in the manuscript *Dance Book* by T.B. 1826. The music accompaniment is notated on a following page. The notation uses different colours to represent a particular dancer. Starting positions and figures are given for nineteen sections of the dance, with a Coda given only in step names. The waltz step itself is indicated in sections 2, 11 and 19 of the dance.

Left: The first four bars of the Gavot by Kellom Tomlinson shown in baroque dance notation (published in 1720) and Laban's dance notation.