

# Dance Research Journal

Congress on Research in Dance

14/1&2 (Double Issue) 1981-82



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# Letters

Editor:

Rose Anne Thom's review of my book *A Study of Ballet Technique*, which appeared in the Spring, 1981 *Dance Research Journal* expresses much welcome praise and appreciation. As she discovered, the book is not without fault, and I was interested to see what she would find. Her quibbles are few and rest mainly on the question of how certain movements are "spelled." For those interested, I would like to take this opportunity to reply to the specific points. Readers may wish to refer to the notation examples on p. 36 of the issue cited above.

Room directions were given before turn signs because in ballet, emphasis is placed on facing the particular room direction rather than on the turning action and degree of turn which must occur for any change of front. Ballet dancers are concerned with such facings as 'en face,' 'croise,' early on in their training. It has long been established practice in Labanotation to make such abbreviations when detail is not needed and the additional indications have not yet been explained. In my study of other systems of dance notation I have been interested to see to what extent the notation is kept simple when the style and context of the movement is known.

In the development of Labanotation I and my colleagues produced increasingly refined movement descriptions so that no room was left for ambiguity. (This in response to the challenge "we can't accept your system until you prove that you can write everything." Needless to say when we had achieved a high level of specificity the same people complained that the system was too complicated!) If other systems of notation operate successfully in allowing the simple and obvious movement transitions to be understood and not stated, why were we fussing so much when such details were not necessary in general practice but only theoretically correct?

Another change in point of view has gradually come about since the early days. We now recognize that a simple notation does not express a precise manner of performance. Exact performance is left open. When precision is needed the means exists in our system for adding all desired details. To cite an example: Does the indication of a single hand clap, as in example a), mean the hands stay together after the clap? Or do they separate immediately?

