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Library News

From the Dance Notation Bureau

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Dance Notation Bureau Library

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New York Public Library for the
Performing Arts

Libraries—Treasure Troves for the Labanotator

by Sandra Aberkalns
DNB Staff Notator

Labanotators tend to spend the majority of their professional lives in a studio, at a desk finishing their scores, or in libraries digging through the stacks—both open and closed. One reason to go to a library, other than that at the Dance Notation Bureau (DNB), is that while documenting the choreography is the most important component of any score, over the course of a notation project a notator will need to conduct research for the score's introduction. The DNB's collection primarily focuses on housing Labanotated works—the notated scores themselves as well as additional or supplementary materials specifically related to them. Therefore, when adding a new work or choreographer to the collection the notator, by necessity, seeks out other resources.

Even though the Internet is a tremendous asset, the fact remains that the World Wide Web is a limited research tool no matter how good a favorite search engine is. In addition, even though larger libraries are digitizing and getting large portions of their collections online, the materials are more often than not in the form of a search aid (Archival Materials Access Tools—AMAT) to let you know what is available—rather than a view of the actual documents. It is also inconceivable that any library will be able to get everything digitized in our lifetime, so for our generation, at least, there will always be limits when using electronic resources. Therefore, at some point, the notator has to get out from behind the desk and go to the library.

New York is a tremendous city in which to go library hopping, as there are several amazing collections. As unique as each library is, there is one constant, one similarity that could be considered a truism no matter what library in the world you may find yourself in. The various archivists, librarians, docents, and pages comprise the brain, the open stacks are the heart, and the closed stacks are the soul of the library. For notators, the jewel in Gotham's crown might very well be the New York Public Library (NYPL). This system's ever-increasing collection has a growth rate similar to that of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., which is approximately 8,000 to 10,000 items per week. Not only are new materials arriving on a regular basis, which become available to the public once the materials have been catalogued; but authors, composers, choreographers, or their estates are easing restrictions on materials already archived—such as the Graham Collection—which can provide new insights into their work.

The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center is the largest resource in the city for music, dance, and theater, and for many notators it is the first stop when starting any research. If you are conducting research at this library for the first time, you will need to obtain a free "Access" card. The application form is available online and can be filled out at home in advance or at the library. Take your form along with a valid ID to the library's "Access Desk," have your photo taken, and you're ready to visit the Jerome Robbins Dance

Division. Just a few of the resources that a notator will then have access to include: biographies, autobiographies, numerous dance publications (some going back 50+ years), clipping files, manuscripts, and journals. However, DVDs of the work to be recorded are the most common items that a notator will look for on a first visit to the Dance Collection—not to begin notating the work but simply to get an idea of the challenges that may be encountered during the notation process. Some of the questions for which answers are sought include: how long is the work, is it a large cast, how complex is the movement or music, are there sets or props, or unusual lighting... How might these elements affect the ballet and possibly the notation of that work?

Right next to the Dance Division on the third floor, is the Music Division of the NYPL, which is considered one of the world's preeminent music collections. This division has thousands of composers' manuscripts from the 18th through the 20th centuries. The collection is also supplemented by the Toscanini Memorial Archives, a microfilm collection of more than 3000 additional autograph music manuscripts (handwritten scores), acquired from libraries and private collections from around the world.

A music score is an important component in notating a work. So that future staggers can clearly understand the work in both its physical and musical contexts, the music and dance scores must be synchronized. The dance score must indicate all musical indications regarding, for example, time signatures and tempi; and the music score includes markers, which can be in the form of dancers' counts, movement cues, or both. If a company performs to live music, they will most likely be able to provide the notator a copy of the score. However, many companies use recorded music, in which case it is the notator's responsibility to find the music score—if one exists.

If this is the case, before delving into the Music Division's catalogue there are commercial resources, which should be exhausted first as it is always preferable to purchase—rather than Xeroxing—a music score as copyright issues have become quite complicated in recent years and buying a score is the safest course. The most popular store for classical music used by several generations of notators is Patelson's, located on 56th Street around the corner from Carnegie Hall. It is always surprising how such a compact store can carry such a large stock; however, it is also possible they will not have the work you are looking for, and you'll have to wait a few days for them to order it. One advantage to ordering from Patelson's is that an order does not imply purchase—you have the opportunity to peruse the score before making a final decision. If a notator needs sheet music, for popular music, in the heart of the theater district is Colony Music, 1619 Broadway at 49th Street. In both of these stores, the staff is knowledgeable and helpful, and if they don't have what you are looking for they do try to direct you to someone who will.

However, even Patelson's cannot help if, for example, the sale of a musical score is restricted due to licensing and royalty fees that must be paid before scores are made available to an orchestra (Lennox Berkeley's music for Choo-San Goh's *Beginnings* is one example). That is when the notator heads back to Lincoln Center. Even though it is possible to Xerox many musical autographs at the Performing Arts Library, the Berkeley score was not one of them—use was restricted to viewing only. However, the desk librarian was very helpful, providing me with the specific name at G. Schirmer, Inc. whom I would need to contact for permission to copy the score. I wrote a letter explaining who I was and why I was making the request, and G. Schirmer promptly sent me a permission letter, which I gave to the library and they in turn, had one copy of the score made for me. However, if the Performing Arts Library does not have a particular music score, what other options does a notator have?

The Lila Acheson Wallace Library at the Juilliard School would be the next place to go. Their collection includes more than 70,000 music performance and study scores as well as books on music, dance, and drama. While materials circulate only to current students, outside users may make appointments to view materials on-site. To make the best of your time there, it is strongly advised that you search their comprehensive online catalog, before making an appointment, to be sure that they have what you are looking for. In addition, in 2007, a state-of-the-art Web site was created providing access to many of 138 items found in the Juilliard Manuscript Collection. Amongst one of the many treasures available for viewing online is Aaron Copland's annotated copy of *Appalachian Spring*, which is one of the works currently being notated as part of the DNB's Martha Graham project.

Another resource gem, that can be easily overlooked, is the Microforms/Periodicals Room at the Main Branch of the NYPL at 42nd Street. Individuals working in or attending universities have regular access to online resources such as E-Journals A-Z, JSTOR, ProQuest Research Library, and Project Muse because their university has the need to and financial means to subscribe. However, for an independent notator public libraries are a godsend as they are the only institutions, to this notator's knowledge, which provide free access to these resources. While these electronic resources are also accessible at the Performing Arts Library, the 42nd Street branch has one large advantage, especially when searching, for example, the New York Times archives. For instance, an article or review, which is pertinent to your research, includes a photograph that might be relevant. If

that photograph is blocked due to copyright restrictions on ProQuest, you can immediately retrieve the microfilm for that *New York Times* edition yourself from an open stack as well as view it right there all in the same room—you know immediately whether or not the photo was what you were hoping to find. At the Dance Division, you would either have to fill out a call slip and wait for the microfilm to be brought to you by a page, or request, again via a call slip, the clipping files of that work or choreographer. Clipping files while extremely fascinating can also be very frustrating. Oftentimes, they are not organized chronologically; therefore, all the other interesting items you find along the way can easily distract you. You could also breeze right by the article you are looking for without realizing it, or it may not be there at all.

Another amazing resource in the NYPL family is the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem. I discovered this library while notating Katherine Dunham's works. The library's collection, in the Moving Image and Recorded Sound Division, includes in part: African American, Caribbean and African popular and traditional music genres; Caribbean and African contemporary popular music collections; and, early jazz and tap dance film footage. The sheet music collection strengths lie in spirituals, jazz from the 1930s and 1940s period, and popular songs. Since 1980, this division has conducted oral histories, and one category in the series is "Black Dance Pioneers." The manuscripts and archival collections are strongest for the twentieth century in the areas of the performing arts, and African American women.

While some major dance companies have libraries/archives—Martha Graham Archives, Paul Taylor Dance Company, Limón Institute Archives, American Ballet Theatre, among others—they strongly encourage everyone to go first to the Performing Arts Library, Lincoln Center. There are several reasons for this. The Jerome Robbins Dance Division houses comprehensive documentation for all of these companies; the dance company archivists may only work a certain number of days in a week or per month; only in rare circumstances is an archive available to the public; or a portion of the archive may be off-site, which makes document retrieval costly. If a specific search at the Dance Division is unproductive, then you should call the company to speak to the archivist to find out if they have what you are looking for, and, if the answer is in the affirmative, you can make an appointment.

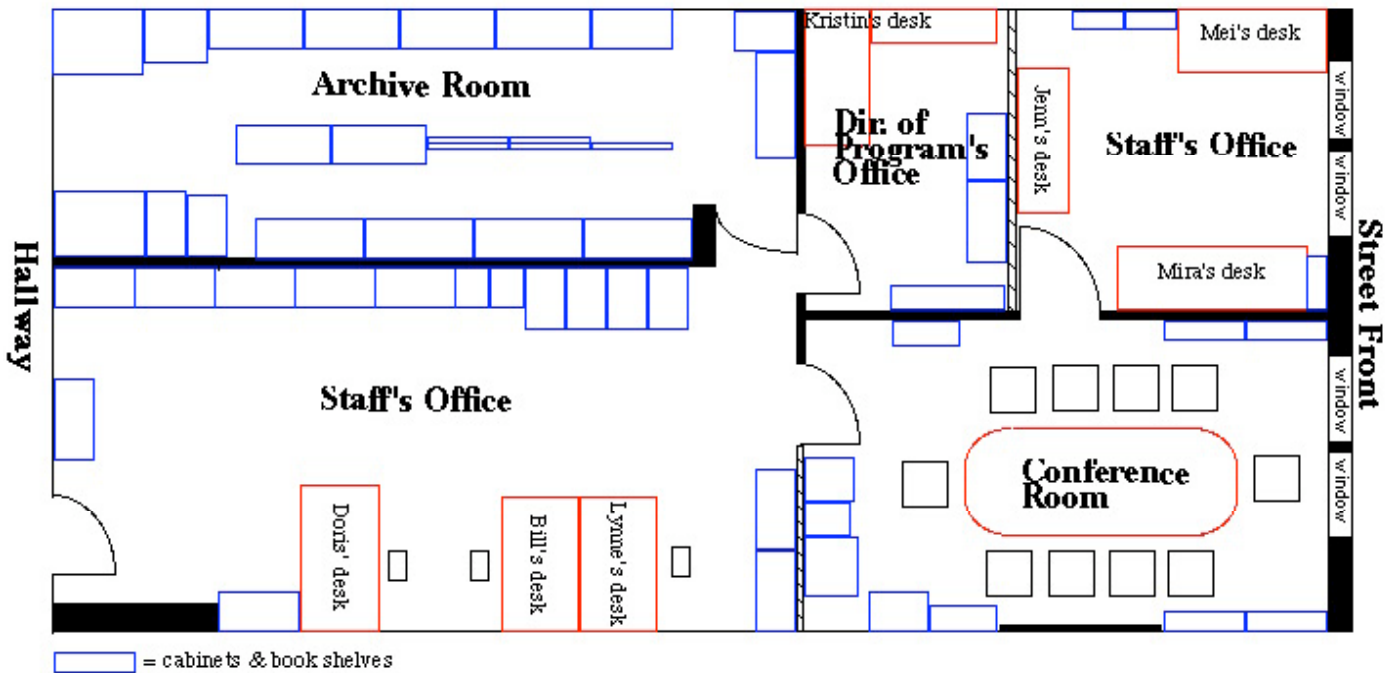
And, finally, a library that must not be overlooked, although not in New York City, is the Library of Congress (LOC), Washington, D.C. The Performing Arts Reading Room is located in the James Madison Building and, similar to the NYPL, requires a "Readers Identification Card" to gain access to the library's resources. While some collections are found in their entirety at the NYPL or LOC, some collections—such as Martha Graham—are split between the two libraries with little if any information overlapping between them. Therefore, depending on the scope of research being conducted a researcher may have to visit both libraries. Before going to Washington, consult the LOC's online catalogue. If the LOC seems to have what you are looking for then you really should take advantage of "Ask a Librarian," to check that the materials you would like to peruse are available. At present, the Performing Arts division is pulling certain collections—again, Graham is one example—from the stacks to scan a portion of those documents as part of American Memory from the LOC. American Memory is different from AMAT in that it allows online users to actually see scanned documents. For an idea of the types of documents from the Graham Collection that will be available for viewing online—estimated online availability is sometime this spring—go to loc.gov and keyword search Aaron Copland. Besides Copland's acceptance letter to Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge for the commission of *Appalachian Spring* there is also an early, rough sketch of the music score.

The unsung heroes in all of these library searches, to aid the notation process, are the librarians who create and catalog the archives, preserve the manuscripts, and then guide you to and through them. Especially when dealing with a library's closed stacks, having an experienced desk librarian can make or break your day. They can guide you in finding the most appropriate DVD, book, or transcript. Moreover, if they are especially knowledgeable with the various collections, they can make precise recommendations that save you hours if not days of work. Therefore, I would like to gratefully acknowledge the libraries, and a few individuals, who have assisted me over the course of just one undertaking—the DNB's current Martha Graham project. The Martha Graham Archives housed, in part, at the Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance; Pat Rader and the desk librarians at the Jerome Robbins Dance Division; the desk librarians at the 42nd St. branch of the NYPL; Elizabeth Aldridge and the desk librarians at the Library of Congress; and the DNB's own Director of Library Services, Mei-Chen Lu.

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Join Our Emailing List

The DNB is going GREEN. If you are not on our email list and would like to receive DNB News, DNBulletin, and Library News through your email, please send an email message to dnbinfo@dancenotation.org with the text of the message being: subscribe DNB emailing list firstname lastname



The DNB has Moved and with it the Library!!

by Mei-Chen Lu

On January 31, 2009, the DNB moved, along with the library, to a new location at **111 John Street, Suite 704, New York, NY 10038**, after our ten year lease terminated at the previous location. The search for the new space started a half year ago led by Lynne Weber, the Executive Director, and William Kiley, the Director of Finance and Administration. Back then, the New York City commercial real estate market was still thriving. Midtown Manhattan, like the rest of Manhattan, is gradually gentrifying itself into high-end condominiums and office buildings. The rate per square footage had tripled in comparison with the rent we were paying. The possibility of staying in the neighborhood became slim. Kiley and Weber, therefore, started looking into places in Queens, Brooklyn, and other districts in Manhattan.

They secured the new office space near the Wall Street district two months before the lease ended. Mei-Chen Lu, the Director of Library Services, and Mira Kim, staff notator and skillful LabanWriter user, worked together to draw the office layout and map the furniture (see the illustration above) on LabanWriter, the software to computerize the Labanotation symbols, according to scale. Kim drew a total of six different versions as furniture was added or removed before the move.

Over 150 boxes were used to move the DNB and it took six staff members two weeks to pack and unpack. All the staff and board members are very pleased with the new space. The office occupies approximately 1,050 usable square feet and is divided into five areas: three being staff members' offices, and the other two bring the archive and conference rooms. The conference room serves as a meeting place as well as working space for visitors to the library. The office has four large windows that provide sufficient sunlight. All the rooms are carpeted and the whole area is well heated.

The new archive now is in a 9' by 27' room, which is smaller than the previous one, but more efficiently used since we have acquired new matching file cabinets. Knowing that she would not be able to fit all the library materials in the new archive room, after consultation with Nena Couch who visited New York for that purpose, Lu shipped rarely used library items to the Dance Notation Bureau Collection in the Lawrence and Lee Theatre Research Institute at the Ohio State University for safekeeping. These materials are gifts to OSU with stipulations that the DNB has access to them and is able to obtain photocopies of the materials when needed.

Our **office number** also has changed to **(212) 571-7011** and the **fax** to **(212) 571-7012**. When you are in New York, please come visit us in our new office. We would love to see you!!