

## CAPTURING DETAILS OF PERFORMANCE

by Ann Hutchinson Guest

It is our loss that the old dance books gave so little specific information on how particular dance steps and patterns were to be performed. But would they have, **could** they have analyzed movement in the detailed terms now possible? While leeway in performance must exist in performing old dances, for example, Baroque dance, and each dancer is an individual with innate movement preferences and dynamic patterns, what are the possibilities of interpretation?

In the following exploration I will use Labanotation examples as well as words to describe the differences in movement. Even a small smattering of Labanotation can help you to see visually the subtle differences which I will discuss; all the signs needed will be explained as we go along. Worry not, everyone will be able to follow!

### 1. Arm Movements

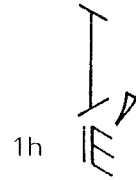
Let us start with the Baroque arm movements and specifically the lower arm circles. The path they take is basically lateral, a 'cartwheel' path. We will assume that we are using the right arm and it is being held out to the side. By bending the elbow and allowing the upper arm to rotate in a passive manner, the extremity of the lower arm, the hand, describes a lateral circle. This circle may be an outward circle (to the right), Ex. 1a, or it may be inward (to the left), 1b. In a similar way these two circles can be done with the hand (a much smaller circle, obviously), made possible by flexion in the wrist joint and rotary movement in the lower arm. Because these rotations have to happen we do not need to figure out exactly how much - they take care of themselves during the performance of the circle.

1a		1b		1c		1d		1e	
Lateral circle to the right (downward first)	Lateral circle to the left (upward first)	Right lower arm	Right hand	A slight accent					

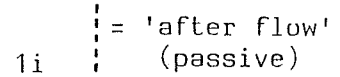
In looking at how such a lower arm (or hand circle) might be performed, let us consider the following variations. The movement can flow evenly over the given amount of time. Note that here we are not designating counts, i.e. how long the circular gesture takes. It can be done more slowly, or fairly fast. What is important now is that the passage through space is even. This evenness is understood in Ex. 1f. But sometimes such a gesture ends with an accent. Reading up the notation, the accent sign appears at the end of the movement, Ex. 1g. Until the end, the gesture progresses smoothly and then concludes with a light accent. This is not a strong accent, not a hard stop, but an emphasis. Please note that in the notation here we are assuming that a whole circle is to be performed, ending where it started, although this fact, the amount, has not been stated; sometimes the gesture is only 3/4 of a circle.

1f		1g	
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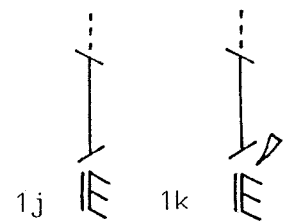
Consider how the movement would be if it started with an accent. Reading up the page, the accent sign is therefore placed at the beginning, as in Ex. 1h. Once the accent has disappeared, the movement progresses at an even speed, with a clear end, but no marked, stressed, arrival.



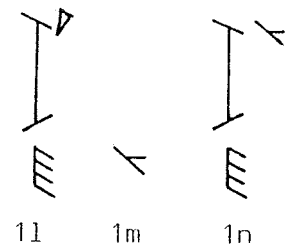
For feminine softness, it is often elegant to conclude an arm gesture with a 'drift', a gentle settling into place, so to speak. It is almost a trailing off, but it is understood that the destination is the same; a different destination would have to be stated. Such 'drifting' we call 'afterflow'. This is shown by a dotted line, 1i, placed at the end of the movement. The timing of the movement is subtly adjusted so that this afterflow can occur without becoming out of time with the music. Often it occurs just before a pause which makes the 'lingering' effect more observable. In Ex. 1j the movement concludes with this afterflow.



A more contrasting dynamic occurs when such a gesture is started with a slight accent and then ends with afterflow, as in Ex. 1k. This can be quite an elegant way to perform this movement.

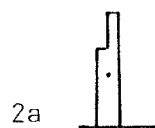


In observing some French performance of Baroque dance I have seen a hand circle ending with a flicking movement, somewhat harsh, but effective in being eye-catching. Ex. 1l shows a hand circle of this kind. The sign for 'flicking', Ex. 1m, can be added to convey the light, indirect action of a flick, Ex. 1n.

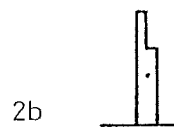


## 2. Steps

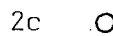
In walking, taking steps, there can be much variation, not only in the actual transference of weight but also in how the preparatory leg advancement takes place. Are the steps totally flowing, the centre of weight moving smoothly forward all the time? I am presuming for now that we are dealing with forward steps. The indicator on the symbol points into the forward direction.



2a Forward step on left foot

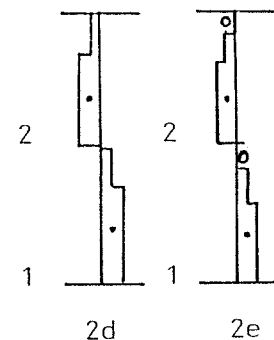


2b Forward step on right foot



2c Hold (pause)

Ex. 2d shows (reading up) a step forward on the right foot followed without a break with a step forward on the left foot. These are normal level steps, no knee bend or rise on half toe. By leaving a little gap between the steps, as in Ex. 2e, we can show a slight hesitation, a very slight pause before the next step takes place. The hold sign states stay on that foot.



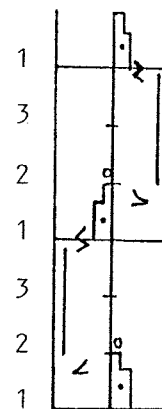
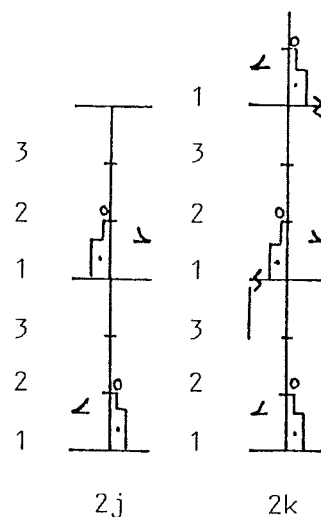
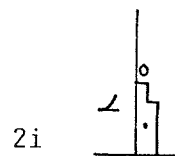
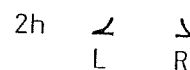
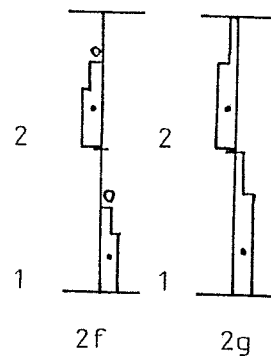
A longer pause between steps breaks the flow, but can be very expressive. This is shown in 2f. Such a break may occur for stately purposes, the dignity or majesty of the person, asserting in this way his or her importance. On the other hand, the smooth flowing of 2g can show the control and elegance of a noble lady. It is likely that the male will make more use of a pause than a lady, a difference in how they want to present themselves, perhaps more forceful, more in command?

When such pauses occur, the free foot (that not taking weight) is often left touching the ground. In a continuous walk each foot will leave the ground as soon as the next step is to be taken, there is no moment of resting the foot on the floor. Ex. 2h shows the ball of the foot contacting the floor, left and right; such contact is specifically stated in 2i, as it is important to know how the free leg should be used during the pause.

After a pause it is sometimes important to feature the movement of the free leg as it passes forward to take the next step. A degree of elegance can be shown in this action. This leg gesture may be quite slow and deliberate, or may occur rather at the last minute. Let us take a 3/4 metre. The step may be on count 1 and then hold for 2 and 3, as in Ex. 2j (remember to read up the page as the numbers indicate). No transition is shown here; the stepping action is rather abrupt. The left leg will start forward to take the next step just before the step actually takes place. But the left leg may release and start to move on count 3. This leg movement has no 'self importance', it serves only to show the timing of the leg action leading into the following step. This is shown in Ex. 2k in which the vertical line on the left side represents the moving left leg and the 'zed' sign (in this instance a reverse zed:  $\zeta$ ) links this action, this gesture to the step which follows to show that the step is the aim of that motion. In the second bar we see the same happening for the right leg, leading into the step on the right foot.

The timing for this preparatory leg gesture may be lengthened. In 2l the left leg starts to move on count 2 and continues through count 3 to lead into the step. In such a walking pattern the carrying through of the leg can be done with great elegance, particularly by the men whose legs are so much more visible in Baroque dance.

Here I have indicated only a few of the subtle differences that can be captured in recording the manner of performing what are basically quite simple movements. But these differences are easy to compare on paper once the symbols are familiar. And, while words give us so much and are common currency, a comparatively few strokes of the pen (or pencil) can give the same information which required dozens of words. Such is the written Language of Dance!



2l