

Elements
of
Dance Composition

by

Nona Schurman

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about the author

NONA SCHURMAN (1909-2016) joined the Humphrey-Weidman company in the late 1930s and remained a principal dancer until 1943. She was Assistant Professor Emeritus of SUNY Geneseo where in 1977 she received the Chancellor's Award for Excellence in teaching (upon receiving a perfect score from her students). During her many years in New York City she was vice-president and head of the Humphrey-Weidman department of the New Dance Group studio, and taught modern technique and elementary and intermediate composition courses at the 92nd Street Y. She also had her own studio company. She was an active member of the Board of Directors of the Dance Notation Bureau in the 1950s to mid-'60s.

Ms. Schurman was artist-in-residence at Illinois State University, guest teacher at the North Carolina School of the Arts, head of the dance department at Interlochen Arts Academy, and spent a year teaching at the State Dance School in Stockholm, Sweden. She was an authority on the Humphrey-Weidman style and technique and co-author with Sharon Leigh Clark of the textbook *Modern Dance Fundamentals*, a collection of dance exercises based on Humphrey-Weidman principles. A revised in 1991, her second edition was self-published in 2010. Ms. Schurman was born in Oxford, Nova Scotia, Canada. She retired in Geneseo, NY, and lived there until her passing in 2016 at the grand age of 106.



- evolving -

“in the long line”

There was a Humphrey-Weidman Concert Dance Company. There were two directors: Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman. Doris composed her dances; Charles composed his. To my knowledge, they never collaborated on a work. They performed in each other’s pieces, rehearsed in them, and made suggestions, but the works were always presented with their separate names on the program.

Naturally, the “Company” worked with and performed both Humphrey and Weidman works; they, therefore, became Humphrey-Weidman dancers: *two* parents, *one* home.

In the studio, Doris taught her classes: Humphrey technique; Charles taught his: Weidman technique. They never collaborated on the techniques nor was there any “team teaching.” The principles underlying both techniques were identical but the classes turned out to be surprisingly different as to formal structure, the development of technical skill, and choreographic invention. Drill and accuracy of performance was not stressed. The emphasis was on developing a dance instrument that can play more than one tune. In other words, what we learned was not just a technique, but that a basic idea can take many forms.

The students and company members studied with both Humphrey and Weidman, so, again, they became Humphrey-Weidman dancers. However, there never was a Humphrey-Weidman technique as such. The blending of the two took place in the muscles and imaginations of the people who worked with them. So, two parents, two sets of genes — and you have, in them, a Humphrey-Weidman technique! But only if it is blended!

When I was asked to teach for Doris and Charles and Mills College in California, Bennington, or New York University, I was supposed to teach one session of Humphrey technique then one session of Weidman technique. I did not mix the two.

However, when I taught under my own banner, I never taught a Humphrey exercise and then a Weidman exercise in the same class. I mixed them together and added my own inventions.

Question: is this Humphrey-Weidman technique? Are my students learning Humphrey-Weidman technique? Or, have I added to or diluted the “gene” pool I have inherited?

Is the technique now Humphrey-Weidman-Schurman? And what of José Limón: Humphrey-Weidman-Limon? Or others— Humphrey-Weidman-Whoever? With additions to the “gene” pool this technique stays alive, evolves and stays relevant in new environments. The very nature of material and concepts leaves room for this to happen.

Nona Schurman
Geneseo, NY
November, 2008

preface

“I don’t teach dance, I preach dance!” ~ Nona Schurman

Just after the end of WWII, a young USO performer returned to New York City to resume her career in modern dance. She said she remembered sitting in the gardens in the Museum of Modern Art and deciding she was going to write a book on choreography. Almost immediately following that day and that decision, Nona Schurman returned to the dance company she had left behind, The Humphrey-Weidman Company, and resumed teaching for Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman at the 92nd Street Y. Years of performing, teaching, and composing ensued and, little by little, Nona returned to her writing. However, time and again, Nona set the writing aside to devote her energy to real-time endeavors and professional projects which, rightfully, took precedence. Through her busy career years and on into her retirement, Nona continued to turn to the book project seeking help from many willing students and colleagues and, as she put it, “one gem of an illustrator.”

Nona’s passing in 2016 left the book unfinished; oh, so close yet, still unfinished. When Nona moved into a nursing home and celebrated her 106th birthday, she told me she was “done with it.” She didn’t want to put any more energy into it. After all, this small book was in the making for an astounding 70 years! Nona had written another more substantial book on modern dance technique in the meantime, “Modern Dance Fundamentals,” in 1972. She revised that same book in 1991. Regarding the manual, Nona told me to “do with it what you will.” I promised her I’d see it to print. So, here it is! A manual formatted by the collaborative effort of Nona’s former students. A book written over the course of one woman’s life of longevity, intended to be a manual for dancers and non-dancers alike. The concepts are clearly defined with simple elegance. The elements of dance choreography are made accessible for the student, the novice, the professional. Nona so enjoyed teaching what she called “Humphrey-Weidman-Schurman technique” to non-dancers and dancers alike. Her intention was to explain how anyone can cultivate the art of choreography with an understanding and practice of the elements of composition.

Again, Nona’s intention in writing this book was to offer tools, pure and simple, to anyone interested in creating a dance. She wanted the dancer to learn some basic principles or elements of choreography and learn how to manipulate them. Working with the elements of gesture, space, time, and form, Nona said, “Anyone can make a dance!” Nona thought this book might be useful to the high school stage director, the community choral director, the young aspiring student of dance, or the professor teaching an introduction to composition.

Nona knew that her teacher, Doris Humphrey’s book, *The Art of Making Dances*, was a seminal book and an excellent source for understanding choreography. One might ask then, “Why another book?” This book differs from Doris’ book because it is not so much a book on the theory and methodology of choreography, but a user-friendly guidebook and easily accessible manual for the reader.

Nona was passionate about dance. She lived and breathed dance. She genuinely and generously wanted to share her expertise, knowledge, and love of movement with anyone who *moved!* Nona was a teacher in every sense of the word and took great joy in seeing her students, the “kids,”

learn, grow and excel. She wanted to make this book an offering for future generations of dancers. Nona had a broad-view approach to life and learning. She herself was a dedicated student and always positioned herself “in the long line,” as Doris liked to say.

For Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman and Nona Schurman, the dancer/choreographer’s role and place in this exquisite, exuberant and expressive performing art, was by all counts, very significant.

On Nona’s behalf, Heather and I would like to acknowledge the dedicated work of some of Nona’s students and colleagues who helped complete this project. Special thanks to Carol Cornicelli, choreographer in her own right, for spending numerous hours formatting and promoting both of Nona’s books as well as making this book available online as an e-book. With affection, Nona was most grateful for the work illustrator Delores Garnier did to enliven her concepts with her drawings. Special thanks to Steven Vendolla, one of Nona’s early students at the New Dance Group Studio, for his continuing encouragement, support, and genuine gratitude for Nona’s teaching. Our phone conversations have been a total delight. Thanks to Jacqueline McCausland and Jonette Lancos, both dance faculty at SUNY Geneseo where Nona taught before retiring, for continuing to make these dance principles come to life in their classes.


Please note that although Nona’s perspectives, language use, and formatting throughout the text are at times considered antiquated by students and professionals in the contemporary dance world, we have chosen to allow her words to remain almost entirely in their original form, so as to keep the text as authentic to Nona’s voice and spirit as possible.

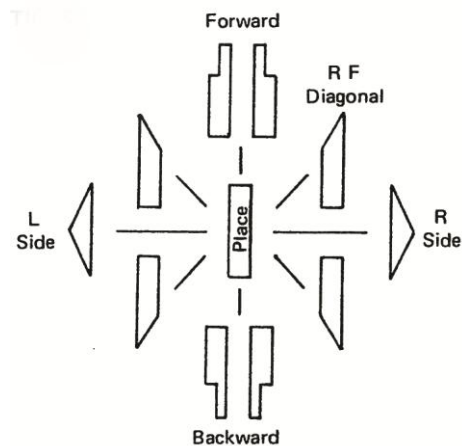
Enjoy,
Angela Caplan, BA
and Heather Acomb, MFA
July, 2018



glossary of basic labanotation

*For further information, see the text *Modern Dance Fundamentals*

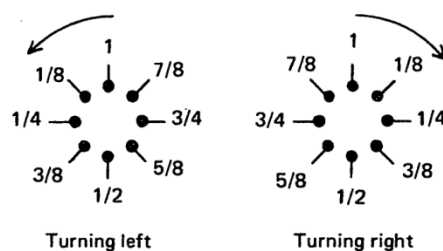
The **basic symbol**:  The rectangle, indicates **place center** from which the directions are taken. Like a note in music or in a letter of the alphabet it says little until it is used in a specific context. The principle directions are Forward, Sideward, Backward, and Diagonal. These directions are clearly indicated by modifying the shape of the basic symbol.



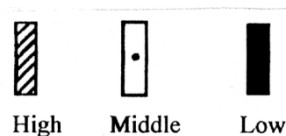
Rotation: This symbol, a modification of the basic rectangle, is used for the whole body turning on its axis or to indicate rotation of a part of the body.



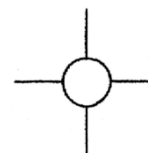
The black pins indicate the relationship of one part to another. They state which part is in front of or behind the other. The point of the pin is the indicator. Placed inside the rotation symbol, they show the degree of turn.



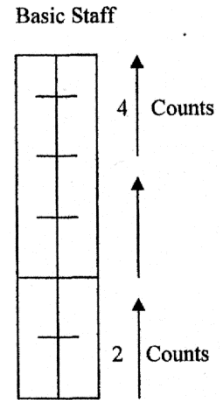
Level: To indicate level the basic symbol is shaded. The principle levels are high, middle, low.



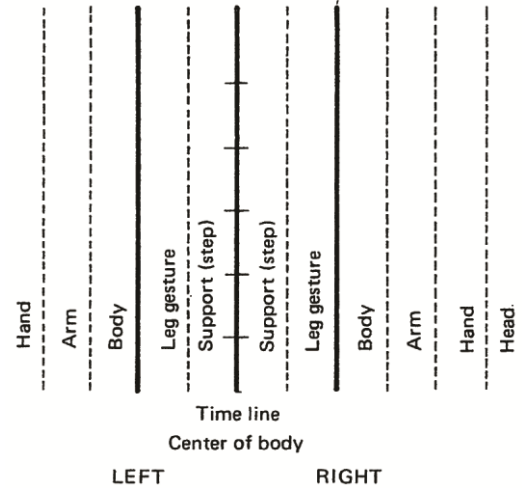
Note: Level is judged from the standing body position and is called the "cross of body axis." In this context low means towards the feet, high means towards the head.



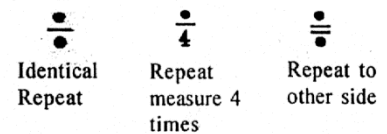
Basic Staff: The organizing agent for the symbols is the staff. It is similar to the five line music staff but is turned on the vertical and read from the bottom up. The main staff consists of three lines. The middle line, representing the center line of the body, serves as the time line and also divides the staff into right and left. Movement for the right side of the body is on the left side. The beat lines cut across the center line, the bar lines across the full staff.



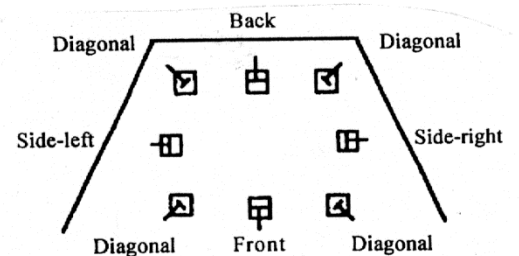
The spaces between the lines become columns, each reserved for the action of a particular part of the body. By placing the symbols in their respective columns and giving them specific time values we get a complete picture of what the body is doing. The elements of time and space have been fused and the result can be read back as movement.



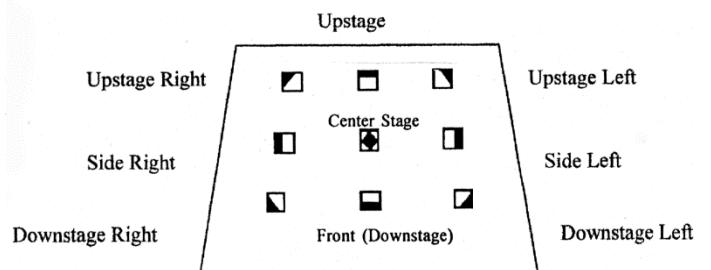
Repeat Signs: Indicates how many times an exercise or phrase should be repeated.



Facing Tacks: The sign for an area is a square. A flat pin placed in this square shows what part of the area the dancer is facing.



Stage Areas: The sign for the stage is a square. The portion of the square that is blackened out indicates where on the stage the dancer is to stand.



Note: Stage directions are always taken from the performer's point of view.

The dance is the rule of number and of rhythm and of measure and of order, of the controlling influence of form, of the subordination of the parts to the whole.

That is what a dance is ...

*We are strictly correct when we regard not only life
but the universe as a dance.*

From *The Dance of Life*

By Havelock Ellis, 1923

introduction

Elements of Dance Composition

In discussing dance and dancing, I have found it useful to divide this enormous and complex subject into four categories.

1. Technique— The physical skill of the dancer.
2. Composition— The craft of making a dance work.
3. Performance— Casting, style, music, etc.
4. Production— Costumes, lights, stage, theatre, etc.

This book is about #2 only — the craft of composing a “work.” It is not concerned with training the dancer/performer, the choice of music or the stage technical equipment. The book is an examination and analysis of the various elements of *Time*, *Space*, and *Form*. These basic elements can be used by the composer as tools for organizing and shaping his or her diverse ideas into a Form-a dance form- a work of *movement*. This is not a “How To” book. No rules have been laid down, no method suggested. The organizing principle used here is the ancient and time-honored practice of variation on a theme.

The choreographer’s *material* is the expressive movement of the human body. His *instrument* is the human body. His *product*, his work, is the expressive movement of the body organized and shaped into an organic whole - a dance - a “piece.”

As always, the question is the *when*, the *where*, and the *how*. These basic elements, with their diverse composition parts, are always interwoven to create a unique *event*. This is the human situation. If the choreographer as a creative artist wants to make an artistic comment on this situation, he must enmesh the distinct properties of these elements so he can use them, independently, the way a painter used colors.

chapter 1
gesture

the key element

the dancer's language

GESTURE —THE KEY ELEMENT

The Dancer's Language is Gesture

“Gesture is more than speech... it is the revealer of thought and the commentator upon speech.”

François Delsarte

Gesture: Movement of the body, or part of the body, to express or emphasize ideas, emotions, etc.

Webster, New World Dictionary

A dance is made with the silent language of the dancer. To make a dance, one must start with gesture. It is the very stuff and fabric of the composition.

To paraphrase Susanne Langer, a dance is made up of the unbroken fabric of gesture.

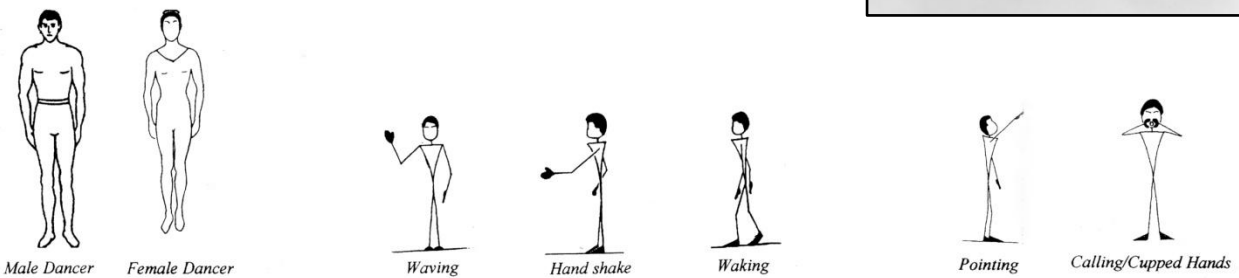
The European concept of **gesture** as a basis for stage movement is relatively new. It comes in a direct line from François Delsarte, a teacher of movement for singers and actors who lived in France from 1811-1871. He taught that the human body itself, through posture and movement, spoke a silent language more expressive of human feelings than words. In effect, **gesture** reinforces and underlines the words of the actor or the song of the singer. Delsarte's influence on European theatre and the great French actors of the late 19th century Eleanor Druse and Sarah Bernhardt, etc. was enormous. But his greater revolutionary influence was on the whole field of theatrical dance through forerunners of modern dance Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn.

The idea of **gesture** as a basis for dance composition was part and parcel of the Denishawn school and, of course, was inherited and used by their company graduates Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, Martha Graham and through them José Limón. As for American theatrical dance, it rests solidly on Delsarte's principles and that is: human gesture speaks its own language.

Brilliant and spectacular as is ballet, its codified systems of steps and positions is inadequate for expressing the often intense and subtle nuances of human feelings. A choreographer with something to say must turn to some other source for material to compose with. Like the actor, the question is: What does the human being do?

The **actor** interprets the individual character: the words, the language of the play, extends the thought and reinforces the gesture. For the actor, the chief use of gesture is to underline and reinforce the dialogue and thereby illuminate the character he is playing.

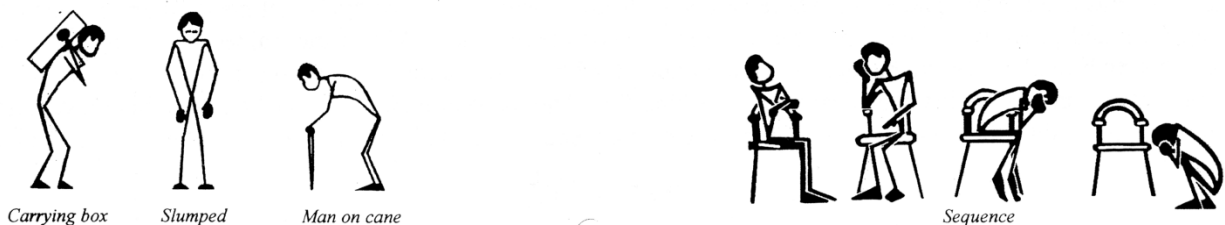
The **dancer**, with no words to rely on, stylizes and extends the gesture in **Space** and **Time**. In this way, the dancer himself becomes a symbol for the “words” and thereby reaching beyond individual character the actor is playing allows the dancer to speak not of “a man,” but “all men.” In effect, the choreographic devices replace the words. It is this treatment of the **gesture** that makes the broader statement.



Always there is a motivation. The body in itself is a **gesture**. By just appearing it makes many gestures and speak many languages.



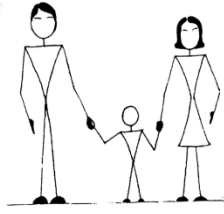
The presence and actions of, for example, a young, healthy, vigorous human body speaks volumes without a word being said.



Emotional stress such as fatigue, illness, fear, or old age change the body contour and tensions and, again, speak their silent language.



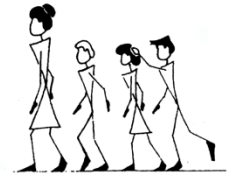
Walking the dog



Family



Mother child



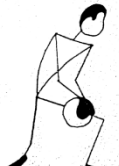
Mother with children

Once the **gesture**, as a theme, is chosen, the next question for the contemporary composer is how to lengthen it, develop it, and make a dance. Other than the codified system, what other kind of organization is possible to make an artistic whole — the ancient process of variation on a theme.

Given a good dancer, a simple **gesture** can be developed into a brilliant technical display. With a little restraint and some imagination, the same **gesture** can become a piece charged with feeling. It depends on what you have to say.



Dinner for two



Basketball



Giving a Speech



Poker night

Each individual has a sense of “place:” of where he comes from, where he is now, his social position and responsibilities and cultural attitudes and pressures. The composer of dances needs the technical skill of the trained body, but the *person* of the dancer brings with him all this extra baggage of living understanding. This extra baggage adds rich overtones to his movement and may be just the unique quality the composer is looking for. This is what adds layers to his movement and may be just the unique quality the composer is looking for during rehearsals. This is what makes dance the lively, exciting, living art that it is.



Man with ax



Man with pistol



Bowing



Salute



Hands on face



Picking a Flower



Squat



Praying hands



Sitting on heels



Kneel on one knee



Bow on floor



Lying on side



Lying on back

Also, all the unspoken specific **gestures** of everyday life or social intercourse and relationships are marvelous sources for the choreographer. The composer of dances stylizes, expands, and varies these everyday movements to make a dance that the audience can relate to. One thinks of Charles Weidman, or the musicals of Jerome Robbins and Agnes de Mille.

The formal, highly stylized and eloquent dances of many Asian countries is solidly based on human gesture. They tell stories through movement.



The **dance** and the **dancer** always stand before you in the present tense. They cannot speak of the past like novels, paintings or movies, or of the future. They exist only in the **now**.

As José Limón said, “*Dance is a moment.*”

In short, the composer of **dances**, confronting his **dancers**, is dealing with the enormous complexity of the human condition. Because the human body is the vehicle through which he speaks, it can only speak of human things.

Intangible human feelings are made visible through the body of the dancer.

“The first time I saw Doris and Charles perform I knew I wanted to study with them. I saw in their dances the Affirmation of life itself.” —N.S.

The following chapters examine the various properties of time, space, and form that are available to the choreographer as tools for making his new organic form— a dance composition.

chapter 2

elements of space

SPACE AS VARIATION

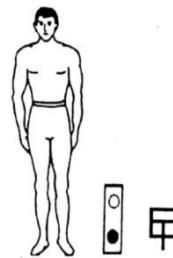
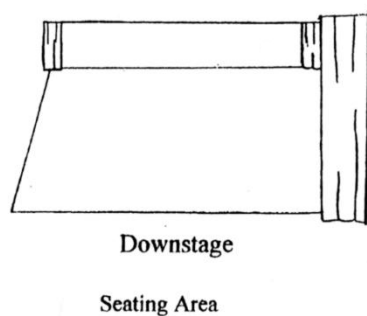
The Dance Space: The human body needs space. It's not always just what we do but where we do it. Not the huge wide-open space of the stadium or arena, but a well defined, unobstructed area with a firm, flat, smooth surface to dance on.

The use of space itself is a variation of gesture. Different uses of space changes the context of the gesture. This is what the choreographer has to work with; the simple human body speaking its silent language of gesture.

In a stadium, the *spectators* surround the players on all sides and even participate in the game with their individual enthusiasms. For sculpture, the *observer* can walk around the work and look at it from many angles. To be recognized for what it is, a finished work needs a formal setting. The ideal setting for showing dance works is the quiet, comfortable stage of a theatre. In the theatre, the *audience* remains seated and silent facing the stage. This perspective of the audience does not change—it is the dancer who makes the turn.

The proscenium arch¹, creating the so-called open “fourth wall” lets the audience look in on the action. At the same time, this open “fourth wall” allows the performers to look out through the proscenium and offer their finished, nurtured work to the audience community. As with art in a gallery, the choreographer is presenting a completed work, not an open-end activity like a game.

The stages for dance are what could be called “life-sized” — a home large enough for the dancers to move around in with great freedom, but small enough so the whole stage can be seen at a glance. At all times, the full figure can be seen no matter where he is on the stage. The heroic proportions of the Opera House stages with their huge sets and grandiose ideas are not the best home for dance. The elegant bodies of the dancers are lost in those enormous spaces. Dance speaks of homier things on a smaller scale; it's very flexible, sometimes playful use of space suggests that life itself is a skill.



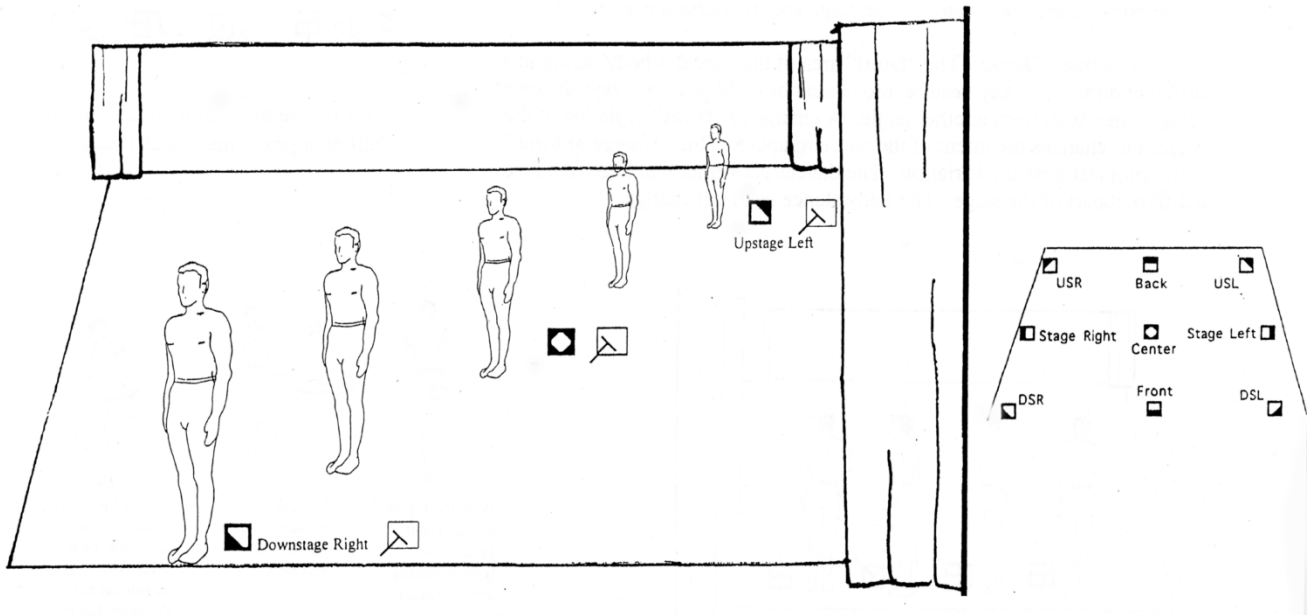
So much is “given” and cannot be changed; the true dimensional design, the front, side, back, the upright stance, the amount of space occupied, and the front facing of the position.

The great gift that is a “given” is movement and an urge to move. The feet are not rooted in place but have an itch to move. This restless itch carries these unique instruments through space to other areas, so it is not just that the body appears, but *where*.

¹ Nona was a great proponent of dancing and performing on a proscenium stage.

The reasons for this restless urge are not a “given,” but are complex, varied and persistent. It is into the unchanging instrument of the human body that the choreographer must pour his diverse and intangible concepts of the human experience. This is the choreographer’s battle – transforming the unchanging body to show the vast, kaleidoscopic world of human feelings.

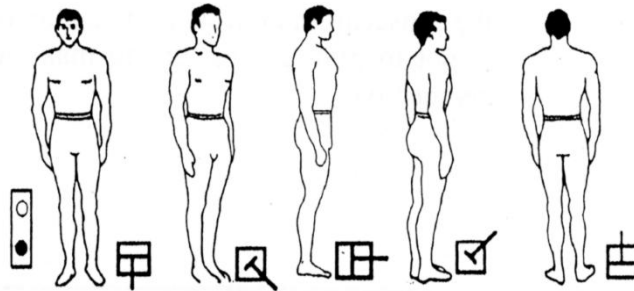
The Stage: This device is not useful in sports stadiums or arenas. In such spaces there is no fixed point of reference – no “front,” so a change of facing is unimportant. The proscenium arch stage is valid not because of tradition, but because the human body has a front, a side, and a back. The only way to emphasize various aspects of that body is through the device of the proscenium arch with the audience in a fixed position facing it. There is nothing artificial about this: the intent of theatre is not to play games, but to make an artistic statement. To make an artistic statement there must be a point of view, a perspective.



Front: Body facings — stage “Front:” A perspective, a point of reference.

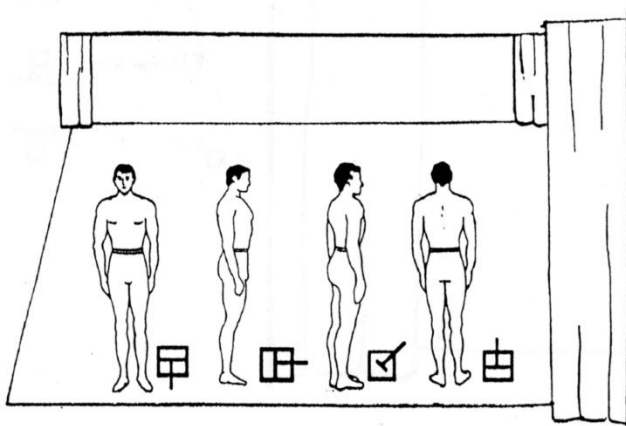
The **front** is one of those all purpose terms that is used in many contexts and everyone thinks they know what it means, but the minute you start defining it, it gets slippery.

The **front** refers to the **front** area of the body. All the important and interesting parts of the body are located at the **front**. The **front** is our contact with the world. Therefore, choreographers’ strongest statements are made with the **front** of the body facing the **front** of the stage.



Of course, this variation is useful in the traditional proscenium arch theatre.

Change of Front: The **front** area of the dancer’s body facing in a different direction. Any gesture, movement, or body position says a different thing when seen from another angle. A **change of front** or **facing** of the performer changes the intent of the choreographer. This **change of front** is the simplest possible variation. The dancer/performer just turns and faces a different part of the stage. The body stance need not change. The unchanging perspective of the audience gives the turn its significance: the dancer turns, the audience *sees* a turn.



With the figure in the “front” facing, the foreshortening almost negates the leg and arms: only the sole of the foot and the finger tips are seen.

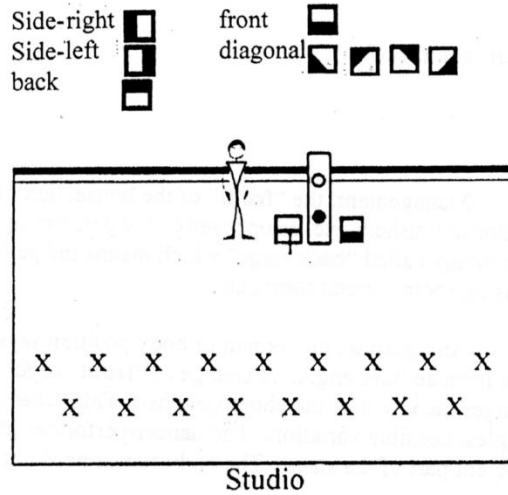


Turning it around makes a whole new statement.

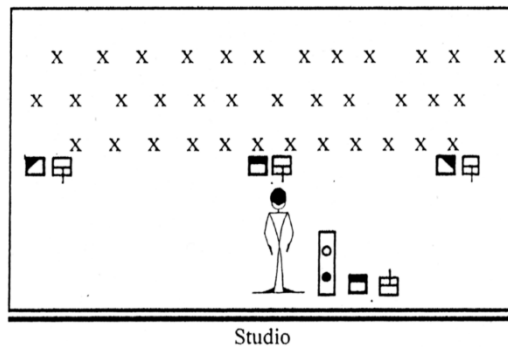


Facing upstage the audience can see only one leg and no arms. The body action has not changed, but the choreographer’s comment on it has.

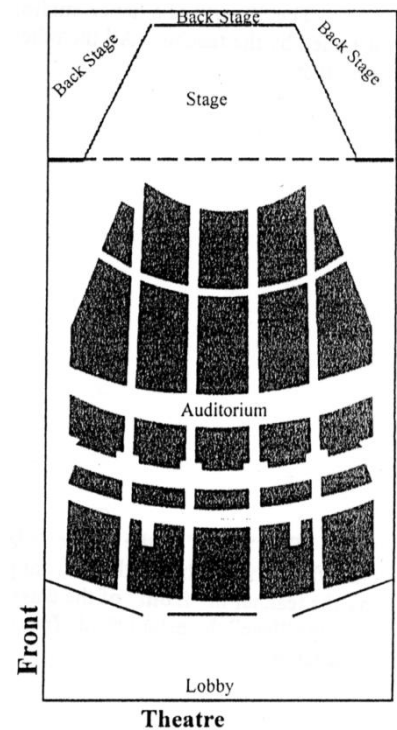
The **front** of a dance studio: the area in the studio occupied by the teacher. All the other directions are taken from that.



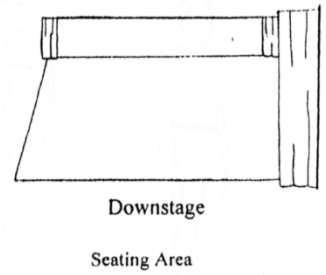
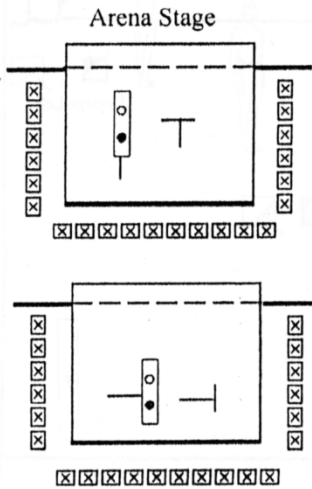
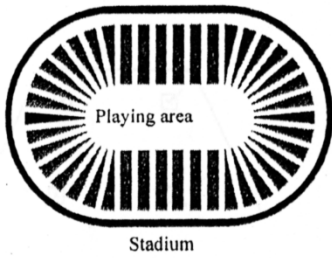
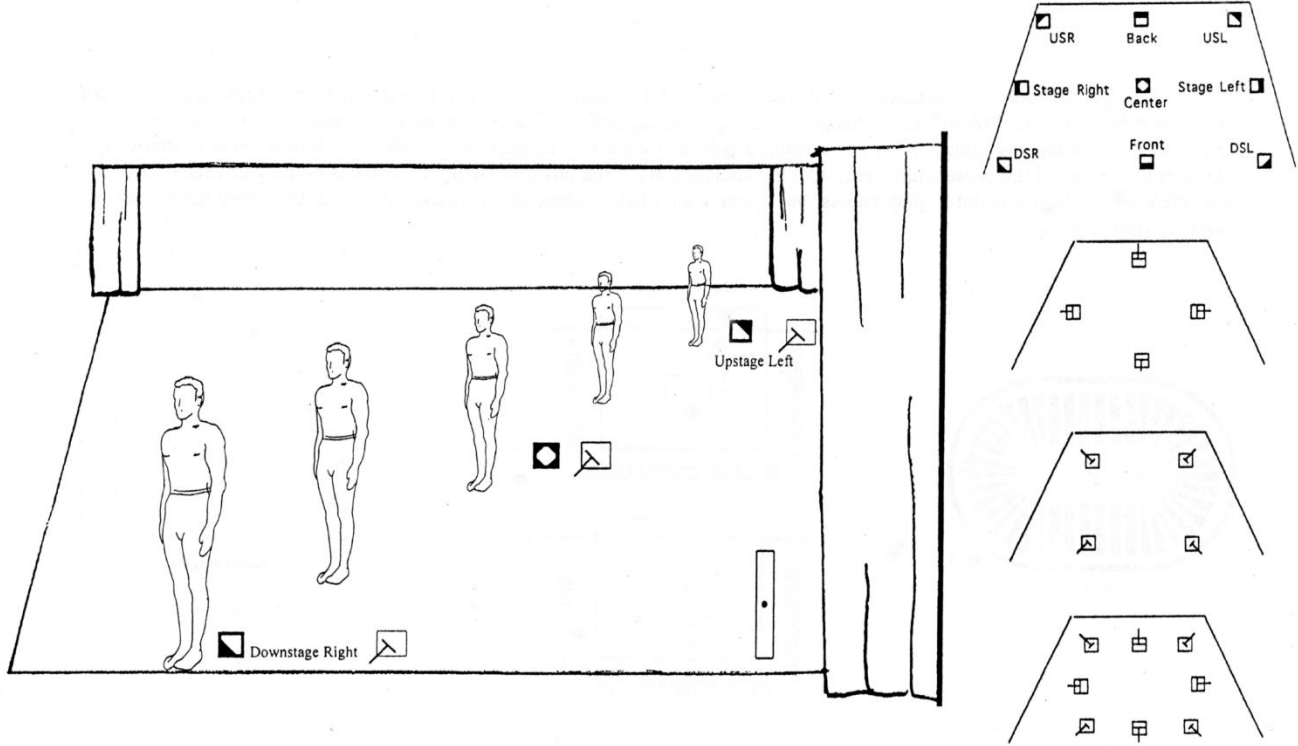
The **front** of the teacher's body faces the class. The class faces the teacher with the **front** part of the body. You might say the teacher in **front** of the class "faces" the students. The students "face" the established **front** of the studio and "face" the teacher.



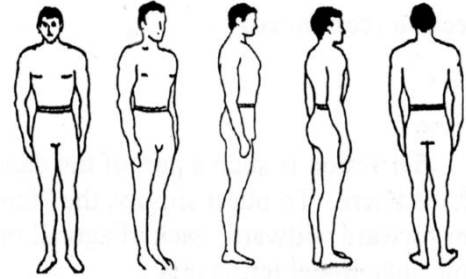
Management: the **front** of the house – box office, advertising, auditorium, ushers, etc. as opposed to the performing area of the theatre. Commonly called "backstage," which means the performing stage area, dressing rooms, green room, etc.



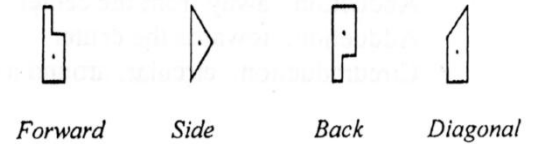
Front (continued)



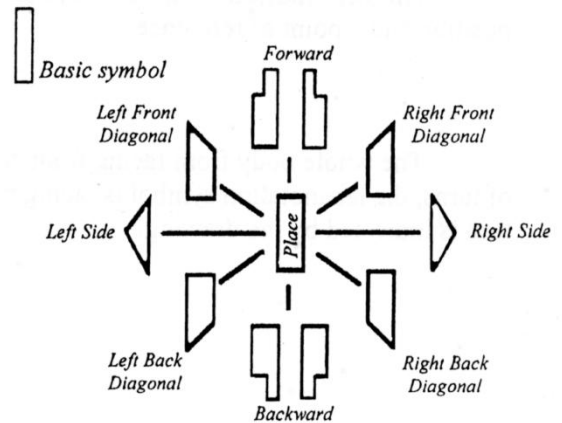
Direction: The human body is three dimensional. It has a front, a side, and a back. The front, of course, is the most important side. This basic body position is the starting point for all movement. To use notation terms – everything “in its place” – the starting position. All body movement radiates from this passive position.



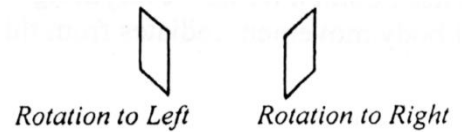
Movement of all or part of the body directed towards the front area of the body is in the *forward* direction. Movement directed towards the side area of the body is *sideways*. Likewise, movement towards the back is *backwards*.



The logo for the Labanotation system of movement writing includes all the directions in a neat package.



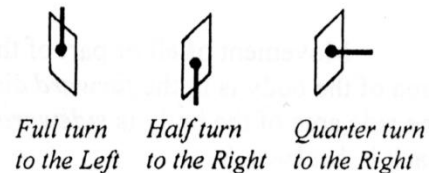
Direction is such a part of the dancer’s training it need not be described here. To put it simply, the “family joke” is: “everything is either forward, sideward, back, diagonal or circular, up or down.” In simple anatomical terms it is:



- Abduction: away from the center
- Adduction: towards the center
- Circumduction: circular, around a fixed point

All these indications involve a *fixed point* which is a starting position and a point of reference.

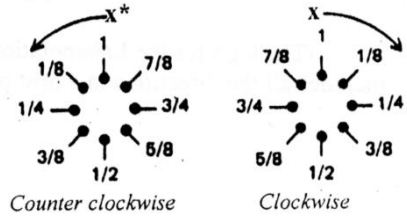
Examples



Direction (continued)

The whole body from facing front can make various degrees of turns, the Labanotation symbol is facing pins. The degree of turn is indicated by the drawing.

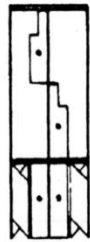
Facing pins



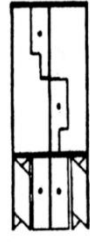
Note: "x" indicates starting point.

Of course, the whole body, by taking a step, can move into these directions.

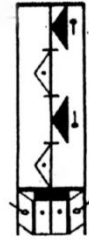
Walk:



Forward Step



Backward Step



*Sideward Step**

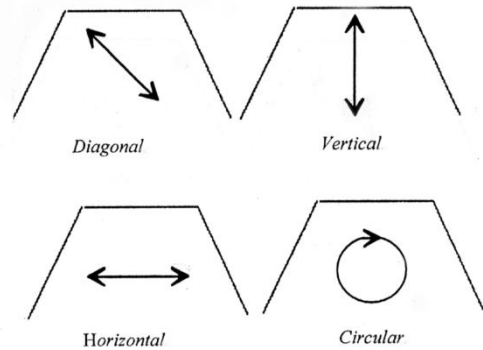


Step Diagonal

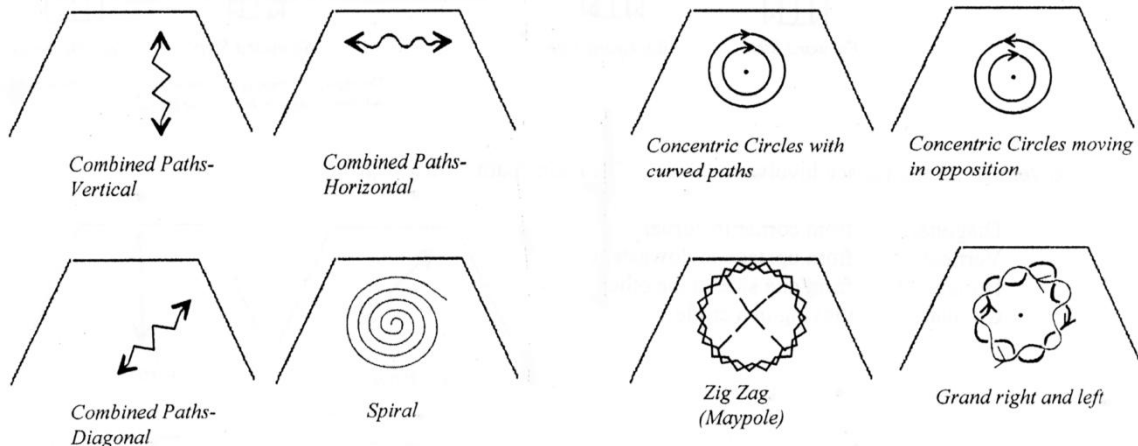
*The right foot crosses in front of the left. On the second step, the right foot crosses in back of the left foot.

Movement through space involves a "path." The main paths on a stage are:

- Diagonal: from corner to corner
- Vertical: from upstage to downstage
- Horizontal: from one side to the other
- Circular: moving in a circle

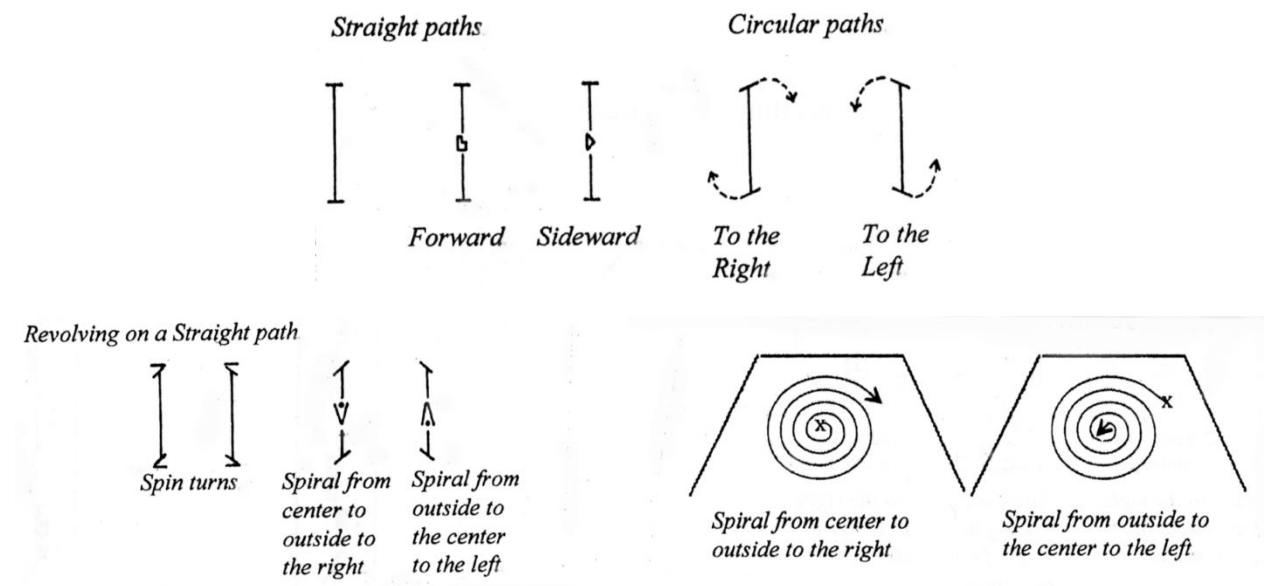


As usual, the basics are simple. There is a straight path, a curved path or a zig-zag (straight lines, curved lines, angular lines). Everything else is a combination of these paths.

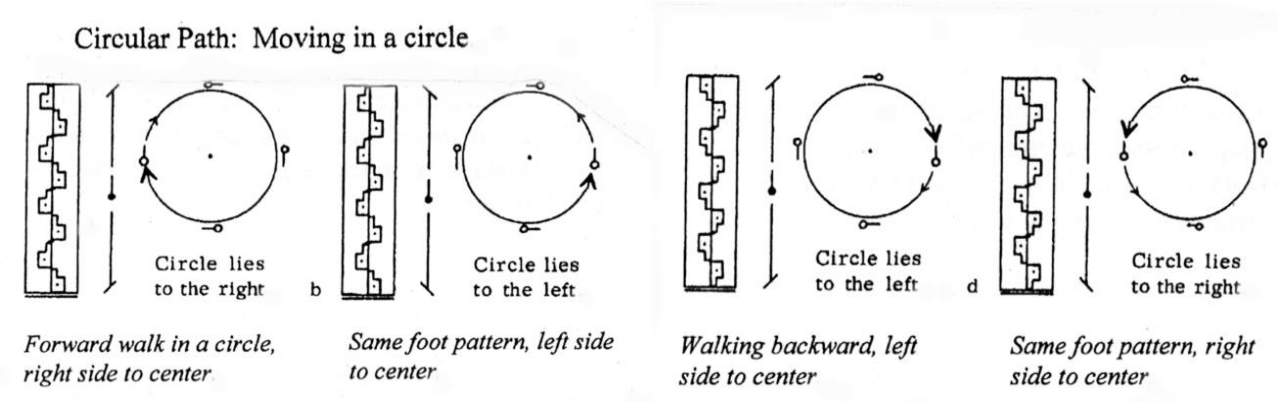


Direction (continued)

It is the combination of these paths that add the interest and makes a floor plan.



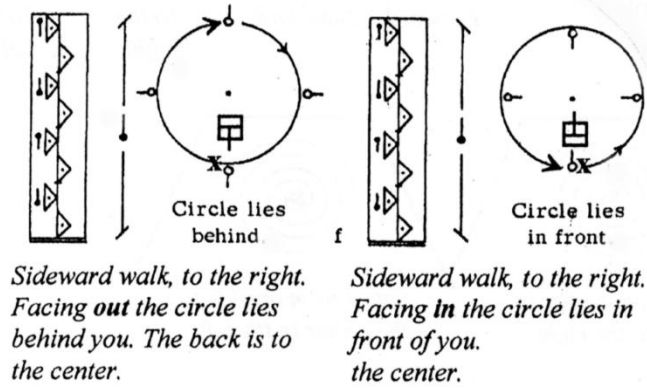
As with so much in dance, it is not just the movement made by the dancer, it is the dancer moving through space, *going someplace on a path* that holds the interest of the audience. The movement might be as simple and repetitious as a walk; it is *where the path is going* that is important.



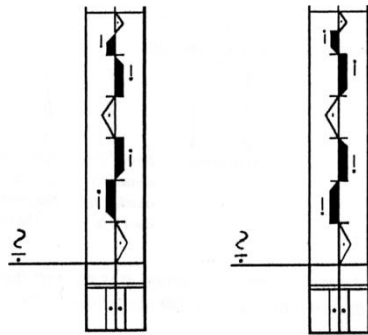
Note: The movement is identical. The direction it is given is the variation. The variations are similar, but it is not the same. For the side walk, the crossing foot will be either "in front of" or "in back of" the lead foot.

Direction (continued)

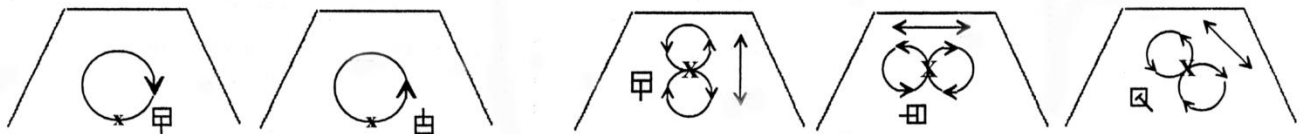
The “circle without changing front” in an interesting pattern of steps using several directions of steps around the *circumference* of a circle. (Notation: The circles moves *backwards* in space from its *starting* position.)



The same pattern could move forward in space from the same starting position.



Linked together, they could make a figure eight facing *downstage*. By changing front, the pattern could face *off-stage* or on the *diagonal*, or any other combination.



Level: Vertical Movement Up/Down

Change of Level: Movement of the whole body or parts of the body going higher or lower than the normal starting position. It describes a vertical change up and down.

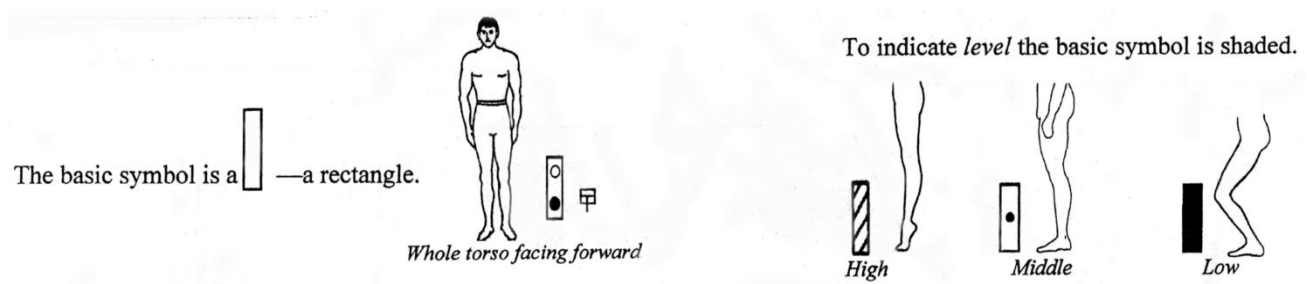
All movement is a change of level. That is what we do. In the dance class the student is told to “get your leg up,” “raise your arms,” “bend your knees.” All this *up* and *down* activity, although designed to develop the dancer’s technique and is part and parcel of the training, carries with it the emotional weight of *gesture*. The raised arms or legs become an emotional extension in space, not just a technical exercise. The compact tension of a horizontal fast spin, the release of energy into the air space of the leap, or a slow descent onto the floor are emotional states revealed by the dancer’s technical skill. The very structure and design of the exercise suggest a form for these feelings to take.

The exercises, which prepare the body to dance, can also prepare the choreographer to compose. The technical directions of raising and lowering, bending and extending directed at the dancer can be seen as structural elements directed at the *dance*, not the dancer. Large movement, small movement, contracted movement, extended movement, the whole range of *level* are the bricks are mortar of a work.

Change of level can be a choreographic concept, not only a technical one. It is like changing keys in music. It can be used as a modulating device or a simple change of emphasis. Firmly rooted in the technique of the dancer, change of level is a wonderful, simple tool for the choreographer.

Normal discursive language is inadequate for describing movement. The clear, simple symbols of Labanotation show objectively what kind of movement we are talking about. The symbols are as easy to understand as music notes, and although unfamiliar to many readers, should not be intimidating.

The fundamental concept of the Laban system is “*place*.” “*Place*” indicates the starting point for movement of the whole body or parts of the body.



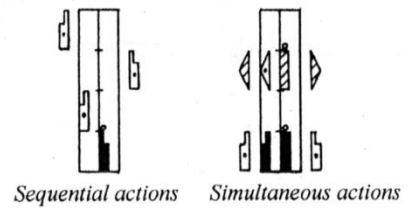
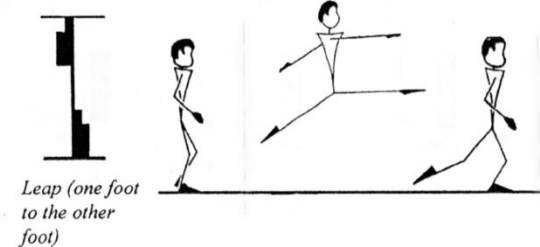
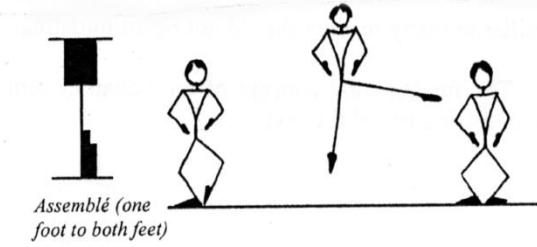
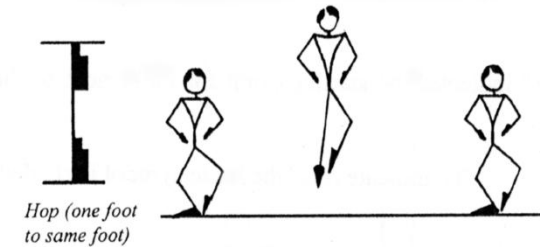
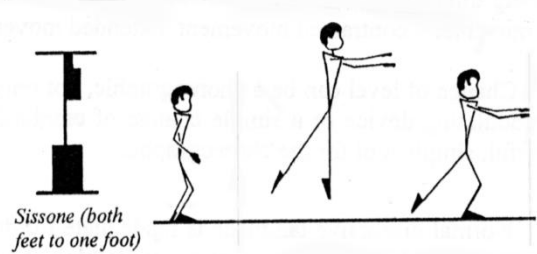
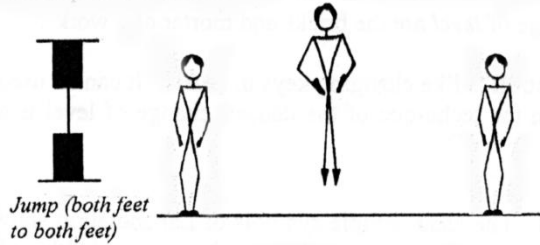
Level (continued)

Elevation: Change of level upward in the air (no support). There are only five (5) ways of taking off and landing. What happens in the air is *gesture*. It can be anything the dancer wants to do or has time for. However, the take-offs and landings must be precise.

(*Note: Nothing in the support column indicates you are in the air—jumping. A hold sign “o” in the support column, with nothing following it, indicates there is no movement through space.*)

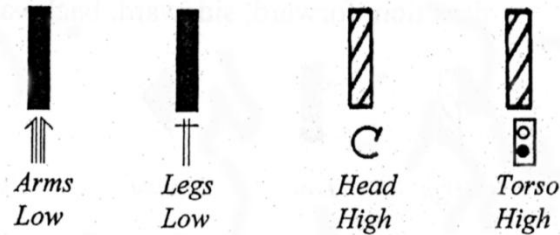
Examples of Elevation:

Examples of Elevation

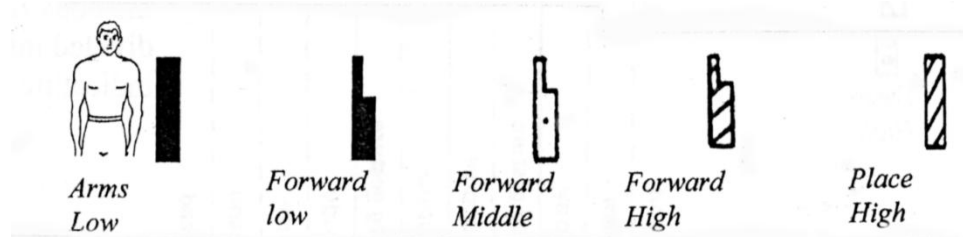


Level (continued)

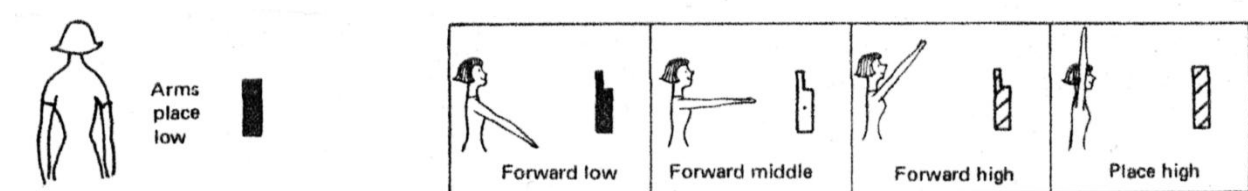
Parts of the body: The starting position for each part of the body is *taken* from its *point of attachment*. *Arms* are *place low* from below the shoulders. The *legs* are *place low* below the hips. The *head* is *place high* above the shoulders. The whole *torso* is *place high* above the legs.



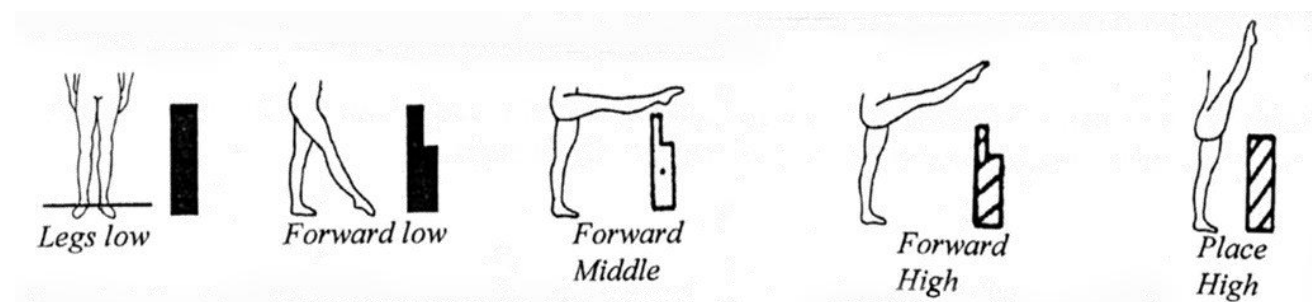
Arms: All movement takes a certain direction. In the illustration, the level symbols indicate the degree of *up* and *down* the arm makes when moving in the forward direction from *place low* below the shoulder to *place high* above the shoulder (over the head).



Arm Levels: Normally the arm hangs down by the side of the body when we are standing: *place low* being the starting position. Middle level is horizontal with the shoulder. High is above shoulder level; low is below shoulder level. Because the whole arm moves from the shoulder joint, direction and level are taken from that joint.

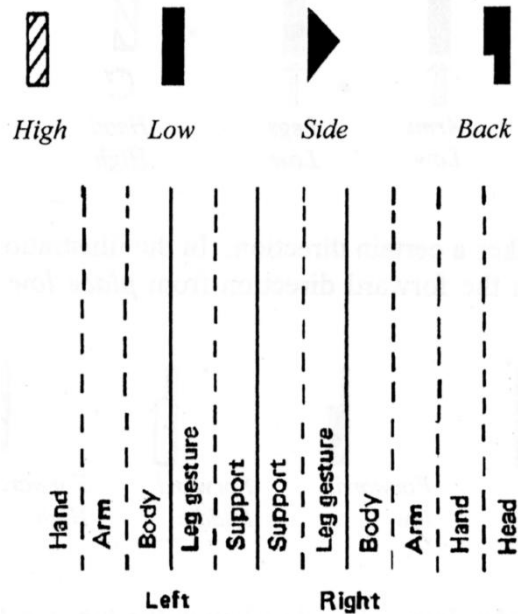


Legs: The legs do the same, from *place low* below the hip, to *forward high*, above the hip. (Note: From a standing position the legs cannot go to *place high* because that position would be *in* the body— above the hip.)



Level (continued)

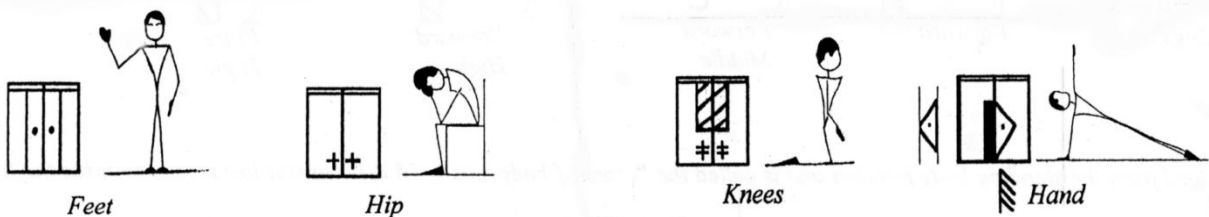
Head and Torso: Starting from *place high*, of course, go low in some direction, forward, sideward, backward.



The staff is read from the bottom up. The center line divides the staff and the body into right and left. The staff is divided into columns reserved for symbols indicating different parts of the body.

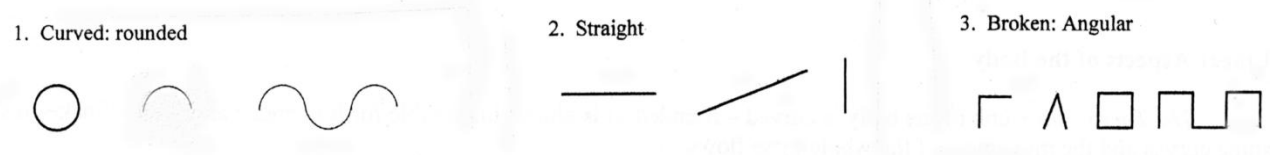
The Whole Body: *Level of Support*— normally we stand at middle level. *Low* is with the knees bent. *High* is on the toes.

Changing Support: *Downward*. Normally we are supported, in a standing position, by our two feet. If we change level and sit or kneel, the hips or knees become our supports— they carry the weight.



Linear: The design the body makes in space. The outline: How it looks in any given position. Stopped action. The linear aspects of the body, like sculpture, suggest some degree of feeling.

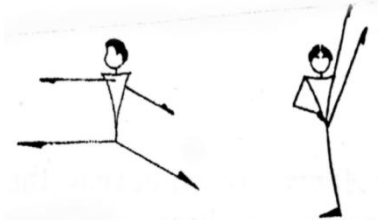
From the point of view of graphic design, there are three categories of lines and shapes.



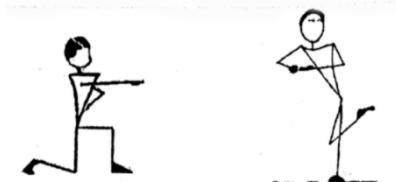
The Curve: The smooth curve has very little tension. The eye follows it easily. The direction does not change quickly or frequently. It has a feeling of grace and ease.



Straight Lines: Unbroken, they keep going. They carry the eye with them. They almost attack space. They are full of unrestrained energy and exuberance.



Broken Lines: Angularity, suggest degrees of tension. The eye must be alert to follow them. They change direction constantly. They are exciting and dramatic and have rhythmic vitality.



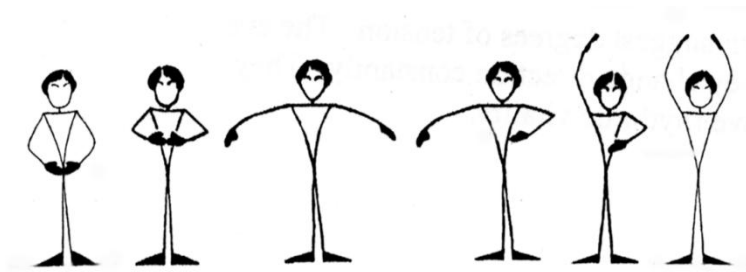
Linear Aspects of the Body

The Torso: the trunk of the body is curved – rounded. It is almost impossible for it to create angularity. Snake-like, the spine curves and the movement of the whole torso flows.

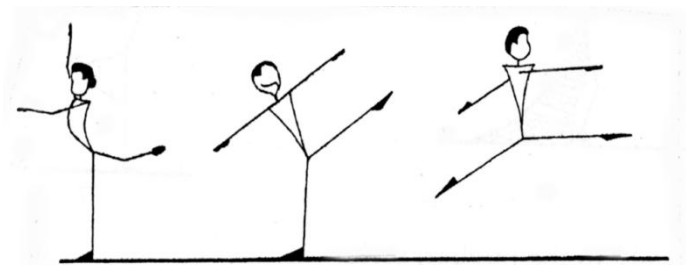


Linear Aspects of the Body (continued)

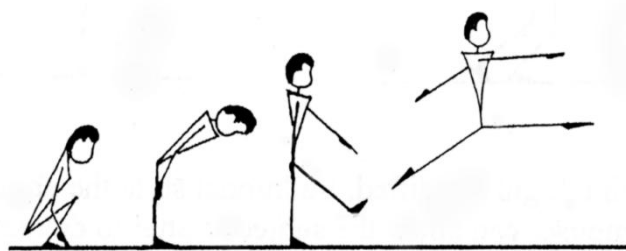
The Arms: When at rest, the arms are straight at the sides. Once they start moving, the angularity of the elbow appears. In the ballet port-de-bras the arms are made to look curved.



The Legs: It is almost impossible for the legs to look curved. They are either straight or angular. The knee cannot make a curve. The ballet “attitude” can suggest the curve, but, the perspective must be carefully chosen if the angularity is to be disguised.

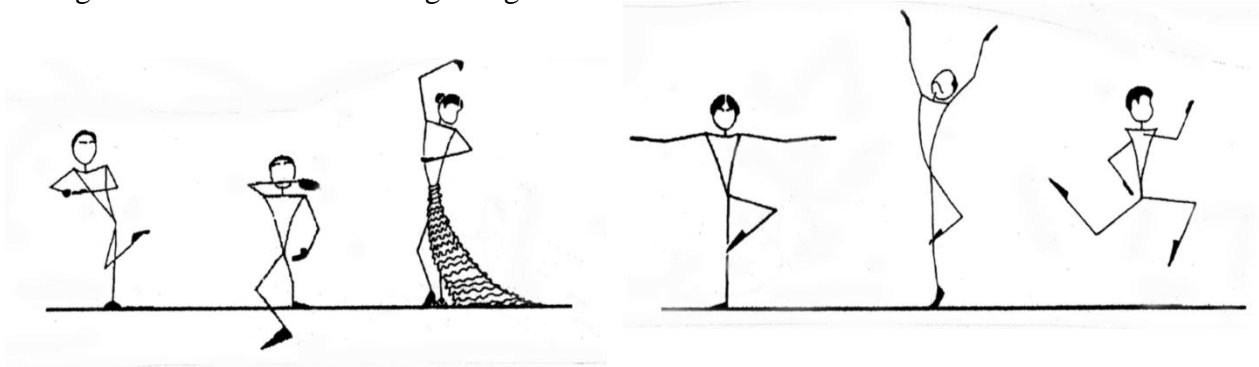


Straight Lines: Much of ballet is built on straight lines – the energetic thrust of the extremities from the body center. Even the back is held straight. No curve is allowed.

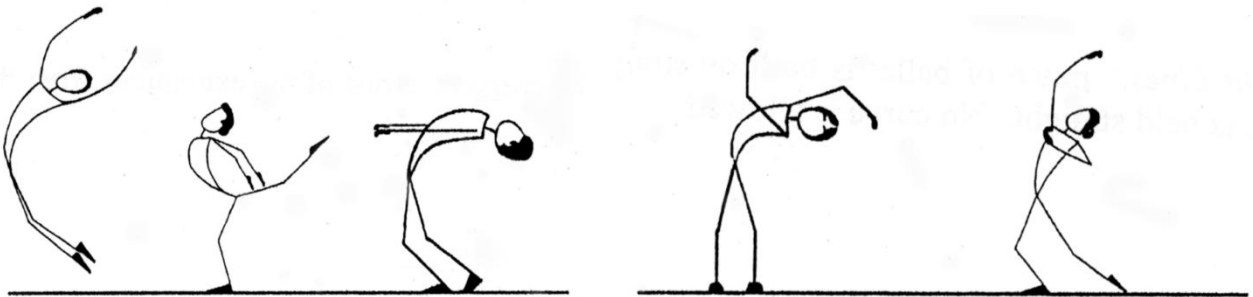


Linear Aspects of the Body (continued)

Broken Lines: Angularity. Much Asian dance uses, with spectacular charm, the angularity of the limbs as contrast to the curve of the torso. In Europe, the Flamenco dance of Spain is full of exciting and dramatic use of the right angle of the limbs.



Curved Lines: Used extensively in the modern style.



If the composer is working in a highly codified, traditional style the choice of line is very limited – the linear “look” is a given. In a freer medium, the composer can allow the subject matter to determine the linear choices. In any case, contrast is an important formative element. To emphasize a curve, contrast it with something straight or angular. The gentle curve can be straightened and extended in space or pulled in on itself in angularity. A subtlet and unexpected liner change in a gesture can suggest emotional nuance and add richness to the composition. Of course, no one can say what feelings lines and shapes convey in themselves but a good work will use linear variety to achieve a balanced whole. As always, too much sameness looks routine.

chapter 3
elements of time

TIME

“the ever flowing stream of time...” – Rachel Carson

Space is tangible: it can be seen, touched, measured, occupied, photographed, lived in, even conquered. Space is where we live. It is familiar and comfortable. It is home.

Time, on the other hand, cannot be seen. It is intangible, difficult to measure, fluid, and cannot be conquered or held in our hands and examined.

Nevertheless, the passage of this “ever flowing stream of time” is not uneventful. It is punctuated by an orderly and dependable sequence of events even more comforting than Space. There is a Pulse to time: sunrise/sunset, the rhythmic ebb and flow of the tides, our own heartbeat— strong/weak, the breath – inhale/exhale, action and sleep.

Our living has been shaped by this vast environmental order. This is our life experience. It is not unreasonable to expect the creative artist to respect our need for sense of order and to organize and punctuate the little space of time chosen for the new composition.

Musicians have developed devices and symbols for organizing and illustrating their concepts of how this great river of time is flowing by. These ideas are useful tools for the choreographer in helping to organize and hold the concept of time values in the imagination. These concepts of time can be illustrated by simple lines on paper— vertical or horizontal, or as broken lines, like a “pulse.”

Or as lines and ticks to illustrate unequal or uneven importance.

__ V __ V __ V __ V __ V __ V __ V __

Pulse: The underlying beat; like the pulse in the body; an orderly progression of time.

Accent: The point of emphasis

Strong Accent



Weak Accent



The elusive element of time – pulse, accent, flow, duration – are hard to describe in literary form and difficult to hold in the imagination because they cannot be written down. However, over the centuries, musicians have developed symbols and graphic designs which represent these elements so we can see them and use them in expressive ways to create new forms. Dance is also a time-oriented art so the concepts and devices used by the musician can also be used by the choreographer as tools for organizing the time aspects of his piece. In other words, for varying and manipulating his material.

Tempo: The rate of speed – fast, slow, moderate, deliberate.

Tempo determines the character of a piece or movement. Festival events the world over are celebrated with lively songs and dances usually performed at a very fast pace. Ceremonial events are rather slow paced and deliberate. After all, one does not do a jig at a funeral.

Any departure from the normal speed of a gesture changes its intent. For instance, waving a hand is usually moderately fast. If it is done very quickly it has an urgency to it. If it is slow it lacks enthusiasm and suggests disappointment. The movement is the same, but the speed has changed the meaning.

Musical Terminology

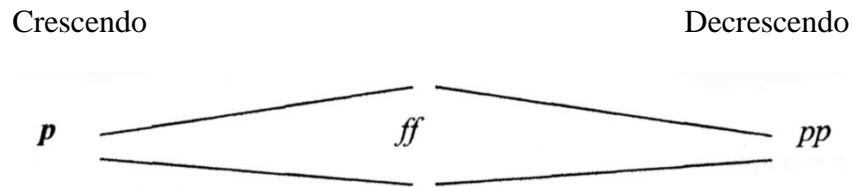
Italian	Metronome Marking	Dance Terms	Degrees of Speed
Largo	40-60	Slow	Ritardando – slow
Larghetto	60-66	Moderate	Accelerando – increases
Adagio	66-76	Deliberate	Ritenutos – hold back
Andante	76-108	Walking	Rubato – freely, ad lib
Moderato	108-120	Running	
Allegro	120-168	Skipping	
Presto	168-200	Hopping	
Prestissimo	200-208		

Dynamics: The amount of force given to a movement or gesture. The quality of intensity of the movement, such as strong, crisp, smooth, sharp, etc. Dynamics, like all time elements, is difficult to define and measure. It can only be understood in the experience of doing.

Dynamic Terms

Music Terms

p – piano/soft *pp* – pianissimo/very soft *m* – mezzo/moderately soft
mf – mezzo forte/moderately loud *f* – forte/loud *ff* – fortissimo/very loud



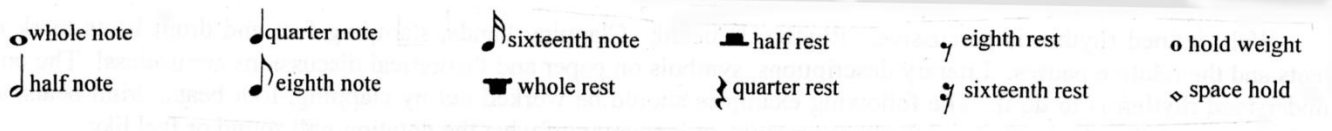
Dance Terms



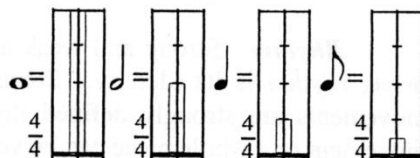
Rudolf Laban, in his excellent little book, effort, describes dynamics through eight effort actions which correlate to the dynamic music terms above. They are:



Duration: Musical notation of a beat (note values) to show duration are:



In Labanotation, the length of the movement symbol indicates the relative time value:



Meter: The rhythmic pattern resulting from the grouping of pulses by means of accented beats. The basic staff is marked off into regular units of time called *measures* which are separated by lines. Various note values are grouped between these bar lines. The kind of grouping is indicated by the two numbers. The upper tells the number of beats per measure, the lower number tells the kind of note which gets one beat. This is called a time signature.

The examples below in music notation show two measures of 2/4 and 3/4, one measure of 4/4 and 6/8, with the Labanotation staff on the right. The small ticks across the center line of the Labanotation staff indicate regular recurring beats. These groupings may be called *Duple Time*, *Triple Time*, or *Compound Time*.

Regularly recurring beats

4/4 6/8

Duple Time: one accent to each measure. 2/4

Triple Time: one accent to each measure. 3/4

Compound time: two accents on each measure. One heavy, one light. 4/4

Compound time: three accents on each measure. One heavy, two light. 6/8

Rhythm: Strong and weak accents succeeding each other in time to create a pattern. If *tempo* is the character of a piece, *rhythm* is its identity. Meter is a time signature and rhythm is a movement signature. Some of our everyday activities are more rhythmic than others, and there are some people whose movement signatures are strongly defined rhythmically. A well-defined rhythmic structure to a movement or a whole piece can be very significant and contribute to its identity.

Well-defined rhythm is percussive. Rhythm is heard. Clapped hands, stamping feet and drum beats mark out the accents and the relative pauses. The following examples should be worked out by clapping, foot beats, drum beats, spoons, anything, realizing that the symbols on the page are only an indication of what the notation will sound or feel like.

The traditional dances of Russia, Spain, and Poland are based on stimulating, exciting rhythmic patterns. We have no trouble identifying their national source. As an African tribesman said: "Tell me what you dance and I'll tell you who you are."

Rhythm (continued)

EXAMPLES

Bolero: Drum Base:
A dance of Spanish origin.

Basic Beat	Accents (Clap)	Drum Beats	Tempo
$\frac{6}{4}$ 1 3 5 6	$\frac{6}{8}$ 1 3 5 6	$\frac{3}{4}$ 3 3	66 - 76

Spanish phrase from
Modern Dance Fundamentals.
2 measures of 6/8 – foot pattern.

1 2 3 4 5 6 1 2 3 4 5 6

$\frac{6}{8}$

Note: There is a heavy stamp on count 2 of the 1st measure, but no change of weight so it feels like a rest.

Polka: Fast, lively Polish couple
dance. It starts with the hop – the
up-beat “and one.”

$\frac{2}{4}$ + | 1 and 2 and | 1 and 2 and | 1

$\frac{2}{4}$

Rhythm example: Hop without changing sides

Tempo – Presto (168-200). The repeat sets up the heavy accents on the 1st and 3rd counts and gives the hop its characteristic bounce.

Ex. 231
♩ = 152 Allegro

Dancer's Count $\frac{3}{4}$ | 1 air 2 air 3 | 1 air 2 air 3 | 1

Musical Count $\frac{3}{4}$

Rhythm example: Leap without changing sides. The 3-1 accents are still there, but the repeat of leap is smooth and rather elegant.

Ex. 228
♩ = 132 Allegro

Dancer's Count $\frac{3}{4}$ | 1 air 2 air 3 | 1 air 2 air 3 | 1

Musical Count $\frac{3}{4}$

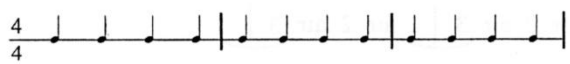
Syncopation: An accent on a weak beat, or the omission of an accent on a normally strong beat: its effect depends on regular meter. The normal and regular pattern of accents must first be established before the syncopation can appear for what it is, a break from the expected regularity.

In Western music, the strongest accent usually falls on the first beat of a measure, the down beat. When this does not occur, the listener is surprised and stimulated by the change from the expected pattern of accents. Syncopation depends for its effect on regularity. That is why it is interesting.

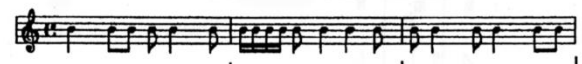
Syncopation can only be a tool for the choreographer if she has first made something to syncopate. To break the mold there must first be a mold to break, either your own or something traditional. If change is the order of the day, the first question is, "What is being changed and how?" That is the value of having a *theme*. It gives the composer something to manipulate.

As an example, the rhythm pattern does not appear as syncopation until the base beat is first shown or heard.

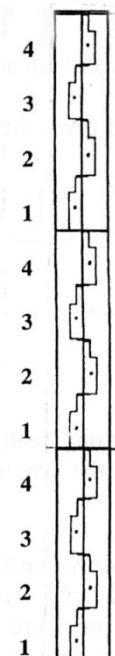
The Base Beat



Moderate Tempo

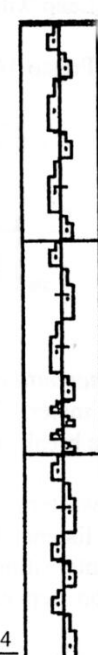


1 2+ 3 + 4+ | 1 2 +3+4+ | 1 +2 +3 +4+ |



$\frac{4}{4}$ - 60 - 76

The rhythm of the music notation translated into a foot pattern in dance notation.



$\frac{4}{4}$

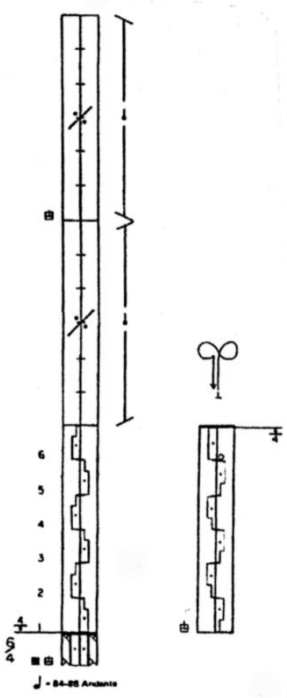
Note: For this to be clear, work in pairs. Have one person clap or walk the base beat while the other claps the syncopation. Or: Use a metronome set at a moderate tempo and clap against it.

Phrase: A sentence, a movement sequence, a unit of music. $\frac{6}{8}$ 1 2 3 4 5 6 1 2 3 4 5 6

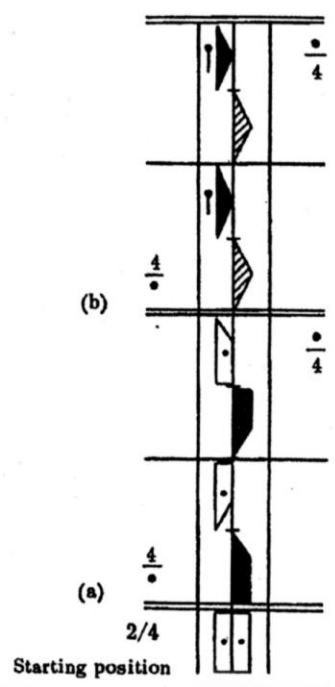
Like sentences, phrases are the building blocks of a piece. A phrase can be any length but it must contain at least the seed of an idea. Great masses of movement drifting across a stage in arbitrary sequence is not a composition however brilliant the performance and the technique of the dancers. There must be punctuation, breath pauses, shifting accents, spatial changes, and so on. In other words, phrases and groupings of ideas into smaller units. Like bricks in a building, each one helps create a significant whole. That is what composition is. An idea is not enough. A technique is not enough. It is what you do with it that makes the work. In other words, creativity means giving the idea artistic shape. It is the “shape” that is new, not necessarily the idea.

For clear, available examples of phrases, music is the great source. Hymns, folk songs, and popular songs are so familiar we tend to ignore the simple structure of phrases and concentrate on the words. Folk dances are the same. We learn the steps, but it is the grouping of the steps into phrases that the choreographer should watch for.

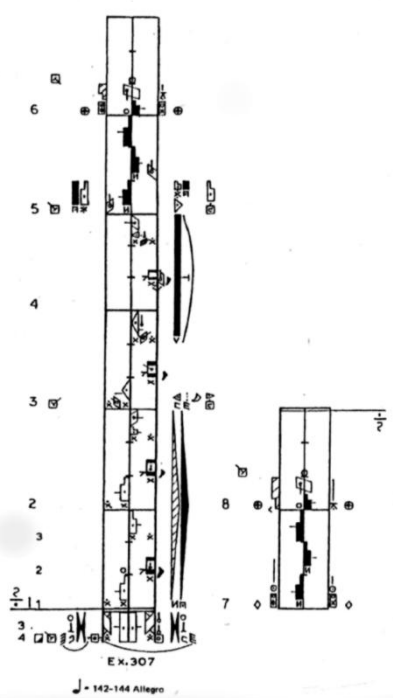
Walking Phrase*



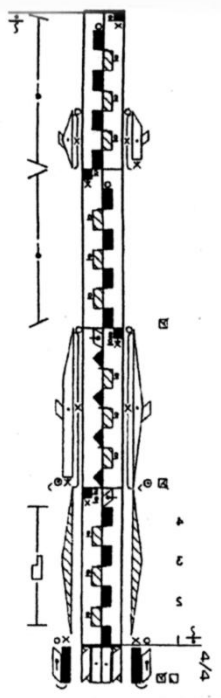
Cherkessia (Folk)**



Spanish Phrase*



Israeli Phrase*



*Walking Phrase, Spanish Phrase, Israeli Phrase from *Modern Dance Fundamentals* by Nona Schurman and Sharon Leigh Clark

**Cherkessia (Folk) from *Ten Folk Dances* by Lucy Venable.

chapter 4
elements of form

FORM

“It is not wood (capital) or labor (carving), but the shape that makes the oar.”

— Colonel Douglas, Engineer

Form: The overall shape or structure of a living thing which gives it identity and character. An ordered arrangement of a composer’s ideas, whatever the medium.

The choreographer’s ideas involve the orderly arrangement of movement of the human body – the use of gesture (see Ch. 1). Simple gesture, with well-defined linear and easily identified emotional aspects, can present the composer’s idea with the clarity and emotional impact of sculpture. A well-chosen gesture is the choreographer’s statement of intention: what the piece is about.

This gesture narrows and focuses the subsequent movement choices and suggests what the overall form of the piece will be. In other words, what you *want* to say determines *how* you say it. What you *have* to say **is** the **theme**, the *idea*. The specific gesture, the chosen movement, presents the idea in concrete, visible form. A well-constructed theme has the solidity of wood. It can be seen and recognized like Colonel Douglas’ oar.

Theme: A simple movement statement which is capable of further development. It is the beginning of a piece, the opening statement, the key to what follows. A theme lets the audience know what the composer is going to talk about (the word *theme* comes from the Greek and Latin *thema*, and originally meant “what is laid down.”) Themes are often declamatory in quality.

Once the theme is “laid down” and the statement made, the problem for the composer is: how to develop the material to make a piece, not just a statement. In other words, “what do I do next?” Fortunately, unlike the carver’s medium, for all the time arts, dance, drama, music, writing, etc, there is a basic formula. All must have:

A		B		C
Beginning		Statement		Exposition
Middle	<i>or</i>	Climax	<i>or</i>	Development
End		Resolution		Conclusion

The terms used are not important. The *form* is the same.

For any work to appear and to be recognized as a unique thing in its own right, it must have certain characteristics. It must have:

1. **Unity:** It must hold together as a unit.
2. **Variety:** Varying the material to add interest.
3. **Contrast:** Use of related but contrasting material to avoid monotony.
4. **Balance:** Different forces should balance each other so as not to destroy the unity of the piece.
5. **Coherence:** It must seem to make sense; be relevant.
6. **Dominance:** Within the unit, one idea must be emphasized. Too many ideas thrown together are confusing. The composer must take a stand. The audience should not have to decide what he is talking about. A good piece makes a clear statement.

Inspiration and good taste can only go so far. To give his idea a shape that can appear and be seen as this unique thing he wants it to be, a composer needs tools.

A “form” does not just happen. It must be made – constructed – created. In 1959, when working on “The Moors’ Pavane,” José Limón stated, “*Movement, gesture, pantomime were not enough. A form was needed; a form strong and distinct enough to justify the whole effort.*”

Note: Examples in Thematic Treatment can be found in the following works:

Doris Humphrey: Passacaglia: Music: J. S. Bach Passacaglia
Doris Humphrey: Day on Earth: Music: Aaron Copeland
Doris Humphrey: New Dance: Music: Wallengford Reiger
Charles Weidman: Traditions
Martha Graham: Frontier: Music: Louis Horst
José Limón: The Moor’s Pavane: Music: Henry Purcell arranged by Simon Sadoff

The basic elements of **Form** include the following fundamentals:

1. **Repetition:** Means of emphasis, unification, recognition.
2. **Contrast:** Provides variety.
3. **Expansion:** Making it longer, larger.
4. **Contraction:** Making it smaller, shorter.
5. **Inversion:** Turning it upside-down – start at the end and go to the beginning.
6. **Variation:** Change the timing, space, technique of movement, etc.
7. **Development:** Letting it grow and change.
8. **Free Variation:** Making transitions from one phrase to another.
9. **Ornamentation:** Embellishments, flourishes and stylization.
10. **Cadence:** The last statement, the end of the piece.
11. **The Phrase:** Like sentences, the building blocks of the work.

Repetition is the very stuff of folk dance and song. The interest is not in the variety of the steps and music, but in *who* is doing them. It is a social function. *Repetition* of social functions make for social cohesion. Ritual hymns and prayers and, of course, the ever present popular songs use *repetition* to excess with very little change or variation. In whatever form, it is not being used as an artistic device to shape a piece, but as comforting ritual. Repetition is a powerful structural tool, as important movement often needs repeating, however, too much identical *repetition* loses its ability to stimulate.

For the composed dance, the opening movement, or *theme*, often needs repeating to establish an identity. When this material is used throughout a piece, it can be a means of emphasis, although the repeat is rarely identical. When the theme does return, it is with recognizable variations. This treatment gives unity to the piece and is the great structural value of repetition.

This chapter is based on the assumption that the dancers' training exercises are also the choreographer's tools. Rudimentary movement can often become the basis for a composition. Its very ordinariness and lack of content cries out for variation; no complex idea stands in the way of its free use by an imaginative composer.

All training exercises are, of necessity, simple, short, completely routine and repetitious. However, when strung together to make a phrase, they show surprising choreographic charm. The drill disappears in the choreographic structure and what appears is *dance*.

Most of the exercises used here are rudimentary in nature. However, with a little imagination and a few tools to work with, these simple things can be the basis for interesting work. Walks and runs are preparation for hops and leaps and, by extension, full blown dances.

Our most elementary movement is "marking time" – a simple shift of weight from one foot to the other. All locomotor movement is a variation of this simple action.

Examples:

The image contains five rhythmic diagrams, each with a title and a tempo marking. The diagrams use vertical lines, squares, and circles to represent beats and movements. The first diagram, 'Marking Time', shows a simple alternating pattern in 4/4 time. The second, 'Forward Walk', shows a more complex pattern in 4/4 time. The third, 'Israeli Step', shows a pattern in 4/4 time with a tempo of 84-86. The fourth, 'Can-Can', shows a pattern in 4/4 time with a tempo of 120 and includes two stick figures in dynamic poses. The fifth, 'Polka', shows a pattern in 2/4 time with a tempo of 138 and includes a stick figure in a dynamic pose.

Marking Time
4/4

Forward Walk
4/4
Tempo ♩- 84-86

Israeli Step
4/4
Tempo ♩- 84-86

Can-Can
4/4
Tempo ♩- 120
Theatre dance of the vaudiville period.


Polka
2/4
Tempo ♩- 138
A couple dance of Polish origin. Hopping step.

Contrast

No matter what the medium, all *forms* are made up of contrasting and diverse elements. That is what forms are; the organization and arrangement of contrasting elements which create an organic whole. Repetition and Contrast are the great twin structural elements that tie a work together, like mortar between bricks in a building.

Charming and comfortable as repetition so often can be, contrast is the life of the party. It keeps the piece interesting and stimulates the imagination. However, its real choreographic function is to make a pattern. It seems safe to say “no contrast, no shape.” The simplest example is close to home: the human blood stream comes to mind. It does not flow smoothly. There are contrasting strong and weak accents. Together they make a pattern: this pattern is called a *pulse*.


The formative potential of contrast, as a device, can be seen most clearly with graphic design. For example, a straight line on paper can hardly be called a pattern or form:

_____ give that line a bit of a twist; 

it is no longer just a line on paper. The pattern appears to represent something: a vine, a path, a wave, whatever;

put a tree beside it  and it becomes a river;

a contrasting bulge on one end,  it becomes a snake;

turn it on end, it is a flower. 

These shapes are familiar to all of us. They are seen and recognized at a glance and can be referred to later at any time. No repetition is necessary.

For the choreographer, the one familiar shape available to him is his own instrument – the human body. Standing by itself, in one place, it is like a single line on paper – the simple melody – the basic gesture. The only way for it to change its appearance or contour is through movement.

Movement is fleeting. It is not durable. It cannot be written down and, once finished, is easily forgotten. Yet movement is the only thing the choreographer has at his disposal to change the shape and show different aspects of this instrument.

Dance is an extension in *Time*.

Movement takes *Time*.

Time has a *Pulse* – there is a contrasting pattern of ebb and flow.

Contrast (continued)

Like waves or the blood stream, there is a press/release, ebb/flow action. The ebb creates the space for the next push – the flow.

To vary the ebb and flow of the pulse of *Time*, the composer will want to use the *Time* devices of the musician: *Rhythm*, *Tempo*, *Dynamics*, etc., to structure his work with interesting and exciting patterns.

To keep things close to home, like the old trick of the chef who puts a bit of sugar in the stew or a pinch of salt in the cookie dough.

Note: Contrasting material is necessary and stimulating. You might say, “for every positive there is a negative.” An idea can often be clarified by saying not what *is*, but what *is not*. Nothing points up the character of anything better than showing its opposite.

There are many ways of creating contrast, most of which do not need brilliant technical displays by the performers. The simple elements discussed in the chapters on *Time* and *Space* are always useful. These can involve minor changes in the existing material or the addition of some new and completely different material.

Contrast in Time

- A. *Tempo*: Just speed it up or slow it down. (*Ritards* and/or *accelerandos*.) Fast things are exciting. Slow things are deliberate and thoughtful.
- B. *Rhythm*: Change from a smooth to a broken rhythm *or* the reverse – broken to smooth.
- C. *Syncopation and Accent*: Shifting the heavy accents to unexpected places or withholding an expected accent from its usual place.
- D. *Meter (Counting)*: Change from a 4/4 to 3/4. This shifts the down beat forward one count adding a more circular feeling to the phrase.

Example:

A square 4/4 becomes a circular 3/4. The strong beats fall closer together.



A 6/8 or 6/4 allows for great flexibility. It can have either two or three accents to the measure.



If strung together as four measure and counted as 3/4 it feels *syncopated*.



Contrast in Space

A. *Space*: Expanding the action from a small concentrated area of the stage to the full stage area. *Or* the reverse, from the full stage area to a diminished, restricted area.

B. *Linear design*: Change from long flowing lines of the body to angularity – broken lines.

C. *Stillness*:

- 1) *Not moving*, of course, is the direct opposite of moving. Just holding still while maintaining the style and character of the piece can become a structural device. It gives the piece stability and authority, like a column in a building. The sudden stopping of movement and holding still is similar to a breath-pause, or rest, in music. This breath-pause focuses the attention, rests the eye and allows the audience to catch its breath, so to speak.

The deliberate withholding of movement allows the body/instrument to appear with great clarity and eloquence. The dancer's instrument itself becomes a significant gesture: the living instrument.

- 2) *Stillness within a movement pattern*: One part of the body, say the feet keep the theme going while the arms and upper body hold a position. (Some styles call this “carrying the gesture.”) The inversion, of course, is the feet hold a position while the arms and upper body carry the action. This creates a highly mature and sophisticated style.

With so much contrast packed into the structure of a few phrases, incredible demands are made on all forces of performance. With impeccable concentration, the dancer must control – and be seen as controlling – the structure of the dance, the stage space and, of course, the audience.

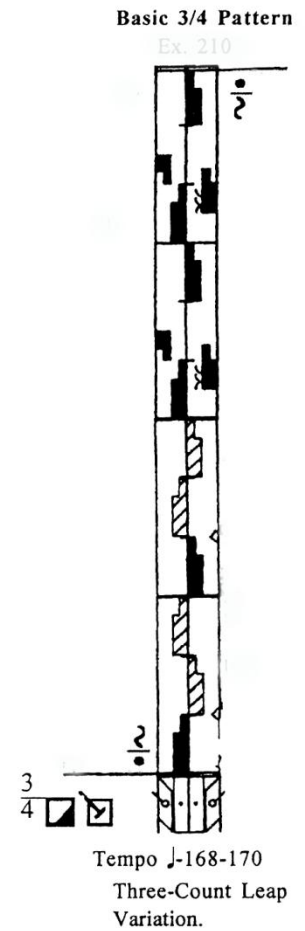
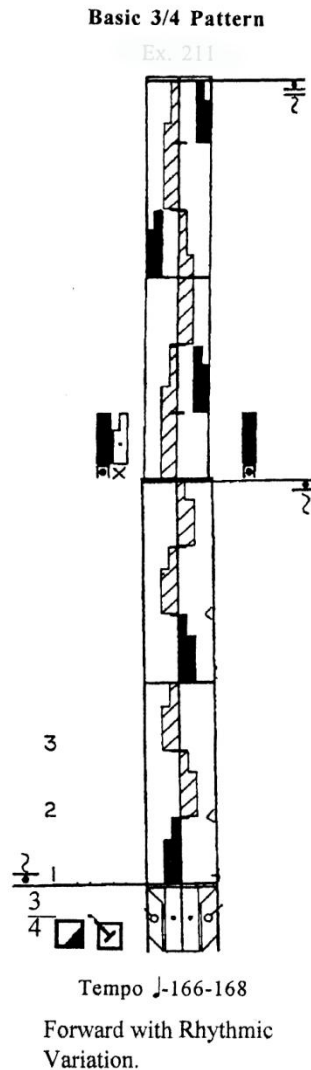
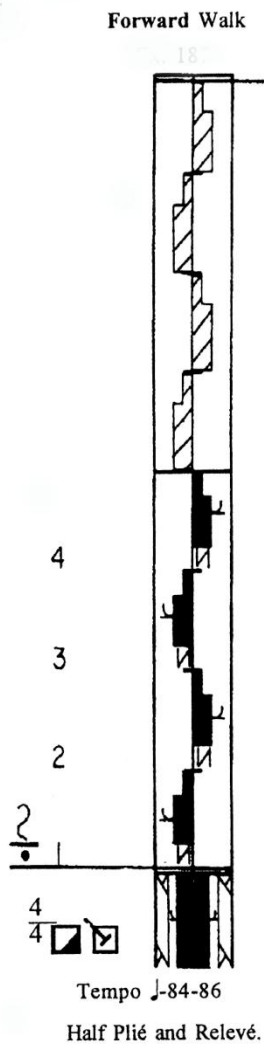
For example, Spanish and Asian dance use this treatment with dramatic brilliance. In both cases, the dancer becomes, and is seen as an instrument of the dance – a carrier of the culture, not just an entertainer on a stage.

Contrast in Space (continued)

As Doris Humphrey used to say, "Making a dance without contrast is like trying to keep house without salt in the kitchen."

Examples:

Examples:



Variation

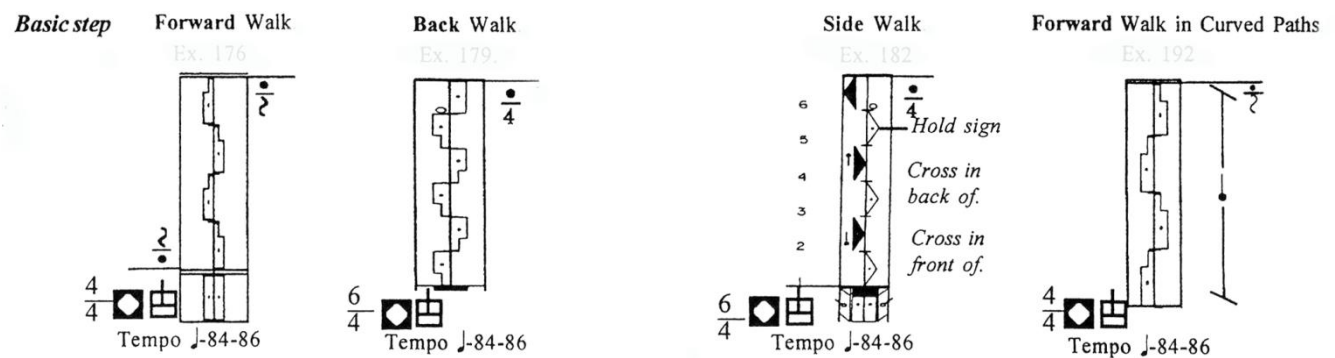
For the performer, variation usually means using all the fancy technical skill at his disposal. Here, variation is thought of as a changing or modifying the whole phrase. The idea used here is variation *within* the phrase, not variation *of* the phrase.

The elements of *Time* and *Space*, discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, are the tools the choreographer can use to manipulate his material. Great changes in movement technique are not necessary. The simple basic elements are wonderful devices for creating surprise and capturing attention.

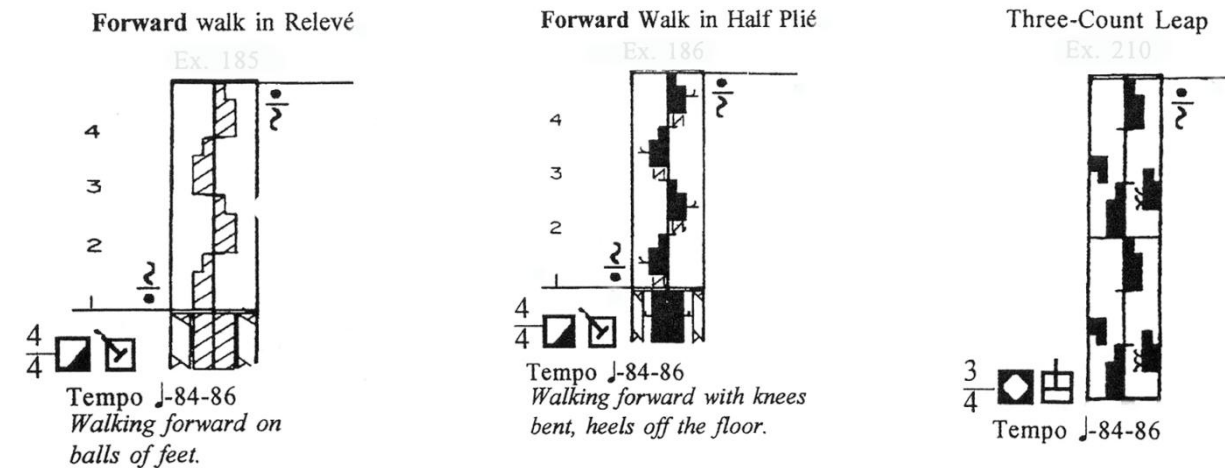
Because they are simple and easy to read, these examples are variations of the human walk.

The **Space** devices are:

Variation in Direction:



Variation in Level:



The **Time** devices are:

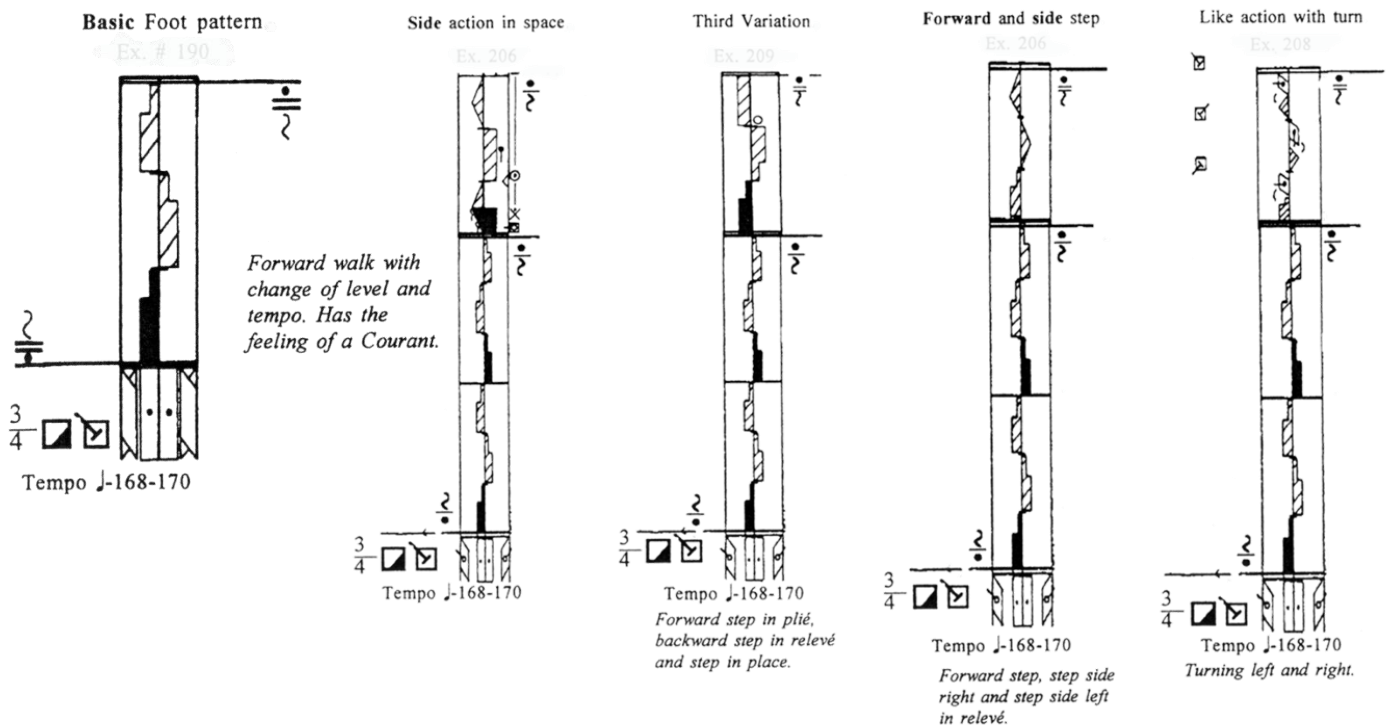
- A. Double the speed, or
- B. Take two steps or more to one beat. It soon becomes either funny, frantic or playful.
- C. Reduce the speed; take one step to two beats and it becomes solemn or processional.
- D. Add an audible stamping of the feet. A dynamic change even at the original tempo says something else.
- E. With a broken rhythm, it could be playful or dance-like.

These devices are suggestions as variation of simple movement. And combination is permissible – the more inventive, the better.

Expansion: Making the movement larger or the phrase longer in *time* and/or *space*. This treatment demands more space. Floor plans with change and expand allowing for greater technical invention and flourishes.

Example: Using the “*Courant*” $\frac{3}{4}$ pattern as a theme and adding variation in the third measure, the theme is expanded in space and time.

Expansion in Time:



Expansion (continued)

Expansion in Time:

3/4 Pattern Forward and Side.
Ex. 215

Notice $\frac{1}{4}$ Turn Left

Notice $\frac{1}{4}$ Turn Right

3

2

$\frac{3}{4}$

Third Measure Side High
Variation of Basic 3/4
Pattern, Turn Variation,
and Forward and Back
Variation.

Ex. 207 8.9

3

$\frac{3}{4}$

Tempo ♩-168-170

Rhythmic Variation of
Basic 3/4 Pattern.

Ex. 211

6

5

4

3

2

1

$\frac{3}{4}$

Tempo ♩-168-170

Note: Watch for the turn symbols.

Note: Watch for the turn symbols.

Contraction

Reducing the number of repeats per measure. Making the movement or phrase smaller or shorter in *time* and *space*. Everything is smaller, more intense, with the energy concentrated in a shorter time frame.

Example: Walking patterns using various levels and directions and also including turns.

**Forward Walk:
Half Plié and
Relevé in 4
counts.**

Ex. 187

Tempo ♩-64-68

**Forward Walk:
Half Plié and
Relevé in 2
counts.**

Ex. 188

Tempo ♩-64-68

**Forward Walk:
Half Plié and
Relevé in 1
count.**

Ex. 189

Tempo ♩-64-68

Note: Watch for the turn symbols.

**Walks in Three Directions
with turns: One Measure
Phrase in 1 count.**

Ex. 205*

Tempo ♩-64-68

**Walks in Three Directions
with turns: One Measure
Phrase in 1 count repeating
the side direction.**

Ex. 202*

Tempo ♩-64-68

**Two-Count Variation of
Can-Can.**

Ex. 242

Tempo ♩-88

**One-Count Variation of
Can-Can.**

Ex. 243

Tempo ♩-88

Contraction (continued)

<p>Walks in Three Directions: Two Measure Phrase in 2 counts.</p> <p>Ex. 201*</p> <p>Tempo ♩-64-68</p>	<p>Walks in Three Directions: Three Measure Phrase in 2 counts.</p> <p>Ex. 204*</p> <p>Tempo ♩-64-68</p>	<p>Forward Walk and Side Walk in 2 counts.</p> <p>Ex. 197*</p> <p>Tempo ♩-64-68</p>
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Combining two or more directions requires turning and change of *Front*. Continue to watch for turn symbols.

Inversion (also known as Retrograde in contemporary choreography terminology):

Starting from the end of a phrase and moving to the beginning.

Any of the foregoing exercises can be manipulated in this way. For example:

The simple 3/4 pattern

could be changed to:

3/4 Pattern: Half Plié and Relevé

Ex. 190

Tempo ♩- 168-170

Like moving up (low, middle, high)

Like moving down (high, middle, low)

With a dip (middle, low, high)

and still keep the *Courante* feeling.

Example: The four measure walking phrase

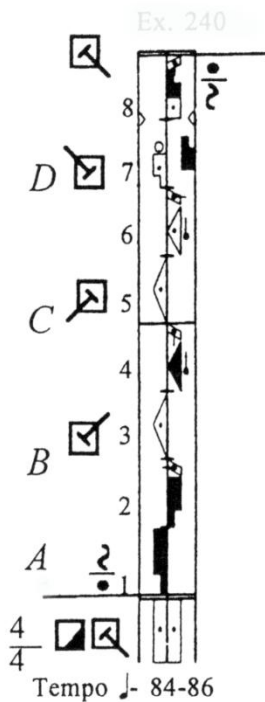
The letters A, B, C, D, representing the four measures, can be manipulated or rearranged in any order:

A, B, C, D; B, C, A, D;

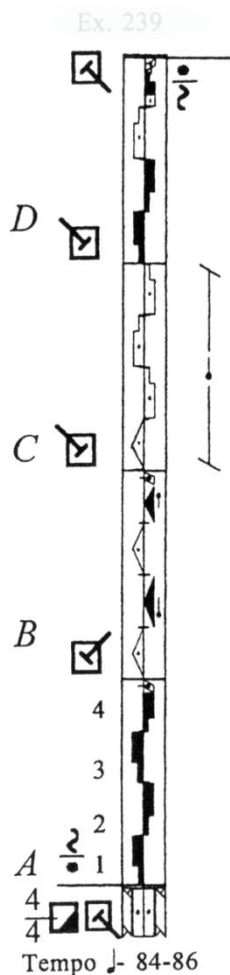
D, B, A, C; B, D, C, A; etc.

This treatment almost demands different floor plans and space positions, as well as technical flourishes and changes of *fronts* (facings). The fun is in keeping the identity of the theme [in this example the Courant] while changing the arrangement of the measures. It is almost like a game, a jig-saw puzzle; what will fit with what?

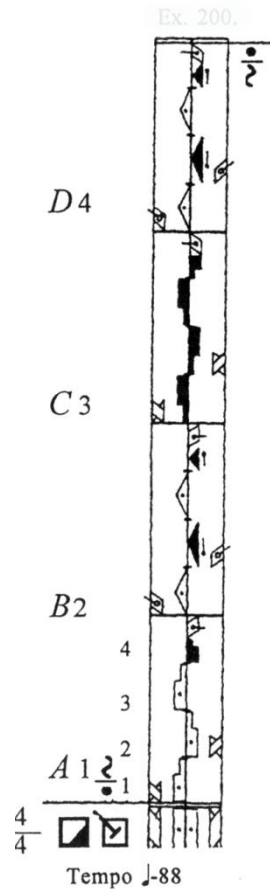
Back, Side and Forward
Walks in 2 counts.



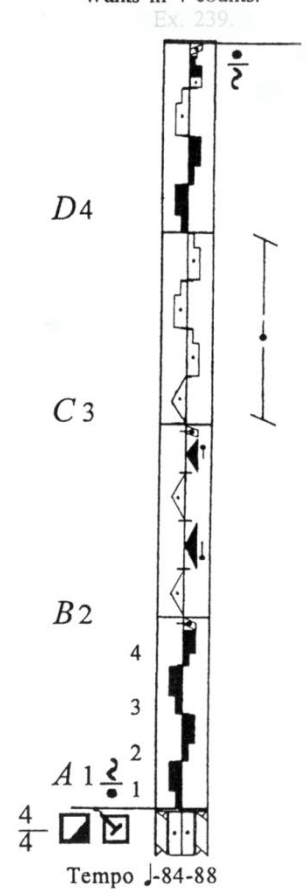
Free Variation



Walks in Three Directions:



Back, Side and Forward
Walks in 4 counts.



Note: Any sequence will do, allowing for degrees of turn, change of rhythm or change of stage position.

Ornamentation

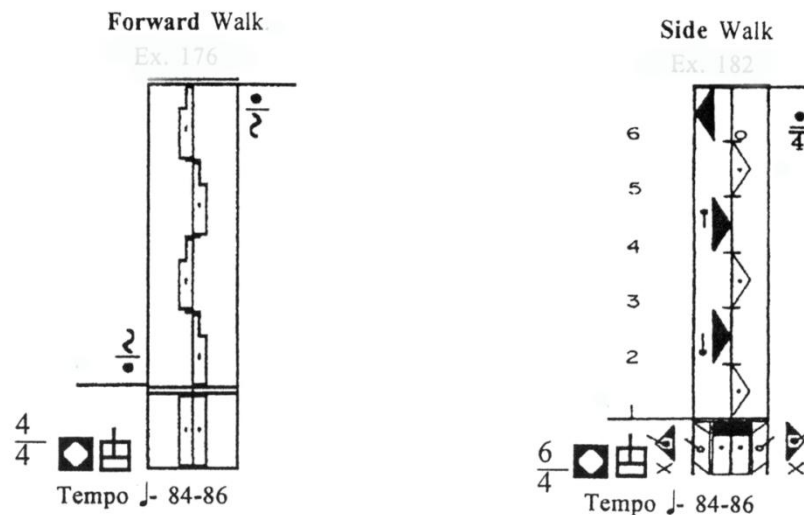
Adding movement of the upper torso and/or arms to the basic foot pattern. Or, if the original action has emphasized the upper body, carry it through space.

The very word suggests adding technical or stylistic movement or gesture to the basic foot pattern, like variations on a ground base. But a more generous use of space should not be ignored as ornamentation.

For instance:

- A. Formal training exercises, done in one place, can be repeated while moving through space.
- B. Musical devises like splitting the beat (two steps to one beat; three steps to one beat [the triplet]), without changing the tempo, and so on. Or the *inversions*; one step to two beats, etc.
- C. Tempo changes within the phrase (slower/faster). Tempo change always changes the character of a piece and almost forces technical flourishes and stylistic adjustments. (*Courante* at *presto* or at *lento* speed could become a *Pavane*.) This also makes for a dynamic shift from light flowing movement to intense “bound flow” (see chapter on **Time**).

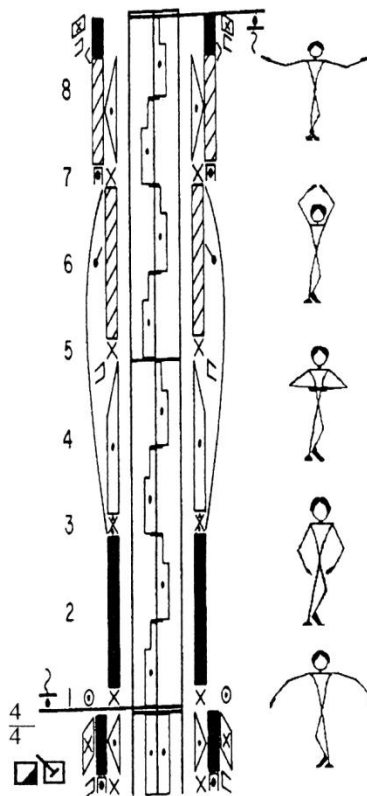
Basic Patterns:



Ornamentation (continued)

Forward Walk on the Diagonal:
Both Arms Circle

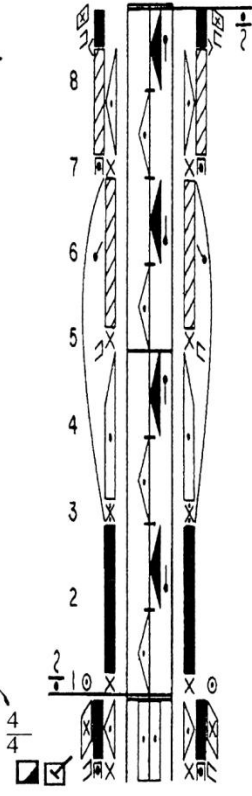
Ex. 160



Tempo ♩- 74-76

Side Walk on the Diagonal:
Both Arms Circle

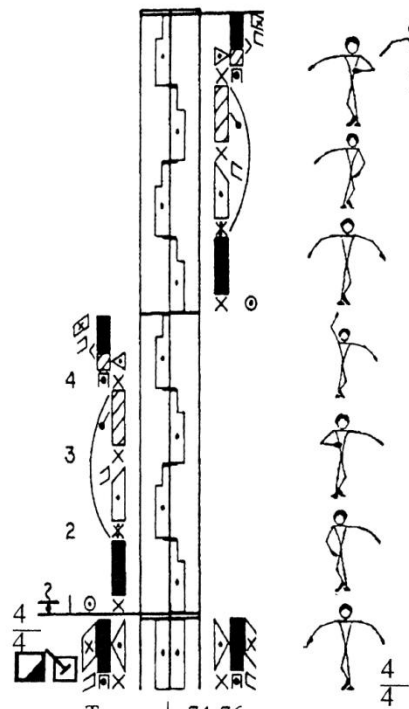
Ex. 162



Tempo ♩- 74-76

Forward Walk on the Diagonal:
Alternating Arms Circle

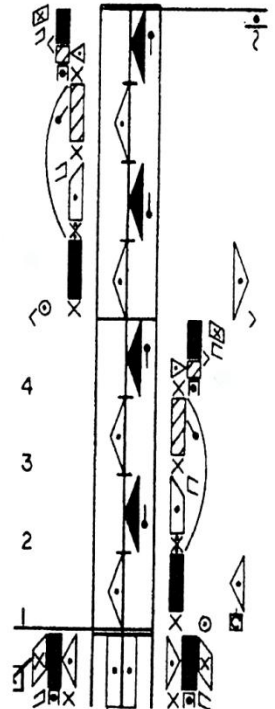
Ex. 161



Tempo ♩- 74-76

Side Walk on the Diagonal:
Alternating Arms Circle

Ex. 163

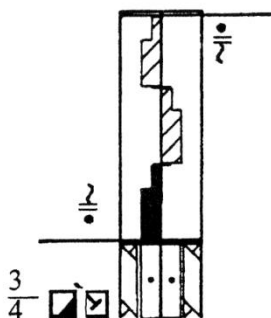


Tempo ♩- 74-76

Basic Pattern:

3/4 Pattern: Half Plié and Relevé

Ex. 190

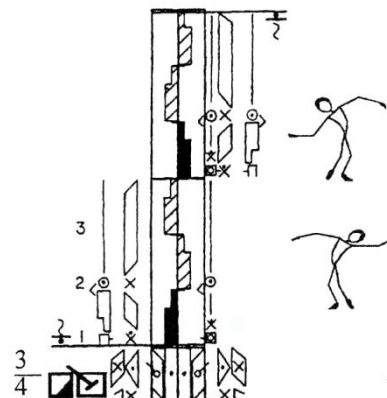


Tempo ♩- 168-170

Ornamentation:

3/4 Pattern: with Arms: 2 measure phrase forward direction

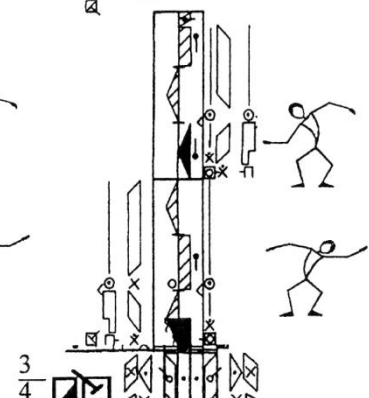
Ex. 206



Tempo ♩- 168-170

3/4 Pattern: with Arms: 2 measure phrase side direction

Ex. 207



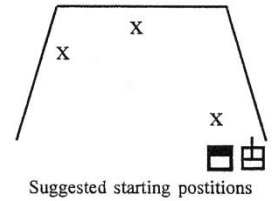
Tempo ♩- 168-170

Free Variation

Rearranging the order of the parts of a phrase. The idea is to manipulate the material in such a way so as to add variety and invention, but still keep the original source recognizable.

For instance:

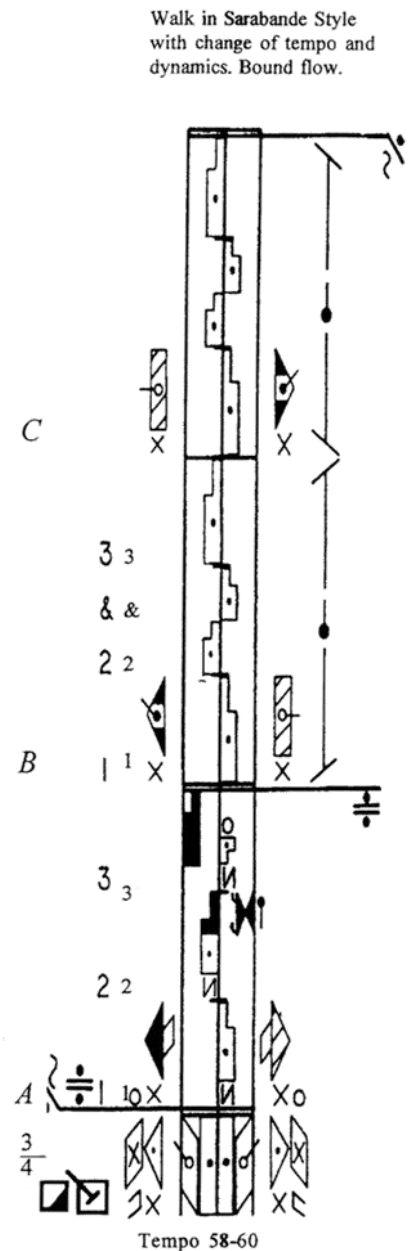
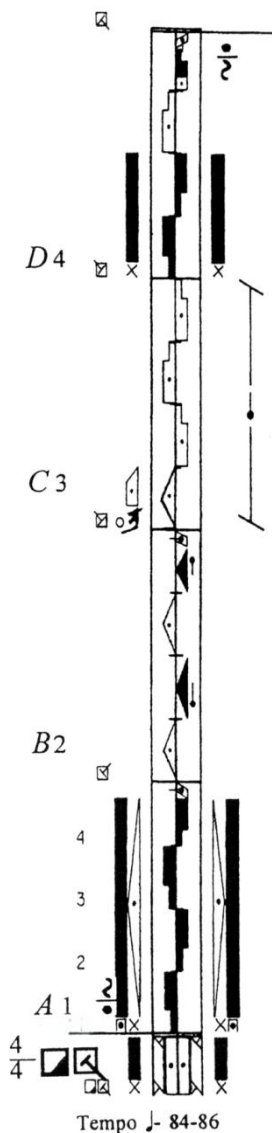
- A. Start at the middle and move in either direction.
- B. Pick any small movement and do variations on that to make a new phrase, etc.
- C. Change starting positions on the stage.



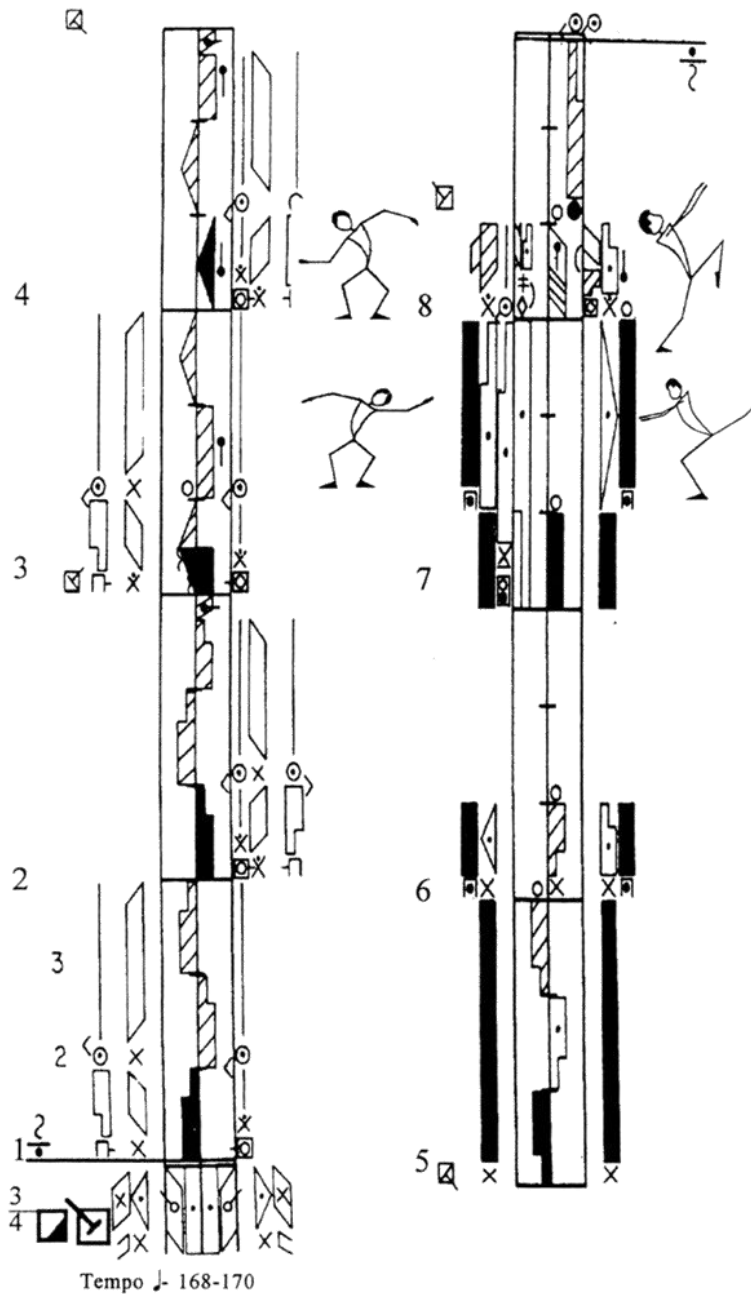
Suggestion: start "upstage center" facing upstage

Other suggested sequences:

- 1) Start with measure #1 (A).
- 2) Add measure #3 (C).
- 3) Add measure #2 (B) – change direction – 2 counts left – 2 counts right.
- 4) End with D – change degree of turn to face a different direction for the repeat.



Development: Allowing the movement to grow organically and/or dramatically. This treatment often results in movement having very little relationship to where it started. Because it had developed, it has expanded. It is bigger; it has changed character. In effect, the composer uses the material as a springboard to launch other ideas.



Cadence

An ending. The final notes or action that bring a phrase or a piece to a conclusion. A summing up of the ideas or themes of a composition.

The composer's final word on the subject. If accent is the point of emphasis, *cadence* is the point of rest.

However you define it, the uncontroversial fact is that things must come to an end. The cadence, or ending, of the work must reflect the character of the whole.

Examples:

Row, Row, Row your boat...
...Life is but a dream.

Three Blind Mice...
...Three Blind Mice.

Annie Laurie...
...I would lay me down and die.

My Country 'Tis of Thee...
...of thee I sing.

Part of the creative process is to bring a piece to a conclusion. The big question is, "How do I end this?" Sometimes this can be surprisingly difficult.

Musicians have a long tradition and many rules to draw on in order to resolve the musical tensions of a piece. The endings, so familiar, of nursery rhymes, folk songs, hymns, etc., are wonderful examples of traditional musical cadences.

Modern dancers have no tradition or rules to fall back on. With no tradition, how to finish a piece is left entirely to the intuition and/or good taste of the individual choreographer.

For the story-ballet, the end of the story is the end of the dance. Spectacular musicals must have spectacular endings. The smaller art works, for the current sage often use stage devices to indicate a finish: black-outs, dim-outs, fast or slow curtains. An appropriate exit can let the silent empty stage make the final statement. These devices become part of the composer's idea. The composer's concern is, "How should it look?" Dance is a theatre art. The only way for it to be seen is on a stage in a theatre. It is quite appropriate for the choreographer to use the theatre devices as a choreographic tool.

Cadence (continued)

However, a strong choreographic conclusion gives the theatre technical crew something significant to support. It is the composer's final word: the point of rest. For the audience, it is the end of the story. Some examples of interesting choreographic endings which stand up well in the studio are:

- A. José Limón's *The Moors Pavane* has a Shakespearean ending with the murder of Desdemona. The figures of the Moor and Desdemona lying together prone downstage while the two conspirators stand above them upstage is a very moving finish.
- B. Doris Humphrey's *Day on Earth* is almost Biblical in its ending. The final picture is an inversion of the opening's the child, seated on the box with three adults lying under the scarf beneath her.
- C. Doris Humphrey's *Lament for Sanches Ignacias Majias* is poetic in its treatment. After the death of the bullfighter, Doris allows Lorca to finish the piece with spoken lines.
- D. Agnes de Mille's *Three Virgins and a Devil* has a hilarious finish when the third angry virgin chases the devil and disappears into the gates of Hell.
- E. Agnes de Mille's *Rodeo* has an exuberant duet at the end.
- F. Anthony Tudor's *Lilac Garden* ends with the delicate choreographic statement with the couple making an exit in one direction while the solo man moves in the opposite direction. The story is told.
- G. Charles Weidman's *Traditions* returns to the opening theme; an identical repeat which says the revolution becomes the new tradition. An ABA theme.
- H. Martha Graham's *Frontier* returns to the simplicity of the opening position. ABA.
- I. Doris Humphrey's *Shakers* ends with religious intensity with the final "amen."

The Phrase

What is it?

"A normal phrase is like a comfortable breath."
– Doris Humphrey, "The Art of Making Dances"

A phrase, like a sentence, is a complete thought – an idea – stated in an orderly fashion in an artistic medium: dance, music, and writing. And these arts, like all the arts, have to do with feeling. A phrase, like a gesture, has, at its core, an emotional motivation.

The dance phrase is a time-oriented unit of design with a kinetic base. Its foundation is the human physical Time-Design – the breath (inhale/exhale), the muscular pull (effort/rest), the heart beat (ebb/flow) – in other words, the comfortable order that we live with; the kinetic punctuation of the progression of time.

Under different physical or emotional conditions, these comfortable patterns change dramatically. There can be long and short breaths, rapid heartbeats, intense muscular activity, and ebb and flow of intensity.

The Phrase (continued)

Intense feelings never travel in a straight line. They have a shape, a pulse, a pattern, a beginning, middle and end. And they take *Time*, not *Space*. The kinetic reality of these emotionally charged patterns give the choreographer an emotional understanding for the design of his phrases.

Depending on what the composer wants to say, the Phrase-Breath will reflect the rise and fall of effort and feeling with a variety of lengths, shapes and patterns.

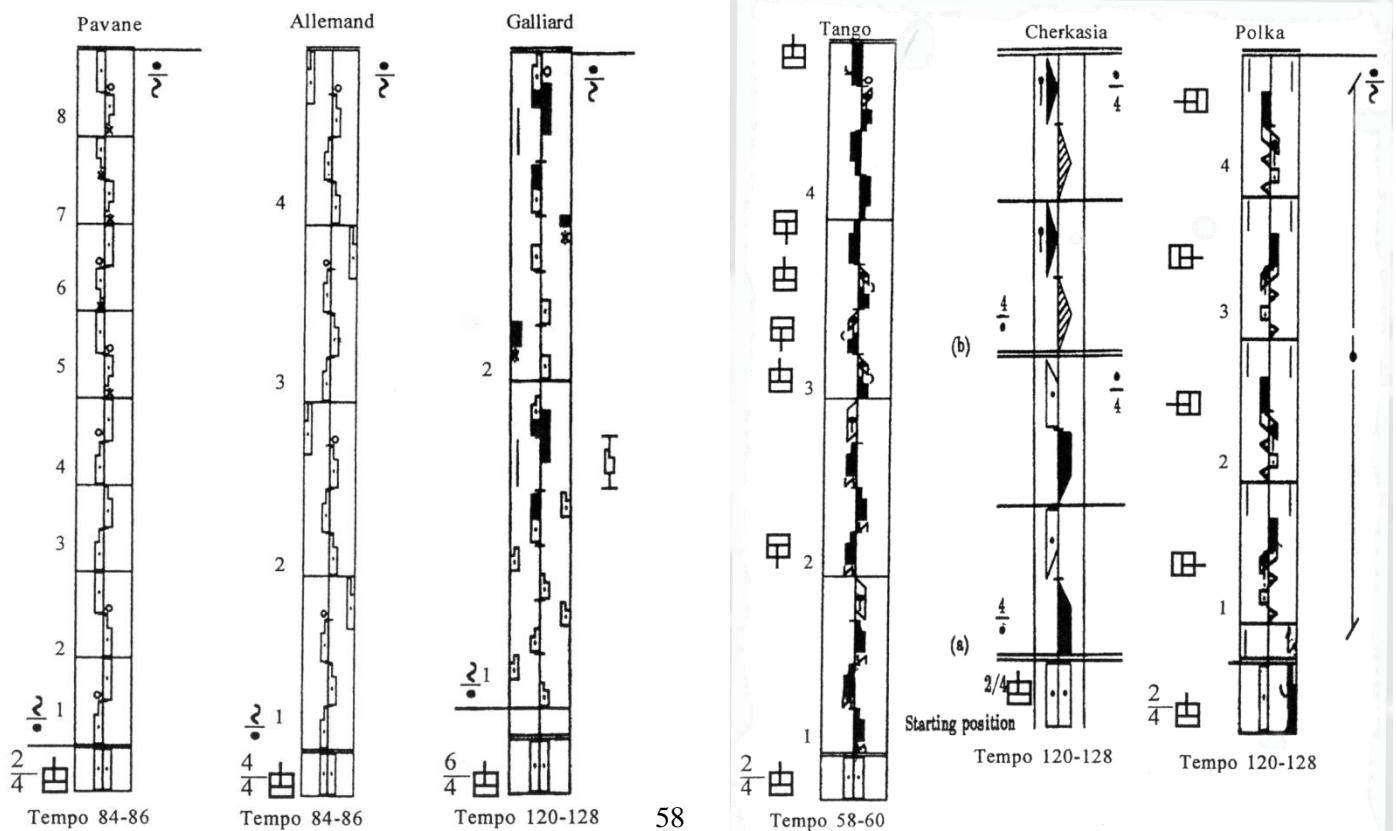
A diversity of phrases adds interest and vitality to the main body of the work and fleshes out the central idea. Whatever the shape or pattern, the phrase is the basic unit of a piece. A composition consists of a series of phrases. They are the building blocks of the structure.

A phrase is a shaped thought. All the technical devices discussed so far will not make a “living” phrase unless the composer has something to say. These “devices” are just tools to help him give his ideas a shape so they can appear and be seen and understood by others. However, the basic “idea” determines what that new shape will be.

The accumulation of all the small and varied phrase-shapes, organized around a central idea, gives unity and authority to the whole. Each unique unit has an organization and identity similar in style and characteristics to the whole, and even when separated as a fragment, it retains its identity and relationship to it. The thought, shaped by the phrase, appears and can be seen to take its place within the framework of the finished and completed work.

If *Repetition* and *Contrast* are the great structural pillars of the work, *Phrases* are its breath – its heartbeat.

Examples of Phrases:



The Phrase (continued)

Sarabande Style
Ex. 238*

Tempo 58-60

Israeli Step
Ex. 249*

Tempo 84-86

Three-Count Leap Variation
of Basic 3/4 Pattern
Ex. 210*

Tempo 168-170

Basic 3/4 Pattern Forward
and Rhythmic Variation,
Ex. 211*

Tempo 166-168

As Charles Weidman used to say, "If you're not a genius, it's good to have a few devices lying around."

chapter 5
the group

THE GROUP

Choreography – The organization of movement of the human body in **Time** and in **Space**.

Up to this point, the focus has been on organizing the vast movement potential of the single human body and introducing some organizational tools for making that movement into a dance form. The choreographic emphasis has been on expressive gesture and the soloist's relationship to the stage space.

The solo body speaks with a single voice. Alone on the empty stage, the solitary figure, in essence, performs a monologue.

In contrast, the *Dance Group* is an ensemble – a company of people. Unlike the orchestra, it is made up of one instrument only– the human, living, moving bodies of the dancers. The ensemble may be small – two, three, four dancers, or a large company of twenty or more dancers. Whatever! But again, unlike the fixed position of the choir or orchestra, their relationships are constantly shifting.

For the Group, the key is *the relationship of one human being to another*. This is a radical shift in thinking. The addition of other people shifts the focus from the single unit to the large unit (the group). It is no longer just the movement that captures the attention, but how all these figures behave towards each other.

With the larger unit, the monologue disappears and is absorbed into what could be called the physical dialogue of the ensemble. The movement becomes simpler: the **Time/Space** elements now dominate the work. As always, the larger unit takes precedence over its smaller parts. Now it is not just **what** is being done, but **when** and **where** and with **whom**.

As with any ensemble of freely moving people, some kind of organization is necessary to maintain order, and order among people means rules, established practices, or just plain courtesy.

With such a situation, the choreographer needs some organizing tools to, in effect, keep order among the dancers; what the army might call “rules of engagement.” Or, as the dance family says, “the choreographer’s job is to keep the dance from running into each other.” For the musician, it might be called orchestration.

The devices for keeping order among a group of people are few and simple. There are only three:

1. Unison

2. Opposition

3. Succession

1. **Unison** – Everyone doing the same thing at the same time. The group appears as a solo unit. Unison, by definition, involves more than one figure. Two dancers doing the same movement at the same time is really a solo plus one – a duet. The extra figure adds weight to the performance, but choreographically it is a solo, like a single melody sung by two voices. Even if there are twenty dancers, as with the Rockettes, it is still a solo line. It is used extensively for marching bands, cheerleaders, musicals and in ballet.

2. **Succession** – Everyone doing the same thing in the same space, but starting at different times. This a time-oriented tool. The group still appears as a unit. It is not just what is done, but when. Succession passes the theme around from one to another like passing a serving dish around the dinner table. Succession creates unexpected Space-Time relationships that can have charm or wit, or just be interesting, like following a discussion.
3. **Opposition** – Everyone doing the same thing at the same time, but starting from different places. This splits the unity of the group. It is not the mass we see, but free-standing single figures facing each other. The movement is unison, but the action is in opposition. The very nature of opposition has dramatic implications. Two or more people just standing and facing each other on a stage makes a statement, seems to raise a question and, in effect, sets the stage for the coming choreographic dialogue. Any gesture added to this situation embellishes or qualifies that initial statement. Moving this gesture through space also extends it in time. The intangible idea now takes a shape and becomes no only part of a statement, but an event.

Whatever movement the choreographer chooses to use, embellishes or qualifies that initial statement.

Bringing this action onto space lines adds power and authority and sustains the concept long enough so it can become a “dance,” not just an abstract idea without a concrete form.

“I learned about the choreographic principle of Opposition in my canoe. I could feel the wind in my face signaling a storm approaching and I paddled and paddled against it.”

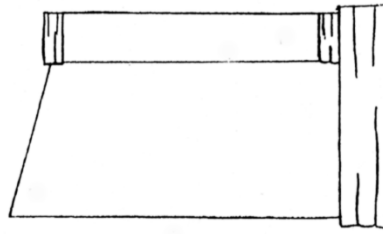
—N.S.

These simple devices are useful in establishing interpersonal relationships and are common tactics in keeping order among groups of people – what might be called “crowd control.”

But, the real organizing tool is the space – streets, stadiums, playgrounds, and churches all determine what can be done there and how these devices can be used.

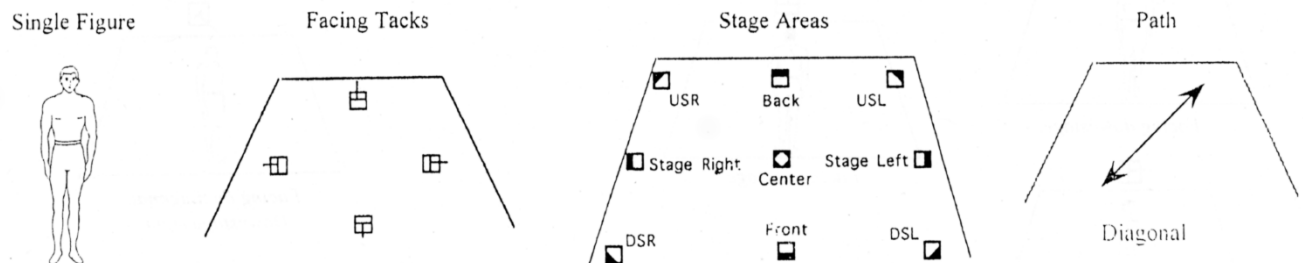
The Stage

For the choreographer composing for the group, the stage itself is the organizing and controlling tool.



On this empty, uncluttered and confined space with the fixed perspective and frontal opening of the proscenium arch, the composer places his dancers. There is nothing—no sets or props—to distract the eye or the attention from the activity that is going on up there, and, at all times the full figure of the dancer can be seen no matter where he appears in that space.

The activity of the group as a unit and the inter-relationships and implied social linkages of the individuals within the group are charged with complex emotional overtones.



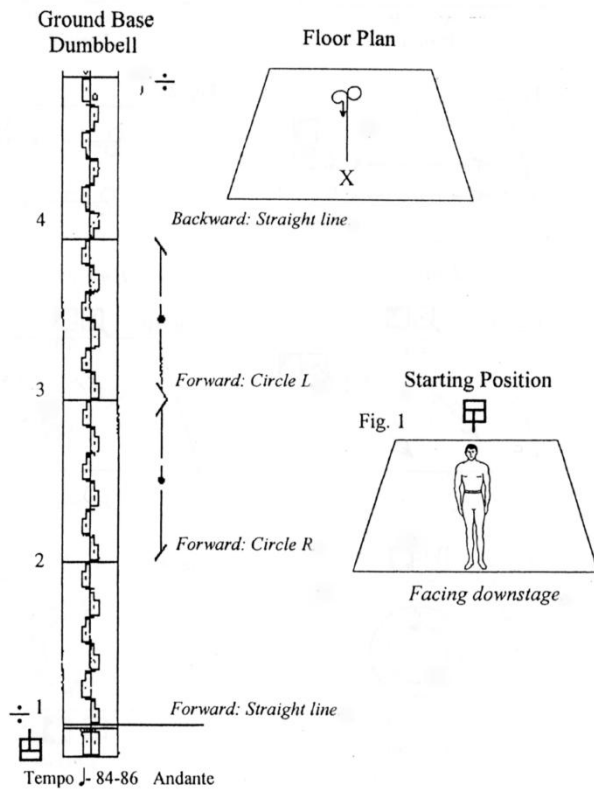
The inherent dramatic character of such events is revealed most clearly in the context of the stage and are, indeed, the essential pillars of the choreographic structure.

To illustrate the choreographic potential of these devices, we use a simple walking pattern as a theme or ground base. This phrase is used throughout this chapter to illustrate the choreographic potential of a simple pattern when two, three or four dancers use the same theme and/or idea.

A simple *walking pattern* using space lines to illustrate these elements.

Walking:

- 1) forward in a straight line,
- 2) circle to the right,
- 3) circle to the left,
- 4) backward in a straight line.

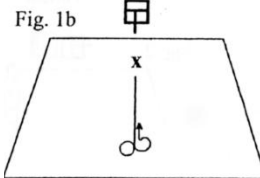


This notation pattern for a simple walking phrase is easy to read and does not demand technical skill (Read from the bottom up.)

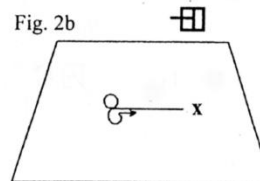
Walking Pattern (the dumbbell)

Floor Plan

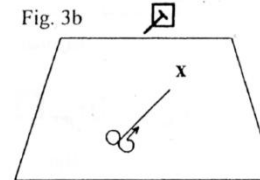
"X" is the starting position.



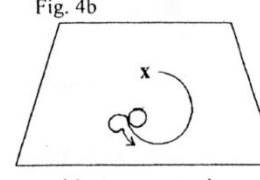
Moving vertical space



Moving horizontal space



Moving diagonal space

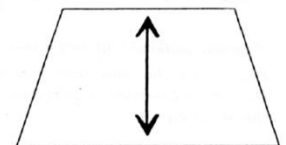


Moving in a circle

Space lines (paths)

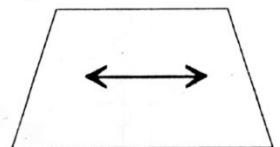
Basic "facings" carried thru "Space"

Fig. 1a



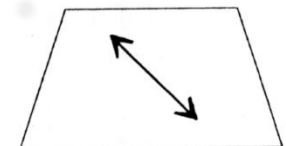
Vertical: upstage to downstage

Fig. 2a



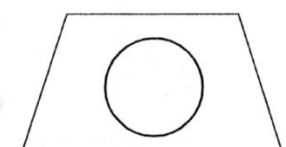
Horizontal: one side to the other

Fig. 3a



Diagonal: one corner to the other

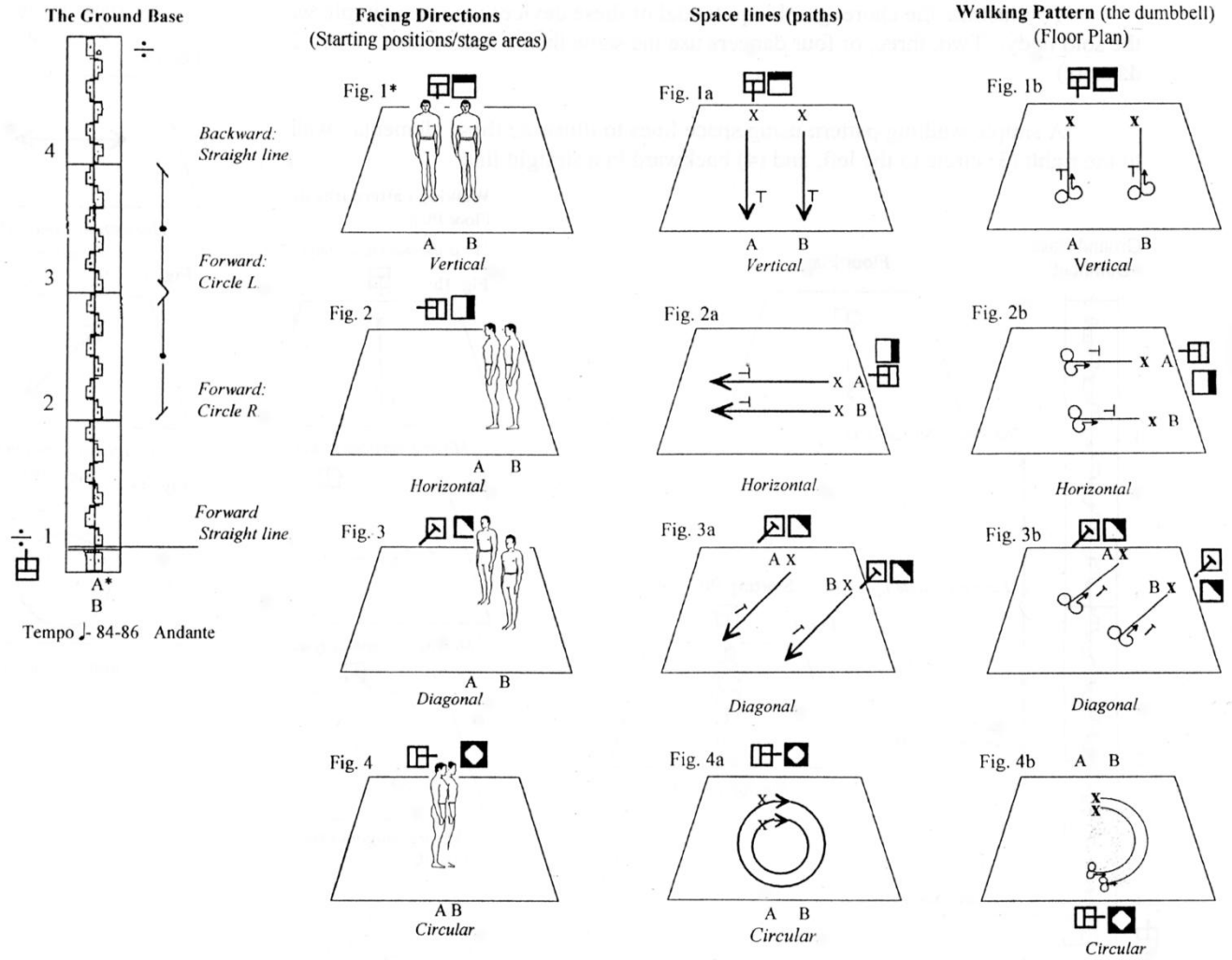
Fig. 4a



Circular: moving in a circle

Duet

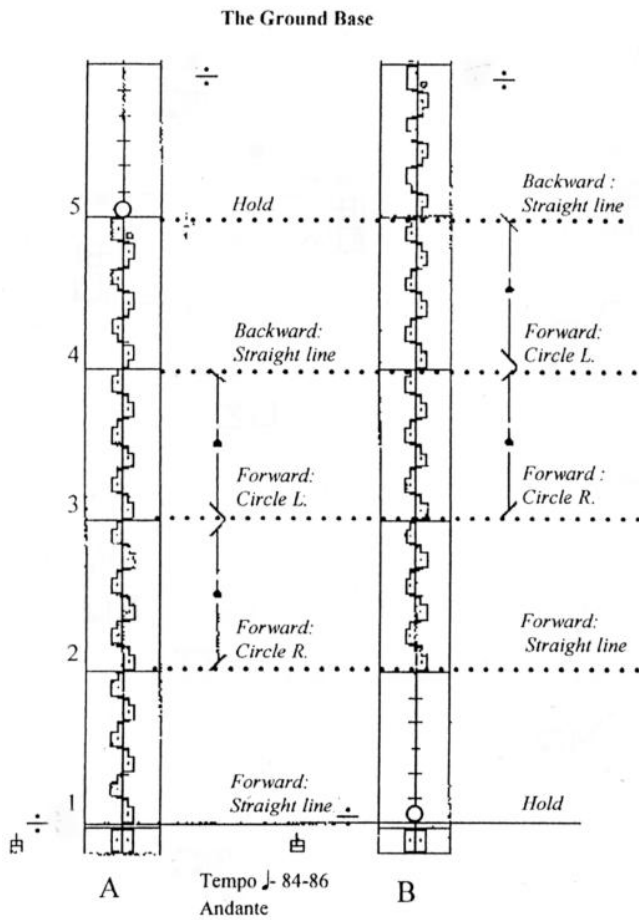
Unison – Both dancers doing the same thing at the same time on their different space lines. Unison duets usually are friendly, charming and warm-hearted, like two people getting along well together. Tap dance and folk dance are wonderful examples. Identical patterns using vertical space, horizontal space, diagonal space, and circular space.



*These figures are shown side by side. Of course, they could move in tandem—one behind the other.

Duet (continued)

Succession – Dancers start from the same place, but one starts while the other holds for six counts (see illustration).



In the notation used here watch for the hold sign (o) on the center of the staff. Remember: if there is nothing written on the staff nothing is moving.

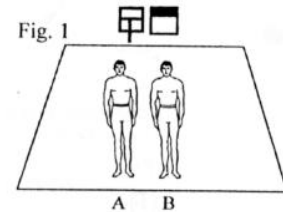
In this duet, “A” will be turning to the right while “B” is just starting. “A” will be circling to the left while “B” is circling to the right.

These actions added to the variations of the solo body suggest infinite possibilities to the choreographer. This is a particularly interesting device when there is repetition which also creates oppositional action.

Once the simple exercises are done, string them all together to see what happens. A small technical “fillup” may be all that is needed to make the connection from one space line to the next.

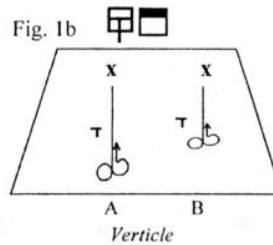
As Doris Humphrey used to say, “All choreography is either lacey or stripey or lumpy. Succession, obviously, is lacey.”

Facing Directions:
Starting position/stage area



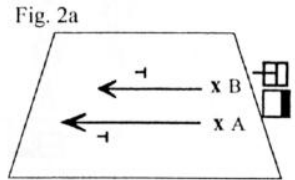
Refer to Unison Action Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4 on page 3. Unison in Space. Succession in Time.

Walking Pattern (the dumbbell)
Floor Plan

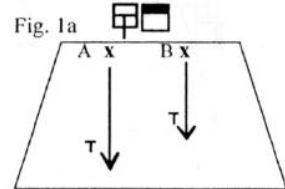


Refer to Unison Action Figures 1b, 2b, 3b and 4b on page 3. Unison in Space. Succession in Time.

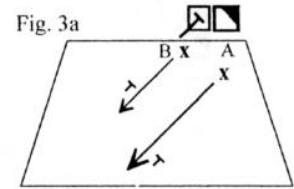
Space lines (paths)



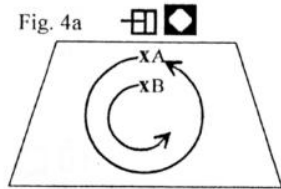
Horizontal



Verticle



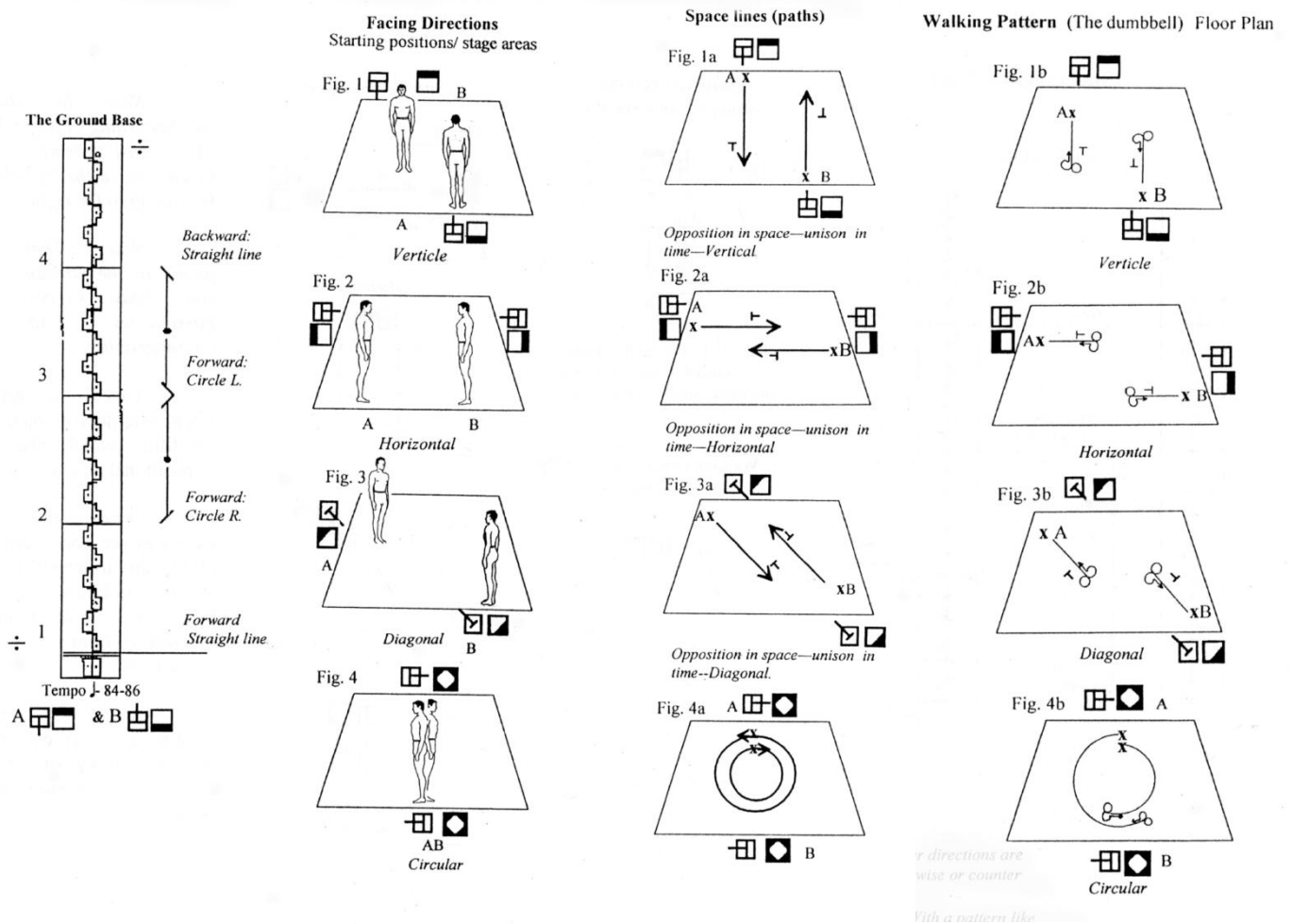
Diagonal



Circular

Duet (continued)

Opposition – Dancers are facing and moving in different directions at the same time.

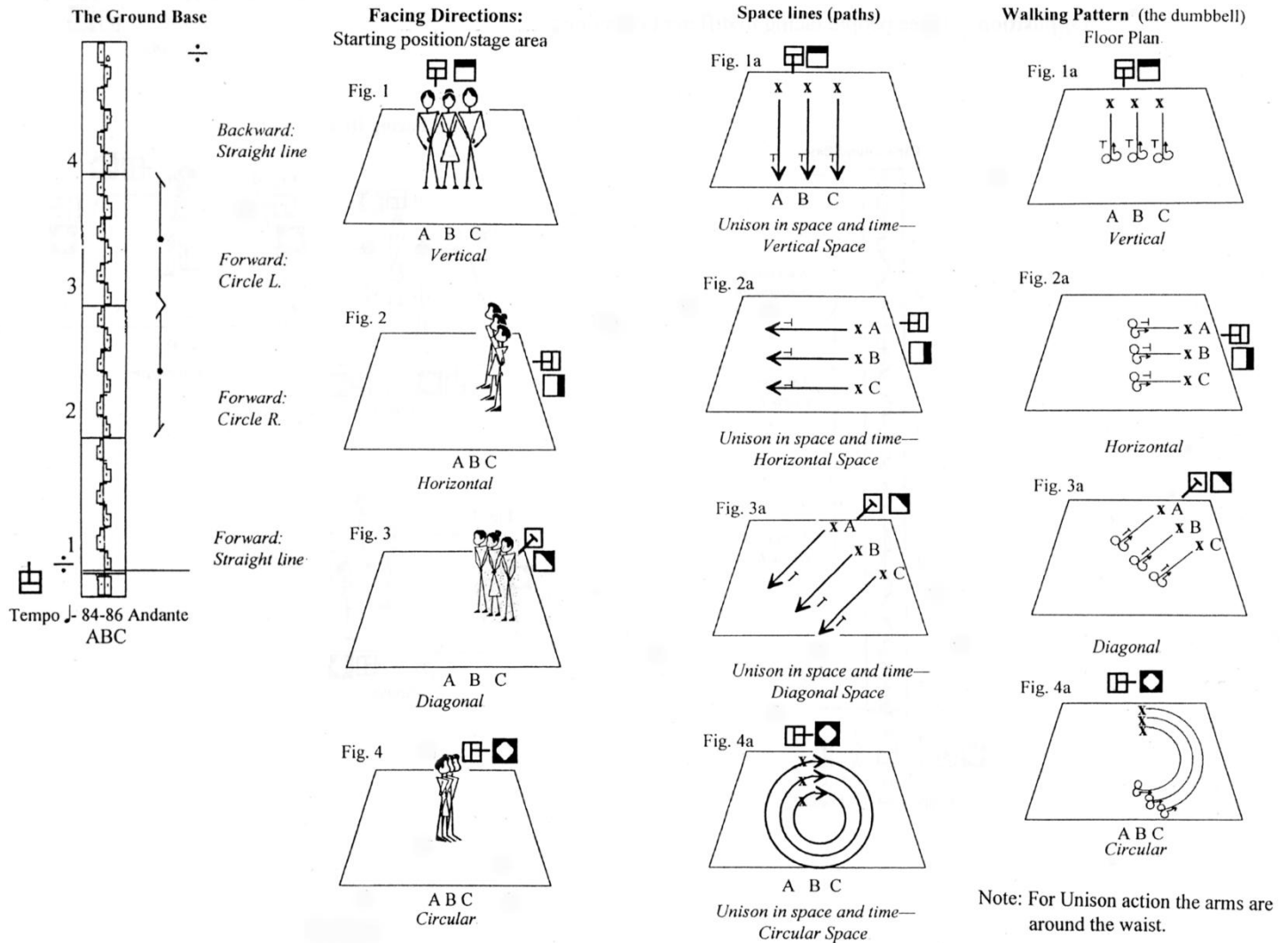


Circular directions are either clockwise or counter clockwise.

Note: With a pattern like the special conflict in Fig. 4b, conflict is almost inevitable. Technical adjustments will need to be made: i.e. starting with a different foot so the circular walks go in different directions.

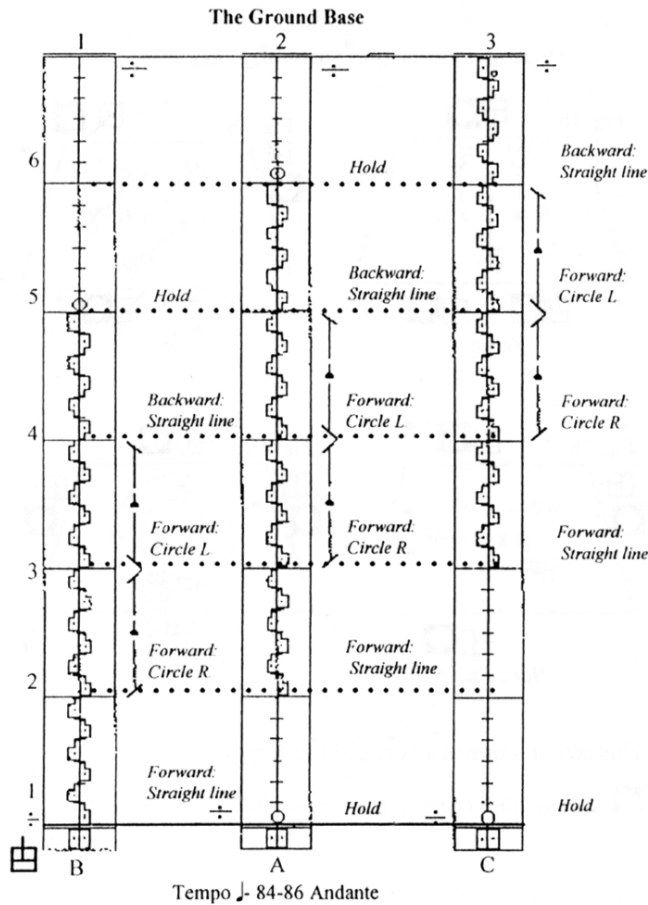
Trio

Unison – Three people are doing the same thing at the same time in the same space lines. The extra figure sometimes adds an element of playfulness, especially when cast with one man and two women or the reverse – one woman and two men. Small gesture variations simply point up the overall unison. Whatever! Three people moving harmoniously together is a delight to watch. The point is, all three must be equally skillful.



Trio (continued)

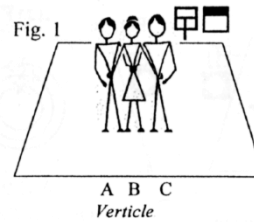
Succession – Starting from the same place, one dancer starts, one holds for six counts and then starts, and the third holds for twelve counts before starting. (See illustrations.)



With this mixed casting, a girl and two boys – the girl B starts the action on staff 1 with the boys (A and C) following, as written, on staves 2 and 3. This is a round-canon – i.e. *Row, Row, Row Your Boat*

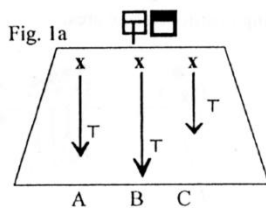
The Space position has not changed. The variation is when you do it. Drawings will not help you here!

Facing Directions Starting position/stage area

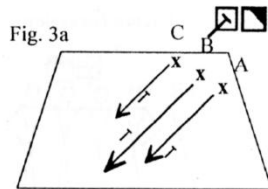


Refer to Unison Action Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4 on page 6. Unison in Space. Succession in Time.

Space lines (paths)

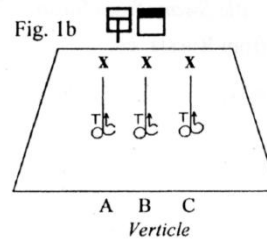


Succession in Time (start after one measure)—Unison in space. Vertical Space.

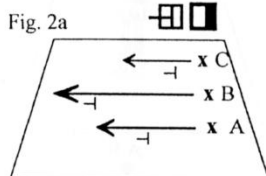


Succession in Time (start after one measure)—Unison in space. Diagonal Space.

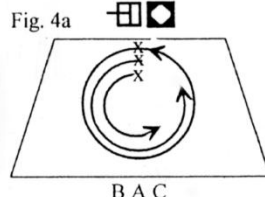
Walking Pattern (the dumbbell) Floor Plan



Refer to Unison Action Figures 1b, 2b, 3b and 4b on page 6. Unison in Space. Succession in Time.



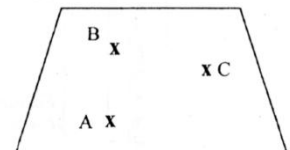
Succession in Time (start after one measure)—Unison in space. Horizontal Space.



Succession in Time (start after one measure)—Unison in space. Circular Space.

Note: It is possible to have opposition in space and succession in time.

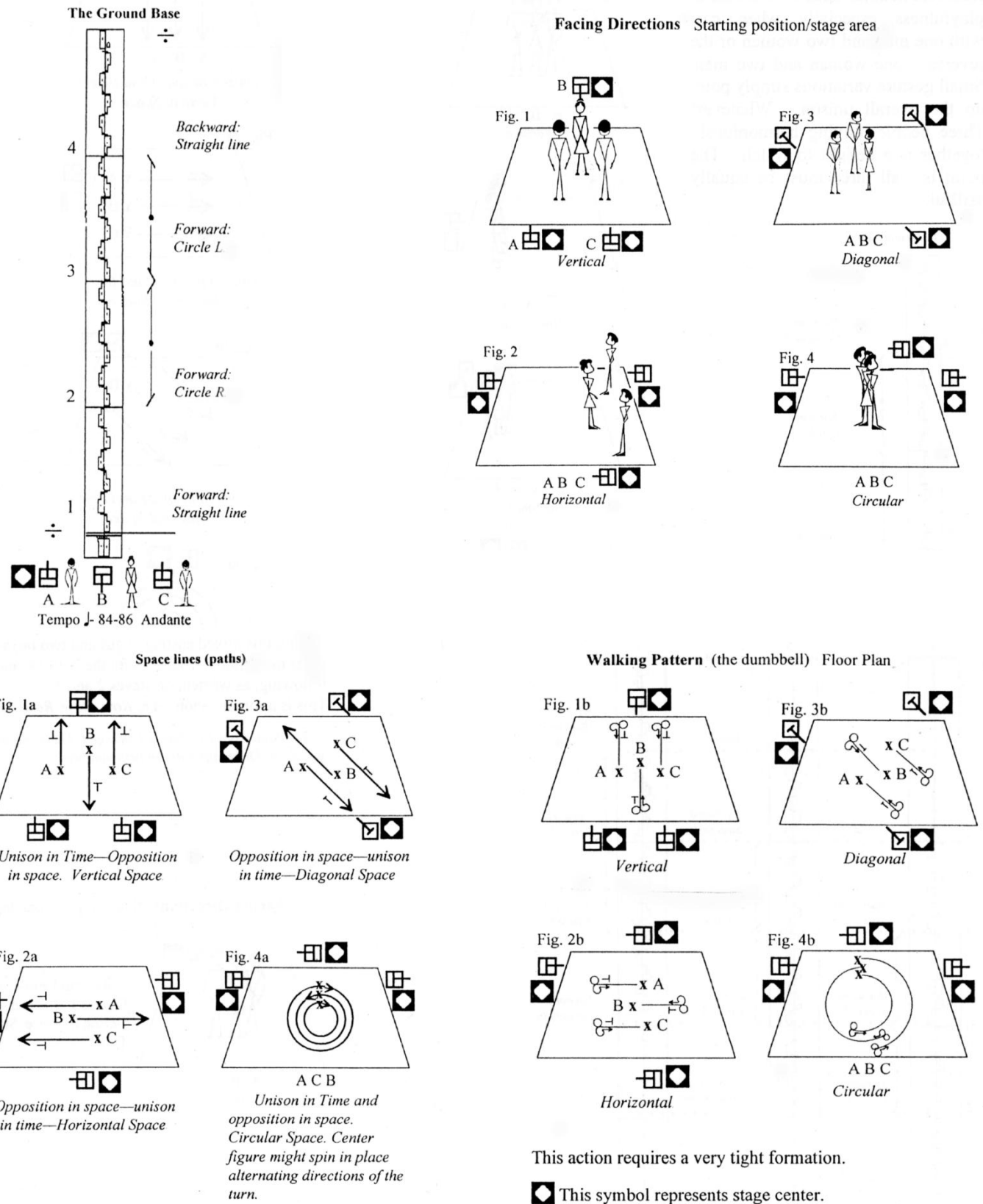
- B starts with staff 1.
- A starts with staff 2.
- C starts with staff 3.



This is the same pattern starting in the same stage area as Fig. 1 Unison Trio, but starting at different times. Notice the hold sign on measure one (1) for B, and measure one and two (1 & 2) for C.

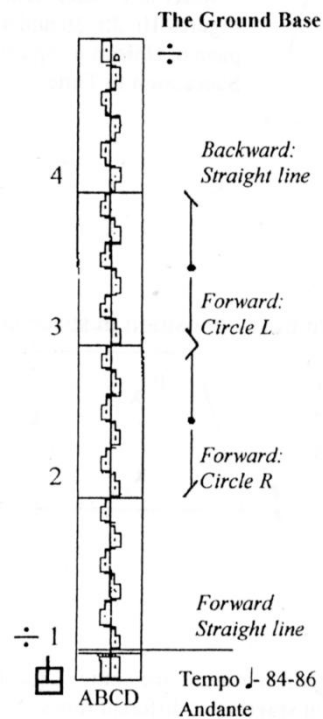
Trio (continued)

Opposition— Three people are facing in different directions.

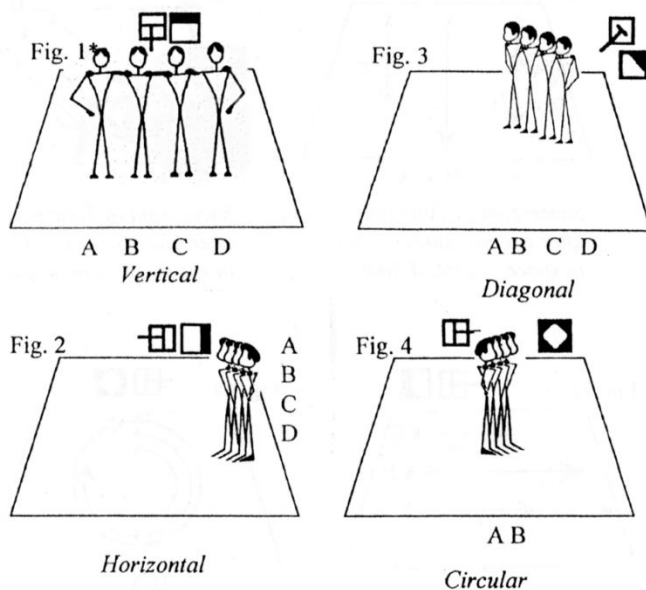


Quartet

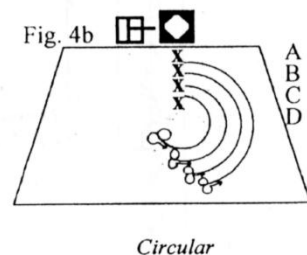
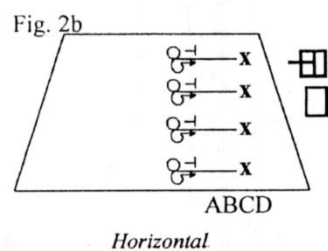
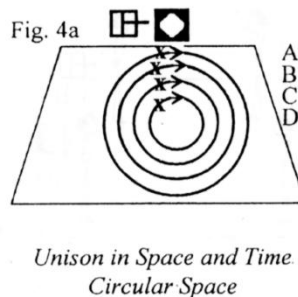
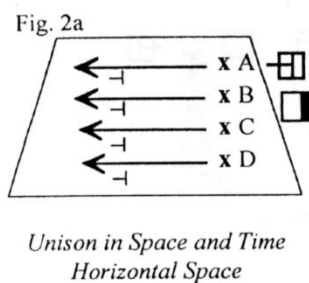
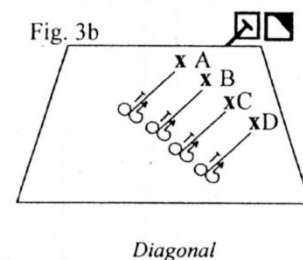
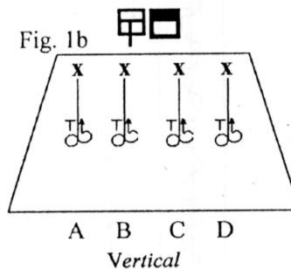
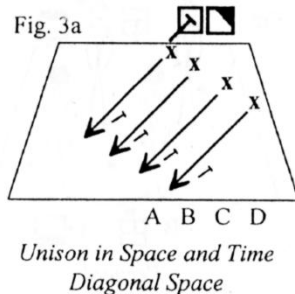
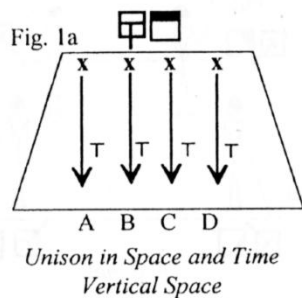
Unison – Unison quartets carry a lot of weight. It is no longer the individual, but the unit that is important. The skill and discipline must be impeccable, otherwise it looks ragged. The appeal for the audience is four people performing with the precision of a machine. Like the trio, they must be perfectly matched.



Facing Directions Starting positions/stage areas

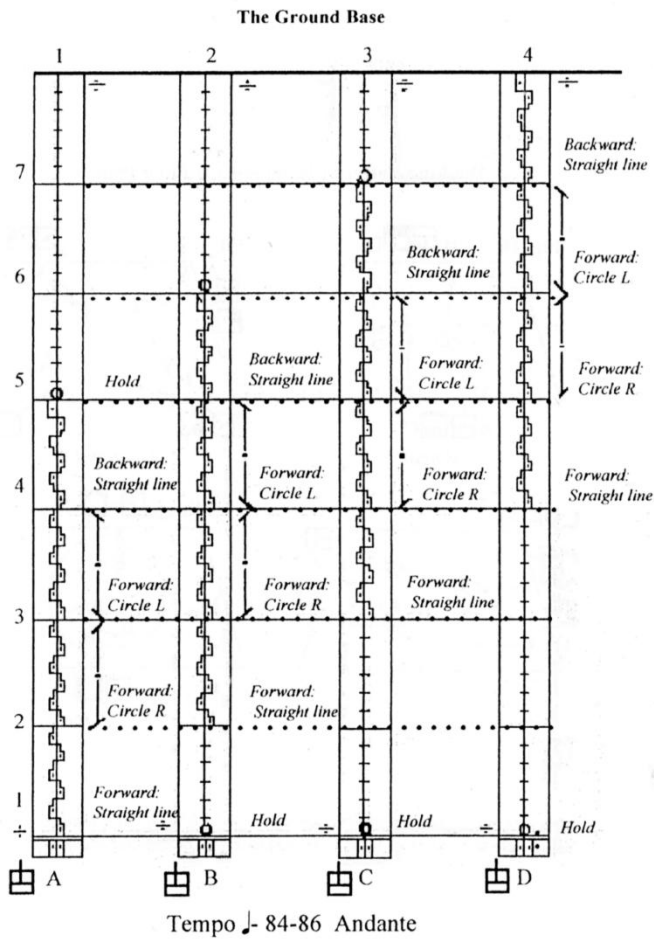


Space lines (paths)

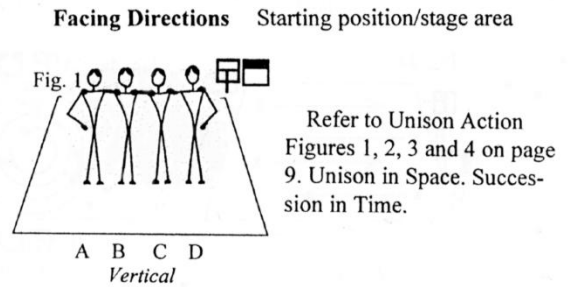


Quartet (continued)

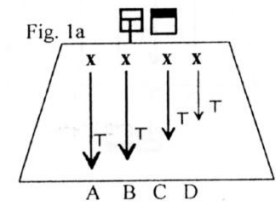
Succession— Each dancer starts at a different time. The first dancer starts, the second dancer waits 6 counts, the third dancer waits 12 counts, and the fourth dancer waits 18 counts.



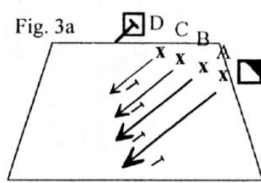
This is the same pattern starting in the same stage area as example A, but starting at different times. Notice the hold sign on measures 1, 2, & 3 for D.



Space lines (paths)

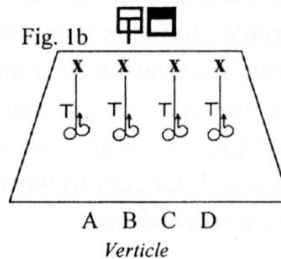


Succession in Time (start after one measure)—Unison in space. Vertical Space.

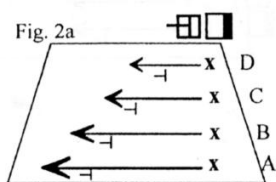


Succession in Time (start after one measure)—Unison in space. Diagonal Space.

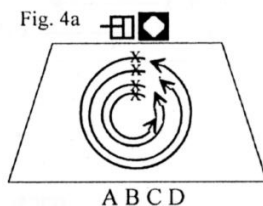
Walking Pattern (the dumbbell) Floor Plan



Refer to Unison Action Figures 1b, 2b, 3b and 4b on page 9. Unison in Space. Succession in Time.



Succession in Time (start after one measure)—Unison in space. Horizontal Space.

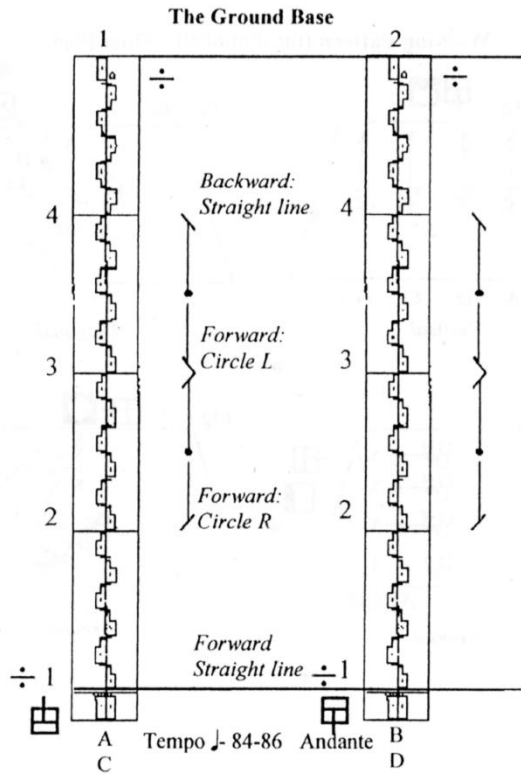


Succession in Time (start after one measure)—Unison in space.

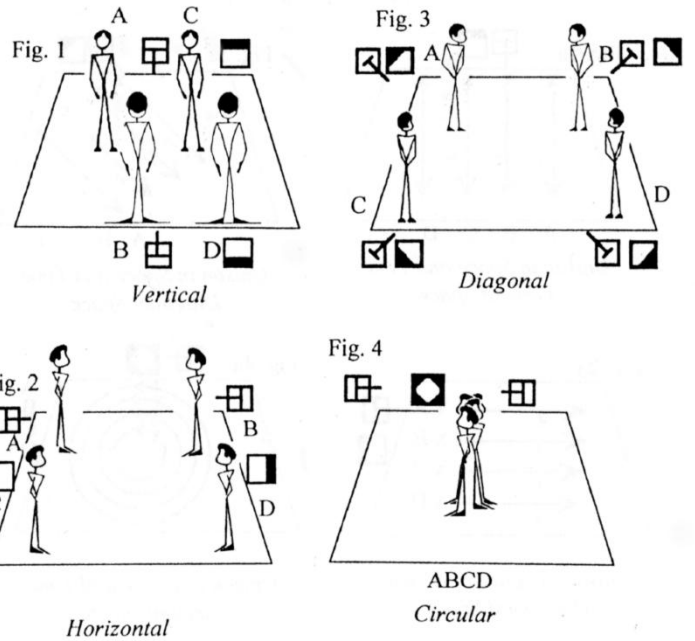
Of course there can be unison in tandem. One person behind the other all lined up. It just doesn't seem quite worthwhile and not much to look at. Military drill is not a choreographic challenge. Any Drill Sergeant could do it.

Quartet (continued)

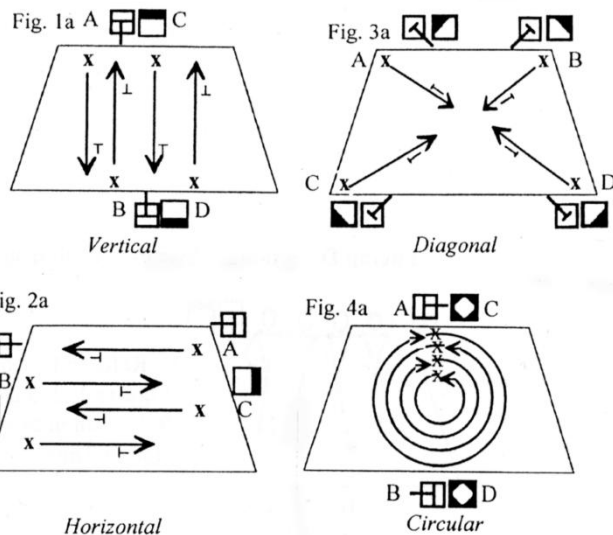
Opposition – Four people facing different directions.



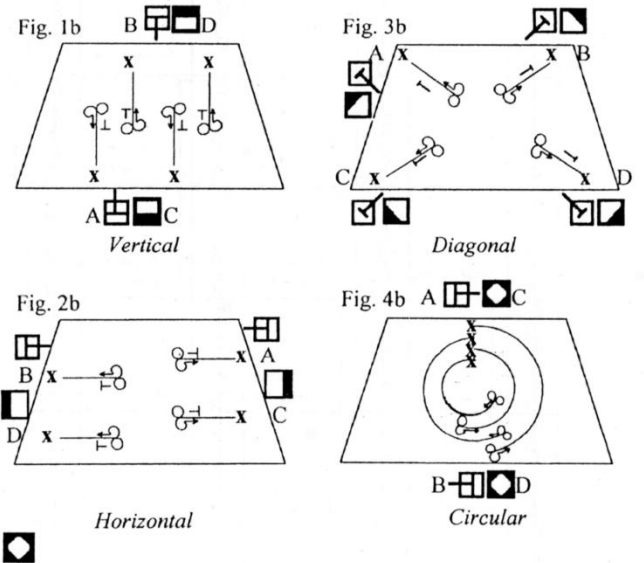
Facing Directions Starting positions/stage areas



Space lines (paths)



Walking Pattern (the dumbbell) Floor Plan



A quartet will create a doubling someplace which makes it a double duet. There are only two ways to turn; clockwise or counter clockwise.

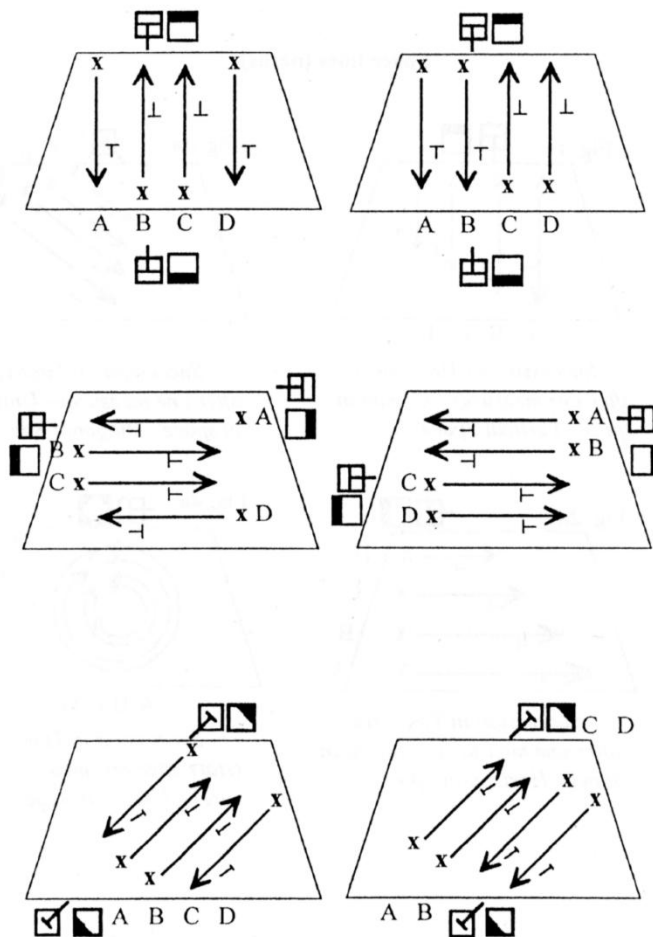
Quartet: Opposition (continued)

These devices are just tools to help the composer organize his scattered ideas into a dance form.

No rules have been laid down. Any combination of the **Time-Space** elements is possible and encouraged. The great motivation for their use and manipulation is imagination and enthusiasm. The major hurdle for the choreographer, as always, is finding trained dancers to work with and an adequate space to work in.

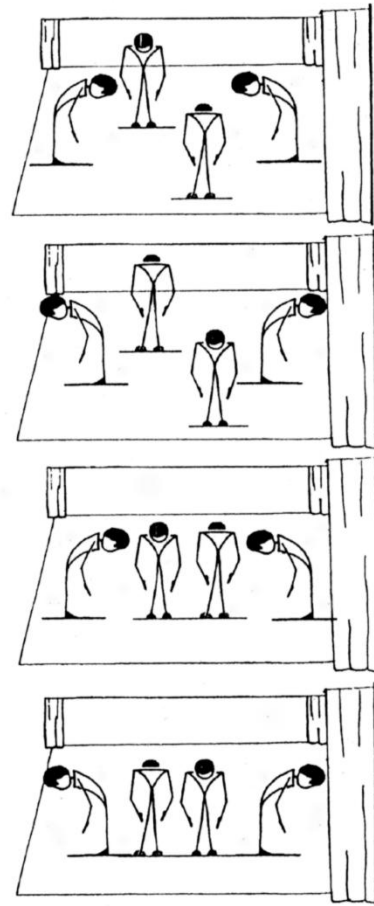
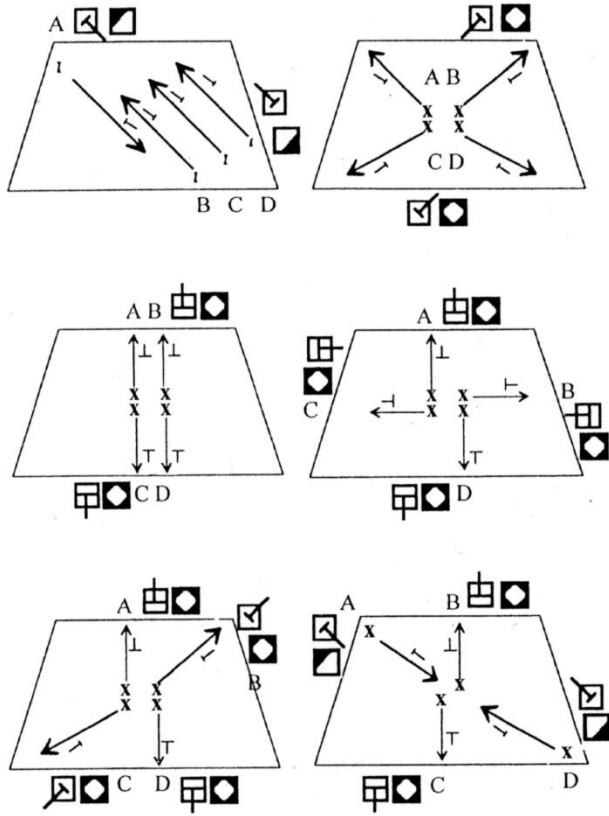
To quote Charles Weidman, "Carry on."

Space lines (paths)



Quartet: Opposition (continued)

A simple change of front speaks volumes even from a simple standing position.



conclusion and editors' notes

CONCLUSION AND EDITORS' NOTES

"You've got what it takes and don't let anyone tell you otherwise!"

— N.S.

As mentioned in the Preface, despite a lifelong pursuit in writing and re-writing *Elements of Dance Composition*, Nona's manuscript is incomplete. Her most completed and final copy, put together on 11/6/03 when Nona was 93, is missing the final chapter. The table of contents to this copy reads as follows:

Part Three: Dance Forms

Folk

Circle Dances

Line Dances

Square Dances

Serpentine Dances

Couple Dances

Historical and Traditional Dance Forms

Allemand

Courante

Sarabande

Minuet

Bouree

Pavane

Waltz

Galliard

After Nona's passing, we spent several months archiving her personal and professional materials. Nona's possessions included so many dance treasures: notes and music from her days teaching at the 92 St. Y, photos of her with Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman at Bennington, course syllabi and curriculum planning from SUNY Geneseo, a costume handmade by Humphrey, dance concert programs, and letters from several dancers in the Humphrey-Weidman-Limón lineage. Many of these items were displayed at SUNY Geneseo during the 50th anniversary Geneseo Dance Ensemble concert in April, 2018. They are currently archived at SUNY Geneseo Milne Library, thanks to archival librarian Elizabeth Argentierie. COVID had delayed that exchange until now and we are excited to pass along such precious and historic items for many to see.

Among Nona's possessions were several versions of *Elements of Dance Composition*. The chapters were written and rewritten. Still, in all of her notes, there was nothing on Dance Forms. Knowing what we know about Nona and her love of classic dance forms and composition, she surely would have written about each of the above dance forms, describing what they look like in space and time, and then suggested assignments to her readers based on manipulating the

elements of form and bodies on stage. She certainly gave assignments like this in her composition classes. Some of these dance forms can be found in Labanotation in Nona's book, *Modern Dance Fundamentals*.

We invite readers to enter into the creative process with Nona's assignments in mind. What would a Line Dance look like with broken lines? As a solo? With uneven phrasing? The theme and variation possibilities presented here are almost endless, are simple enough for beginning movers to play with, and have the potential for professional dance makers to re-focus their compositional eye in a different way.

Dance was the love of Nona's life. Even in her final years, when she could no longer physically dance, she could "talk shop" about dance for hours. Literally hours. Her dedication to her craft is both inspirational and humbling for those of us who consider ourselves "in the long line." At this point this may include just about every living dance artist! Nona once put it this way: "With additions to the 'gene pool' this technique stays alive, evolves, and stays relevant in new environments."

May the publication of this text be a tribute to a woman who passionately contributed so much to dance. May her resonant voice live on in these pages and most especially, in the dance moves so many dancers, dancers-to-be, musical theater directors, and choreographers have yet to create.

Angela Caplan and Heather Acomb



