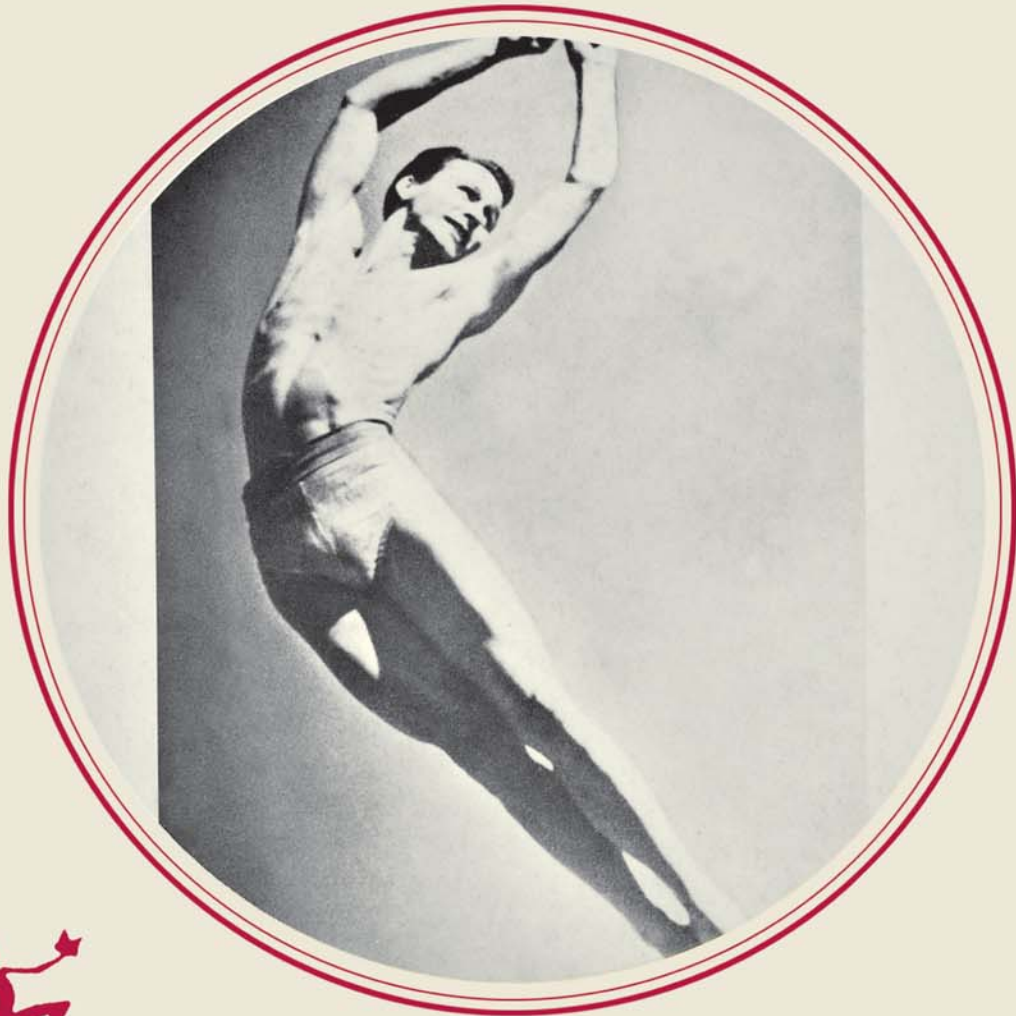


LANGUAGE OF DANCE SERIES, NO. 2

SHAWN'S  
Fundamentals  
of Dance



EDITED BY  
Ann Hutchinson Guest

ROUTLEDGE

# **Shawn's Fundamentals of Dance**

# LANGUAGE OF DANCE SERIES

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## **Shawn's Fundamentals of Dance**

Edited by Ann Hutchinson Guest

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# Shawn's Fundamentals of Dance

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Barton Mumaw performing the *pas de poisson*  
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction to the Series . . . . .	vi
Acknowledgements . . . . .	vii
Shawn's Foreword . . . . .	ix
Preface . . . . .	xi
Introduction . . . . .	xiii
Selection of Photographs . . . . .	xiii
The Music Score . . . . .	xxiii
The Music Tape . . . . .	xxiii
Glossary . . . . .	xxiii
Study and Performance Notes . . . . .	1
I. General Stretching Set . . . . .	2
II. Figure Eight Swings . . . . .	20
III. Tension-Relaxation Set One . . . . .	22
IV. Tension-Relaxation Set Two . . . . .	30
V. Floor Set . . . . .	38
VI. Three Jumps . . . . .	42
VII. Walking, Running, Leaping . . . . .	44
VIII. Long Adagio (Balance Exercise) . . . . .	48
IX. Single Arm Swing and Development . . . . .	50
X. Three Delsarte Falls . . . . .	56
XI. Series of Successions . . . . .	62
Appendix A: Alphabet of Basic Steps . . . . .	70
Appendix B: Shawn Biography . . . . .	73
Appendix C: Shawn Bibliography . . . . .	74
Music . . . . .	77
Index . . . . .	99

# INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

The *Language of Dance* series aims to expand the literature of dance through publication of key works that cover a range of dance styles and dance periods.

Through careful selection of appropriate movement description, these gems of dance heritage have been translated into Labanotation, the highly developed method of analyzing and recording movement.

A language is spoken, written and read. Those intimately involved in the study and performance of dance will have experienced the language of dance in its “spoken” form, i.e. when it is danced. During the years spent in mastering a dance form, the component parts are discovered and become part of one’s dance language. Through the written form of dance the building blocks common to all forms of dance become clear, as well as how these blocks are used. The study of the Language of Dance incorporates these basic elements and the way the various component parts are put together to produce choreographic sentences. How the movement sequences are performed, the manner of “uttering” them, rests on the individual interpretation.

In the *Language of Dance Series* understanding of the material is enriched through Study and Performance Notes which provide an aid in exploring the movement sequences and bringing them to life.

Ann Hutchinson Guest, Editor

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have contributed over the years to the preparation of this book. The idea first took shape during the summers I taught Labanotation at Jacob's Pillow when I also took part in as many classes as my own teaching allowed. I had already notated Shawn's *16 Dances in 16 Rhythms* and approached him with the possibility of recording some of his other works. These Fundamental Exercises seemed an obvious choice, primarily because of our shared concern with dance education. The revival of interest in Shawn's work and the need for teaching material of this kind have spurred the final preparation of *Shawn's Fundamentals of Dance*.

Jennifer Scanlon, later a leading dancer with the José Limón Company, spent the summer of 1956 at Jacob's Pillow as a scholarship student assigned to notating Shawn's classes. Barton Mumaw, the leading dancer with Shawn's Men's Group, who has long used this basic training material in his classes, has graciously and generously contributed valuable verbal instructions highlighting the salient points of each exercise as well as sharing his own teaching notes. I am much indebted to him for his enthusiasm and support. Jess Meeker, Shawn's original accompanist, unhesitatingly contributed his time and talent in answering music questions and in making the cassette tape to accompany the book.

Juli Nunlist's careful reading of the text assured that it would be comprehensible to the non-dancer. The Language of Dance Centre staff undertook details of production in many roles. Jane Whitear undertook the role of production assistant as well as the autography of the Labanotation which was proofread by Rob van Haarst. Nancy Harlock took part in checking and coordinating the text and index which were further refined through Jude Sidall's discerning comments. Cerinda Survant contributed additional revisions and improvements on the text and passed on her word processor expertise to Rob van Haarst who finalized the appearance of the text.

I am much indebted for all help given by Barton Mumaw, Jacob's Pillow and the Dance Collection of the New York Public Library in my search for photographs.

To conclude, I acknowledge with great appreciation the work of Ray Cook, my Associate Editor of this Language of Dance Series, who questioned every symbol and every word from both the dancer's and the dance notator's point of view.

To all the above I extend my heart-felt thanks.

Courtesy of the Dance Collection, New York Public Library.



TED SHAWN  
wearing the Cross of Dannebrog.

# SHAWN'S FOREWORD

Regardless of what type of dancing a pupil may ultimately choose, there are certain constants — abilities, skills — that everyone must master. We expect of every dancer that he have muscular strength, elasticity of the entire body, coordination of all parts of the body, ability to move musically and rhythmically, to have a rich vocabulary of movement, to have mastered spatial aspects both in regard to his own movement and in relation to a group of other dancers.

In contrast to all the other arts, the dancer has the additional task of having to develop his own body as his instrument and as the material of his art form. Therefore the first essential, before the dance as such is approached, is to develop and train the body until it becomes instantly and completely responsive to any command the brain gives.

Muscular strength must be built up through the right kinds of exercise to enable the dancer, for example, to leap into the air and to land without shock or jar. All stiffness must be eliminated, so that fluid movement may pass through all or any part of the body like a wave. The rhythmic and ever-present principle of tension and relaxation must be so much a part of the dancer that he or she can use energy or release energy at will, even in small space and time units. The dancer must understand and be able to produce many different qualities of movement, and develop the ability to improvise as readily as he or she engages in conversation.

No claim is made that the following exercises are complete, or that they produce the only *good* system; there are many. These are the net result of a study of worthwhile systems of physical training available today, plus the personal contributions I have made as a result of over twenty-five years of continuous teaching.

"By their fruit ye shall know them." The use of these exercises has borne much good fruit. I believe that all of the best teachers of dance in America today use all of these principles — and that they differ only in terminology and in the forms of application. But the infinite variety of forms in which a principle may be legitimately and profitably employed is one of the strongest fascinations of dance training. As soon as a principle of movement is thoroughly understood, anyone can apply that principle in forms of his own devising with equally good results. As for freshness of interest, teachers and pupils should constantly devise new forms in which to use these eternal principles. It is only hoped that the convenient form of these exercises, plus the music written by Jess Meeker, a composer who has studied and worked with the rhythms of bodily movement for many years, will be of benefit to those who have not as yet worked out original training routines.

As "pre-dance body training" nothing here presented pretends to have yet entered the realm of dance itself, nor are questions of the *art* of the dance itself even touched upon. The purpose of these exercises is specifically to get the student's body in such condition, and his mind-body coordination to such a state that, when he begins to learn a specific dance form or dance style, he will have an instrument that will respond almost unconsciously — a perfect and effortless instrument of his will.

Ted Shawn  
Jacob's Pillow  
1939

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# PREFACE

Dance techniques, especially contemporary ones, have developed significantly since Shawn wrote the above introduction in 1939. Kinesiology, bio-mechanics and other anatomically derived studies have contributed valuable knowledge to the training of a dancer. Improved knowledge of the body — the very instrument of dance — has produced remarkable techniques. However technically accomplished today's dancers are, we see they have a more limited expressive range than their predecessors; too often they are less able to convey the full scope of qualities of movement, and all too often exhibit an absence of cognitive understanding of their dance material. In short, they lack a balanced dance education. How is their training different from their predecessors, "the historical moderns"?

*Shawn's Fundamentals of Dance* provides a methodical yet organic approach to movement, a series of stepping stones that simultaneously develop physical and cognitive understanding of movement. The exercises vary greatly in movement quality; the student experiences these contrasts in his own body and soon perceives how other, more specialized dance techniques are created from materials as simple as these.

This book is especially valuable for the teacher who — even though highly skilled in one or another form of dance technique — seeks a different approach to the teaching of beginning students.

I met this material personally while a student of Shawn's at Jacob's Pillow. While my own technique was then somewhat more advanced than many of these exercises, I still found the material enjoyable and of value. I also observed its impact on the beginning students in the class. I have since drawn on it in many contexts, including working with adult amateurs.

Books on modern (contemporary) dance technique are rare: the necessary subtleties do not lend themselves to words and pictures: for this reason, text is provided to accompany the Labanotation. For those not yet fluent in notation, these word notes include images that embody the quality each particular exercise seeks to evoke in the student, images that focus the student's attention on the pertinent performance details.

Ann Hutchinson Guest  
London

Courtesy of the Dance Collection, New York Public Library.



In this solo, *Invocation to the Thunderbird*, the contrast that Shawn has used in the oppositionally contracted and extended limbs achieved at the height of the vertical jump expresses inner power, determination, and a strong sense of dignity and presence.

# INTRODUCTION

Shawn was concerned with the principles of movement and with formulating sequences through which these could be studied. These principles centered on body isolations and coordinations, spatial patterns, body weight, both in transference of weight in supporting and in use of weight (i.e. gravity) in gestures, and contrasts in use of energy (dynamics) and in movement durations (rhythms). While the physical and spatial “shape” of the movements and the “textures” used were important, Shawn did not emphasize precise performance, particularly not in exact placement of the limbs; students were allowed some leeway. Therefore the notation indicates the standard version, not the definitive one.

In many instances general timing has been given in the notation, general timing being the indication of the main beat on which the movement falls. However, exact timing is used when such precision affects the resulting quality of movement, the placement of emphasis and use of momentary pauses. As with dance in general, the performer should relate to the music and be affected by it.

## SELECTION OF PHOTOGRAPHS

The following photographs have been included since they illustrate not only some of the movements in *Shawn's Fundamentals of Dance* but also his sense of movement line and use of space in the individual body as well as in group formations. Shawn used the fundamental movement principles as a basis for choreographic invention. Nowhere is this more appropriately illustrated than in his group work, *Kinetic Molpai*, created for his Men's Group and, decades later, successfully revived and performed to acclaim. The enjoyment of the young, contemporary performers in dancing these movements from an earlier period was clearly evident.