STEP BY STEP TOWARDS MASTERING DANCE NOTATION

A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF JÁNOS FÜGEDI'S LATEST BOOK ENTITLED *SIGNS OF DANCE*

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Abstract

János Fügedi is an internationally recognized user, developer, and educator of Laban kinetography. His latest independent work is the book mentioned in the title, published in English, which I will introduce to the reader in this review. After a brief overview of the author's biography, I will discuss the book's background and outline its structure. In my review, I will draw attention to the innovations in relation to the domestic dance notation practice and present the book's substantial annotated appendices. Finally, I will conclude by specifying the exact audience to whom I would recommend this book.

Keywords: Laban kinetography, dance notation, movement analysis, dance research

János Fügedi, PhD (1953), is a senior researcher at the *Institute of Musicology of the Research Centre for Humanities* and a habilitated professor at the *Hungarian Dance University*, where he teaches movement analysis and Laban kinetography. He serves as the president of the *Hungarian Dance Society* and also served as the president of the university's *Scientific Council*. Since 1989, he has been a member of the *International Council of Kinetography Laban*, and from 1995 to 1997, he chaired the *Research Panel* of the Council. Since 2005, he has been the president of the Council's *Board of Trustees*. His main area of research is the traditional dances of East-Central Europe, with a particular emphasis on movement concepts and dance composition methods within this culture. He has published numerous studies and books on these topics. Under his editorship, the publicly accessible online *Knowledge Base of Traditional Dances* was published, making the sources of Hungarian folk dance research increasingly accessible.

The subject of my review is János Fügedi's latest book, entitled *Signs of Dance: Laban Kinetography for Traditional Dancers: Solo and Circle Dances* and published in English in 2023. To understand its significance in the proper context, it is important to briefly outline the background of the book. In 2011, Fügedi's work *Tánc – Jel – Írás: A néptáncok lejegyzése Lábán-kinetográfiával: Szóló- és körformák* was published in Hungarian, which was primarily motivated by the courses he taught at the Hungarian Dance University.

The first part of the book (see below) was published in English in 2016 under the title *Basics of Laban Kinetography for Traditional Dancers*, which can be considered an immediate precursor to the book discussed here. While the content of the present edition largely corresponds to the Hungarian book, it is not a simple translation into English. Therefore, in my review, I will refer to the similarities and differences between the Hungarian and English editions where appropriate.

The new book introduces the reader to the world of dance notation, specifically Laban kinetography, in English. The foundation of kinetography is movement analysis, the results of which are represented through abstract symbols based on various rules and conventions. The book introduces the reader to these signs and conventions, which, when mastered and applied in dance, can lead to greater movement awareness for the dancer. The book discusses the movement phenomena of the traditional dance culture of the Carpathian Basin, primarily Hungarian dances, but does not cover couples' dances and dances with props in its scope. Due to this limitation and the obvious genre constraints, the book's aim is not to present the complete system of Laban kinetography. The motif examples chosen by the author to illustrate the movement phenomena presented in the book are almost exclusively selected from dance recordings' scores in the *Archives and Department for Folk Music and Folk Dance Research of the Institute for Musicology*. One of the book's clear objectives is to assist the development of dance professionals who can contribute to the expansion of the above-mentioned archive.

Following the acknowledgments and preface, the author briefly introduces the development of Laban kinetography, its history in Hungary, its role in Hungarian dance research, and the main source materials for the notation system itself. The main content of the book is divided into two major sections. The first part consists of twenty-five chapters introducing the signs, main movement types, and concepts forming the basis of kinetography. The second part includes thirty chapters, of which twenty-eight explore the depths of dance notation through the movement world of Hungarian traditional dances. Each of these chapters concludes with a table summarizing the presented symbols. Fügedi dedicates a separate chapter to the practice of dance notation from films, empowering aspiring notators to confidently start creating their own notations armed with the knowledge from the book, and, in turn, to explore the movement concepts inherent in dance. In the concluding chapter of the second part of the book, the author emphasizes the importance of dance notation for both stage choreographers and dance researchers, as, in his opinion, describing, understanding, and comparing the intricacies of dance would be inconceivable without it.

I must specifically mention the kinetograms of the motif examples featured in the chapters on dance notation, all of which are both well-designed and easily readable, created with the author's *LabanGraph* application.[1] While the motif examples in the

[1] *LabanGraph* is an application designed for the computer graphics software AutoCAD, which replaced the previous slow and time-consuming method of drawing dance notations using pen and tracing paper with a faster and significantly higher-quality digital solution (Fügedi, 2018). AutoCAD is primarily used by professionals who require a high level of precision in their design tasks, such as architects and engineers. One of its advantages is that it is vector-based, meaning that the size and quality of the images created in it are independent of resolution. Therefore, if we wish to publish the notation created with the *LabanGraph* application in a printed medium, the printed version can be produced without any loss of quality.

2011 Hungarian book include the *starting position* of the motif in only a few cases, the English book includes it for all motifs, improving the overall readability. In the main text, Fügedi often refers to the geographical origin and typological classification of the motif examples, but at the end of the book, they are summarized in a table which provides exact information about their origins, as well as the inventory number of the dance process and notation used as sources. Compared to the Hungarian book, some novelties include, among others, the use of *white pins* instead of *black pins* for certain rotated positions, and a return to the international practice for noting the front, in which the *front signs* are placed on the left side of the kinetogram instead of the right side (Venable & Blum, 1981, 1983).

The book continues with a collection of the symbols that it features, followed by the previously mentioned table of motifs and illustrations. Finally, I must highlight the extensive annotated appendices, which I consider a valuable addition to the international literature in the field. From this section, readers can obtain valuable information about the origins, historical usage, and changes of the symbols presented in the book, as well as information on those who introduced and suggested modifications to these symbols in various publications. The annotation apparatus was not included in the previous Hungarian edition, but hopefully, it will be made available in Hungarian in the coming years in a new Hungarian edition that utilizes both the old Hungarian and new English books.

Aside from presenting Laban kinetography symbols, *Signs of Dance* also provides an excellent summary of the fundamental concepts of movement analysis. Just as literature, music, painting, and other artistic disciplines have their own terminology, I believe the conceptual framework of movement analysis can be beneficial for practitioners of other dance genres as well. Without specific and concrete concepts describing the phenomena of our art, our craft will never be properly appreciated and regarded as on par with the aforementioned art forms. Therefore, the knowledge that can be obtained from this book is not limited to those involved in Hungarian folk dance; anyone involved in any form of dance would do well to delve into it. Personally, as the author of these lines, I would love to see a book with a similar concept and structure about the traditional dances of other people or even about more widely known and popular dances.

To conclude my review, I would like to recommend this book to anyone involved in dance notation: university students and professionals already applying it, dance researchers seeking to support their findings with factual evidence related to movement forms, dance teachers seeking to deepen their pedagogy, dancers aspiring to elevate their precision in dance, and finally, those who have developed an interest in Laban kinetography after reading my review. This book will serve as a valuable guide on the fascinating journey of acquainting oneself with the world of dance notation.

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