Benesh dance scores: key contributions to the Royal Ballet in London

Surprisingly, I'd like to share a dream with you that's only just begun but hasn't finished yet. In February 2020, I was invited to work as a Benesh Choreologist for The Royal Ballet company to restage *Live Fire Exercise* (2011) by the choreographer Wayne McGregor at The Royal Opera House (ROH) from a Benesh Movement Notation (BMN) score written by Amanda Eyles. It was going to be (and hopefully, still will be!) the first time this piece was restaged, but the 2020 season was interrupted (then canceled) due to the virus. Thanks to the invitation of Éliane Mirzabekiantz, this article offers the opportunity to share my experience nonetheless. Thanks to this and by accepting the unfinished (or should we say?) the living nature of everything in life, I am very happy to tell you about my "dream" and put some considerations in writing, which anyone who is interested in the transmission process of ballet will want to know about.

1. **Dance BMN scores: lasting records and essential tools of transmission at The Royal Ballet.**

Since the 1960's, The Royal Ballet in London has been using the dance notation system created by Joan and Rudolf Benesh: Benesh Movement Notation (BMN). In fact, most major dance companies do this, and I hope that the ones who don't use it yet, will do so very soon!

What is more, The Royal Ballet team of Benesh Choreologists is always involved when new ballets are created or when past works are being restaged. They are key contributors to the creative process, thanks to which, restaging can also happen more quickly. Moreover, every time a new piece is created, the choreographer's style and artistic vision are perfectly recorded for future use.

It was incredibly stimulating for me to see The Royal Ballet Benesh Choreologists working on several scores in the office they share at the ROH. How could I not be moved by the many scores carefully organised on the walls! In order to ensure high standards in their BMN scores, they take into account the dancers' unique knowledge of the choreographic works, when they work together with ballet masters and repetitors in the studio. And it's in that context that I had the pleasure and honour of teaching Wayne McGregor's *Live Fire Exercise*.

2. **Amanda Eyles original BMN score of *Live Fire Exercise*(2011).**

Thanks to Amanda Eyles, who wrote the BMN score of the original production, I started learning Wayne McGregor's choreographic work 5-6 weeks before going to London. BMN scores generally are a very powerful tool for transmission and keep a reliable and complete

record of a choreographic work. Working with Amanda's score, let me appreciate her in-depth knowledge of the piece and remarkable Benesh Movement Notation skills.

A video of *Live Fire Exercise (2011)* offers a good overview of the piece, which no doubt has its benefits. But it definitely isn't enough to learn *Live Fire Exercise* quickly, easily, and most importantly accurately. How frustrating, for instance, when you can't see the dancers' movements when the stage lights are dark. Every detail matters!

In McGregor's pieces, dancers are encouraged to personally explore individual moves in order to surpass themselves in every performance. The intrinsic choreographic process of this British choreographer's artistic intention, really brings his pieces to life. Clearly, a video isn't enough to ensure that level of subjectivity. The video captures only one personal interpretation during one performance of one cast, so you really don't want to diminish the quality when restaging it. Thankfully, it is explicitly mentioned in the score by Amanda. Even in the uncertain times the world is facing today, this element of certainty liberates the full potential of physicality.

3. In no time thanks to Benesh movement Notation!

The principal dancers at The Royal Ballet often work on 5-6 different pieces in a single week. Do you think you've got a minute to lose? No, the dancers need very concise instructions from the repetitor and Benesh Choreologist in every rehearsal.

It was reassuring for me to know that many dancers of the new production's two casts already knew Wayne McGregor choreographic style. Several had even performed in the original production of 2011. Their skills, intuition, and capacity of expression made it incredibly exciting to work with. It also was extremely valuable when Gary Avis, one of the Royal Ballet's experienced repetitors, joined us in the studio.

When I acted as the repetitor, it was wonderful to be able to share clear instructions about the choreography, including the intrinsically organic nature of McGregor's choreography. I could even answer any questions about Michael Tippett's music, including any differences between music phrases and movement phrases. Thanks to the score I could also say which body part leads the movement. When needed, anything could be checked with a quick glance at the score! Without Benesh Movement Notation, it would have been impossible to transmit everything accurately.

Benesh Movement Notation is extremely precise, which is what is required when working with excellent dancers and genius choreographers. Benesh Movement Notation scores are very reliable and therefore, in my opinion, the most efficient tool for teaching choreographic work and making sure you don't waste anyone's time during that process.

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