

## Statement on Scholarship

### Labanotation

Staging work from Labanotation score is an act in preserving the history and legacy of the dance discipline. While written documentation in the form of texts, sparse photographs, and video footage exist, there is nothing that can compare to a live performance of a piece of choreography. A Labanotation score allows for choreography to be brought back into the performance venue and out of a text book. Labanotation is a symbol-based language used to analyze, describe, and document movement. For over 70 years, the Dance Notation Bureau has committed itself specifically to the preservation of dance. Labanotation scores, in the form of manuscripts, preserve not only the choreographic work but vital directorial and production information as well. Just as a professional musician wouldn't choose to learn a piece of music from a recording, a Labanotation scholar wouldn't choose to pass on a dance from video if given the choice. My beliefs in the theory allow me to understand that the Labanotation score is a resource that contains exact movement information for each body part, in specific time, and with description of energy and spatial orientation. This highly descriptive and accurate document holds the key information about the style, nuance, dynamic quality and intent of a choreographer's work that a video and/or written text couldn't tell as honestly and purely.

I have been staging from Labanotation score for many years, passing on dance tradition and educating students and audiences of the value and historical importance of the dance discipline. There are many factors involved in my choosing a piece of choreography to stage from Labanotation score. What type of piece do the dancers need at this stage of their training and what can they handle both technically and emotionally? Do the students need to work on a piece with sensitive subject matter to help develop their artistry or do they need to refine their technical skill? What am I trying to teach my audience? Does current society need to be reminded of the necessity of humanity and or cultural importance? Is there a particular piece of choreography from the past that has a similar message we are trying to get across today?

Once I have chosen a piece of choreography for staging my research process begins. This is the time the texts, photos, video footage and reviews become a necessary resource used to enrich the movement description of the Labanotation score. As the stager, I understand that it is my responsibility to convey the intent of the original choreographer. It is this gathered information that assists in the process of the movement becoming a part of my skin, almost as if I created it myself. This seamless connection with the work is vital in translating the movement from the paper to the bodies of the dancers. Each work I present from Labanotation score is held to this high level of accuracy and authenticity.

I have had many professional accomplishments in Labanotation that continue to shape my approach and philosophies on the topic. Since my arrival to Agnes Scott I have staged a piece of choreography from Labanotation score each year, enriching the repertory experience for both students and audiences. My stagings include the work of modern and ballet legends Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, Helen Tamiris, Marius

Petipa, Ruth St. Denis, and Lester Horton. In the last several years I have also expanded my staging repertoire to include works by current choreographers. This includes the work of Bebe Miller, Susan Hadley and Clay Taliaferro. All of these stagings have afforded the students experiences in performing a high caliber of technique and repertory that they would not be able to experience without my active Labanotation background.

As the only person who stages from Labanotation score in the Atlanta dance community, my skills in Labanotation and staging from score are very rare and sought out. Recently, I was commissioned to stage historical work on dance students at DeKalb School of the Arts (DSA) as well as a local non-profit Moving in the Spirit (MITS). At DSA, I staged Helen Tamiris' *Negro Spirituals* (1928-1941) as part of an evening of dance that highlighted the work of female choreographers. The students spent months learning and rehearsing the long work, but more importantly dissecting the theme of racial oppression and making connections to the hate crimes that are prevalent today. At MITS, I staged *Rainbow Etude*, choreographed by Donald McKayle in 1996. This work draws its theme and some of its movement from McKayle's signature work *Rainbow 'Round My Shoulder* that explored the experience of men on chain gangs in the American South. Both experiences presented the young dancers with challenging technical movements that could only be presented successfully if paired with compelling artistry.

I have also been commissioned to stage work from score at other local universities. These projects hold great importance, as I have designed them to be collaborative performances with Agnes Scott dancers. At Emory University I directed/staged Bessie-award winning choreographer Bebe Miller's work *Prey* on a cast of dancers from both Dance Programs. Once the work was staged, the students had the transformative experience of working in the studio with Bebe Miller for a long weekend. Performances by this collaborative cast were included in both Agnes Scott College and Emory productions throughout the 2014-2015 academic year and was also presented for adjudication at the American College Dance Association conference. I have also collaborated with Emory University dancers on the work *Shakers*, choreographed in 1932 by modern dance pioneer Doris Humphrey. These collaborative performances took place during the 2010-2011 academic year and included a performance in the adjudication concert at the American College Dance Association conference. Similarly, I staged/directed Helen Tamiris' *Negro Spirituals* on a cast of Agnes Scott and Brenau dancers in fall 2013. This experience included collaborative performances on each campus in fall 2013 and a performance in the informal concert at the American College Dance Association conference in spring 2014. I am honored to be able to share historical work with the Atlanta Dance community and continue to look for more of these opportunities for collaboration amongst local dance companies/universities.

As a scholar in the field of Labanotation I feel it is necessary to share my love of theory and teaching. In 2013, I was honored to be invited to teach a Labanotation course at Hope College in Holland, Michigan during a May semester. For three weeks I worked with dance majors on motif writing and elementary Labanotation. While reading was emphasized, dictation was also a critical component to this literacy course. I have also served as faculty, alongside six other colleagues, for the Teacher Certification Course in

Elementary Labanotation at the Dance Notation Bureau Extension at The Ohio State University (OSU). During my time with the students I presented a class and provided feedback on the candidates' sample Labanotation class plans. Once back in Atlanta, I continued to work with candidates on their final course plans that were presented as their final project. Finally, I was invited to OSU as a presenter in the 2012 Dance Literacy Symposium. The invitation was a result of my contributions to scholarship and research in the field. This one-day symposium was a robust gathering of scholars, presenting and having valuable conversations about the direction of documentation, analysis, reconstructions, and dance notation systems.

Another role I would like to continue to explore is that of tester of a Labanotation score. Because of the importance a Labanotation score holds to my personal scholarship, testing scores for accuracy and the status of being published at the Dance Notation Bureau is a logical path for me to take. In spring 2011 I tested the score for *Sweet in the Morning*, choreographed by Lenny Williams and notated by Patty Delaney. To test this score, I staged the work on Agnes Scott College students. Once set, Delaney traveled to Atlanta to make any necessary changes to her score. Once my recommended changes are made, the score will be submitted to the Dance Notation Bureau for the DNB seal to indicate the score is pristine and the definitive record of the piece. While she was at ASC Delaney coached the work on our students so they had the opportunity to perform *Sweet in the Morning* in *Spring Forward: A Celebration of Dance* in April 2011.

Throughout all of my work with Labanotation my philosophy has come to revolve around the notion that appreciating the history and evolution of this art form enhances the dancer's awareness of movement intention therefore engaging the dancer more intellectually. This intellectual connection will continue to expand their performance artistry and technique, assisting the young dancer in the development of their teaching and performing careers. Therefore, the Labanotation staging process should be taken very seriously and I find it is a great responsibility to represent a choreographers work genuinely, especially when they are no longer around to direct it themselves. I have recently become invested in staging the works of Doris Humphrey. Through the process of rehearsing and dancing Humphrey's work and the use of her book The Art of Making Dances which is used as a text in the Choreography I class, the students are able to dissect the nuance of her movements and the patterns used compositionally through space. I have found that through the process of staging works like *Air for the G String* and *Soaring*, the dancers are moving with an understanding of the carriage of the body that it brings out a clarity of movement transforming them into mature artists.

Staging from Labanotation score will always be a great passion of mine and I will continue to uphold my standard of presenting authentic, accurate stagings throughout my career. I find myself to be an ambassador of this form of dance documentation through my continued work and it never ceases to amaze me how excited the students get about dancing a piece they have read about in the history books and how audiences are connecting choreography of the past to the present. As a stager I am continuing to uphold the traditional aspects of the art form that have fueled the present and will continue to shape the future. I hope my contributions in staging, testing, and presenting

about Labanotation can aide in the quest to keep the preservation aspect of the dance discipline alive and flourishing for years to come.

### Choreography

As a choreographer, my goal has always been to find the balance between my creative voice and the strengths of the dancers who will ultimately perform my work. I choose to create work that has meaning beyond the movement so that the choreography is driven by an idea that the dancers can grasp and connect with. In my experience, when the dancer can emotionally connect to the work, the commitment to the piece is stronger, making the artistry speak to the audience. I also find that my movement vocabulary is challenged and inspired by this focus allowing me to create a movement score individual to each work even as the body is limited to its physical capacities. This way of working is directly connected to liberal learning as the dance is affected by other disciplines involved in a particular idea. Readings, videos and discussions regarding the intention of the work are just as important as having the work rehearsed and performed. For example, when I was creating and rehearsing *Chasing Silhouettes*, a piece responding to the struggles presented with distorted body image and disordered eating, I incorporated readings and discussion to assist the dancers to emotionally connect to the feeling of isolation that the choreography was connecting with. Throughout the process of creating and rehearsing *Chasing Silhouettes* the cast experienced Portia de Rossi's memoir, Unbearable Lightness: A story of loss and gain. Each rehearsal began with the reading aloud of a chapter from this book that detailed de Rossi's struggle with food, body image and sexuality. This safe space allowed cast members to "open up" about their own struggles, making the process both cathartic and therapeutic. These experiences enriched the dance so that the emotion was not contrived, but rather felt and embodied. An audience can feel this when viewing a dance which is why I always strive for authenticity of intent when presenting choreography.

My interests in choreography have more recently fallen in line with some of the modern dance pioneers in the presentation of dance as a form of social protest. My experiences in staging historical works like *Lynchtown* (Charles Weidman) and *Negro Spirituals* (Helen Tamiris) that present humanity to encourage change, have been very inspiring for both myself and my students. I created *There is* in 2014 as a space for my students to feel that they are a part of a community committed to making change. Through discussion, we determined that each performer could have their own inner dialogue, which created a work without a strict narrative, but one that conveyed a strong emotional investment. This work received much praise when presented for adjudication at the American College Dance Association conference, receiving an invitation to be performed in the closing gala concert. A much clearer narrative was displayed in my work *Fara's Dream*. I had a strong visceral response to a photo gallery I saw on Facebook about the children who are the unfortunate victims of the Syrian refugee crisis. The cast and I read stories about the hopes of these young children, including one of a child named Fara, whose only dream was to own a real ball to play with. A struggle for survival, the burden of having to grow up too soon, and hope for the future is conveyed through the composition of the work. Candles are incorporated to symbolize hope and when the final candle is blown out at the end the responsibility for change is in the hands of the viewer.

The landscape of the performing space is also of great interest to me when I am creating a new piece of choreography. Always an admirer of dance that is done traditionally with the feet on the floor, I am always questioning and experimenting with ideas that can expand the landscape past what our bodies can do alone. I have experimented with props including ladders, benches, swings, ropes, aerial harnesses and chairs to try to move the viewers eye past the 6 feet of height they are used to experiencing when viewing dance. While experimenting with space I should state that it is still of utmost importance to me not to make the dance about the tricks that can be accomplished while using a particular prop. Throughout the process of creating a new work I am constantly asking myself how each movement and moment with the prop connects to the original intent. Strengthening the work while creating a landscape that is visually interesting is always my goal when incorporating a prop. While creating *Unfolding*, a work about taking personal experiences, processing them and then deciding how to move forward, I chose to have the performers work amongst a stage floor covered in crumpled papers. These papers were to represent the historical element of receiving news through a news paper as opposed to how they experience it today through the internet. Throughout the work, the performers are opening the papers and looking for answers which results in a wide range of emotions, changing their relationship to the paper as the work progresses.

Finally, I am a firm believer that collaborations with other disciplines enrich the value of work created and each collaborator's experience greatly. Through a series of collaborations with a group on the Agnes Scott campus of which I am a co-founder, *Complex Mammal*, I have enjoyed the transformations in my choreographic process. *Complex Mammal* is a collaborative group of Agnes Scott creative arts colleagues who are dedicated to infusing the creative process into all aspects of academic life. The unique fusion of sound, image, and movement expands the traditional aesthetic modes of expression and establishes a new concept of shared artistic experience. *Complex Mammal* is especially excited to share the artistic practice with our students, both as a mode for teaching and learning and as a resource for current and relevant ideas. Through a series of collaborative ventures, discussions brought upon several approaches to a topic that has revealed new ways of creating work. One example is the work *Hela*, that was inspired by a campus read of [The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks](#) by Rebecca Skloot. This piece infused elements of visual art, light and dance to portray the tensions and ethical questions raised in this true story about life versus scientific inquiry. In *Enamored Flame*, movement and text are incorporated to document conformity for perfection. These collaborations have stimulated my choreographic process through discoveries made with other artists. I have learned many great lessons from these collaborative experiences and strive to connect with many other disciplines in the future as I continue to create new work. The students are also greatly impacted by these collaborative ventures as they take part in the discussion and directly affect the direction of the work. This kind of experience is directly engaging the student in the experience of liberal learning which they will continue to value and incorporate in the work they do in their student and professional lives.

## Performance

Remaining active as a performer is of utmost importance to me and without this component to my scholarship my philosophies about teaching and scholarship would be incomplete. While I have danced for many choreographers, I have been focused on personal projects in more recent years. Prior to presenting my own work I was fortunate to have worked in Atlanta with many choreographers including George Staib and Anna Leo. Staib's work appealed to me because of the versatility of subject matter and sentiment, coupled with the intricacy and physicality of the movement. As a performer, I felt his work has brought me new levels of artistic awareness and connectedness in performance. I received multiple invitations to teach, perform and present work at the Staibdance Summer Intensive in Sorrento, Italy. In 2011 and 2013 I served as the ballet teacher for the intensive in addition to performing and presenting my work for the closing performance at Parco Ibsen in Sorrento, Italy. With Leo, I spent many years performing her work *Warrior Woman Pantoum*, a solo she created based on the structure of a poem. As a performer I was challenged with portraying the juxtaposing qualities of a fearless, non-trusting character who also displayed qualities of nurturing compassion. Opposing the grounded-ness of the movement with nuance that was soft but still edgy took a great deal of physical and emotional control. Each time I performed this piece of choreography I was pleased to find new moments that coincided with the music while being swept into the world of an alter ego. *Warrior Woman* has been in my performance repertoire for almost 2 decades and continues to challenge me in each stage of my life and performance career. I began dancing the work in my 20's with a relatively healthy body, then continued after a significant knee injury, finding new ways to incorporate strength while protecting my body. I dove in again post partum with my first child, feeding the work with a new maternal energy and now I continue to breathe new meaning into the work in my 40's.

In Spring 2015 I was granted a sabbatical and used the time to expand my performance repertoire by shifting my focus towards creating an evening length solo performance. My research was composed of both artistic and technical demands requiring extensive work in the studio and beyond. The final product, *Opening In* was performed August 27-29, 2015 in Winter Theatre, Dana Fine Arts. This was an evening-length (mostly) solo dance performance that I created and performed alongside talented guest artists. This performance took the viewer through time, reflecting on historical experiences through dance to create an evening that encouraged progression. The program included choreography by Doris Humphrey, Lester Horton, Kristin O'Neal and myself alongside guest performances by dancers, musicians, artists and writers. The dance pieces were connected through dramatic interludes that were created to shift the tone, preparing the viewer for the next work to be performed. This collaborative, yet personal project challenged me as an artist/performer and I will continue to seek out more opportunities to create evenings for myself in this vain moving forward.

Just as in my choreographic and staging philosophies, I choose to pursue opportunities that serve the greater good, whether that be through the message of the work or the purpose of the program. In summer 2017 (while 8 months pregnant with my 2<sup>nd</sup> child), I was contacted by the DeKalb County Solicitor-General with an invitation to participate as a professional dancer for the inaugural "Dancing with the DeKalb Stars" fundraising

event to benefit the Women's Resource Center and the International Women's House. October is recognized as Domestic Violence Awareness month and after dancing Lester Horton's *The Beloved* in *Opening In*, I have a strong desire to educating audiences and raising awareness about this continued social issue. I was paired with Dunwoody Police Chief, Billy Grogan and we worked for months to present a dance during this inaugural event. This event raised over \$10,000 and I was proud to use my art to support the community.

My work with *The Beloved* and promoting awareness of domestic violence continues today. Recently, I collaborated with three other artists on a performance called *Thread: Women's voices through Dance*. Alongside Amanda Byars, Amanda Exley Lower and Laurel Zahrobsky, we created a performance that served to lift up the voices of women expressed through dance. These performances took place in Chattanooga, TN and Atlanta, GA. As all four of us are educators, we aimed to reach a broad audience of all ages and backgrounds affirming the importance and value of female artists. I chose to include *The Beloved*, performed alongside Lonnie E. Davis, my longstanding dance partner, as my contribution to the program to bring a historical component to the production. The female character I portray in the work is strong and determined throughout, but over taken at the conclusion of the work, encouraging the need for continued discussion about domestic violence. The current staggering statistics regarding domestic violence are fueling Mr. Davis and I to continue to seek out opportunities to present this valuable piece of historical choreography that is still relevant today.

#### Future Plans

I have a great deal of enthusiasm for performing which I will continue to pursue throughout my career. My future performance projects will include continued work with *The Beloved* and the creation of workshop-based programming to continue to present the legacy of this work. Mr. Davis and I are in the process of creating such a workshop that will incorporate my skills in Labanotation and staging from score, his expertise in the Horton technique and a repertory component to allow participants to experience the movement vocabulary and intricate partnering in *The Beloved*. We plan to offer this alongside a performance of the work with a talk-back session in hopes to promote awareness of domestic violence while honoring the legacy of Lester Horton and his profound contributions to the dance field.

My *Thread* collaborators and I are also in discussion about touring the 2019 production and the creation of our next project. We feel that the inaugural performance can be of value to audiences regionally, therefore we are currently pursuing opportunities in Athens and Savannah. For my next project I would like to create a new solo work that investigates weightlessness as I navigate through the irreversible damage of arthritis, using my injuries to seek out new possibilities of movement vocabulary.

A long time collaborator and recently retired professor, Anna Leo and I are currently in negotiations to learn the legendary solo *Kaddish* by Anna Sokolow. Once we have had the coaching we will pursue opportunities to present the work and I will plan to share the repertory in modern technique class, enriching the historical component of the course.

I will continue to choreograph and stage historical work from Labanotation score on my students, choosing pieces that will promote artistic growth and technical challenges while connecting to liberal learning. In the spirit of *Complex Mammal*, I remain highly invested in helping students seek out collaborative creative projects that cross disciplines to engage a larger audience and strengthen the process of creation. Having had very successful collaborations with the dance programs at Emory and Brenau, I am very interested in the possibility of a multi- university collaboration on a historical masterpiece. It is a goal of mine to create partnerships with many of the college dance programs in Georgia to combine resources to present notable work and distinctive experiences for all of our students.

Finally, I am looking to expand my teaching repertoire and the audience that dance can serve. Years ago, I created and dedicated a work to a friend who was suffering from Parkinson's Disease as part of a collaborative endeavor with *Complex Mammal*. I have recently learned that one of our students is struggling with the recent Parkinson's diagnosis of her mother and I was contemplating ways to help her navigate this journey. I have decided to pursue the Dance for Parkinson's Disease teacher certification through the Mark Morris Dance Group. This special program allows certified teachers to offer classes to those with Parkinson's as well as their families and care givers. The purpose of these classes is allow participants to experience the benefits of movement and dance to help improve balance, mood, cognition, etc. I would like to pursue this certification as soon as possible and also encourage my student to take part in either a workshop or the full certification with the assistance of student funding.

Whether I am staging from Labanotation score, choreographing my own work or performing, I remain committed to the full embodiment of the subject matter conveyed by the dance. I truly believe that this fuels the excitement of the work for the dancer and the observer and proves that dance is a form of communication that requires as much skill and theory as other disciplines. In choosing my future pursuits my actions will be guided by my necessity to keep the art form flourishing and serving as a means for social change.