

**MALKOVSKY'S DANSE LIBRE**  
**BASIC MOVEMENTS AND CHOREOGRAPHIES**  
by  
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English until “Malkovsky’s *Danse libre* - Basic movements and choreographies” is the title of a publication to come out in French at the end of this year and to be translated into English until June 2000. It contains notations of over 30 exercises and 10 choreographies by François Malkovsky. In addition we have included a biography and reflections about Malkovsky’s thinking. This book is the result of a three-year part time co-operation between Suzanne Bodak and Karin Hermes-Sunke.

Who was François Malkovsky ?

He was born 1889 in Czechoslovakia, he spent his youth in the Carpates. After studying singing in Prague, he discovered France in 1910. In 1917 he met Raymond and Isadora Duncan. These contacts deeply influenced his approach of an art of movement. Malkovsky was inspired by nature as well as oriental philosophy and he observed and analysed movements of animals life. These were the basis for his own movement vocabulary. After 1918 Malkovsky worked and developed his “new dance” in close friendship with the sculptors Martel. He performed his choreographies alone or with his students from 1921 to 1948 on various stages in Paris. In 1950, the dancer became an educator, he taught until his death in 1982. Through his technique and his dances Malkovsky aimed for a freed body, a *danse libre*, which he called an “art of living”.

Through our publication we hope that François Malkovsky will be better known. He belonged to the generation of artists in the first decade of our century who were in quest of new ways of expression. Malkovsky contributed to Paris artistic life and deserves to have his place in the history of dance, but his dancing on major stages in Paris between 1922 and 1939 has almost fallen into oblivion. On the one hand, we hope these scores will be used in notation- and maybe dance education and will arouse both historical and stylistic reflections. On the other hand, hopefully these scores will contribute to bridging the gap between academic (classical and modern) dance and *danse libre*, widely practised among amateurs.

Francois Malkovsky rejected all movement which seemed unnatural to him. We find this search for natural movement again with the “new avant-garde” in New York in the sixties and since then this search is a concern of some artists. Jean Morrison Brown wrote about that in “The vision of Modern Dance”: “Although the outward appearance differed from the dance of Isadora, the spirit of the movement, in its rejection of all dance that is not

natural, was hers.” Although Malkovsky’s use of music belongs very much to the period of 1920 to 1940, his philosophy of using an inner impulse of movement as well as his movement qualities are still relevant today. His basic movement qualities for example are swings and playfulness with off balances. But the gestures, the style, the forms of movement reveal a specific type of dance from the beginning of the century, in quest of a new dance.

Malkovsky wanted a dance of Life, of true Life, a dance which appeals to people from all latitudes. A dance which shows the way towards the unity and the harmony of spheres, an aesthetic dance:

“ Look for Truth and you will find Beauty.”

A dance of metamorphosis :

“ Turn sound waves into visual ones.”

Malkovsky’s *danse libre* flows with simplicity and evidence. Always in harmony with the music, the flow of movements is punctuated by slight accents and there is much game and joy with off balances. The “spontaneous” and “natural” movements do not mean that no studies are necessary. Although it appears as simple form of dance, there are special training and specific exercises to lead to the experience of natural movements.

When Malkovsky stopped performing and became a teacher, he did not train professional dancers, his work remained within educational aims: dance for the “broad public”. Many school teachers learned how to apply dance in education. In our times in France the place of the *danse libre* in the physical education in schools has been taken over by contemporary dance.

Malkovsky thought that no one with a trained body in classical dance could understand his movements. Suzanne thinks differently. And of course times changed and dancers, professionals and amateurs, have different training and also different consciousness.

Recently there was an interesting experience of a classical ballet teacher studying “*Grande Valse*”, one of Malkovsky’s most complex choreography. The ballet teacher is convinced that the work with the *danse libre* is enriching her quality of teaching ballet. I studied and danced the “*Petit Berger* ” as well as “*Berceuse* ” and “*Pensee constant*”. These were very interesting experiences for me. It is not easy and often I felt insecure to let go of the so called technique and to find the natural movements.

Malkovsky expected simplicity, presence and authenticity from the performers. His personality, his words and his intonation conveyed his demands far better than precise explanations. Malkovsky said:

Dancing is living like the tree that is growing,  
like the river that is flowing,  
like the wind that is blowing,  
with the same justice, the same simplicity, the same straightforwardness.

### **Notating Malkovsky's *Danse libre***

The process of movement analysis has been a challenge in several aspects:

- the understanding of directions of the dancer in *danse libre* is more depending on energies and inner qualities than on spatial consciousness.
- the timing is very precise concerning the weight transfers, but there are movements of arms and upper body which precede the weight transfer. The timing of these movements is undefined, but important for the style.
- There are no codes of academic dance for the style of Malkovsky's *danse libre*. How far should details be notated? We decided to give more indications for the basic movements than for the choreographies. Concerning the choreographies, the notation focuses on the choreographic structure. The specificity of the style should be learnt through the exercises of the basic movements.
- The breath is essential for right the movement quality in *danse libre*. But Malkovsky never explained how the individual dancer should breath. Following his philosophy we decided not to notate the breathing, but to explain the importance and to give some proposals in the glossary of each choreography.
- The inner paths of movement are not notated. This is an open question: how far can and should kinetography indicate these? We face a similar problem with emotions and energies. We also decided to follow the teaching philosophy of Malkovsky who never explained the theory of the movement, but who gave inner meanings and metaphors: we have enclosed images or phrases given by Malkovsky.

If public performances are to be held, coaching with a specialist is to recommend.