

From Notation To Animation

By

Ilene Fox

The Dance Notation Bureau is creating a documenting tool using today's technology that will improve the dance field's ability to preserve dances of our time. We are creating an interface between LabanWriter, a word-processing-like software for dance notation, and Life Forms, an animation program created for choreographers to use to plan and visualize a dance. The interface is being created in cooperation with the developers of Life Forms at Credo Interactive and the developers of LabanWriter at the Dance Notation Bureau Extension for Education and Research in the Dance Department at The Ohio State University.

The project has received funding from the National Initiative for Preserving American Dance and the National Endowment for the Arts.

The first version of the interface will translate from LabanWriter to Life Forms. Long term goals include being able to translate in the other direction, from an animation created using Life Forms to a LabanWriter score, and to be able to translate animation created using motion capture to LabanWriter.

LabanWriter scores translated into animation for display in Life Forms will allow easier visualization of the movement without the expense of rehearsal space and dancers. This could cut staging costs for the field by allowing staggers to better prepare before beginning rehearsals. The interface would make notation more accessible to the dance field. Dancers with little or no knowledge of notation would be able to see the dances realized in animation. It would also allow the stager to see the movement without the artistic interpretation of a specific performer, as captured on videotape. The stager could form his own vision of the work without the influence of a previous performance.

By translating and saving the various versions as a choreographer works with Life Forms to create a new work, we will be able to document the choreographic process as well as the final product. The various stages of the choreographer's creative process will be able to be seen in Life Forms and at the same time will be saved as a detailed, written record in Labanotation.

It is also envisioned that the interface will create a powerful tool for dance education. Notation students will be able to see their notation animated, to get a better idea of what they are writing.

The following examples were taken from a CD-ROM put together by DNB notator Robin Hoffman for this presentation.

The interface is being created as a plug in that can be used with Life Forms. To open a LabanWriter file in Life Forms, one will go to “Open” under the file menu, see figure 1.

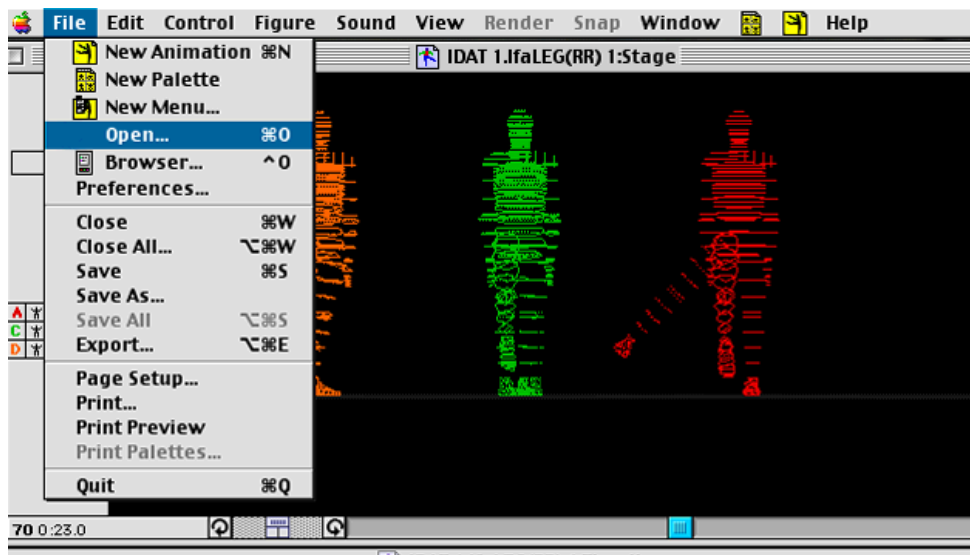


Figure 1

Next, one pulls down the menu under types of file to show and selects LabanWriter, see figure 2.

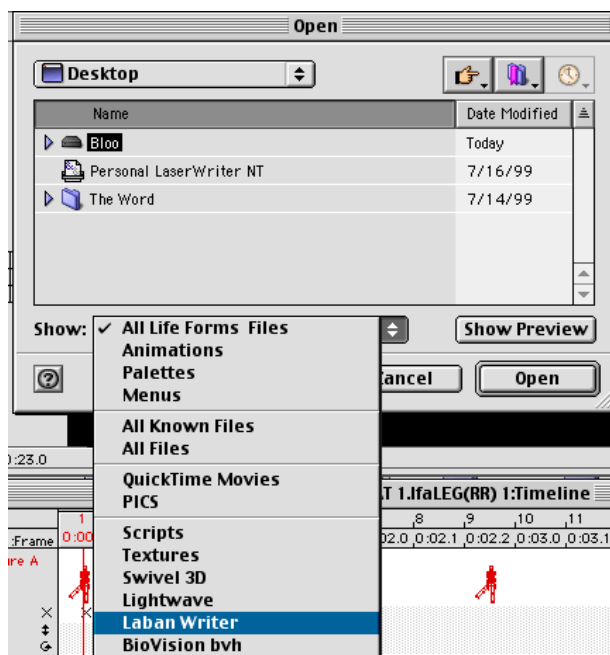


Figure 2

The LabanWriter files will be shown, and the desired file can be selected, Figure 3.

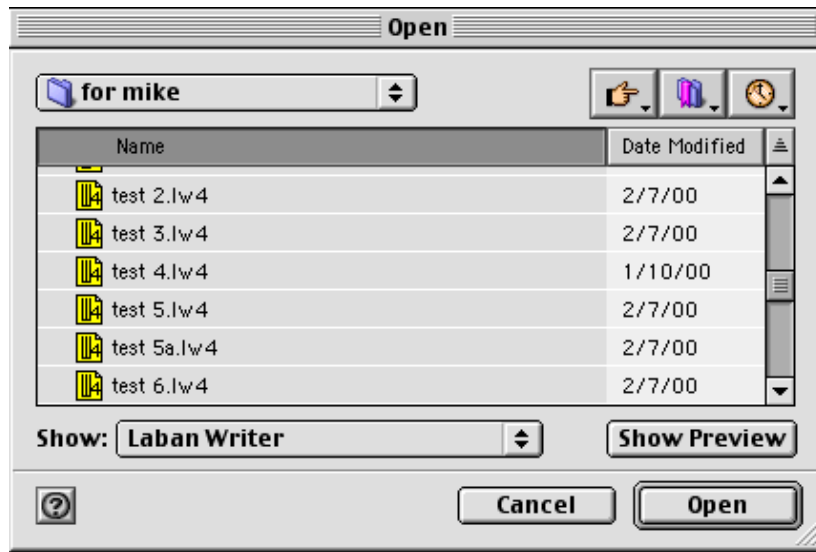


Figure 3

Opening the desired file will cause it to be translated into Life Forms and a Life Forms file will open with the animation to match the notation, figure 4.

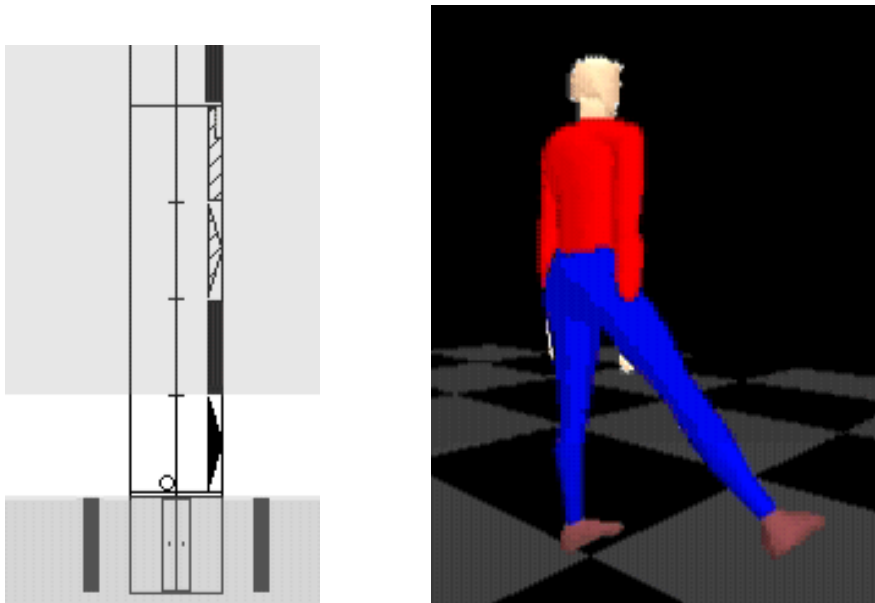


Figure 4

One will be able to see the notated movement in animation with the computer doing all the translating work for you. Even those who do not know notation will be able to access the wealth of notated materials.