

# **LABANREADER**

**by**

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The LabanReader CD-ROM represents a prototype developed by Sheila Marion and A. William Smith, with assistance from Joukje Kolff and Gina Jacobs. The project was funded by the Dance Preservation Fund at The Ohio State University.

In LabanReader you can designate different columns on the notation staff to be displayed in any combination of black, gray or white. Designating columns as black highlights symbols, making them appear strongly on the screen, while designating a column as white causes symbols to temporarily disappear from view. The gray feature allows symbols to fade but remain visible.

Our goal is to develop software that can work directly with LabanWriter to allow you to select your own groupings of symbols and to cluster symbols in any configuration, vertically or horizontally. We anticipate that the ability to display various kinds of movement patterning will be useful to dance researchers as well as teachers.

In the prototype, we selected symbols by columns, so that supports, leg gestures, and movements of the arms and torso could each be viewed separately.

There are three categories of examples on this CD. The first is selected from reading examples developed for notation classes which include steps with arm and leg gestures, port de bras with palm facings, turns, jumps with leg gestures, and contracting/extending. The second category focuses on technique phrases in ballet and modern dance. The third comprises score excerpts from theatrical dances as well as dances from different countries.

The initial screen of an example usually comes up with full notation. From this screen you can select which part of the movement you want to look at first, based on which actions seem predominant in the phrase. Because we were experimenting, there are several different methods for selecting, ranging from a dialogue box to rectangles below columns that you click like a three way switch.

For the most part, we found that a cumulative approach to showing the material works best. Once supports are learned, for example, fade the support symbols and bring the arm gestures up to black so that students can see the relationships between the steps they just learned and the arm movements. It is also helpful to show the staff alone to see the meter, number of measures, any repeats, and floor plans.

LabanReader uses the computer to do what the trained reader learns to do after much practice, which is to selectively focus attention on one aspect of the notation at a time. Looking at one or more columns also helps develop good reading skills by encouraging the dancer to look at through-lines of movement (reading vertically on the staff) instead of moving from position to position (reading horizontally on the staff).

Combining the use of computer technology with an analytical approach to movement seems to make a virtue of the notation's technical appearance. Also, the computer image projected on a screen or wall, along with lowered light levels in the rest of the dance studio, help focus attention and concentration.