

FRANCOIS MALKOVSKY'S FREE DANCE

Dance, whatever its style, has the lasting reputation of being intransmissible in any way other than physically, through imitation and speech. Concerning the trends of "Free" Dance which appeared at the very beginning of the 20th Century, the certainty of this intransmissibility was all the stronger as this "free" dance, in its very essence, did not seek to refer to any precise code.

It is the very difficulty of communication which urged researcher Rudolf Laban to create a writing system wide enough to notate the components of the human movement without referring to any particular style of movement, thus opening the possibility of founding a literature of movement in general and of dance in particular: accessible, open, exploratory.

Each style of dance requires from those who practise it a strict analysis in order to understand its sources and foundation mechanisms. Having put all her passion into analyzing over and over again this style which is part of herself is not one of Suzanne Bodak's least merits. She had to become a spectator in order to find the fundamentals deep down in her body and then translate them onto paper after learning Laban kinetography.

Everybody knows that the process of translating is hard work in order to restore as finely as possible the author's intentions. Transcribing a dance into signs is very similar to this process and requires a great deal of sensitivity and skill.

Karin Sunke's contribution has been essential thanks to her marvellous qualities as an interpreter supported by a solid analytical mind: it permitted the confrontation of two views which enriched and polished the notation of the study exercises and the few choreographies recorded in this book.

Seeing the fruits of one's teaching in such a publication as this is certainly the highest reward for a teacher, all the more so as it is one more stone added to the building of a dance literature Laban had dreamt of.

Jacqueline Challet-Haas

FRANCOIS MALKOVSKY'S FREE DANCE
or
SIMPLICITY AS A DANCE PRINCIPLE

By calling his dance “Free Dance”, François Malkovsky both expresses his vision of dance and his belonging to a major art trend which characterizes the beginnings of modern dance. Linked to the emerging notion of the individual as a receptacle of multiple memories and as an interior being, together with a new perception of a world undergoing perpetual transformation, Free Dance attempts to lay bare the surge of life from a global, dynamic conception of the human being. Breaking away from pre-established, academic codes, it advocates a coming back to sensory experience and rhythms before any formalism.

Through work from the fundamentals of bodies – weight, breathing, momentum, muscle tension/release – following the research on movement carried out by François Delsarte, it poses the essential elements of contemporary dance: loss of balance, fall, swings.

The style of Free Dance is characterized most of the time by a movement uncurling little by little from the mobile spine. The search for natural movement is organized around work on coordination and fundamental gestures such as walking, taking, throwing, swinging, gathering, sowing... This work favouring flowing plasticity and fluidity underlies the expressiveness of interpreters in Free Dance. A close relation with music is the aim.

Free Dance praises the direct connection with nature and the open air. The body is revealed, feet are bare, light tunics are worn. The notion of social, individual harmony and of happiness is at the core of this art trend. Thus, replacing the individual in the midst of the social changes of his era, it has often been linked to various political and democratic movements, sometimes joining contemporary humanistic utopias, like that of Monte Verita. It has attracted many amateur interpreters, giving birth to numerous dance schools and contributing to the construction of new forms of teaching: its artistic ambitions are also philosophical and political.

Free Dance does not only revolve around Isadora Duncan's research but also around Emile Jacques Dalcroze and Rudolf Laban. By its very essence, it favours multiplicity and allows for the emergence of choreographic personalities. Around Isadora Duncan, the “Paris School”, as the critic Fernand Divoire called it, was born: Lisa Duncan, Georges Pomiès, François Malkovsky; etc.

Suzanne Bodak's work is a living, authentic testimony of the history of Free Dance. With Karin Sunke's contribution, it is an insight into Malkovsky's choreographic specificity.

Isadora Duncan declared she had founded a school of life, not a dance school. Following the example of the dancer, Malkovsky's project was a project of life, a project of being. How many dancers, choreographers, or teachers support this choice nowadays?

Such is the path François Malkovsky chose to follow throughout his life, with simplicity of heart and body, perhaps with some austerity, any form of self-indulgence having been gently rejected in favour of self-discipline.

Elizabeth Schwartz¹

¹ Elizabeth Schwartz, dancer, kinesiologist, Laban analyst, a graduate of the Laban-Bartenieff Institute of Movement Studies, New-York. Performs Isadora Duncan's repertoire, transmitted by Julia Leviene in the United States.

MALKOVSKY AND HIS FREE DANCE

I would like to thank Suzanne Bodak for doing me the honour and the kindness of asking me to write a foreword for the book she has just completed on Malkovsky and his dance.

She came to me because I have experienced the times of Malkovsky's recitals, I danced with him at the Paris salon parties as well as at the Champs Elysées Theatre. I admired this dance technique more and more as I went deeper into its value, its liberty and simplicity. This dance requires sincerity.

As I was reading Suzanne Bodak's work, I enjoyed rediscovering the treasures of Malkovsky's teaching. She has managed to pay tribute to this dance by approaching it on the "physical, mental, emotional and spiritual planes", to quote a phrase Malkovsky cherished.

What did Malkovsky dance ?

A dance which connects us to the major, universal, unchanging laws of Nature and the Cosmos.

A spontaneous dance which expresses the emotions of a sensitive heart: tenderness, joy, pain, lightness, love, loneliness...

A dance which makes the music visible and conveys the feelings.

What did Malkovsky teach ?

Gestures which make you free.

I hope this notation work carried out by Karin Hermes-Sunke and Suzanne Bodak will give dancers an opportunity to approach and interpret these choreographies where Art and Life interpenetrate.

"Being able to watch, to love, to give".

Janine Bouclier ¹

¹ Lived in Malkovsky's and the Martel brothers' entourage and took part in their artistic life until the end of the war. Taught Free Dance in Paris and all over France until advanced in years.

INTRODUCTION

Living for five years in Malkovsky's private mansion, situated at No.41, Berthier Boulevard in Paris, teaching at a nursery school in the daytime, working in the studio every evening, letting oneself be penetrated by music, intonations, words, suggested movements, majestic or mischievous gestures, impetuous or tenderly hesitating ways of moving about, bottom-fishing in July in the fragile kayak off the Pino creeks in Corsica, all this leaves traces, if not deep tracks, I would even say furrows. My training with Malkovsky lasted ten years. Absorption was as strong as technical learning. Today his words have decanted within me.

It was only after Malkovsky died and with my husband's complicity – he was Malkovsky's pianist from 1957 to 1980 – that I started to analyze his dances, to look for their inner logic, their recurrences and their specifications, in order to pass on this heritage as a living memory.

Working as a teaching adviser gave me the opportunity of participating in the project entitled "Dance at school" originated by Françoise Dupuy. Exposure to other dance experiences in this framework enabled me to get a better idea of my own practice, and to measure the originality and the strength of Free Dance's contribution to the quest for totally inhabited movement, to analyze this art of movement differently, as a tool used to develop an independent personality in total harmony with nature, and as a means to better perceiving its convergences and divergences with other dance styles

Meeting the Knust Quartet during a training course was crucial; Doris Humphrey's solo "Circular Descent" interpreted by Dominique Brun overwhelmed me. I had the video and now I could see the solo come back to life from the notation. From this emotion sprang the idea of the book on Malkovsky's dance.

My objective is to preserve the aesthetics of a form of dance, to preserve one man's constantly developing ideas, a specifically early twentieth century style, and to pass on a subtle, fragile, artistic dance which too many non-professionals spoil in the name of the "natural" and of "economy of effort", for as long as memory and energy permit. Just as I have been able to experiment with other "ways into" to dance, I would like to reveal my dance to other dancers through notation. I would like them to experience, through its disturbing simplicity, the pleasure of dancing differently, or, quite simply, to discover the vision of a pioneer of contemporary dance. The only thing that remained was to acquire the means to do so, i.e. learning Labanotation in order to understand it, which I did with Jacqueline Challet-Haas.

Confronted with this learning process, I discovered that I would be able to analyze beauty without betraying it, and that I would be able to undertake what Malkovsky wrote in 1921:

“It may not be necessary to analyze beauty, but beauty must nevertheless stand up to analysis”

I slowly climbed up the first levels; not without difficulty, for kinetographic analysis is very far from Malkovsky’s words. Three years later, it was Jacqueline Challet-Haas again who suggested Karin Sunke, her student, should meet me. This is the way the adventure of a book written by four hands began.

The aim of this work is on the one hand to situate Malkovsky and his work in the context of the time. His texts share with those of his contemporaries “a vision of a new dance away from triviality, a dance which is breaking new ground through its vocabulary and philosophy tinged with mysticism”¹. On the other hand, I would like to clear up the ambiguity of the term “Free Dance” through the notation itself.

Generally speaking, the term “Free Dance” evokes an early twentieth century dance philosophy, but masks a very specific vision of bodily movement. The dance styles of Isadora Duncan, Mary Wigman, Laban and Malkovsky, all have their particularities.

The founding principles of François Malkovsky’s Free Dance are the reflections of his own “gravity-led organization”² polished by a philosophy, perhaps even an ideology. He analyzes his conception, builds up a technique, teaches his basic movements and choreographies in a demanding way until about 1980, using poetic and metaphoric language. Malkovsky’s creative period stopped with World War 2, but as he was able to pass on his choreographies for many years, he is one of the few dancers of this generation of French pioneers whose work has endured among amateurs as a form of enjoyment or education.

I hope I have laid down on paper in a truthful, respectful way a dance which has modelled me, which I love for the “*nobility of its gestures*”, the elegance of its simplicity and by doing so, perhaps I have filled in a blank in the history of French contemporary dance.

“It is the body which moves, the arms follow.
Right now, your body is not inhabited, you are only moving your arms.”³

Suzanne Bodak

¹. Jacqueline Robinson: *L’Aventure de la danse moderne en France, 1920/1970*, Bougé.

². Hubert Godart: “Le geste et sa perception”, in *La danse au XXe siècle*, Bordas.

³. Maurice Béjart: *La vie de qui ?* Flammarion.