

LABAN MOVEMENT IN THE CHORAL REHEARSAL
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Rudolf von Laban created a vast system and notation for describing every human movement imaginable, and inspired the modern dance world in the mid-20th century with his breakthrough approaches to artistry. Explore with Dr. Giselle Wyers how to implement aspects of Laban movement with your choristers in warmups, rehearsal techniques, group bonding activities and even performance. Conductors will learn how Laban can serve as a toolbox for creating an easily translatable series of gestures their students will understand and respond to with minimal instruction.

Who was Rudolf von Laban?

Born Hungary 1879, died England 1953

We are born with tremendous variety in our movement with a full component of possibilities

Over time, habits and repeated patterns form “movement signatures”

“Movement signatures” usually also form in our early conducting practice, through observation, mimicry or deliberate choice

Laban and Music: “Few people will realize that a page of musical notes is to a great extent a description or prescription of bodily motivations or of the way how to move your muscles, limbs, breathing organs...in order to produce certain effects” (pg 39, Karen Bradley, *Rudolf Laban*)

Description or prescription?: we need both

Laban was concerned with inner motivation because he had seen “all too many dancers who throw themselves into the air without any sign of inner participation.” (R.L, in “The Educational and Therapeutic Value of Dance”, *The Laban Art of Movement Guild Magazine*, no. 22 (May 1959)

Why is Laban useful in Conducting?

Movement is not our first passion

Initial conducting class usually occurs in college, after body maturation (movement signatures are set)

Many young conductors are not body-aware and perhaps will be even be awkward

Young conductors also may need to strengthen their musical imagination of intent and meaning, rather than simply obeying musical symbols on the page

Laban reminds us to focus on the *intent of our movements* not just mimicry or imitation

Conducting study via Laban: body alignment, intent of musical gesture, identifying weight, space, time and flow as separate elements that can be varied continually, learning to prioritize which elements of movement are most important based on musical examples

What is Effort? How we expend our energy, and for what intent

Effort	Indulging elements	Fighting elements	Basis of Intent
SPACE	Indirect _____	Direct _____	Attention/Focus
WEIGHT	Light _____	Strong _____	Force of Will
TIME	Sustained _____	Quick _____	Attitude towards Time
FLOW	Free _____	Bound _____	Feeling of tension/release

Action Drives: Combine Time, Space and Weight

Float: Indirect, Light, Sustained

Glide: Direct, Light, Sustained

Wring: Indirect, Strong, Sustained

Press: Direct, Strong, Sustained

Flick: Indirect, Light, Quick

Dab: Direct, Light, Quick

Slash: Indirect, Strong, Quick

Punch: Direct, Strong, Quick

Action Drive Examples, Breath Cues and Warmups

A full list of warmups available in [Wyers' chapter](#) from *GIA Publishing Evoking Sound; Music for Conducting Study*

Float: trace a picture with a pencil, use a bubble wand, follow a feather as it falls, “fff”

Glide: use highlighter pen, smooth fabric on a table, Tai Chi, “ssss”

Wring: twisting a wet washcloth dry, ripping a large phone book, twisting baguette in half, “Zh”

Press: washing window with squeegee, pushing a child on a swing, pushing air out of mattress, “vvvv”

Flick: shoo a fly, folding egg whites, strike a triangle, “wht!”

Dab: popping bubbles in air, dotting paint on canvas, tapping a window, “t/p”

Slash: swinging a bat, light sabre, Wii sports, “ZT”

Punch: punching bread down, plumping pillow, playing drums, “CH”

Bound Flow: extremely focused line of air (singing through lip trill, straw), tone often brighter

Free Flow: looser air stream, less focused, but can help singers relax esp. higher registers

Laban related Group Bonding Activities:

1- Choose one person per “effort” and have them demonstrate their “action” for the rest of the choir. The choir guesses what they see. End by lining all 8 singers up and having them demonstrate their action in quick succession. No talking allowed!

2- Laban skits: Divide into 8 groups. Each group must demonstrate the same activity *silently* using one of the Laban efforts (float glide press wring dab flick slash and punch). The other groups watch and guess what they are seeing.

3- Laban dramatic reading: Have choristers read text from their choral music in the style of one of the eight efforts. The other choristers guess what effort they are attempting. Great way to show what “makes sense” dramatically and what is ridiculous and not musical.

Use of Laban in Rehearsal: a few examples

1- Cutoffs (designate a specific effort for each cutoff)

2- Onsets (teach choristers to breathe using specific effort “breaths”)

3- Phrasing Kinesthetically (especially fun when diff. sections are singing different efforts at the same time)

4- Writing efforts into the score and noting when they change

5- Conductor has the choir sing National Anthem while they vary their effort action. Choir sings and responds, and afterwards is asked to guess which actions were used.

Laban in Performance:

Elevating conducting to a truly “silent art form” means creating a common visual language that everyone understands. Conductors who teach Laban to their choristers may have a better chance of making artistic choices “on the spot” based on what is needed rather than reverting to a “script of movement” already prescribed to the choir. Choristers have already built musical expression into their bodies and can attend more freely to full expression with the audience and each other.