

Theater HL

May 2020

“LOVE YOURSELF”

Solo Performance Report

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Part 1: The theorist, the theory, and the context

Introduction

Rudolf von Laban was an Austro-Hungarian artist and dance theorist born on December 15, 1879. His tremendous contribution to the development of center European modern dance made him known as the “Founding Father of the Expressionist Dance” in Germany.¹ Become the successor of his high ranking military family from the Austro-Hungarian empire does not stop him to pursue his dream. After neglecting his military career, he shifts to architecture and arts following his passion. Starting from studying architecture in Paris², building a choreographic institute Zurich, and establishing his professional career in Germany and England, Laban’s journey of his interest in humans’ movement is defined by his interest in a form of freedom, non-verbal, expressionist, and spiritual releases. He raises the status of dance as a form of art by his works: Kinetography Laban (Labanotation) and Laban Movement Analysis³. His initial research of people’s movement in all aspects of life is based on anatomical, spatial and dynamic principles. LMA method is considered as a language for visualizing and interpreting human movement and is used by many dancers, choreographers, actors, psychotherapy, and other occupations that need analysis on human movement. Laban movement analysis was originally formed by two categories: *Choreutics*⁴ as a system based on an individual body’s relation to surrounding space that affects the direction of movement into a complex geometric figure and

¹ Evelyn Dörr (2003) Rudolf von Laban: The “Founding Father” of Expressionist Dance, *Dance Chronicle*, 26:1, 1-29, DOI: [10.1081/DNC-120018851](https://doi.org/10.1081/DNC-120018851)

² “Rudolf Laban.” *Rudolf Laban | Trinity Laban*, <https://www.trinitylaban.ac.uk/about-us/our-history/rudolf-laban>.

³ The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica. “Rudolf Laban.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 11 Dec. 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Rudolf-Laban>.

⁴ Ibid.

*Eukinetics*⁵ as a design to control dancers' movement and its expressional aspects. Later on, one of Rudolf's students, Irmgard Bartenieff further investigate the notion of movement and successfully classified it into 4 different focus--body, effort, shape, and space--that I will be focusing on for the purpose of this paper, specifically Laban's eight effort states.

"Movement is one of man's languages and as such it must be consciously mastered."

- Rudolf Laban, *The Language of Movement: A Guidebook to Choreutics* (1966)

The chosen aspect to explore for the performance

I choose to focus on LMA as it intrigued me to explore theater from different forms other than a spoken theater. Digging into a physical theater through LMA categories opens up a whole new spectrum of theater for me. The combination of body, effort, shape, and space used in my performance while trying to connect it with the topic I want to raise in my community.

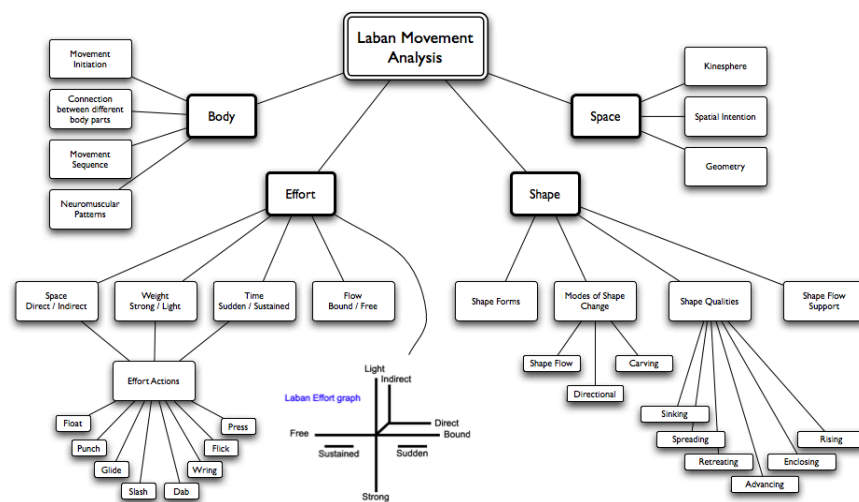


Figure 1: Laban Movement Analysis breakdown⁶

⁵ Ibid.

⁶Rood, Nick. "Research Project - Laban Movement Analysis." *Nick Rood Media*, 1 Jan. 1970, <http://nick-rood.blogspot.com/2013/11/research-project-laban-movement-analysis.html>.

Body category is described as a physical characteristic of the human body while moving in which we see the connection between each body part, how it influences each other and body composition when we are expressing emotion. The way a body changes shape during movement is further analyzed in the shape category. There are three subcategories of shape⁷: *shape qualities* that determine whether the movement is opening (extension) or closing (flexion), *shape form* that describes the static shapes of the body, and lastly, *shape flow support* which focus on its torso movement as the support movement for the rest of the body. Space categories are the scale of movement associated with the spatial patterns, pathway, and environment. Laban often explained this theory within geometric forms as he believed that movement could be directed and emphasize on the direction of the action, place in shape, and how the mover paying attention to make a harmonious movement.

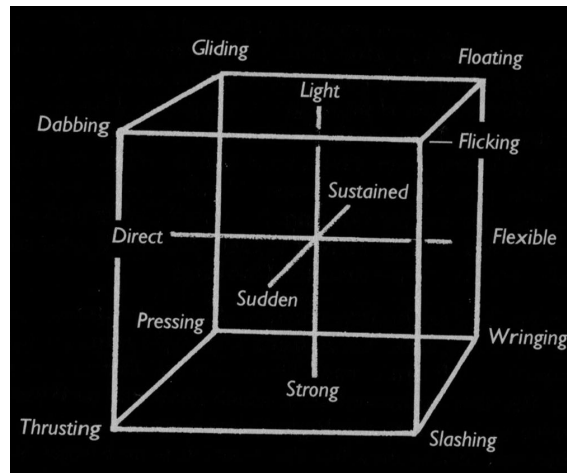


Figure 2: The Dynamosphere represents Laban's Efforts State⁸

⁷ "Rudolf Von Laban." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 7 Apr. 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudolf_von_Laban.

⁸ "General Information About the Eight Basic Efforts: Laban." *Savannahs Theatre Blog*, 27 Feb. 2011,

On the other hand, Laban's eight effort states is my main exploration for this piece that explores subtle features of movement with respect to inner intention. Timing, control, and strength of the movement is the main exploration for this category. Effort factors including space (direct-indirect), weight (light-heavy), time (sudden-sustained) and flow (bound-free) in which each has two opposite dualities called effort elements.⁹ When an artist carries out a movement, these elements define the action as an essential part of expressing character. The classification between effort factors and elements can be seen in the image above.

While preparing the piece, I decided to bring up a topic inspired by two outsider inspirations: BTS as a musician creating a global self-love project called *Love Yourself* and a Japanese proverb about three characteristics of humanity expressed in three masks. My final concept was to explore the Laban Movement Analysis--Laban's eight effort states--to create a story focusing on self-love through movement notion.

Part 2: Practical exploration and development of the solo theatre piece

The bigger picture of the performance

With the intention to recreate the Japanese proverb and adapting the BTS *Love Yourself* project by creating a movement piece based on LMA, I started to build the piece by combining music and choosing the good representation of the mask in a stage before exploring the movement. The idea to split the stage into three different portals of self-expression was chosen as

<https://savannahindigo.wordpress.com/2011/02/27/general-information-about-the-eight-basic-efforts-laban/>.

⁹ Ibid.

the best set that could be applied in this piece. The first section is the introduction when I heard the voices around my head as a representation of imposter syndrome each individual has. Then, I enter the first portal out of three, each associated with a specific mask explained in the Japanese proverb. Here I expressed my superego that I have to fulfill society's expectation based on society norms to be seen as a good person. In the second portal I represent myself around my friends, family, and relatives which when my ego starts to take control over my thoughts and actions. This segment considered as my happy moment or my comfortable space as I am surrounded by my loved ones. The third portal signifies myself in my own thoughts--meaning that this side of myself is only known to me and no one else knows it. This could be pictured as a suppressed side of me that I won't share with anyone. I concluded the performance with a cloak and mask to give credit to my inspirations--mask objectifying the Japanese proverbs and the cloak as a reference to BTS *Love Yourself*.

Elements of the performance

The triptych stage set is inspired by one of BTS's performances as seen in the pictures below. The first one is the "faces of the world" as I called it. I chose ribbons as a vital component because it represents the idea of being controlled by someone like a marionette doll to meet social expectations, and the skeleton of a cube also captures the feelings of containment. The second partition is called "happy comfy space" because I craved this section to be the sparkling part of the performance. I choose flowers as the main theme and decorated the gateway like a wedding gate because often when we think about our happiest moment, what comes up is marriage, and I think this is a good visualization of the emotion I'm trying to convey to the audience. The last separation represents the hidden feelings people have in their mind, the truest

reflection of themselves that only they can sense. I choose a black half-open cardboard box to embody the suffocated, trapped, and pressed feelings I had while expressing my emotion through the Laban's effort states. While I was trying to find a perfect design that could deliver my intended intentions to the audience, I had the initial notion of using a huge birdcage or a prison-like cubicle with plenty of broken mirror surround it, but then as it is impossible to create one with the limitation of time I choose to shift it into an open cubicle that could still reach my intention even though it was not as perfect as I wanted it to be to reflect my decision-making journey as a designer of the show.

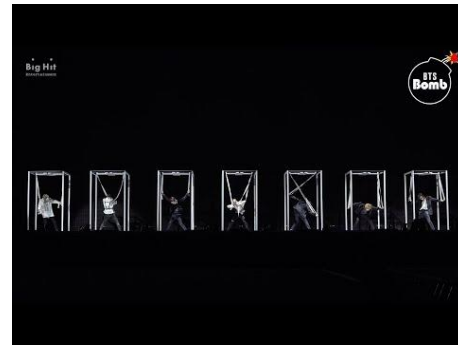


Figure 3: First segment of the stage¹⁰



¹⁰ "BTS - Fake Love (GDA 2019)." *YouTube*, BANGTANTV, 1 Feb. 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=emwlgC0te1U>.

*Figure 4: Second segment of the stage*¹¹

*Figure 5: Third segment of the stage*¹²

My main process consisted of investigating the movement in each of the portals using Laban's eight effort states. Because each segment of the performance manifests a different combination of effort states, it makes it easier for me in the process of devising the movement sequences. The first segment utilized dab-flick as a focus of movement as well as punch-slash; the happy comfy space segment implemented glide-float effort state; and lastly, press-wring was conducted in the last segment. I decided to incorporate my improvisation instincts to my movement; nevertheless I still tried to create an outline and framework to make the distinctions clear to the audience to understand my piece. In the creation process, I delved into a different kind of physical theory. Trying an easy ballet movement for dab and flick inspiration, analyzing jazz and tap dance body rhythm for heavy-direct-sustained movement, until deciding upon contemporary dance as I think it has the best interpretation in terms of glide and float movement.

Apart from the set I designed, I created the music soundtrack by selecting the sounds that represent the emotions. In order to do this, I considered different movie soundtracks that display the same feelings and then sourced a similar melody on a website I discovered called Audio Network and then combined them together. I wanted the lighting to correspond with each section of the performance as a way to enhance the correlation between tension and emotion. For the closing, I wore a cloak and a mask to create a visual interconnection between BTS's piece and

¹¹ Sinton, Lauren. "Stunning Wedding Arches: How to DIY or Buy Your Own." *Wedpics Blog*, Wedpics Blog, 22 Oct. 2014, <https://blog.wedpics.com/blog/2014/10/22/stunning-wedding-arches-diy-buy>.

¹² Donnell, Evans, and Denice Hicks. "Review: The Terrible Cost Of Inhumanity In Searing Maidens." *StageCritic.com*, 11 July 2019, <http://stagecritic.com/maidens-tps-review/>.

my performance as shown below. However, as the creative process of this piece continued, I changed the closing into a monologue as a result of the feedback I received.



Figure 6: Cloak and mask inspiration from BTS's performance¹³

Part 3: Analysis and evaluation of solo theatre piece

Main learning objectives achieved

Perceiving my role as director and performer has given me tremendous insight that I achieved during this whole process of solo performance. Physical and time limitations have always been a wall for me whenever I create some work. My injuries hold me back for not being able to fully explore movement that relies heavily on my knees. The incapability of my body to move lightly as I am pretty heavy as a person restrains me for being able to enjoy my improvised movement. With the time limit of approximately 2 weeks, it was hard to create a perfect show while I had other responsibilities other than creating a solo piece for the IB. However, I gave my best to create the best set, storyline, and show possible to the audiences. What was lacking was

¹³ “BTS Mask Mystery Revelation Will Make You Feel Dumb.” Kpopmap, 28 Jan. 2019, <https://www.kpopmap.com/bts-mask-mystery-revelation-will-make-you-feel-dumb/>.

the fact that I did not have enough time to create the third segment birdcage or prison-like set which frustrated me as I am not able to fully cultivate my director insight into a physical set.

This thought brings me to my next reflection as to how it is different and difficult to distinguish yourself as a creator and designer into director and performer. In my case, I discovered that I am capable of being able to perform a one-man show by myself in a huge auditorium which I never thought I am capable of doing so before. Considering my role as a director is what makes it even more difficult. It is hard to criticize yourself as a performer and director at the same time. I have learned how I should be hard on myself and point out the things that I can't, to myself, in order to create a magnificent show for my audience. Accepting mistakes and not being cocky just because I have a comprehensive understanding of the show are what I have learned throughout the rehearsal process. I believe perfection is not a thing given my situation; however, that does not mean just because I am the creator and designer of the show, I know everything in the universe. I have come to a point of realization where I become more sensitive towards my actions and its effect on the audience. I admit that self-grading is needed to assess my performance and to be able to improve my directorial intention that I have for the sake of the show.



Figure 7: Final set design expressing three different segments of the show

Evaluation of each element of the performance

Changes throughout the production of the piece based on the feedback I received resulted in a significant improvement of the piece. One of the feedbacks I encountered from my peers and my mentor is to deeply unite myself as a performer to the movement I displayed even more. Because I was implementing Laban's effort states, I had to create more distinction between each effort state by expanding my exploration of the movement so that it will not look like it is just a glide and float movement for the whole show. My facial expressions were also one of the aspects they pointed out during the rehearsal. As all four different segments in the performance commanded varying levels of tension, my physiognomy was also the key factor of the show. Given this feedback, I become aware of how to absolutely immerse myself with the storyline of

the show to deliver it to the audience as a performer. After becoming a creator and designer of the show and really understanding its objectives, I forgot for a second how crucial it is to also present myself as a great performer.

They also that it was hard for them to see the connectivity of the storyline and message I was trying to deliver in the rehearsal performance. Hence, I revised the connection in-between each segment while using four different masks to make the four segments flow smoothly and compose coherence within another. I also replaced the whole cloak and mask business in the closing segment with a monologue that tells the whole story from having and imposter syndrome inside, realizing and accepting the different faces we all have, and accepting our frailty to be seen as a beautiful aspect of our lives.

Conclusion

If I could do this performance again I would have done a couple of things differently. I would improve and strengthen my artistic vision and really think about my emotional investment in the piece. The post-performance feedback I received from the spectators stated that there was still some missing piece regarding the connection of each segment no matter how hard I tried to revise it and improve it during rehearsal. What they said made the distinction better was the way I changed masks before I entered the next getaway and the monologue in the end. I think what could have been done better is the exploration of my movement. Using Laban's effort movement overshadowed the other features of LMA. I would definitely make a more profound interconnection between the effort states and other categories in LMA such as body, shape, and space. Approaching it from the basics of LMA might be a better approach to pursue a show

rather than focusing on my set design. Nevertheless, it does not mean that I regret focusing on set design as it created more coherence with the topic I wanted to raise, but I would just say if I could master the movement analysis and exploration I think I could transfer my intended message to the audience more effectively.

The imagination of taking this piece forward in the future provides me with inspiration on making a full performance of movement exploration without any storyline, monologue, and properties so that the focus of the performance will be fully on the movement instead of the story. This idea will surely take a long time to implement as it is hard to do physical theater especially when it focuses on body gestures and flows and displays a non-verbal performance, but I believe If I commit enough time to work on this, nothing is impossible. The last thing that I want to enforce for this piece is to inquire into different topics. I have brainstormed diverse possible options of issues I wanted to bring to audiences. An example of those would be a mental illness, dual personalities, an adult trapped in 18 year-old body, unhappy marriage life, patriarchal society from the lower class, and many others. I look ahead to exploring these ideas further together with an improvement in my artistic vision as a director, performer, creator, and designer.

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FEEDBACK

What did you gain from the performance? What do you think it was about? Is it as you expected before?

- I think it was about different aspects of someones personality. It was not at all what I expected. I usually associate theater with dialogue or facial expressions or other things more than I think of body language and movement. I thought it was a cool blend of dance and theater. And when you spoke at the end it was an awesome and unexpected twist.
- The performance showcased several different aspects of the character's personality, as represented by the different masks, music and dances and differently colored backdrops. Specifically, the performance showed the different faces that we all show to our various relations — strangers, friends, and family — and the self that we hide from everyone.
- I think it helped me understand the person who made the performance more. I think it reflected nicely on how we have different personas that we show to different audiences. It is something that everyone experiences uniquely but still goes through similar phases.
- I learned about the meaning behind the masks—how we are all unique but at the same time have to go through stages with different “self-identities”. We are all in a way “acting” through our life even sometimes we cannot even recognize that. But embracing every faces and stages of yourself is also an amazing experience of life I wasn't expecting this, because at first, I thought it would be related to the transformation of time.

What aspects of the performance were significant and leave a sparks in your heart after you watched it?

- the lighting was awesome and I loved the set
- The music, dancing and soliloquy
- The music and the monologue were really nice in my opinion. The combination and contrast between the audial elements was well put together.
- I loved how you made the hand gesture of handcuffs, how you are dragged by invisible powers. I could feel that tension even without seeing anything physically on the stage.

Is there any aspect that could have improve in the future? Any constructive feedback?

- I loved the sets as they are, but I think additions could always be made to dramatize them. Like more flowers in the middle set.
- YOU WERE AWESOME RARA I'M SO PROUD TO BE YOUR CEC BABY THANK YOU FOR INVITING ME
- I think the artist did a great job in expressing herself ❤️
- Maybe the masks can have more significance on its characteristics of “faces”? (Maybe they could look distinctive?)