



## Congress 2000

### Rudolf Benesh Remembered

#### Tributes

### Kathleen Russell F.I. Chor – Some recollections of Rudolf

Kathleen studied at the Rambert and Bush Davies Schools, and with the Beneshes in the late 50's and early 60's. In 1965 she became involved in teaching with the focus on choreographic analysis. As Secretary to the Technical Liaison Committee, she helped write the beginnings of what was intended to be the Encyclopaedia of Benesh Movement Notation.

When music acquired a notation, it kicked the language and structure of music into a spurt of creative growth. Rudi always envisaged that the same could happen in dance. He believed that notation gave us a tool for thinking about dance; it enabled us to examine in detail why particular structures worked.

He was very interested in the possibility for choreographic analysis that was created by having an efficient notation system and often talked about ways of considering the "visual balance" of the use of the stage space. Using his knowledge of painting and mathematics he suggested that the rules of mechanics could be applied visually, i.e. that if distance ( $d$ ) from centre  $\times$  weight ( $w$ ) produces the same figure for both sides of the stage, the effect is balance. His unit of "visual weight" was one dancer, therefore, the stage will appear to be in balance when:

$(d \times w)$  on audience left =  $(d \times w)$  on audience right.

I remember once as he talked about these matters he sketched one situation after another to make his point. I was fascinated not just by the points he was making, but by the quality of his fast sketches – but he just scrumpled them up and put them in the bin!

Another way in which Rudi saw the notation being used as a tool to think about dance was in helping us define the distinction between the work (the choreography) and a performance of that work. These differences mean the structure of the work is preserved while allowing the interpretive artist scope for their creative vision of the work.

I also remember the enormous buzzing excitement when he wrote his paper 'The Birth of a Language' and I think that some of the concepts in that have become important bricks in my thinking. One thing that always impressed me was if I went to him with a technical problem he would go very quiet, as if all his being was concentrated inside himself, then come up with a solution.

His thinking was always original. It was as if instead of standing in front of an idea looking at it as everyone did, he walked around it and approached it from a different angle.



From left: Rudolf Benesh, Caroline Shercliff, Kathleen Russell  
Monica Parker, Melvina Bura (back view) Photo: Ato Kando