

Movement, Gesture, and Expression

One result of the past year is that we have all become experts at making proverbial lemonade out of proverbial lemons (although at times it feels like the saying is “When life gives you sh*t, make a sh*t sandwich,” where neither option is particularly desirable). Another facet of our new reality is that many Artists are making educational materials and performances available for free online. One of these resources is Dennis Whittaker’s “Incredibly Useful Exercises” video series on YouTube. This week’s video is a concise description of Laban Movement Analysis and its application to the bow arm. Briefly defined, it is “a method for describing, visualizing, interpreting, and documenting all types of human movement”. This was my first exposure to these concepts in this context, and it immediately led me down a rabbit hole of exploration.



Bowing Basics

Some background is necessary before we can get the most out of LMA. The basic parameters of bowing are commonly described as the 3 interrelated factors of Speed, Weight, and Location (point of contact). If you want to get fancy with your

positional and momentum lingo we could also use 5 additional factors (this is a subject for another day and only presented here for context).

Tilt - the motion of the stick around the hair relative to the string.

Inclination - the proximity (or change thereof) of the bow to either (where applicable) adjacent string.

Skewness - any deviation from the imaginary perpendicular line of the path of the bow.

Rotation - any motion during the bow stroke that results in movement of the screw in a clockwise or counterclockwise direction.

Lift/Drop - the resulting movement of the screw while rotating that can be perceived as moving toward the player and/or the floor (drop) or moving away from the player and/or the floor (lift).

All of these distinctions are invaluable, but they only describe a series of "whats". The inevitable "hows" of the technique of these movements also falls short in that it is ultimately a list of "physical whats" that still leave out extensive amounts of information about the type and QUALITY of the movements described.

Laban Movement Analysis (LMA)

Rudolf Laban was a movement therapist, a dancer, and a choreographer. Laban categorized human movement into 4 component parts, each with 2 elements, that make up the foundation of LMA (or as I like to call it Laban Movement, Forms, Analysis, and Organization. If I have to explain why, you won't). I have substituted a few synonyms for terms to avoid confusion with the 3 fundamental bowing parameters. Laban uses "weight" for mass and "speed" for time.

Space/Focus- **Direct** or **Indirect** movement. Think of this as movement straight from point A to B, or movement that takes a more meandering path.

Mass- **Heavy** or **Light**. This is describing the QUALITY of the movement and not the physical weight.

Time- **Quick** or **Sustained**. Does the movement have a strong initial impulse, or is the movement more continuously propelled?

Flow- **Bound** or **Free**. This is the sensation of internal resistance within a movement.
Not necessarily physical tension

These parts are further combined to create what he refers to as "8 Efforts"

Wring - I H S B (Indirect, Heavy, Sustained, Bound)

Press - D H S B (Direct, Heavy, Sustained, Bound)

Flick - I L Q F (Indirect, Light, Quick, Free)

Dab - D L Q B (Direct, Light, Quick, Bound)

Glide - D L S F (Direct, Light, Sustained, Free)

Float - I L S F (Indirect, Light, Sustained, Free)

Punch - D H Q B (Direct, Heavy, Quick, Bound)

Slash - I H Q F (Indirect, Heavy Quick, Free)

The most obvious and direct application of all of this analysis pertains directly to movement, but Actors have harnessed its power in ways that go far beyond external expression:

Observational Work - The physical movements of a character

Text Work - speech patterns in dialogue (e.g. pacing, articulation, etc.)

Emotional Work - Effort as it pertains to personality. This is the most abstract and potentially the most rewarding. What qualities would you ascribe to someone whose personality could be described as a "punch"?

Costuming - influence of required or period clothing on Effort.

Musicians have the opportunity to expand even further on this expression as our very medium is "sound in time". It allows for expressions of movement, articulation, rhythm, and timbre that span the gamut of human experience both internal and external.



FRACTAL FRIDAY TOPICS!

Please submit comments or suggestions for future topics to davidallenmoore@fractalbassist.com

FRACTAL FORUM: Friday Forums are on "pause" for the moment

NEXT FORUM:

March 7 @ 10AM PT Answering your repertoire questions + other topics

SPECIAL GUESTS!

Paul Ellison 3/21

Joel Quarrington 4/18

FRACTAL BASSIST Channel on YouTube (Coming Soon!)

This invite-only YouTube channel will be a continuation, development and place to share these ideas and principles. Although the entire Fractal Fingering course and samples are available online and at DiscoverDoubleBass.com, this channel will provide a forum for more in-depth content and to address questions on a more individual basis.

If you have any questions, comments, ideas you'd like explored, or inspiration you'd like to share please email: davidallenmoore@fractalbassist.com.

With Love,

D