

# Dance Graphical Notation System

Theodor Vasilescu

## Forward

Since ancient times the dance was customary in the life of civilisations and it is certain that in modern society it finds itself a place more and more sought after.

Its presence not only as a show but also as a means of education, strengthening and physical training by practicing in recreational groups or as a "hobby", has led to the diversification of forms and programs.

Under such conditions, the dance memorisation and transmission can no longer be done by traditional methods. The video recording of the movie does this service in the most proper way but in teaching the dance, in conceiving and reproducing choreographies, in the dance study and analysis, the graphical notation cannot be substituted.

It is obvious the need for some notation systems with full possibilities to cover the movement in the finest details, which should also be very effective by the power to synthesise the details in simple by comprehensive graphical expressions.






To such desiderata responds the dance graphical notation system drawn up by Theodor Vasilescu with the consulting contribution of Sever Tita and initially published in 1969. It proved its efficiency by the fact that it became the working tool for more than 40 volumes published by over 20 authors, containing collections of choreographic folklore from various areas of Romania. Being known and used in other countries as well, this dance notations system has mostly contributed to the establishment of the documentary and study basis for the specialists in the dance field: choreographers, teachers, pedagogues, instructors, etc.

This system was put on a computer program in The Netherlands and its use became very practical and efficient.

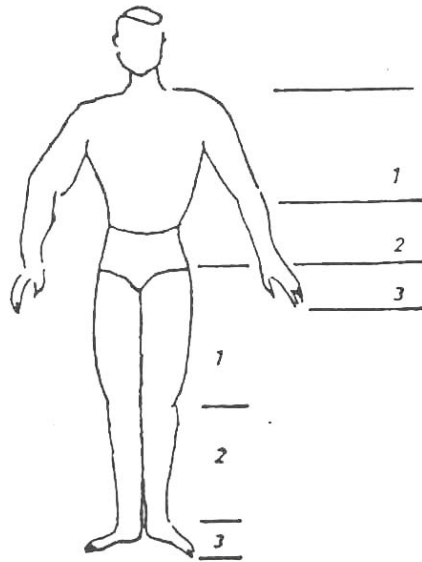
*Theodor Vasilescu, June 1992.*

## Principles of Dance Notation and Conventional Basic Signs

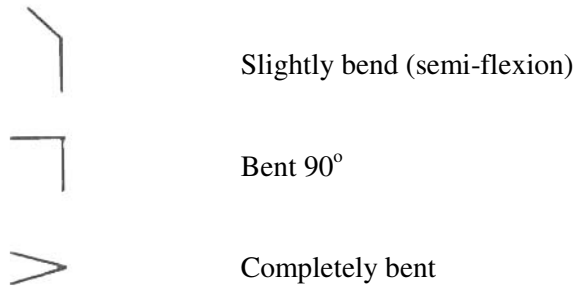
In the writing, all is looked at forward from the place where the performer is.

	Right leg (step with the right leg)
	Left leg (step with the left leg)
	Body and its orientation
	Arms and their orientation
	Head

The limbs are divided in three parts, in accordance with their articulations.

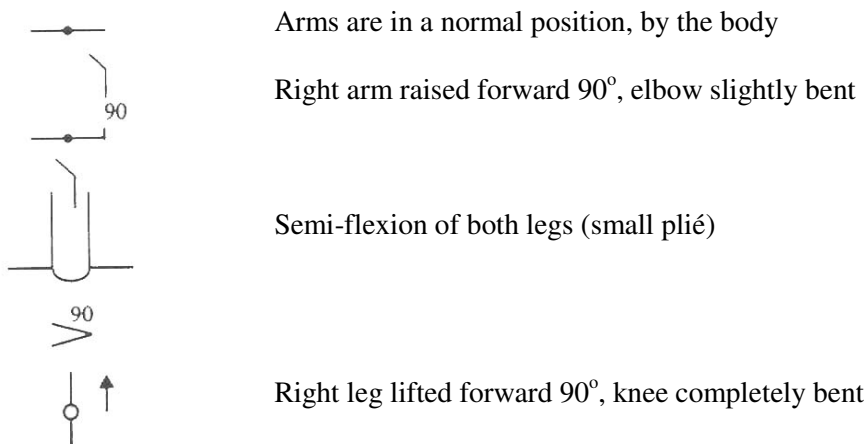


The signs for the bend of the joints of the knee, of the elbow and the fingers. These signs may be used also to indicate some movement of closing (contractions) for other fragments of the body (eyes, forehead, etc.).



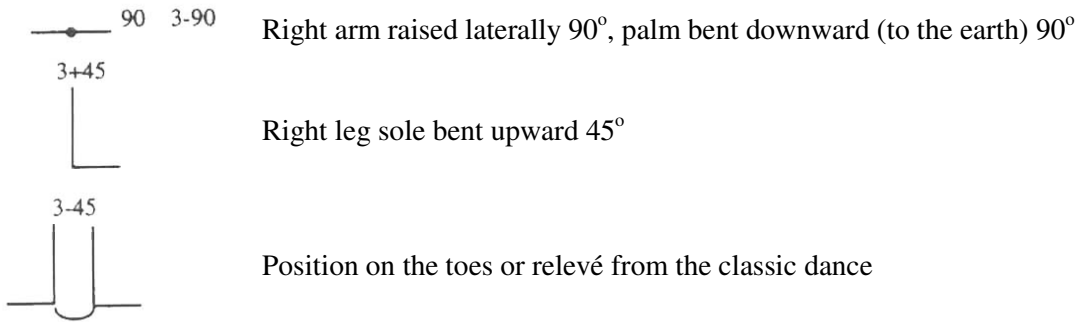
At the moves of the members from the joint of the shoulder (scapulo-humerale) and of the hip (coxo-femorale) is used the indication of the amplitude of the movement in degrees: 15°, 29°, 45°, 90°, 120°, etc. the same principle is used at the movement of the inferior jaw, of the segment three of the feet and the hands (foot and palm).

Examples:



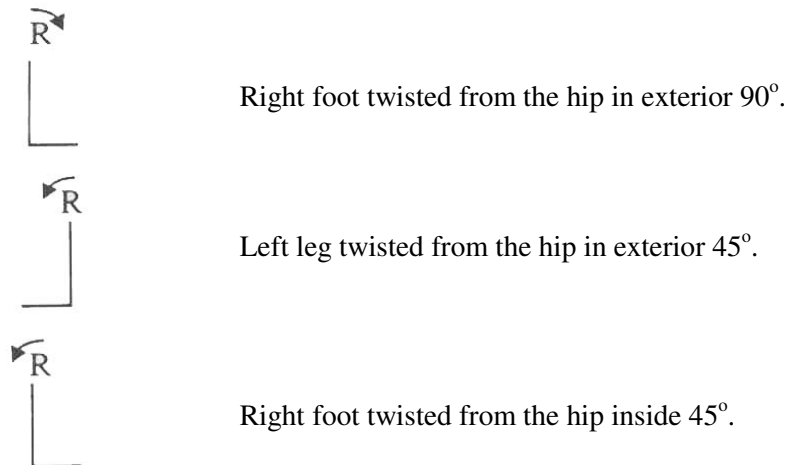
Sole or palm bends are indicated by the angle degrees and flexion directions. The + sign is used for the frontal lift and the – sign for the back stretch.

Examples:



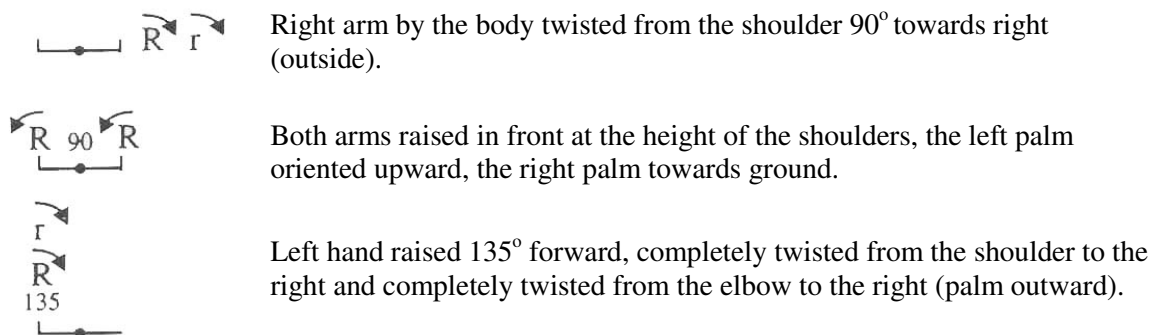
The absence of a flexion sign with arms and legs means these remain in their natural position (more or less stretched out). The sign ▲ is used for stretching. The same sign represents for any segment of the body - tension, strain. Relaxation will be noted by the sign △.

Limb twist from the shoulder of haunch are articulations are indicated by the letter **R** associated with twist direction and amplitude marking arrow:



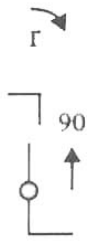
As to the arms, there is also possible the forearm twist from the elbow articulation, so here appears besides **R** marking shoulder twist, **r** noting forearm twist.

Examples:



Whenever the feet are raised in the air, bent, or in any other case there is also the possibility that for the segments 2 and 3 there appears **Γ**:

Example:



Right leg lifted in front  $90^\circ$ , knee bent and foot twisted outside  $45^\circ$ .

The body sign is used for body bends, blackened, where the bend is performed. The same with head bends.

Examples:



Trunk inclined ahead  $90^\circ$ .

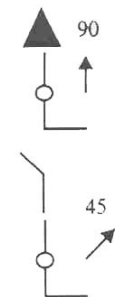
Trunk inclined towards right  $45^\circ$ .

Head bent backward  $15^\circ$ .

Head bent to the right shoulder  $45^\circ$ .

Body inclined ahead  $30^\circ$  from the joint of the ankle.

An air bubble included in the respective sign marks feet lifting in the air.

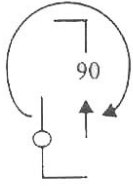


Right foot raised in front tense at  $90^\circ$ .

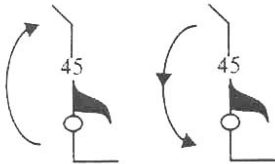
Right foot lifted oblique to the right  $45^\circ$ , knee slightly bent.

The feet rotations are indicated by circular arrows that describe the rotation movement of the respective foot and its sense.

Examples:

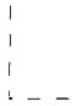


Right foot raised in front tense at 90° with the knee bent, performs a complete rotation.



Right foot raised at 45°, with the knee slightly bent perform a half rotation on an eighth stops and then comes back to the initial position on the second eighth.

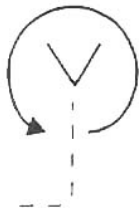
When the foot is put on the floor without getting body weight it is represented by an interrupted line.



Step with the right leg without taking body weight.



Rotation of the right foot on the floor on the cushion.




Rotation of the left foot on the floor on the heel.

The air bubble placed under foot means jump.



Jump on the left foot.

To mark the tiptoe-heel step, quite often seen in Romanian dances, the sign  is used meaning that during the same rhythmical value, the foot lifts on its cushion and immediately falls on the heel.

The placing of the foot on the floor is marked by the following signs:



Entire sole



Tiptoe



Cushion



Heel

By including the air bubble, different combinations are obtained:



Tip in the air (heel being on the floor)



Heel in the air (toe being on the floor)

For beatings on the floor:



Beating in accord (beat without taking weight – the foot lifts immediately from the floor).









Full beat on the floor, accentuated.


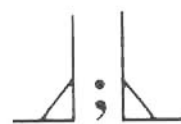
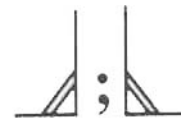




Full stamping (the foot that performs the stamp does not take weight)

The following signs are used for the spurs (clapping heels):


	Spur on the floor with both legs (they clap equally)
	Spur with right clapping on the left.
	Spur with the left clapping on the right.
	Spur in the air with both legs.
	Spurs in the air with the right clapping on the left.
	Spurs in the air with the left clapping on the right.

Steps amplitude is marked by the following signs:

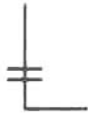
	Normal step
	Large step
	Very large step
	Small step
	Very small step

In order to specify that one leg does not surpass the other in performing shift steps (unsurpassed step), the step sign is cut by a cross line.

Example:

	Unsurrpassed step with the left leg.
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The non-surpassed step is placed in line with the vertical line from the centre of weight of the body.



Adjoining step with the right foot.

For the superposition of a segment (arm, foot, etc.) on another, the following signs are used:



Crossed in front



Crossed in back

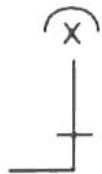
For the crossed steps:



Step with the left foot crossed in front of the right foot



Step with the right foot crossed behind the left foot



Step with the left foot crossed in front but not surpassing the axis of the body



Step with the right foot crossed in front but not surpassing the axis of the body

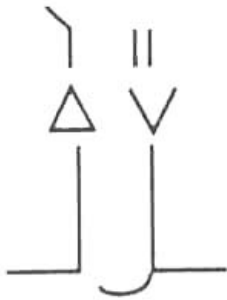
To characterise a sliding movement on the floor, under the sign of movement is laid a comma who's short tail indicates the direction of the siding:



Beat sliding along the floor with the right leg from behind forward.

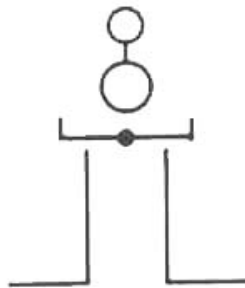


When the steps are performed with both legs simultaneously, the movements performed by each are noted and the signs are linked with a small arc.



Full beat on both legs, the left on the ball of foot, the right on the heel.

The movement is noted by superposition in the order:




Head, body, arms, legs, which reproduces the scheme of the whole body.

When the body makes contact with the ground other than with the sole of the foot, the letter **Z** is attached next to the sign that represents the active segment of the respective movement. Thus **Z** specifies the contact with the ground.

A little perpendicular line on the sign representing a member of the body indicates a contact either between members, or with another portion of the body, or with the partner. This sign also appears in the case of the contact with the ground.

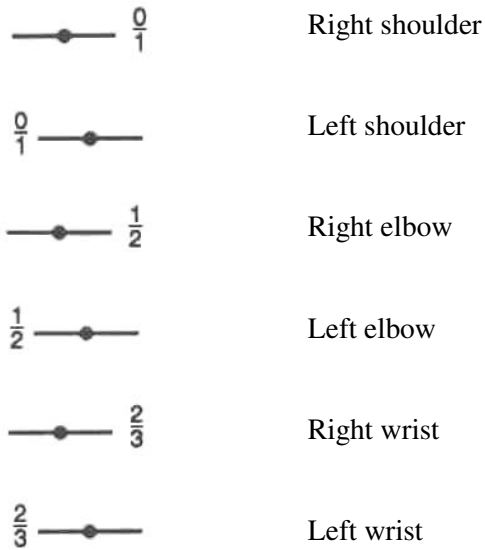


Right arm touches the floor in front of the body.

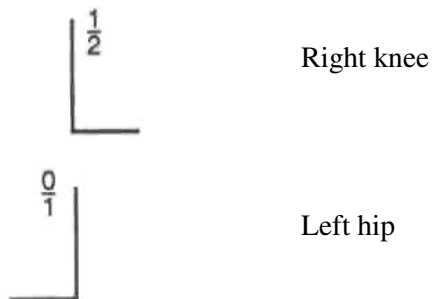
In the case of making a genuflexion (legs remaining on the ground), the body performs a pli . Returning from genuflexion is marked by: .

When the palms slap sections of the body or segments of the legs, this is specified by attaching a little marker to the figure indicating the segments of the legs or to the signs that indicate other regions of the body.

Using the representation of an ordinary fraction, the portions of the body representing the basic joints of the members can be specified.

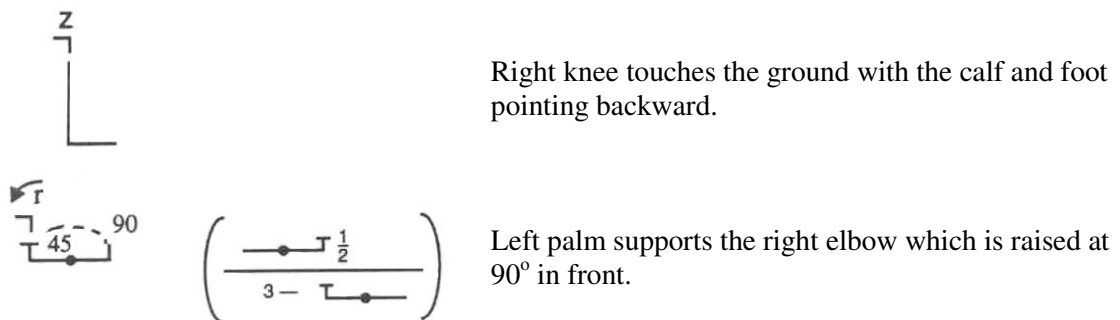


The same notations are available for the legs:



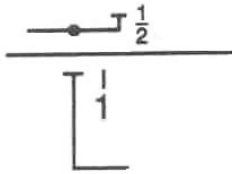
The precise position where the contact will be made can be indicated through the use of the horizontal bar that shows contact.

Example:



The fraction determines the exact position of the contact between different segments. In the same way, using the fraction system the contacts of members with other sections of the body can be noted.







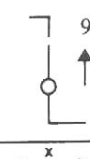
Example:







Right elbow leans upon segment 1 of the right leg.

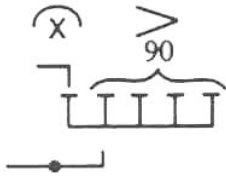
The precise indication of the place where the segment is struck is marked by attaching a small accent to the segment number.

Examples:

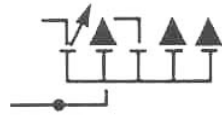
- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1-   | Striking the right thigh, laterally.  |
| -2   | Striking the right calf inward.   |
| 3-   | Striking the left heel, inward.   |
| 3-  | Right palm stroke on the left heel, inward in front of the body                                 |
| 3-  | Right palm stroke on the left heel, inward behind the body                                      |
|     | Left palm stroke on left leg, segment 1, frontally  |
|     | Right palm stroke on right leg segment 1, laterally   |
|     | Palm clapping in front of body  |
|     | Palm clapping behind the body   |
|     | Clapping of the palm ahead under the right leg which is lifted 90° in front, with the knee bent |

The sign  indicates the position of the fingers. To it are added indications of flexion of the joints by using degrees and flexion signs ( , ,  ) and when appropriate, the arrows of direction may also be filled in.

Keep in mind that for the metacarpophalangeal joint and respectively the metatarsophalangeal, the degrees are used for the flexion, while for the interphalangeal joint, the signs of flexion are used:



Right fist closed, thumb over the other fingers



The thumb and the middle finger of the right hand touch each other and the other fingers are stretched.

As a shortcut, finger snapping used in many Romanian dances, is noted:



Right hand fingers snapping



Left hand fingers snapping



Both hands fingers snapping

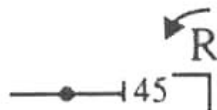
By fingers snapping, we mean the sound obtained by the sudden fall on the palm of the middle finger initially stopped by the thumb.

Arm raising direction is indicated by the arm position itself as against the body line.

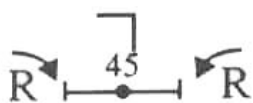


Right arm raised inclined to the right 135°.

When arms raise laterally, amplitude and elbow articulation flexion indications are attached laterally close to the body line.



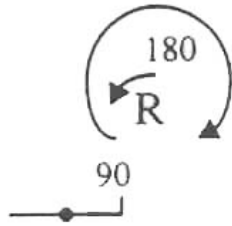
Right hand on the hip, the other free along the body



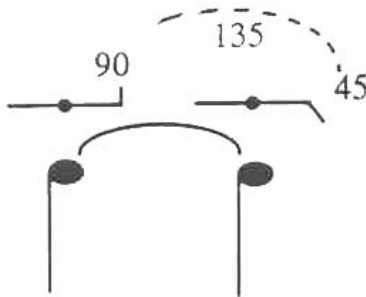
Both arms bent, with the palms on the hips

For the rotations of the arms as well as the rotations of the feet, the arrows that describe the direction and route of the rotation and the angles made by the arm with the line of the body, determine the traversed route.

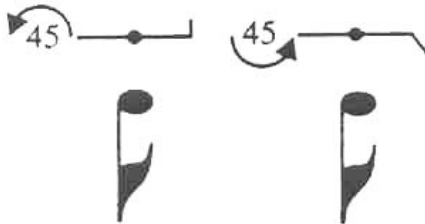
Examples:



Arm raised at  $90^\circ$ , in front, with the palm to the ground, performs a rotation, reaching the amplitude of  $180^\circ$  (the right arm above the head) and continuing the rotation comes back to the initial point.



Right arm raised at  $90^\circ$  turns around arriving at the maximum point with the arm raised at  $135^\circ$  and the movement continuous on the second quarter note until the position oblique in the back at  $45^\circ$  is reached (the movement is fluid and non-stop)



Left arm executes a complete rotation with an amplitude of  $45^\circ$  on two eighth notes (the short movement is stopped after the first eighth note).

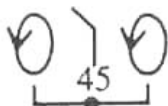


Left arm executes a little rotation from the normal position until the maximum angle of  $15^\circ$  is reached; then it comes back continuing the rotation until the initial position is reached.

The rotations on a vertical plane are noted by ovals with the arrow on them specifying the direction of rotation.



Clockwise rotations of the arms in vertical plane, the arms being bent, raised at  $45^\circ$ .



Counterclockwise rotations of the arms in vertical plane, the arms bent, raised at  $45^\circ$

## Abbreviations of Arm Position

For group dances, the position of the arms is graphically represented by signs that abbreviate the analytic description and which are placed above the choreographic stave. They remain in effect until another sign for arm position appears.

Example



Boy (the angle represents the face, and the opening the back).



Girl (the concave part represents the face and the opening the back).



Chain of arms oblique down.



Chain of arms down.



Chain of arms bent.



Chain of arms oblique upward.



Chain of arms upward.



Chain of arms laterally.



Chain of arms crossed frontally.



Chain of arms crossed behind.



Belt position.

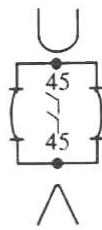


Shoulder position.

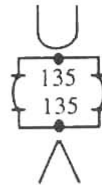
In couple dances, signs are used graphically note the positions occurring during these dances, these signs being abbreviations of the complete analytic notations.

Examples:

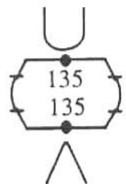
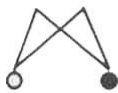
Abbreviation	Complete notation	
		Hands laterally down .
		Hands laterally arms bent.
		Hands laterally inclined upward.
		Hands laterally crossed in front, the boy's <b>R</b> hand over the girl's <b>L</b> hand.
		Hands laterally crossed behind, the girl's <b>L</b> hand under the boy's <b>R</b> hand.
		Hands laterally on the shoulders.
		Hands laterally, an arm on the shoulder of the partner, the other one on the hip.
		Hands laterally around the girl's neck.
		Face to face, hands down.



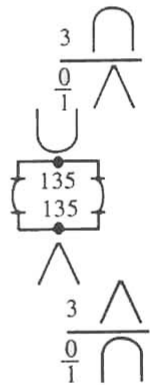
Face to face, arms bent.



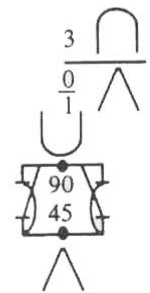
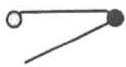
Face to face, hands up.



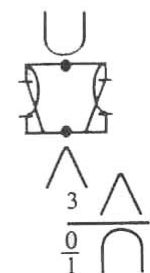
Face to face, hands inclined upward.



Face to face, hands on the shoulders.

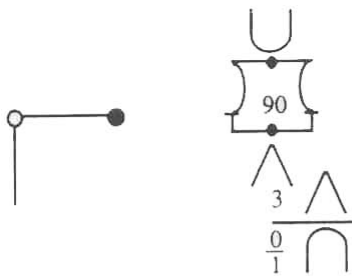


Face to face, girl's hands on the shoulders, boy's hands on the waist.

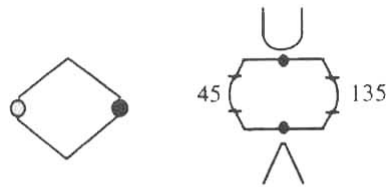


Face to face, girl's hands on the waist, boy's hands on the shoulders.

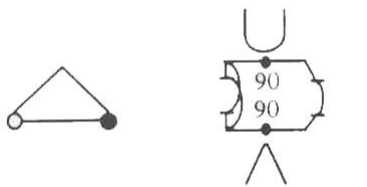




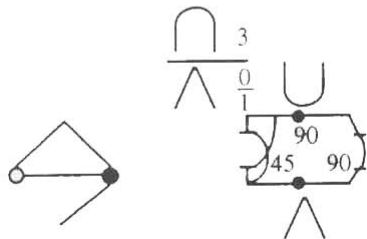
Face to face, girl's arms along the body, boy's on the shoulders.



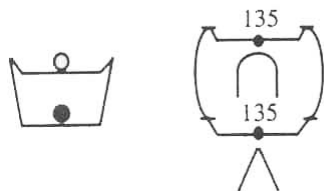
Face to face, one arm oblique upward and the other oblique down.



Face to face, free arm on the shoulder of the partner, the other joined with partner's and raised tense at shoulder height.



Face to face, girl's free arm on the shoulder of the partner, the other joined with partner's and raised tense at shoulder height. The boy has free arm on the waist of the girl.

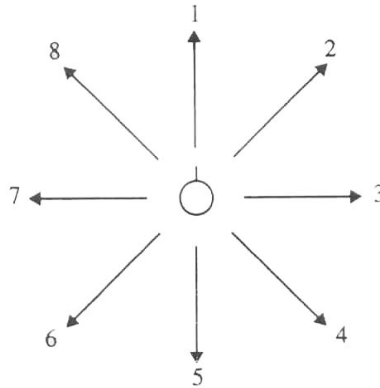


Boy behind girl, joined hands inclined over head.

The arc "legato" indicates the connection between the arms of the girl and those of the boy when it is felt that the sign indicating the contact of the respective segments would not be sufficiently suggestive.

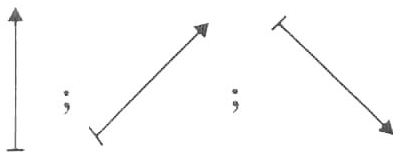
## Orientation directions

Directing arrows are used to indicate changes of directions of the body and movement and rotations of the arms, legs and head. The fundamental scheme uses eight principal directions.

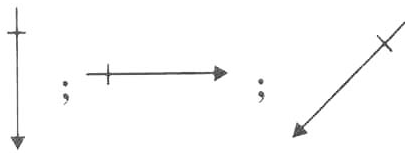


It is also possible to notate intermediate directions when needed.

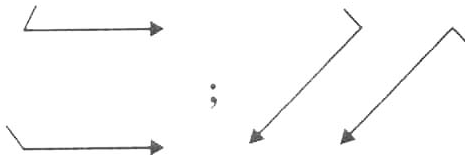
The following signs are used to explain the orientation of the body.



Body oriented to shifting directions.



Body oriented opposite to shifting directions (shifts backward).



Body orientation forms and angle with shifting direction.

In order to render the fact the moves are executed on the spot or in order to underline the cessation of a movement, the following sign is used.



The hyphen attached to the sign indicates the orientation of the body.

Important in the shifting is the fact that the place is determined by the centre of the body weight in normal position. The place shifts with the dancer and is always where his centre of weight is. From this place, the shifting directions or movements of the members, of the trunk, of the head, etc., are determined. This, non-surpassed steps will not surpass the line that passes through the point where the centre of weight falls and the steps on the spot have no characteristics of size, only amplitude.

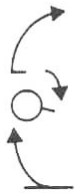
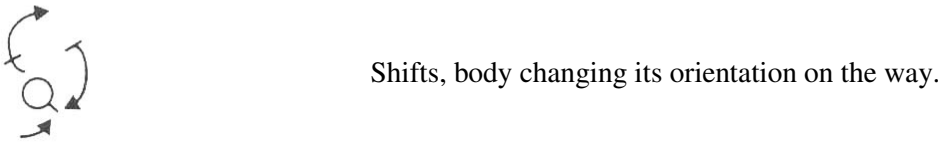
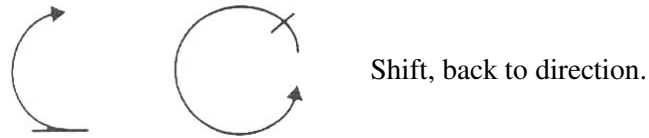
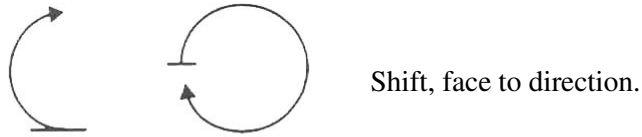
Body orientation and shifting direction combinations are systematised in the following table.

**Table 1:**

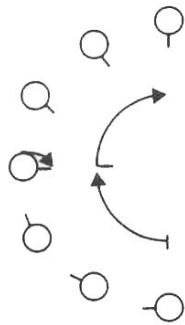
**Orientation of the Body**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Direction of Movement	1							
	2							
	3							
	4							
	5							
	6							
	7							
	8							

Circular movement is noted from the starting body position in relation to the shifting direction.

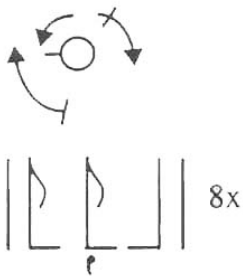


To explain all we said above, we will describe the scheme that can be analytically presented as follows:



These schemes of movements are necessary, especially in the case of some abbreviations.

Example:



Body rotations are noted by directional arrows attached to the respective sign.



Moving on the spot, body rotates to indicated direction toward point 2.



Moving on the spot, body rotates to indicated direction toward point 3.



Body rotates one time as marked.

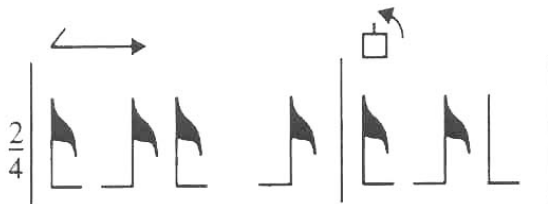


Body rotates three as marked.

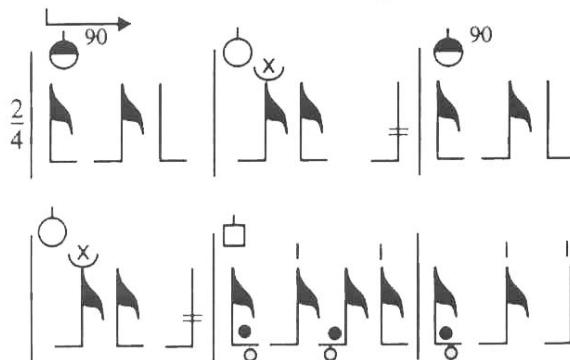
The figure represents the rotation number. When rotations are performed during several values, this is indicated by writing the sign above a brace including the respective values.

Direction and orientation signs are valid until the appearance of a new direction and orientation sign.

Examples:



The appearance of the sign  stops the shifting.



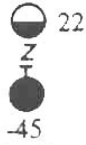
The position of inclination 90° in front of the trunk lasts on the three steps of the first bar. At the second bar, the trunk comes back to its initial position. At the third bar, it is inclined again and it returns in the fourth bar. All this time the body shifts towards the right. The shifting ceases in the fifth bar.



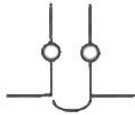
The contraction of the chin (the contour of the lips lowers, the face weeps).



The body laid with the shoulder on the floor.



The laid on the floor, with the face downwards, with the belly on the floor, the feet lifted in the air at the back, and the trunk cambered.



The shoulders move in front (the trunk crouches).



The shoulders move at the back (the chest stands out).



The right shoulder is raised up.



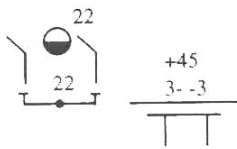
The shoulders are raised up (gesture that expresses “ I have no idea “ no care).



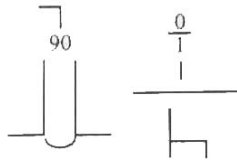
The right shoulder moves backwards and the left forward. The trunk makes a rotation at the right.

If it is necessary to note the relations of the body with different objects (properties, environment), the writer defines them at the beginning by granting abbreviations or symbols. For example :

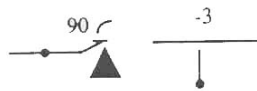
Cane	
Chair	└─
Table	┌─┐
Flag of “ <i>oḍu<sup>o</sup>ari</i> ”	▭
Door	□



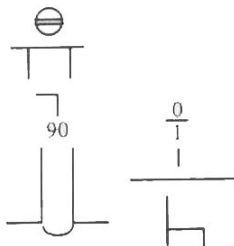
The trunk inclined in front  $22^\circ$  leans upon the arms with palms on the table.



Seated on the chair



The right hand stretched at  $90^\circ$  oblique to the right which holds a cane.



The body seated on the chair and forehead propped up on the table.

## Notation of the Movement Duration

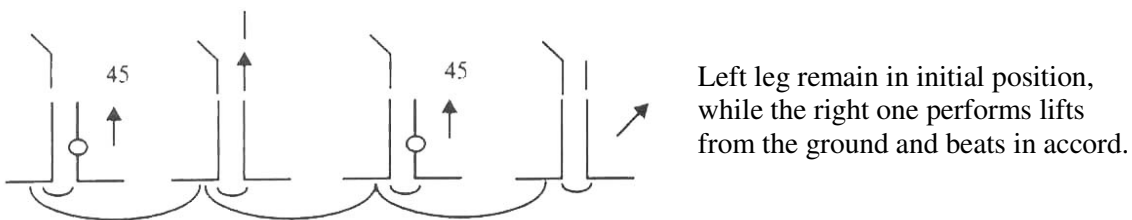
Rhythmical values are included in the leg signs:



The point attached to the right of a sign extends its value with half of its initial value:

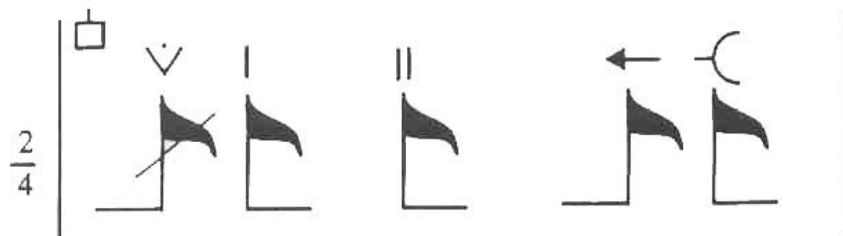


The sign ‘legato’ unites the included values to one value equal to their sum. The respective leg remains in an unmodified position during the ‘legato’ arc, though the other may perform different movements:



If some appoggiatures are met, they are noted only by cutting the sign of step with a diagonal hyphen. The sign ‘legato’ is no more used with the basic note, in order to complicate the choreographic score.

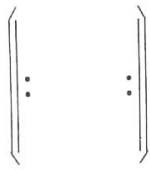
Example:



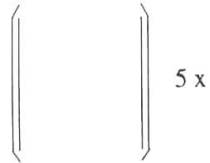




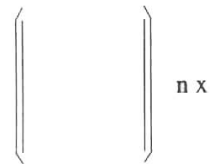
In order to facilitate the notation, repetition signs are use as follows:



Repetition of dance fragment of bars comprised between signs.



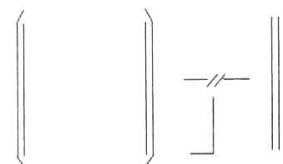
Total number of dance fragment executions comprised between signs (5 times).



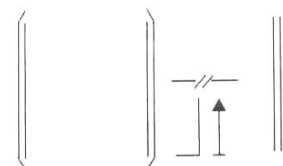
Repetition "ad libitum" of dance fragment comprised between signs.



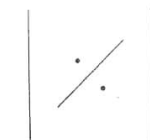
Repetition of dance fragment comprised between signs, leg changed.



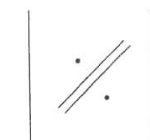
Exact repetition of dance fragment comprised between signs, but in a new direction indicated by arrow at the end of repetition sign.



Repetition of dance fragment comprised between signs in a new direction indicated by arrow at the end of repetition sign and with changed leg.



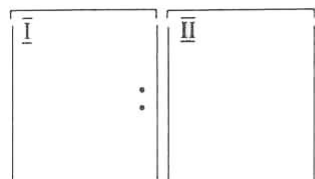
Repetition of one bar before the sign.



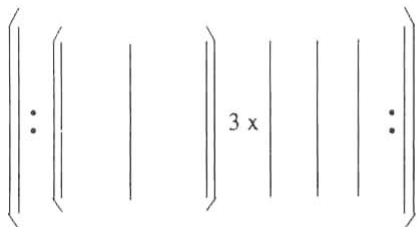
Repetition of two bars before the sign.

= = =

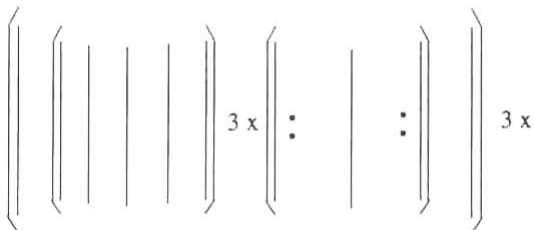
Indicates to maintain the positions until the appearance of others.



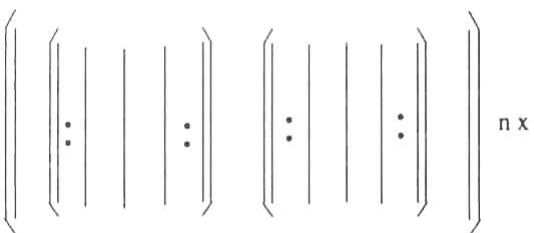
Volta I and volta II indicate repetition of dance fragment without the bars comprised under the first brace, passing directly to the bars under the second brace.



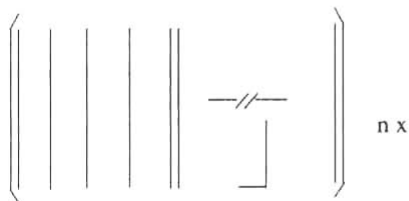
The repetition signs from the interior are observed.



-- idem -- but it is repeated three times.



-- idem -- but it is repeated n times.



The repetition of the bars of dance with changed foot (eventually in an opposite direction) and then the repetition of the entire fragment of dance included in the great brackets, in accordance with the indications of repetition (two times or n times).



The dotted line delimits the dance fragments that end in the interior of a bar, without exhausting it entirely.