

About Betsy – Visitor to Melbourne



Betsy Kagan, a visitor from the USA is in Melbourne in mid November to present at the 5th Interdisciplinary World Congress on Low Back & Pelvic Pain Effective Diagnosis and Treatment of Lumbopelvic Pain. (see below or What's On for further details)

A graduate student at the NYU School of the Arts in the late '60s, Betsy was taught by many notable guest teachers, one of whom was Irmgard Bartenieff. Cecily Dell was her classmate and together they studied "Effort/Shape" and explored Laban systems and what they could teach them about human movement. Betsy said *"I was fascinated by the way E/S, unlike Labanotation, illuminated aspects of human behavior and emotion. Amazed by the richness of knowledge that Irmgard represented, I began to follow her path"*. (CMA of the Month, March and April 2004 – LIMS website.)

Betsy feels that she is lucky to have been around at an incredible time when *"Irmgard was stirring up a whole new consciousness, and pioneering all kinds of studies"*, also working with *"inspiring people such as Martha Davis, Kayla Zalk, Allison Jablonko, Marion North, Warren Lamb, Forrestine Paulay, and others"*. She was also fortunate to experience the power of LMA in a workshop with dance therapists Elissa White and Claire Schmais.

Betsy received her MFA in dance in 1968 and danced with the Jean Erdman Theater of Dance and was privileged to take classes in New York with, and *"perform in pieces choreographed by - the 'greats' including Charles Weidman, Merce Cunningham, Jose Limon, Nenet Charisse, and many others"*. During that period she also worked with Joseph Pilates, Eve Gentry, and Andre Bernard. Moving to New Haven she became a member of the New Haven Dance Ensemble and was part of a non-profit group *"that founded the*

Movement Studies program at Wesleyan University".

She was a student in two of the earliest Certificate programs and received her CMA in the 70's. She says that *"To study with Irmgard Bartenieff was not only a privilege then, but she has been my lifelong teacher ever since"*.

Her work in Labanotation led her to reconstruct several dances for performance. The LIMS website article tells us that three were by *"Doris Humphrey and one by Paul Taylor. The latter, "Three Epitaphs," was the first reconstruction and "test" of the then new score by Mickey Topaz, and in 1973 it was approved by the Taylor Company for performance by the New Haven Dance Ensemble"*. As her CMA Certificate project she undertook the first comparative dance style analysis using LMA, in comparing the styles of Humphrey and Taylor. (CORD Dance Research Annual IX: 75-92, 1978.)

Following her move to the San Francisco Bay Area in 1974, Betsy with other CMA's in the region formed a teaching collective which became the Institute of Movement Studies (IMS). She also taught dance and LMA extensively and promoted the field by offering introductory workshops and writing newsletter articles. As well she performed and presented her own choreography in numerous concerts and received an NEA fellowship. She says that *"LMA/BF has always been a deep foundation, enriching the expressive vocabulary of my teaching, performing and choreography"*.

Betsy has also taught at the American Dance Festival, LIMS in N.Y., in Certificate Programs at UCLA, Ohio State University and faculties of Mills College, Ohio State University, Stanford University, UC Berkeley, Lone Mountain College, and others. She has served on the LIMS Board of Directors and more recently initiated and coordinated a core faculty for the first and only LIMS accredited Bay Area Certificate Program in LMA Studies (1998-2000.)

She says that she has *"loved the field of LMA for the incredibly wide range of applications and the many new insights it has led me to, both within and beyond dance"*. As well, Betsy has taught classes for *"actors, dance critics, orchestral conductors, Pilates trainers, graduate students in ethnomusicology, and once collaborated with an animal behaviorist at the University of Alaska in studying the play behavior of brown bears"*. She says that exploring the four major styles of Hawkins, Graham, Cunningham, and Limon, was

one of her most favorite and exciting courses. This involved using LMA to understand each style's unique, expressive characteristics.

Betsy has presented at nearly every LMA conference and as part of the 1976 Ohio State research group, was author of the 1976 Coding Sheet for Dance Style Analysis. She has also co-authored several LMA-based articles - one published in *The Drama Review* (Volume 32, 1988.), one, with Margaret Morse, a cultural/movement study of Jane Fonda's workout, and another written with anthropologist and fellow CMA Allison Jablonko (a student of Margaret Mead), in a study, based on Allison's films of cultural attributes of the Maring tribespeople of New Guinea.

For the past 18 years, she has been developing new approaches to movement classes for the elderly and also for stroke victims and found that "*LMA/BF provides valuable information about movement functioning not available in conventional medical or fitness approaches; it is a field in which I feel CMA's could play a significant role*".

Betsy had a back injury after her pregnancy in 1977, with surgery a week after delivery - this left her disabled with ongoing pain and dance career in question. As her pain continued, she was apparently placed in a cast which forced her to come to terms with the fact that her medical treatment was inadequate and that she needed to trust her own instincts. It was due to this experience that led her to truly connect with the healing potential of Irmgard's work. She undertook her own rehabilitation, eventually regaining her mobility and retrained herself to return to dancing. She says that through this experience she learned the true meaning of "*the unity of function and expression!*" Following her recovery she performed using the back brace as a costume and metaphor for imposed limitations both physical and psychological, exploring her journey "*through fear and despair to resolution and the discovery of new possibilities - within and because of these limitations*". She says that this was possibly her "*most meaningful tribute to Irmgard*."

Betsy tells us that she was never really free of back and pain problems and unfortunately a new complication in 1997, led to her having to manage intense chronic pain. This was apparently triggered by change of lifestyle when establishing the CMA program in the Bay Area and although this led to new and difficult challenges for her she also feels that it also led to new insights for her of understanding the emotional impact of chronic

pain on the nervous system and how this in turn manifests depression and anxiety.

Familiar with the inadequacies of medical science in the area of treatment of back pain and injury, Betsy has been directing her explorations towards teaching, and writing in relation to bridging the gap between the medical model and the movement knowledge available through LMA. She has developed a BF/LMA-based hands-on approach to movement therapy and rehabilitation of these problems and recently presented a paper at the IADMS (International Association of Dance Medicine and Science) conference in London at the Laban Centre. The paper was entitled "The Healing of a Dancer: Treating an Injury through Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analysis." She says that "This work has led me to realize with even more conviction how rich, profound and unique a field we have, and what an incredible gift to the world it is".

This work is the subject of her presentation at the 'The World Congress Series on Low Back and Pelvic Pain', to be held on November 10-13, 2004, at the Melbourne Exhibition and Congress Centre.

Acknowledgement: We would like to thank LIMS for allowing us to quote passages from - and reflect - the information in the article - *Betsy Kagan - CMA of the Month For March and April 2004* from their website.

Please note: We regret that the information on Betsy's presentation at this conference will reach readers too late to enrol in her workshop session on Monday 15, after the formal events. However have discovered it is not easy to enrol in it. It is mandatory to be a conference attendee to access any of the days of workshops events - even if you are unable to get to the conference!

Also - Would you like to meet Betsy?

Due to the extended Conference 7 day program, arranging a professional development event with Betsy whilst she is in Melbourne has not been possible. However, we do hope to meet with her at a social event on the evening of Friday 12th or Monday 15th, or both - depending on the response to the invitation. **Email:** dtaa@alphalink.com.au
Everyone welcome!

We hope to publish *Remembering Irmgard*, written by Betsy in a future edition of the Quarterly, with kind permission of Betsy and the ADTA. **JG**