PHOTOGRAPHY FOR DANCE RECORDING

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Potentially, still and motion photography can aid dance research in the same way as tapes aid musicology. If reality is still far from the ideal, that is due to costs, cumbersome mechanisms, and requirements of special skills. Nevertheless, such a visual record can be so valuable as to merit photography when permissible and possible. In the field I have used three cameras: one for slides, one for monochrome stills, and a 16 mm. Bolex. Here are a few observations, so that others may profit from my boners and my successes.

Photography in the Field

All photography should be as straightforward as possible. Still shots offer no problems. They should vary the distance—close-ups for costumes and other details, long-range for the formations, especially bird’s-eye-views. Black-and-whites are as useful for study as kodachromes and are less costly, but a few slides give an impression of the color pageant. Motion pictures should always record color with the new Kodachrome II film. The record is most complete if the camera remains stationary, panning is held to a minimum, and shots are prolonged. Each shot must include an entire phrase. Few dance phrases take too long for one winding. Generally, one should strive for continuity. The recognition of a phrase implies some knowledge of the dance pattern. A trained choreographer can recognize the pattern after one viewing. Usually in a ceremony there is some repetition. In Tewa Pueblos, for instance, the dancers repeat the entire pattern at four stations. Hence one can memorize the outline at the first station (note-books not allowed), take stills at the second station, movies at the third, and, if desired, fancy shots at the fourth. Separately, the music should be recorded.

Editing

One copy of the film should remain in its pristine state for study purposes. Another copy can be cut and assembled for public viewing, without changing the order of choreographic events. This copy could juxtapose close and distant shots for effect.

Study of Pictures for Notation

Back at home, the choreographer has notes which are certainly incomplete, stills, movies, and a tape for transcription. First, the stills can augment the notes, which would include some stick figures, dance script, and verbal explanations as to orientation and participation. The dance script includes diagrams of ground plans and notation, of which there are several systems (I use my own system in the field, because of its speed, and translate into Labanotation later on). The motion pictures should be projected many times, first at normal speed in entirety, then slowly, in entirety and in sections, also backwards, finally at normal speed. For frame-by-frame study a splicer-viewer is the most useful tool. The music should accompany several of the viewings. It sometimes happens that sections, even rhythmic figures, synchronize. This is a great aid in the ultimate combination of dance and music scores. After each viewing the notator corrects and amplifies the score. After a week or so the procedure is repeated, till the integrated scores show details of step and posture as well as all-over structure.

Choreographic Values of Films

Photography (when permitted) is especially useful in the case of long and complicated dances by groups, above all, when participation is limited to a trained group of natives. Whether the pictures stem from an arranged session or from a true ceremony, they jog the memory, show fine points missed during performance, and recreate the color, spacing, and atmosphere of the setting. Films offer the greatest value to the choreographer who has seen these dances on location,

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but they can also give impressions to students who have not been there. Thus they can serve comparative choreography. For the public they are valuable with purely verbal comments.

But the greatest archival use would be the following: when the film is prepared for filing, it is accompanied by a folder of notation scores and corresponding stills, and also by the taped music. It would be excellent to dub in the music as a sound track, but the movements lost during rewinds make this impracticable. Sound films remain a hope for the remote future.

COMMUNICATION

Note on assistants in the Berlin Phonogramm Archiv during the early twenties: Dr. Kurt Reinhard’s most valuable report on the Berlin Phonogramm Archiv, in Vol. 5, no. 2, of the Folklore and Folk Music Archivist, is in error in not including me in the group of E. M. von Hornbostel’s students who functioned as his assistants.

The Archivist is correct in stating (Vol. 2, no. 4) that I was Hornbostel’s assistant during the academic years 1922-1924. Those years gave me an opportunity to develop my primary interest in the studies cultivated so extensively by Dr. von Hornbostel, especially in the fields of Folk and Primitive Music. I welcome this opportunity to acknowledge my great indebtedness to him for his untiring guidance. My publications based on research under him, are:

“Die Musik auf Truk” (chapter in Augustin Krämer, Truk, Hamburg, 1933).


Unpublished manuscripts resulting from this research are: “Die Musik auf Misol” (transcriptions of a collection of recordings by Tauern, in the island of Misol, Moluccas), unpublished manuscript at Indiana University. Further: unfinished study, “Congo Music” (two collections of recordings made by the Swedish missionary and linguist Laman in the Belgian Congo); manuscript and a group of records deposited at Indiana University.

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