

BELINDA QUIREY

An appreciation

Ann Hutchinson Guest

Pacing up and down outside the main building was this young woman. She looked like a Botticelli painting, dark, flowing curly hair. "He does not know what he is talking about!", she exclaimed. It was 1947, it was at Bishop Otter College near Chichester, and Rudolf Laban had just given a lecture. He had touched on historical dance, stating how simple dance had been and how demanding it had since become. The young woman was Belinda Quirey, who had experienced the intricacies of dances of the past through her studies with Melusine Wood. "What do you mean?" I asked. "All right, you are a professional dancer, can you do an authentic minuet?", Belinda said, demonstrating the steps. I tried to pick it up, my feet would not articulate, it was NOT SIMPLE! That was my moment of conversion to having respect for historical dance and realizing what a specialized study it was. Laban's contribution to dance has been tremendous, but there is evidence that, for one thing, his knowledge and understanding of Feuillet notation was imperfect.

The summer of 1947 I was over in England briefly; in 1962 I married Ivor Guest and came to London to live. I was soon in touch with Belinda and while I have never made historical dance my speciality, I was able over the next few years to learn a lot through attending her sessions and recording what I learned in Labanotation. Belinda was very interested and supportive but, understandably, not being able to read the notation, was very uncertain as to exactly what I had written down. At that time I had an assistant, Liz Lucyzin, who was modern-dance and Laban trained, with no background at all in historical. We arranged for Liz to read back all that I had written. This happened at a time when I was not present. Belinda was amazed and delighted. "But she demonstrated the quality of movement as well as the correct patterns and timing!" she reported to me afterwards.

Belinda had a difficult row to hoe. With her brilliant mind she should have gone to university (and no doubt her family were disappointed that she did not); instead she fell in love with dance and, discovering Melusine's work, acting as the instrument through which Melusine could realize the results of her research, Belinda made it her life's work. Her dedication to this field, her striving to educate people and to make this form of dance popular, are much to be admired. It was unfortunately a style of dance so specialized that too many people did not understand or appreciate it. Gradually over the years others began to be involved in this form of dance. A great boost for Belinda was when the American scholar/dancers began to come over to benefit from the knowledge existing in this country. In particular, Belinda appreciated Catherine Turocy, long since a major figure on the American scene.

Belinda had a wicked tongue; she felt she had to speak her mind. In retrospect, one can appreciate her frustration at the lack of interest in the work. Her very dedication made it difficult for her to be patient, to be understanding of others who differed with her view. What must be admired is her perseverance through many difficult times; she never lost sight of her goal. The qualities she lacked which might have brought her closer to that goal cannot take away from the degree of her impact on the younger generations who, directly or indirectly, were influenced and carried on the work she loved so much. I personally was much enriched by my association with her, and my love of the work stems from that sunny day in a Sussex garden, fifty years ago.