



The history of Benesh International (formerly the Benesh Institute)

“His [Rudolph’s] thinking was always original. It was as if instead of standing in front of an idea looking at it as everyone did, he walked around it and approached it from a different angle.”

Kathleen Russell, Benesh News 2000, The Benesh Institute, London

Rudolf Benesh

Rudolf Benesh was born in London in 1916 to a Czech father and an Anglo-Italian mother. Though a qualified accountant, he had always been fascinated by science and the arts. His passion for these saw him enrol to read Fine Art at Wimbledon College of Art and Music at Morley College. It was through painting that he met his future wife, Joan, the catalyst and inspiration for what was to become known as Benesh Movement Notation.

Joan Benesh (née Rothwell)

Joan Rothwell was born in Liverpool in 1920. She studied at the Studio School of Dance and Drama, later studying ballet with Lydia Sokolova. During the war, she danced in the commercial theatre before joining the Royal Opera Company in 1950 and the Sadler’s Wells Royal Ballet, the following year. In 1957 she joined the staff of The Royal Ballet School before founding the Institute’s training course in 1963. She retired as Principal in July 1976.

From 1947 onwards, Rudolf and Joan started eight years of collaborative development (marrying in 1949). Their work resulted into the first public presentation of the notation at the Royal Opera House in September 1955 and the publication of *An Introduction to Benesh Dance Notation* in 1958. That year, it was also included amongst the British government pavilion exhibits of Technological and Scientific Discovery at the Brussels’ Expo.

After launching a correspondence course and the development of a teaching syllabus, 1960 saw the employment of Faith Worth by The Royal Ballet as their first professional notator.



Rudolf and Joan Benesh.

The Benesh Institute of Choreology

The Benesh Institute was founded in 1962 with Sir Frederick Ashton as president, Arnold Haskell as vice-president, Nicholas Dromgoole as chairman of the board of governors and Rudolf Benesh as director.

In 1965, with funding from the Gulbenkian Foundation, the Leverhulme Trust and the Pilgrim Trust, the Institute acquired premises in London to house its growing library of scores and its first full-time training course.

Some of the first graduates joined Joan (principal of the training course) building a team of teachers and researchers that explored the use of the notation in a variety of applications:

- Modern dance (Janet Wilks)
- East Asian classical dance (Marianne Balchin)
- Folk and national dance (Robert Harold)
- Character dance (Melvina Bura)
- Historical dance (Wendy Hilton, Belinda Quirey)
- Choreographic analysis (Kathleen Russell)
- Work study and medicine (Francis Green and later Julia McGuinness Scott).

Highdown Tower, the residential training centre of the Institute in Sussex, was opened in 1973. Conceived along the lines of a three-year university degree programme, the education offered was well ahead of its time, incorporating a wide range of dance and movement study options augmented with the study of Benesh Movement Notation.

Rudolf Benesh died in 1975 and the same year, Joan Benesh retired as principal of the Benesh Institute training course.

In 1986, Nicholas Dromgoole, then Chairman of the Benesh Institute, gave a citation at the occasion of the QEII Award to Rudolf and Joan Benesh in recognition of their services to dance.

"In 1975 Rudolf Benesh was tragically struck down with cancer and his death robbed the dance world of one of its greatest innovators. In his quiet, diffident way he had a gift for stimulating the thinking of those around him and arousing their loyalty and affection.

Positive, determined, and tenacious in what she [Joan] believed to be right, together they made a formidable team. Of them, it can truly be said, that they left the dance world a changed place. Not only did they change it, they changed it for the better."



(L-R) Monica Parker, Nicholas Dromgoole, Dame Ninette de Valois and Julia McGuinness-Scott.

Following the death of Rudolf Benesh in 1976, Monica Parker was appointed director of the Benesh Institute. Combining this with her role as Principal Notator with the Royal Ballet and numerous invitations to stage works around the world, Monica persuaded many other companies to employ notators. She engaged Adrian Grater as technical director to carry on Rudolf

Benesh's work developing and refining the notation system. Her published works include *Dance Notation for Beginners*, *BMN Elementary Solo Syllabus – Ballet Application* and 'Benesh: The Notation of Dance' in *Images and Understanding*.

Now retired, Monica was internationally renowned for her close working relationship with MacMillan and she continued to stage his works worldwide for many years after he died.

Andrew Ward was appointed director of the Benesh Institute in 1990. Formerly a soloist with The Royal Ballet, Andrew had studied the notation at The Royal Ballet School. Under his leadership the Institute was incorporated within the Royal Academy of Dance, giving it a secure home and access to a wider market. Andrew secured funding from the Arts Council England and the Sports and Arts Foundation to develop the Benesh Notation Editor software in collaboration with Surrey University.

In 1997, following its incorporation within the Royal Academy of Dance, Liz Cunliffe became Technical Director of the Benesh Institute and in 2000 she was appointed director. Much of her energy was focused on development of the Benesh Notation Editor computer software and on completing the Encyclopedia of Benesh Movement Notation, a comprehensive online reference work on the system.

Benesh International

On the retirement of Liz Cunliffe in August 2017, Anna Trévien was appointed as the Head of Benesh International. Anna originally trained as a dancer and graduated from the Benesh Institute in 2001. She has worked with some of the world's top ballet companies and alongside her role at Benesh International, she also remains the Senior Benesh Choreologist for The Royal Ballet. Her vision for Benesh involves three main strands offering training, providing support for the BMN membership community, and investment in heritage and development. Under Anna's guidance, the Benesh Institute was rebranded as Benesh International in January 2018.

Chronology

- 1947 – 1955** Evolution of the movement notation system by Rudolf and Joan Benesh.
- 1955** Dame Ninette de Valois announced the Royal Ballet's adoption of BMN to record its repertoire at a press conference at the Royal Opera House Commencement of notation teaching at The Royal Ballet school and other leading vocational schools.
- 1956** Publication of *An Introduction to Benesh Dance Notation* by Rudolf and Joan Benesh.
- 1957** Joan Benesh notated the Grogoriev/Tchernicheva production of *Petrouchka* for the Royal Ballet: the first score to be written in BMN.
- 1958** BMN was included among the Technical Scientific Discoveries of the British government pavilion at the Brussel's Universal Exhibition
- 1959** Collaboration with the Centre of Technical Studies in the clothing industry, Paris.
- 1960** Appointment of the first professional Benesh notator, Faith Worth with The Royal Ballet.

- 1962** Founding of the Benesh Institute of Choreology with Sir Frederick Ashton OM CH CBE as president.
Original patrons: Dame Margot Fonteyn de Arias DBE, Lord Clarke CH KCB FBA, Tamara Karsavina, Dame Ninette de Valois CH DBE, Phyllis Bedells, Sir Robert Helpmann CBE, Dame Marie Rambert DBE.
- 1964** Application to medical research in order to record the movements of cerebral palsy patients, in collaboration with the Centro di Educazione Motoria, Florence, Italy.
- 1965** **Official opening of the Benesh Institute by Jennie Lee, Minister with special responsibility for the arts.**
Start of the first full time professional notator training course at the Benesh Institute.
- 1967** Award of an annual grant from the Arts Council.
- 1968** Appointment of the first full-time teacher of BMN, Jacquie Hollander, at the Royal Ballet school.
First anthropological study carried out using BMN – *Aboriginal dances of the Northern Territory of Australia* by Andrée Grau.
- 1969** Featured in BBC's *Tomorrow's World* television programme directed by Julian Pettifer.
- 1973** The first clinical notator, Julia McGuinness-Scott working at Guy's Hospital, London.
- 1974** Founding of the journal *The Choreologist*.
- 1975** Death of Rudolf Benesh on 3 May.
Retirement of Joan Benesh as principal of the Benesh Institute training course. Appointment of Monica Parker as director of the Benesh Institute.

- 1976** BMN is introduced into the dance curriculum of the University of Waterloo, Canada.
21th birthday of the launch of BMN celebrated by a party for the international membership of the Benesh Institute at the Martini Terrace, London.
- 1977** Publication of *Reading Dance, The Birth of Choreology* by Rudolf and Joan Benesh.
- 1980** Georgette Tsinguirides is awarded the John Cranko Gold Medal in recognition of her contribution towards preserving and keeping alive Cranko's works.
Initiation of the ChoreoScribe Benesh Editor Project, a collaborative project between the department of Computer Graphics Laboratory and the Dance Group of the University of Waterloo, Canada.
- 1981** BMN is incorporated into the new GCSE 'O' Level Dance Syllabus, England.
- 1983** Andrée Grau is awarded a Doctorate of Philosophy in Social Anthropology from Queen's University, Belfast, for her dissertation: *Dreaming, Dancing, Kinship*, a study using notation of the *Tiwi* of Australia.
- 1984** Publication of Cecchetti Society's Professional Examinations Syllabus in BMN notated by Linda Pilkington.
BMN is incorporated into the curriculum of the BA (Hons) Dance in Society programme at the University of Surrey.
- 1986** BMN is incorporated into the new University of London GCSE and A Level Dance Syllabus.
The first BMN congress is held at the Royal Opera House, London.
UK launch of MacBenesh computer software developed by the University of Waterloo, Canada.
First publication of BMN Score Catalogue - Ed. Berry, I. *An International Listing of BMN scores of professional dance works recorded 1955-1985*.
- 1987** Rudolf and Joan Benesh are awarded the RAD's Queen Elizabeth II Coronation Award for their "significant contribution to British ballet".
- 1988** Sir Kenneth MacMillan became president of the Benesh Institute.
- 1990** Appointment of Andrew Ward as director of the Benesh Institute.
- 1991** Diana, Princess of Wales officially opened the new premises in Lisson Grove and became Royal Patron of the Benesh Institute.
- 1993** Sir Peter Wright CBE became president of the Benesh Institute.
First issue of BenTech (Benesh technical papers) provided to members of the Benesh Institute.
- 1994** The Benesh Institute draws up an agreement for the educational use of scores, which was signed by choreographers and score owners.
- 1995** Professional BMN course opens at the Conservatoire de Paris.
- 1997** 15 April the Benesh Institute became incorporated in the RAD (at the time called Royal Academy of Dancing).
The RAD began to publish the major examination syllabi incorporating their BMN notation scores.

- 1998** **Second publication of Benesh Movement Notation score catalogue - Ed. Inman, T. *An International Listing of Benesh Movement Notation Scores of Professional Dance Works recorded 1955 – 1998.***
- 2000** International Conference: Rudolf Remembered. Celebrating the life's work of Rudolf Benesh is held at the Academy's headquarters.

Appointment of Liz Cunliffe as director of the Benesh Institute.
- 2002** The Benesh Notation Editor computer software is released.

Launch of the distance learning Certificate in BMN programme under the Faculty of Education.
- 2005** Launch of the Diploma for Professional Benesh Movement Notators programme under the Faculty of Education 2008
Launch of Score Reading for Dancers, a specialist programme for vocational schools that focuses on the use dancers can make of BMN in the furtherance of their performing career.
- 2009** Relaunch of the Certificate in Benesh Movement Notation and the Diploma for Professional Benesh Movement Notators under the management of the Benesh Institute.
- 2015** Launch of Benesh Movement Notation for Ballet Distance Learning course.
- 2017** **Liz Cunliffe retires and is succeeded by Anna Trévien.**
- 2018** **The Benesh Institute is rebranded as Benesh International.**

Launch of Postgraduate Award in Benesh Movement Notation (PABMN) and the Postgraduate Diploma in Benesh Movement Notation (PGDipBMN).