

***Using Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analysis as a  
Palette for Teaching and Analyzing Safe and  
Effective Single Rapier Stage Combat***

**by**

**Stacy Alley**

MFA, The University of Alabama, 2003

BA, The University of Southern California, 1996

---

A Final Project

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

CERTIFIED MOVEMENT ANALYST

LABAN/BARTENIEFF INSTITUTE OF MOVEMENT STUDIES

New York, NY

2010

## INTRODUCTION

I decided to study Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analysis because I wanted to find out who I was as both a teacher and performer of theatre. I also wanted to find a way to help my theatre students become more aware, to find out who *they* are so that they are able to become someone else. My job is to provide an awareness of their personal tendencies and patterns of habitual movements, gestures, and tensions so that they are free to adopt and adapt to the movement that best aids their learning process and performance. It is also my job to foster and condition the mind, body, and spirit so that an actor can guide his instrument to such a state that he may truthfully serve both the story and the environment that the playwright has created. I feel that LMA/BF provides a way to solve problems not easily solved through recognized acting approaches and methodologies. In addition, I teach many and varied classes in a theatre department in the university setting, and wanted to try and synthesize my “areas of expertise” with a common language, both a physical and verbal vocabulary, in which to communicate with all students and artists, no matter what show I was directing or choreographing, or what class I was teaching.

*Stage Combat* is a class that I inherited when I took the job at Arkansas State University seven years ago yet it is not a class that I necessarily looked forward to teaching, as it is not my forte. This class, which focuses on the acting techniques related to stage combat as a necessary skill for the acting student, explores development of body alignment, kinesthetic sense, partnering, trust, and the

articulation and projection of content in controlled, staged physical conflicts. In other words, it is a class that could definitely benefit from the application of LMA/BF. I suspected that by using LMA/BF as a “way in”, I could make the class safer for the combatants and more believable for the audience. Additionally, approaching the class from a different, less technical perspective might help both me and my students enjoy the class more. After searching for information on LMA/BF and its relationship to stage combat of any kind, however, I discovered that this was essentially uncharted territory and therefore an exciting yet intimidating prospect for a final project.

In any combat class, workshop, or book, you are likely to hear the phrase “safety first, last, and always” which signifies the fact that a lot of rehearsal and patience is the key to a safe, effective fight. Consequently stage combat epitomizes the LMA theme of Function/Expression as it is a series of pre-planned and safely executed moves whose purpose is to effectively serve the story that the playwright intended. Simply, it is the act of pretending to fight for the benefit of an audience, yet the audience must never be aware of the techniques involved or of the hours of rehearsal it took to create a fight. In addition, the actor must be aware of the next move in the choreography but must play the fight as though spontaneous with moment-to-moment actions. Therefore, the challenge in any type of stage combat is how to give a production the effect of reality, appearing to be improvised, when it is in fact choreographed. A certain physical agility, full engagement with one another, and the ability to put their rapiers and bodies in the correct point in Space are the

key requirements to safety and are objectives that can be brought to fruition by LMA/BF.

Some combatants and instructors, for that matter, get so caught up in the safety and technical aspects of the fight that they forget to tell the story hence the aspect of stage combat that is often neglected is authenticity. After all, a stage fight is simply a dialogue between two people, or, in the words of Dale Girard, “the external manifestation of the character’s inner attitude of aggression coupled with their skill with a weapon” (426). The fight needs to start, happen, and end in a manner consistent with the script, grow naturally out of the story and the actor combatant has to ask himself why the playwright has chosen to use combat at this particular point in the play. The job of the actor then is to present a specific character in a specific circumstance. According to William Hobbs in *Stage Combat: The Action to the Word*, “The challenge of presenting a convincing, exciting and imaginative fight may on the face of it be a daunting prospect to the inexperienced, not unlike the fitting together of a jigsaw puzzle. There are many moves and tricks available to the actors and the fight director” (7). Through the execution of this project, I discovered that *my* “tricks” are now realized through Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analysis and that LMA/BF allows me to reach the ultimate objective of making stage combat safe for those performing it and more believable and exciting for those doing and watching it. Because when the actor combatant has free and easy access to his Body and the information that it provides, he has free and easy access to all of the acting choices at his disposal, culminating in performances that

are safe, truthful and engaging. Thus LMA/BF colors the movement associated with Stage Combat.

## PROJECT DESIGN

The nine students in my *Stage Combat* class in the spring semester of 2010 were subjects for this project. These students, ranging from sophomores to seniors, had never had any previous combat experience. Most had introductory knowledge of Body, Effort, Space, and Shape, however, that they had received in *Voice and Movement I* and *Beginning Acting* classes their freshman year. The class was taught in a seminar format that met for one semester (fifteen weeks), once weekly for two hours and twenty minutes. The first half of the semester was used to teach unarmed stage combat while introducing and reviewing various LMA/BF concepts and exercises, which I hoped would prove beneficial once we began the rapier portion of the class. The second half of the semester (five class periods) was dedicated to the application of LMA/BF concepts and principles when teaching safe and believable rapier technique. I used combat “language” as well as LMA/BF language, which I gradually incorporated into each lesson. Elements of BESS served as excellent warm-ups as well as the preparation for and execution of basic footwork and offensive/defensive skills, which eventually culminated in a basic fight sequence.

The students were often tired and sore yet excited and exhilarated at various points throughout the semester. Most were more than willing to give feedback as to their breakthroughs and victories as well as to their aggravations and confusions. I personally kept a journal during the second half of the semester reflecting detailed observations, conclusions, and my own discoveries and frustrations (See Appendix

A). Furthermore, I recorded the subjects periodically to evaluate their progress before and after exposure to certain LMA/BF concepts. All participants signed a release form prior to participation in the study.

I went into this project without knowing how best to utilize my students to prove the hypothesis that LMA/BF would make a wonderful palette for safe and effective stage combat. Should I focus on one student? Should I compare and contrast two students? I decided that by observing all of them, I would have access to the full spectrum and limitless possibilities that LMA/BF has to offer the combatant; I would be able to see how it supported their process and product as well as how it aids in my teaching the class. To my dismay, I didn't see the significant change that I expected in several students but all seemed to benefit in some way from my efforts to apply LMA/BF to stage combat.

A few students stood out and provided a good deal of information for my analysis. Ashlea, for example, had a tremendous amount of trouble with all aspects of BESS but I know that she would benefit from LMA/BF with more time and attention. Ben, on the other hand, took to everything easily and was a shining example of how the elements of BESS can be explored and employed in order to succeed in a rapier stage combat class and ultimately on stage; I analyzed a video of his final combat sequence for the Macro/Micro analysis and motif required for this project (See Appendixes B, C, and D). The vast difference between these two students is clearly evident in the video that I will show as part of my presentation.

Other video clips will exhibit our journey throughout the semester, both the positive and negative aspects, but usually very enjoyable.



## **DISCOVERIES THROUGH A BREAKDOWN OF BESS**

Below is an analysis for each area of BESS. I often found it difficult, however, to break them up into separate categories due to the fact that they are all intertwined and do not stand alone. Intrinsicly, Body and Space serve as vehicles for the safety aspect of rapier stage combat while Effort and Shape serve as vehicles for the authenticity aspect. Although the lines were sometimes blurred, all four areas provide the potential to launch and support the stage combatant/acting student into expressing his way of being in and interacting with the world around him. On a whole, Body, including Bartenieff Fundamentals, the Basic Six, Developmental Patterning, and anatomical discussion prepared the combatant for basic drills; Space set the stage for the actual “fighting” to begin; and Effort and Shape provided a means to performance.

### **BODY**

Discipline, control, and technique are the very basis upon which a safe fight depends and the first step is finding one’s center, or the *en guard* position. The proper en guard stance provides the Stability necessary to eventually Mobilize and is therefore the basis of footwork in a rapier combat class. According to Dale Girard, “The learning of footwork and regulation of safe distance and controlled movement requires a strong foundation. This foundation is the En Guard stance. Practice of footwork should only begin after you thoroughly understand and can automatically assume correct placement in the En Guard stance” (33). From such a solid

foundation, the actor combatant can move through Space with agility and confidence and only then should a rapier be placed in his hand. Thus the combatant uses en guard as support and Recuperation for the Exertion of moving into Space and allowing the Body ( ) to accommodate to a changing form, direction or pathway. This cornerstone of stage combat provides both a Stable base and Mobile platform with which to defend from or launch an attack thus exemplifying Laban's theme of Mobility/Stability on a micro level.

En guard requires that the combatant place one of his feet a foot's length in front of the other foot and lower his center of gravity, making a "pentagon with the ground". Non-LMA instructions usually include "make sure that your knees are directly over your toes", "your knees should not turn inward", "your hips should be square to the mirror", and "your weight should be evenly distributed on both legs". Here the Body ( ) must be Stable and Vertical ( ) with Weight evenly distributed between both feet in a deep plie'. The key to being deep enough to keep balance against an assault, yet not so deep as to lose Mobility is Femoral Flexion.

Because the actor needs incredible Mobility in order to cope with the demands of Stage Combat, en guard utilizes several BF Principles. First it focuses on the Lower Body ( ) for Initiation of stationary offensive and defensive positions, where the combatant is putting sixty-percent of their weight on either the lead (front) or lag (back) foot, which is fundamentally the BF Principle of Weight Shift. Initiation from the Lower Body ( ) is also essential to locomotion i.e. advancing, retreating, pass forwards or backwards, because the way one moves from en guard

has to be done in such a way that guarantees that the combatant remains nimble and that his foundation does not waver, leaving him with without a solid base with which to move to the next step or position. He needs to be able to stop, start, attack, defend, change direction, deflect an attack, or avoid a potential accident at a moment's notice. In other words, he needs a strong sense of Weight.

The *advance* (offensive action) carries the Body ( ) forward in the Sagittal Dimension ( ) by moving the lead, or front, foot first followed by the lag, or back, foot whereas the *retreat* (defensive action) carries the Body backward in the Sagittal Dimension ( ) by moving the lag foot first and then the lead foot. *Passing forward* (offensive) is a linear step forward in the Sagittal Dimension ( ) made by passing the lag foot to the front and *passing backward* (defensive) is a linear step backward in the Sagittal Dimension made by passing the lead foot to the back. All footwork is most effectively accomplished by Distal Initiation, using the toe in offensive footwork and the heel in defensive footwork. Each step of the foot and shifting of weight should be made in a process of sensing and grabbing the ground, or Weight Sensing, skimming the floor as the combatant moves toward or away from his partner. Doing this correctly aids in the keeping the body centered and balanced. Otherwise the student is likely to fall over.

This underpinning of stage combat cannot be accomplished without the BF Principle of Core Support to activate Grounding for Stability while activating a specific Body part for Mobility; according to Peggy Hackney, “to say someone is grounded implies that that person has a stable sense of him/herself. This presence

of self requires an embodied relationship to the earth” (41). Core Support is also directly related to the BF Principle of Breath Support, which links the Inner with the Outer, a LMA theme that is omnipresent in most acting classes, scenes, and performances. In relation to Mobility/Stability an exhale allows the release of tension in order to Stabilize oneself when Grounding whereas an exhale also allows the student to Hollow, connecting the torso to the leg, creating an initiation for Mobilizing into Space. A common problem that I encounter with my students is a lack of self- confidence, which is manifested in sloppy, tentative moves that prove to be a danger to both themselves and their opponents. Obviously a truly safe and effective fight will only occur when students are Grounded, with a strong sense of Weight, Breath Support, and accordingly, a sense of Self.

The BF Principle of Dynamic Alignment and the idea of Vertical Throughness especially in regard to the Heel-sitzbone and Head-Tail connections ( ) is also imperative for a proper en guard stance, footwork, and eventually fighting with an opponent. It allows the Body ( ) to be Stable and controlled and allows the combatant to be so versed in the technique of footwork that it frees the body from the restrictions of basic technique and propels it into accurate placement and a sense of spontaneity. The better he can control his footwork, the easier it is to match his opponent, keep proper distance, and step from one point to another without losing his center. With those objectives accomplished, the combatant is free to explore character and circumstances within a specific context.

Attention to the Upper Body ( ), especially to the Core-Distal Connectivity ( ) of Developmental Patterning, is also integral to the execution of safe and effective rapier combat so that the combatant's limbs actually feel connected to his core when attacking and defending an opponent which gets him in touch with his own power. Unless offensive movements are initiated from the Core and travel in Successive Sequencing through the Proximal, Mid-limb, Distal pattern, Shape and/or Effort Intent are difficult and, as a result, authenticity is compromised. According to Bartenieff, the Upper Body ( ) "essentially serves exploring, manipulating, gesturing activities. It initiates and extends reach space, communicates through spatial gesture, body touch, grasp, enveloping, dispersing, intertwining" (19). Bartenieff Fundamentals such as the Hand-Scapula connection, sets the stage for finely articulated arm movement, helping with Flexion in the proximal joint to avoid locking the elbow and raising the shoulders, which are common occurrences and counterproductive to placing the rapier in the correct point in Space. In addition, all components of attack and defense must be done with active Weight behind the action. Hobbs says the "body must be behind the movement, for whether the weapons are in fact heavy or not, if they are big the movements will only look real if the effect of weight is behind them" (Hobbs 32). If two combatants don't put active Weight behind their actions with a weapon, the two blades may not meet, allowing people to get injured.

The next stage in learning rapier combat involves the synchronization of footwork with various moments of attack and defense, allowing the Body ( ) to move together as a unit: arms, legs and body—supported and sustained by the

center of gravity, in a relaxed yet focused way. Although footwork is done with Distal Initiation, it is common for the beginning student to charge forward with their Upper Body ( ), relying on the Upper as propulsion into Space and seeming to forget that they have a Lower Body ( ) at all. Upper/Lower Connectivity ( ) is essential to rapier work because it helps the actor to support himself and claim himself as an individual. Furthermore, it activates the Lower Body ( ) in order to advance and retreat while activating the Upper Body ( ) in order to perform either offensive or defensive actions. A strong Upper/Lower Body Connectivity ( ) gives the combatant the look of someone who is confident and in control while fighting or en guard. This idea is supported by Cross-Lateral Connectivity ( ), which connects Grounding with reach into the world and, says Hackney, connects the Body ( ) “from fingertips of one hand through the core and to the toes of the opposite foot” (Hackney 179). This is absolutely necessary once the combatant is given fight choreography.

## EFFORT

Although typically utilized for uncovering the inroads of authentic rapier stage combat, Effort also serves the safety concern in several ways. For example, as previously mentioned, rapier work uses the thumb and index finger as manipulators. In order to achieve this agility, the hand (and therefore the wrist and forearm) holding the rapier must be in Free Flow Effort ( ) or you will not be able to “steer the point” and the wrist won’t be able to support the movement (Girard 76). Free Flow ( ) in the hand also allows the combatant to maneuver the weapon in order to “show”, a physical cue that lets your partner know that that you are ready to attack a specific target. Hackney says these two fingers “allow for specificity”, a concept absolutely imperative when meeting an opponent in rapier combat (Hackney 158). Once the rapier hand is in Free Flow ( ) the combatant may begin to learn proper offensive (cuts and thrusts) and defensive (parries) actions.

Once a weapon is placed in its proper position for either an offensive or defensive action to be met with the corresponding parry, the hand, as well as the entire arm, should be in Bound Flow ( ). Tom Casiero describes Bound Flow ( ) as “an action capable of being stopped and held without difficulty at any moment during the movement” (200). This statement exemplifies the safety aspect of rapier combat because when a combatant fails to stop an attack or parry at the precise place and time, the safety of one’s opponent is compromised. It is fitting that

then that Laban, in *The Mastery of Movement*, refers to Flow as the “precision” factor in movement (114).

When attacking, Direct Space Effort ( ) is needed in order to provide focus to what the combatant is supposed to be paying Attention to, first the opponent and then the intended target, or else the safety of the fight will be compromised. So although the attacker may aspire to Passion Drive ( ) since Effort elements such as Quick Time ( ), Strong Weight ( ), and Bound Flow ( ) tend to give the impression of violence, this is unrealistic for rapier combat due to the need for Space Effort ( ) in terms of safety. However, Bartenieff says that Passion Drive ( ) “may be a precursor of a Basic Effort Action of violence such as extreme Punching or Slashing” (61). And although some people would equate the swinging of a sword with the word “slash”, it is an inappropriate comparison in terms of the Effort Action Drive since Slash ( ) involves Indirect Space Effort ( ). Rather, such offensive actions would be better suited to the Effort Action Drive, Punch ( ).

The defendant, however, in his execution of parries, should use a degree of both Direct and Indirect Space ( ) because a person in the defensive mode isn’t looking directly at a target, but is forced to pay attention to both his opponent and the areas of his Kinesphere ( ) into which the opponent is sending a weapon. Furthermore, it is easier for the defendant to keep both he and his attacker safe in a fight as they move through Space as his use of Indirect Space Effort ( ) helps to



avoid such disasters as falling off of the stage, running into the set or into other actors.

Mere meaningless swinging of swords, however, conveys nothing to an audience except this is where two (or perhaps more) people are supposed to fight and fails to add anything to the development of the plot or character development. According to Suddeth, "Fight choreography created without a sensitivity to place, time, and character is just random movement". Applying Effort ( ) to a standard fight sequence, however, helps give the fight meaning and the characters depth by indicating what is going within the mind and soul of the character. Hobbs explains:

No two people move or react in the same way, and the personality of each of the characters will determine the way they fight, and govern everything they do during the fight sequence. People who behave in a distinctly individual way throughout a play cannot and must not merge in personality when fighting. Broadly speaking, if careful consideration is given to a man's physique, intellect and personality, an idea will be formed of the probable way he will move and fight (Hobbs 12).

The use of Effort ( ) provides the combatant physical tools with which to investigate what's going on in a particular fight and is excellent material for establishing the movement behavior of characters. The respected actor and teacher Stanislavsky writes: "...the body can provide a direct route to the emotions..." "In every physical action, unless it is purely mechanical, there is concealed some inner action, some feeling" (228). Perhaps Effort tells us the level of training someone has, their mental state, whether a fight arises out of anger, passion, frustration, etc. What ignites the violence between the two characters? For example, Tybalt, in *Romeo and Juliet*, would be a highly skilled combatant and his use of Quick Time, Strong Weight,

and Direct Space ( ) might indicate not only a level of expertise but perhaps reveal social status as well.

It is not surprising that most fights occur on the condensing side of the Effort graph ( ) as it is often said that one is “fighting” Flow, Time, Weight, Space on that side of the graph. I witnessed mostly variations of Bound Flow, Strong Weight, Direct Space, and Quick Time ( ), (although this is not always the case). Effort Action Drives ( ) seem to be best suited to combat which is no surprise since they are usually seen in work or action-oriented movement and de-emphasize emotion. (This is beneficial for actors as they are usually taught that emotion is a by-product of action anyway. Actors need or want to achieve an objective, find tactics in order to reach that objective, and then an emotion is experienced as a result of such actions.) Because one has to remain in complete control when executing any kind of stage combat sequence, however, Bound Flow ( ) seems to underlie and initiate these Effort Action Drives ( ). As Bartenieff explains, “although it is not necessarily dominant, and may not appear identifiable as Bound or Free, its neutral continuity as flux will still underlie all the other Effort elements” (55). An extremely heightened, seemingly dangerous combat scene might use a Full Effort Combination (all four Effort elements) for a short period of time. Punching ( ), for example, becomes very violent when Flow ( ) is added to it and because of the safety aspect the majority of the Flow ( ) evident remains Bound ( ). Bartenieff says in the resisting or fighting group “the Full Effort combinations are manifested emotionally as acts of ‘senseless’ violence, such as murderously beating up a person or tearing something apart” and are like “destructive confrontations”

with an “extreme survival response” (Bartenieff 63). She goes on to say, “It is the addition of the fourth element, Flow, to the Basic Effort Action Drive that gives the extreme character to these movements, whether they be murderous or ethereal. There are extreme fluctuations of Free and Bound Flow in the violent acts and there are subtle fluctuations in the non-violent actions” (Bartenieff 63).

Such Effort combinations lend to the authenticity of the fight as they allow the combatant to act the fight, using the rapier as an extension of his character. Hobbs expands on this idea when he says, “It is only when the various components, such as the creation and selection of moves which relate to character, the sharpening of the actors’ skill and the proper forwarding of the story, are all put imaginatively together that the fight scene can be considered to work” (7-8). Effort helps it “work” as it can further the plot, develop characterization, and therefore provide a wealth of information. What’s more it aids in putting energy into the Dynamosphere, projecting a sense of confidence in the combatant. Clearly the actor should attack a physical scene just like any other acting scene and Effort helps link the fight to playable actions such as the ones students brought in to work on such as to test, to protect, to destroy, to probe, to show off, to punish, to overpower, to humiliate, to stalk, and to challenge (objectives and tactics are usually put in the form of transitive verbs).

It is clear that Time Effort ( ) is useful when exploring a character’s objectives and relationships. For example, an aggressive opponent might be ready to murder at any cost and therefore uses Quick Time Effort ( ). Perhaps he is

facing, however, a more tentative, perhaps nervous opponent who isn't comfortable with a sword in his hand who uses Sustained or Neutral Time Effort ( ) at the beginning of the fight but is forced to switch to Quick Time Effort ( ) in order to avoid being killed. A character's objective (what he or she needs from their opponent) and tactics (how they go about reaching that objective) is what drives the fight and it might be immediate (Quick Time)—to kill or maim, etc. or it might be more haughty (Sustained Time). Quick Time Effort ( ) has to do with urgency which is obviously needed when you are trying to kill your opponent or save your own life.

When Time Effort ( ) is combined with Space Effort ( ), the combatant is taken into Awake State ( ) which is usually how a combatant embodies the en guard position. With its concern with Decision and Attention, Awake State ( ) illustrates an inner attitude of alertness and finds a way for the fighter to balance the many instant decisions he must make. In addition, changes from attack to defense will usually happen in Quick Time ( ) and Direct Space ( ); actors/characters have to have their guard up, and must be aware of, and respond immediately to any movement their partner performs. The stakes and danger are at their highest in such situations. Additionally actors can use Quick Time ( ) to rush in, threaten balance of other person, or to take advantage of a moment of vulnerability. While we, as actors, do not need to beat our partner to the punch, we do need to show the audience how an opening is created and the advantage taken. It is also important to note that Quick Time Effort ( ) must not be confused with the tempo of the fight, which is something we often talk about in the world of stage

combat. We always begin rehearsals of techniques very slowly and only increase the tempo when correct form, safe distance, and Spatial Intent have been established.

Moreover rapier combat offers a wide variety of ways to explore Weight Effort ( ), which can stem from character, objective, or tactic. An attack could be done with Strong Weight Effort ( ) when trying *to punish* or *to overpower* or it could be done with Light Weight Effort ( ) as in playing the tactic, *to test*. Or perhaps two fighters are toying with one another, showing off more than actually executing any kind of skill in which case, Light Weight Effort ( ) might also come into play (and more Sustained Time perhaps). If a character is cautiously approaching an enemy and their objective is *to push him over*, then Strong Weight ( ) might be applied. Yet if a character moves cautiously toward an enemy without a clear objective, trying to avoid confrontation, Bound Flow ( ) may be more apparent.

Maybe a character is so charged with rage or revenge as in a play such as *Romeo and Juliet*, that he fails to reach an Effort Action Drive ( ), and is only able to implement Strong Weight ( ) and Quick Time ( ). This describes Rhythm State ( ), which makes perfect sense for a fight scene because, in the word of Barbara Adrian, it “includes presence and impact that may be physical or emotional” (142). Perhaps this inner attitude serves as Recuperation from the control and focus driving an Effort Action Drive such as Punch ( ). Rapier combat’s relationship with Rhythm State ( ) is also relevant in that effective combat

sequences are often said to have a musical quality. Stable State ( ) might also function as Recuperation to the Exertion of Effort Action Drives where Strong Weight ( ) and Direct Space ( ) prevent a character from wavering or “crumpling under pressure”. A fighter in Stable State ( ) “is not likely to be bullied and is willing to listen to and apply advice as long as it helps her achieve her stated goal” (Adrian 143).

Effort Phrasing also aids in letting the audience know what is going on in a scene and lack of variety or punctuation in Phrasing will ultimately lose the audience’s interest. Even without dialogue surrounding it, a fight tells some sort of story and Effort phrasing plays a major role in it. It too can help in both finding and executing objectives, tactics, and obstacles. Every character’s objective is to win the fight but HOW will he reach that objective? If the actor isn’t reaching his objective then his tactics (or verbs) will change which can be manifested in Effort Phrasing. For instance, two opponents may have the same elements in a fight but their phrasing will make their message different. Referring specifically to combat, Hobbs says “A fight, like a piece of music, should start in a low key at slow tempo and gradually gain in momentum and pitch, arriving eventually at the equivalent of a clash of cymbals” (15). This could be translated to LMA/BF by saying that an exciting fight might begin with Even Effort Phrasing ( ), followed by a bit of Swing Phrasing ( ), leading into some Impactive ( ) actions, with a big Impulsive thrust at the end. Again adding Time Effort ( ) to such phrasing might demonstrate a readiness to respond to the unexpected and to anticipate what’s coming next, keeping things unpredictable:

How often has one seen a stage fight which contains virtually the same rhythm and feeling throughout the entire sequence, and lack any change or variety of mood! It is as though the actors are performing a fight equivalent to Chopsticks over and over again with relentless monotony. The restriction of every combat to the same kind of tempo, without variety or punctuation, will have a soporific effect, and will ultimately—albeit unconsciously—lose the audience’s interest (Hobbs 15).

Clearly without both Effort and Effort Phrasing, a fight will undoubtedly run the risk of being dull and will fail to keep an audience on the edge of its seat. Thus a combat sequence punctuated with fluctuations of Effort and Effort phrasing supports the safety of, and stimulates the effectiveness of, stage combat while coloring the expressiveness of the actor.

## **SPACE**

According to Dale Girard, a fight is “conversation with steel” (189). In conflict, the actor must understand clearly the concept of physical proximity and the non-verbal meanings that are carried with them. Most actors don’t have experience with physical conflict let alone sword fighting and their practical emotional knowledge of distance, which they can draw upon, is severely limited. Space creates a structure for which the actor may begin to visualize and react appropriately, as a trained fighter would, to explore choices in those circumstances and to expand their non-verbal vocabulary.

The use of Space also provides information about the core of character and is as important as other, more obvious, details like dialect or the way a person walks, and so a fighter will be affected by and will react to how their opponent enters and leaves their Space. Also, the amount of personal Space people allow in their life varies and this will be reflected in the way a character fights. Characters are invading the personal Space of others when performing combat thus there is a conscious use of Space specific to character and circumstance. Some of my students had trouble relating to one another because they were uncomfortable sharing the same Space and using Space in general. If Spatially directed movement is difficult, how are they supposed to connect on an emotional level? Sometimes, though, actor combatants allow their personal space to become very small and inappropriately permit other actors into their character’s Space on stage. This generosity of spirit



can be a valuable tool but if it's misapplied in the circumstance, it can ruin a wonderfully dramatic moment or worse, compromise safety.

Both offensive and defensive actions of rapier combat demand an enormous amount of Spatial precision and must be executed with maximum accuracy. One of the first things students of rapier stage combat are instructed to do is make eye contact with their partner before beginning a fight. Then when attacking they are told to "show then go" meaning show where your weapon is headed, then go to your target (on a particular place on the outside of your opponent's body) which is clearly the BF Principle of Spatial Intent.

Once combatants are moving together in Space and are ready to cross swords, the Dimensional/Defense Scale becomes extremely significant. This Scale is useful when exploring the actor's relationship between Space and character, both in and out of conflict. Like the Defense Scale, there are ordered sequences through which vital points of the opponent's body are aimed at and reached when attacked or defended. Combat actions do differ from the Defense Scale as described in Ellen Goldman's book, *The Geometry of Movement* because the Defense Scale is "modeled on the art of fencing and defends parts of the body in a specific order" (5). Modern rapier combat sequences are initially taught in a different order and protect or attack different parts of the body, which align with points of the octahedron or Icosahedron.

En guard should put the rapier in Place Forward ( ) in the Octahedron and is just one example of how the concept of Space in LMA/BF can start to facilitate

safe combat. Moreover, when warming up our wrists for rapier work, knowledge of Space allowed the tip of the rapier to move precisely in the Vertical and Horizontal Planes, starting and stopping at a specific point.

*Parries*, executed with the hand remaining center in the mid-reach of the actor's Kinesphere ( ) and at points in the Icosahedron, are defensive actions designed to protect the vulnerable areas of the body. When parrying, the hand holding the rapier uses Peripheral pathways ( ) when describing the periphery in a circular or semi-circular parry. There are ten parries, actions that stop the attacking blade at its weakest point (the foible) with the strongest point (the forte) of the defending blade. Each parry, is "presented as a solid wall" or Wall Still Shape Form ( ), making up a portion of the entire defensive box, and are most effective when executed with Active Weight so as to give the physical conflict subtextual nuance and character motivation (Girard 140).

Attacks, either *cuts* or *thrusts*, are offensive actions directed three to six inches outside of an opponent's Body to points in either the Icosahedron or Cube (with the exception of a cut to the head where the hand goes back to Place Forward in the Octahedron). Attention to these points in, and the understanding of, crystalline forms is crucial to the safety of rapier stage combat; for example, if the combatant thrusts to Right Forward High ( ) instead of Right Forward ( ), he will be sending his weapon to his opponents neck or head instead of to the bicep which is "meaty", the safest types of areas at which to aim.

All thrusts travel in a Central Pathway ( ) whereas cuts (to the thighs and shoulders) travel along a Peripheral Pathway ( ). Both cuts and thrusts are “shown” in the near reach of the Kinesphere ( ) and are fully executed with the hand at the far reach of the Kinesphere ( ). Because a hand holding a rapier in Far Reach extends the actor’s Kinesphere by three feet, a combatant absolutely must maintain the proper distance between he and his partner (an arm’s length) or, once footwork is added, disaster is inevitable. Additionally, footwork requires clear Spatial Intent in the matter of maintaining distance, which, if ever hesitant or vague, is unsafe to all involved. A combat student must stay on “railroad tracks”, mirroring his opponent’s footwork. Girard maintains that “Ambiguity is excessively dangerous to the stage combatant”, states Girard, and is poignant whether moving through space with footwork or placing the rapier in the proper place (129).

I was also able to engage the concept of Spatial Intent within the crystalline forms with internal visioning. By that I mean when I saw a poor use of their spine, I asked the student to move his sternum toward Forward-High ( ). Or, if I had someone breaking distance due to not squaring their hips to their partner, I asked him to think of expanding his sitzbone to Right Side Low ( ) and Left Side Low ( ) while the Scapula widens to Right Side High ( ) and Left Side High ( ). This ties in good technique, safety, and Space.

Besides giving the combatant a clear idea of where to aim a rapier for either offensive or defensive movements, work with the Dimensional/Defense Scale in general proved extremely beneficial to rapier combat for other reasons including

relating, Stability, Grounding, Core Strength, as well as addressing Directional Movement, which “cuts through Space to get to a goal” and is “backed by desire or intent” (Goldman 12). Goldman goes on to describe how a typical combat sequence is like the Defense Scale in that a combat sequence is “opening or closing, Central or Peripheral, attacking or disarming the opponent” (57).

## SHAPE

Shape ( ) is the element of BESS that was paid least attention to during this project but Qualities of Shape Change provided clues as to how to make rapier stage combat more effective and safe. A Wall Still Shape Form ( ), as mentioned before, must be maintained with shoulders and hips square to their partner, as related to Body Attitude, in order to “make yourself appear bigger than you are”. Shape Flow is ubiquitous, with a growing Shape Flow ( ), (Lengthening ( ), Widening ( ), and Bulging ( )) appropriate for a person defending his life, as it gives the combatant a sense of fullness and power. (One student likened Widening to having on a suit of armor).

For the most part, rapier stage combat sequences are about bridging one combatant to other via a weapon; they carry the action from me to you, or vice versa. In these situations, “the movement will most likely be Directional in quality or arc-like Directional, as the situation is outside ourselves. We are doing what it takes to accomplish the task. We are not molding the situation into something new. We are responding or describing” (Goldman 56). Indeed, offensive actions in rapier combat use Spoke-like Directional Movement ( ) for thrusts and Arc-like Directional Movement for cuts ( ).

Shaping ( ) is more evident in the defensive action of parries where the combatant is either Enclosing ( ) or Spreading ( ) when protecting various areas of his Body. Shaping is also obvious in performance, when the combatant is forced to mold and adapt to his environment as he moves through Space, Advancing

( ) or Retreating ( ), reacting to his opponent. Also, the combatant Shapes around the rapier as he lightly grips it. However, because combat is about “me” or “me to you” and not about “us” or support for another, Shaping ( ) does not play a huge role in *beginning* rapier stage combat. However, Shaping ( ) serves important functions in more advanced armed combat; there is a lot of use of deep rotation in the proximal joints for “full-arm” cuts and wonderful Shaping ( ) that happens when one is executing “around-the-body” cuts, (which travel in Transverse pathways).

## CONCLUSION

After classes were over for the semester and most of the research complete, I ran across a quote from Irmgard Bartenieff in *Coping with the Environment*: “There is a Kendo saying about the basic attitude toward fighting that can also be described by Labanalysis vocabulary: ‘Eyes first [Attention], Footwork next [Weight transference], Courage third [Time Effort and Spatial Initiation] and Strength fourth [Weight Effort]”. Although she was referring to the martial arts, this simple quote justified my work on this project as I made some of the same general discoveries.

Initially I felt as if I had to expose every little gem that LMA/BF held for teaching and analyzing rapier stage combat. This was not feasible of course as the potential for discoveries is infinite. In terms of safety, authenticity, and believability, there is no doubt that applying LMA/BF allows students to become familiar with a broader range of physical choices and experiences because awareness and Function of the physical instrument enhances Expression. My final certification project proves that after applying various elements of LMA/BF, rapier stage combat has the potential to be safer while active in thought, active in energy and active in intention. From exposure to this material, actor combatants can learn how to bring an enlarged sense of his entire person to the theatre and into the world in general.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

A big thank you to Arkansas State University's Department of Theatre and my wonderful students: Aleigha Morton, Lauren Emerson, Ben Griffin, Josue Pollnow, Ashlea Armstrong, Michael Trevino, Meredith Hendrix, James Kaut, and Amy Penny. Your participation, dedication, and hard work over the course of the semester and with this project are greatly appreciated. Your energy, thoughts, frustrations, and candid comments are always welcomed .

Thank you to my wonderful husband, Rob Alley, who supported my initial decision to start this program and who continues to encourage my growth as an artist and person. Also, thank you to my daughter, Evy Alley, for being a good girl while mommy was away for weeks at a time.

And lastly, thanks to the wonderful faculty and staff at LIMS. You have all enriched my life in your own unique way.