

**Barbara Mettler: Germany, Life Before And In, 1933.  
Interview, date and interviewer unknown.**

BM: I was united to Allan in life and work and in New York when we started he helped me very very much with my work. And then of course up in New Hampshire when we moved the school up there. And I was determined to be a good partner. I was determined to be a good wife. I just felt that I had everything to learn in that direction and that I wanted to do what was right. This perhaps accounts for some of my feeling that I stick with him and don't care what his past was. Now the fears that he experienced of course, or the enemies that he had of course, were mine too, and I wanted to share the difficulties. It was not in my nature to conceal the truth. It was not in my nature to deceive. As our life together went on I was drawn into a web of total deception as to the nature of his life, and work, and situation and past and present and future, which was very, very difficult for me for two reasons. Or perhaps it's all the same reason. I was a child of America, naïve as Americans can be – as Americans could be at that time and can still be – A midwesterner, right at the heart of the country with unsophisticated lifestyles and simplicity where everybody knew everybody and everybody knew what everybody else did. And we never concealed anything, I know there were terrible prejudices, I know there were anti-Catholic prejudices and there were anti-Semitic prejudices although we didn't have any Jews in our community so it didn't have a chance to express itself. But still it was a very simple thing.

Now here comes Allan out of a very, very sophisticated, overripe culture with this political, tremendous political maturity, really, is the only word for it. And me - here was I, trying to share these things. I- oh, I think I neglected to say the one thing about why I was so, why it was so hard for me to live a life of deceit, which it really was. Partly it was this simple Midwestern experience. Perhaps even more than nature, although my nature is a rather simple one and I feel myself much happier when I am wholly able to say what I feel and say what I believe and what to me is true. The other thing that I think needs mentioning is not so much me personally as the atmosphere of America and the atmosphere of Europe. I know that my first contact with the continent of Europe was a revelation to me and certain kinds of maturity--political maturity. I mean everyone in Germany at that time knew what was going on in politics, and even though they might not be very interested, as I said we weren't very interested as dancers when Hitler was made chancellor but still we knew what was going on, everybody read the papers. And everybody had a political affiliation in one way or another. An overripeness, sophistication in many ways. I think anyone who writes or talks about Europe can perhaps know what I am talking about.

So here's Allan, a sophisticated, in some ways very mature, European city man, and here was I, a little country girl from the Midwest. Now in this country we don't hesitate to say, "What do you do? What does your husband do? How many children [have] you got?" Etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. In Allan's world you didn't do that, because the past was too complex. And half the time - he wasn't the only one who was trying to conceal, I mean there were many many Germans in the country at this time. And I became so sensitive that anyone who said to me, "What does your husband do?" I would just think they were the most inconsiderate, rudest, most dreadful person in the world because you didn't say that to anybody. And there's something in it, I think to this day when someone comes up and says, "Oh, what does your husband do?" There's something a little crude about it because there are many people in this country, nothing to do with deceit or concealment, but who haven't had a chance to do anything at all. Unemployment, so great, and "What does your husband do?" sort of implies that he has to do something interesting, we're all in the same boat and my husband does something interesting, what's yours doing? So that this was quite an experience for me and I didn't do it very well. I'm a rather poor liar.

And it got to the point where there were two very very serious manifestations of Allan's difficult situation. One was [when] we went to war with Germany, all men of his age were drafted. Well, I don't know what his age was then but I guess it was within the draft age. He put on glasses, probably powdered his hair, who knows, may have even painted wrinkles on his face, went to the draft board in Chicago, said that he'd been born in Chicago and that the records had been lost and that his family had taken him and brought him up in Germany, and that he was five years too old to be drafted and that he was an American citizen. Well, he was an American citizen, he was born in this country, an American citizen, brought up in Germany, and was too old for the draft.

Well, it was a scary time, a very scary time. This was after our fire in New Hampshire, I just remembered. I was confusing the two. The fire, the burning down of our farm studio and home in New Hampshire was a tragedy for Allan. We had left New York City to be out in the country. We had found a farm that we could afford way up in the mountains in New Hampshire and had settled in there, during the war - well this was just before the war, this was 1940, the war was declared I guess a year later. Settled down in this beautiful 85 acres in this enormous farm and a beautiful little house and had taken three dancers and a musician up with us for the winter from NYC to remodel it and get it ready for summer schools there. And we did spend a whole winter building and making two studios in the barn and getting everything ready, putting plumbing in.

And then in April the barn burned down. And like I said, everybody really – that was a tragedy from many angles. He'd never had a home, never had a place, he'd never been in the country I guess, never lived in the country and it was his home. And he was one happy man, it was a great great thing for him. I remember when the barn was in ashes he said to me, "I can't start over again." Which of course he did eventually. But there was also that fire. We'd been in New Hampshire for almost a year and rather naively had just moved in without getting to know the neighbors and hadn't had much contact with them and didn't have any time. The barn burned down and we found they considered us German spies. Allan's name, Hammer, my name, Mettler – Mettler sounds like Hitler – and Allan... Allan didn't have much of an accent then but he had lots of his German friends coming up helping to remodel the place, and the Germans and the German names like Hoffman. At the same time, and this is the odd thing about narrow-minded people, we had – all our dancers and the musicians were all Jews. So after the barn burned down we tried to go back to very very small amount of insurance which we had taken from the previous owner, the insurance agent went around and turned up these gruesome, gruesome stories. You don't need to know – just hair-raising stories of Allan, who was often writing for a New York newspaper in his little study. Didn't want anybody to clean, for fear that they would mess around with the papers. So our neighbor – well, she wasn't really our neighbor, but somebody who came in to clean passed the word around that he had a short-wave radio there that was probably transmitting messages to the enemy because he wouldn't let anybody in there.

Interviewer: That wasn't Marian?

BM: No no, not Marian at all, this was somebody before Marian. This was someone who actually came down and called me up. On Christmas – at Christmas time, I guess I was out of town for something for a short while and the whole crew, including some of the carpenters and masons that were Allan's friends that were helping him out with the place hooked wire all the way up to the steeple of the barn. It was a huge barn, it had a basement, it had one, two, three floors I think, huge barn. I think I was only downtown, when I got back from town that was put up and of course that turned out to be a signal to the enemy. And interestingly enough we were both a signal to the enemy – Germans, Hitler, but at the same time we were a Jew camp. In other words, everything bad that could have been said about us during WWII was said, and it all came out in a rush. And I think it broke Allan's heart. This man was trying to be American. And not only the horror of being deported by the United States government, because he was an illegal entry, but something of the good life that he could have there on the farm – so that was a scary, a very very scary time too.

And in all this I was trying not to tell the truth. And I guess I didn't, and it alienated me from everybody including my own family. Naturally they used to ask questions about him, and they cared for him. And he would go out there and we would all be out there together, and he would lie and I would lie and everybody would lie and it was a misery. Now he was more used to it than I was as a communist, but it was a hard, hard thing.

Interviewer: Barbara, at this point I want to interrupt to say just one thing. Now, I've noted that you've said very recently everyone knew what was going on, the newspapers were available, everyone read the newspapers, there were troops in the street and so forth. Earlier, if I remember correctly, it seemed that you were saying something about the naivete of the German people, almost saying well no one really knew what was going on. I know you said at the dance studio there was great naivete, but it seems to me you said something about the German people being almost non-political at this point. I probably misunderstood it but you might want to clear that up.

BM: Yes, it's just in my expression of it because we were speaking of Germany, of course. And speaking of Allan, and referring that to Germany and everyone having their political party and knowing who was Chancellor and how the Chancellor was being changed all that represented a political maturity which we certainly don't have over here. In fact, the whole political structure of Europe is so much older and so much riper that I think someone else would be able to explain that a little better than I.

But when I first went over there, that feeling of, goodness gracious, what a lot of political activity, everybody belongs to some political party, or many, incidentally. Not just two or three like ours. And this is a part of life over here which I had never known before I went to that country, never. That was what I meant by the political activity and maturity I think is the only word - maturity of the culture. Now it could go over ripe, there could be too much maturity, which I think we sense there too.

Now what I was talking about much farther back when I was talking about my experience in Germany, I guess, was - there are three elements here, this is related, I'm sure - during the 1930s, when I was over there, I was over there 1931, 1932, 1933, there was tremendous political upheaval, political animosities, there were battles in the streets. The communists were a mass movement and the socialists were mass movements and they were killing each other off in the woods every night. They would march in the streets. I could sing to you the national socialist anthem. I heard it every day. This was part of life, as I said the chancellors were being turned over every day. You had to read those newspapers carefully. And every few days there'd be a new chancellor and the government was

overturned. Well everybody knew that. And people knew that, and people had their favorites. Hindenberg I remember was one of the chancellors [president], then one day Hitler was made chancellor. Well those among my connections who knew him thought he was a joke! They thought he was a joke and would be out of the chancellorship in a few days. Well he wasn't. And he moved in, and obviously he was going to stay, and those of us who were in the school, mostly younger people who I knew, didn't know what to make of it. They – I think there's a difference between being politically knowledgeable and politically active. Now the artists were not politically active. They knew what was going on and they thought that it was a joke. But it never occurred to them that it would last or that something should be done about it. And we went on with our dancing. Well, in a very short time we couldn't go on with our dancing, as we could have done. Now does this answer the question?

Interviewer: Yes, and if you'd go on about the school-

BM: I'd like to talk just a little bit about my experience in Germany. I had found it quite by accident, I suppose I may not even know how I got there. I had gotten out of college and as I have said perhaps earlier my high school years and my college years were a disaster. I was not in any – I was not in my field and consequently was a fish out of water floundering around trying to do what other people did and not knowing how, not being able to. I had hoped – the field of dance was not a field and I knew nothing about it and had never had any dance lessons. I had had a lot of music so I thought when I went to college I would like to be a music major. And they didn't take me, they accepted only some majors and they didn't accept me. And my first music courses were so filled with rules and so little music, it was rules and writing chords and so forth, and I said that wasn't for me. I intended to go to music school when I got out of college, but by the time I got out of college I was one confused mess, and the one thing I didn't want to do was to do any more studying, I wanted to get out in the world.

And it was 1928 when jobs were for the asking, money was all over the place, and I walked in to a job on an advertising magazine at the Marshall company. I barely had any money, living at home, and this was just before the depression, before the big bust, and I learned a lot about business. I commuted to NYC – I mean I commuted to Chicago, which is a story in itself, I'd better not get lost in it. I just brought it up because during that period my first dance experiences, my first moving dance experiences came – no, I'll have to go farther back than that. My first dance experience of any meaning was in elementary school when we had a lovely teacher from the University of Wisconsin, and we trampled out grapes and we had simple costumes and we danced to romantic music and I thought it was the greatest. And there were only a few of us who did, and we

were really on measure and our classmates called it pretty. In fact, one of my high school classmates came out here for a winter visit to Tuscon with me and said, "Barb, are you still flitting?" And that was – so that, I was kind of a freak then.

And then I got to college, I'm sure you've heard me tell this, it better be on tape. I got to college, they were just starting some sort of dance program and I thought it would be great. So I started, I got in to it and I kind of liked the exercises and things we had in class and they had a program and they put me in a green frog costume and had me jump around under a tree to Tchaikovsky music and I was absolutely humiliated. And I thought if that is dance, it's not for me, it was my freshman year so I got out of dance. So you can see why I was a mess in college.

Okay, so here I am out of college, first year out of college in Chicago, commuting 25 miles and having a wonderful experience, growing up in the business world. And the Isadora Duncan dancers came to town, Irma Duncan's group, and a dear old man, who knew I loved music and loved the arts took me to see the Irma Duncan dancers. And I, well the balls fell down, I said that's for me, let me go to Moscow tomorrow, they have a school in Moscow, I gotta go. I mean that's all I want, nothing else, everything else is nothing. He said, "You have to start, if you are going to dance, you have to start when you are nine years old and you are now 22." So that door closed with great bitterness.

A year or so later I saw Harold Kreutzberg and Yvonne Georgi from the [?] School, from central Europe, come over here, and I went to see them. And another bombshell. The young man I was with and I literally ran around – I led the way – the whole of a Chicago block in ecstasy, and it was an ecstatic experience. But I'd been told I had to be 9 years old and I wasn't, so that was the end of that.

Here I was at the Marshall Company with a very successful young group of editors who arranged their six edition magazine, six editions a year, so they could go to Europe every spring. So they packed me under their arm and marched me off to Europe. I'd never been on the continent before. Marched me off to Paris and all. But in that group was in fact all the staff, was a good friend of mine who was very interested in all the arts, especially ballet dancing. And she wanted to visit all the dance schools that she could. So we went around visiting dance schools, visiting dance schools, and they were always boring to me. And I didn't get much out of them, I guess they were ballet schools or something.

And then we visited the Wigman school in Berlin. And I guess she wasn't too interested in that, but I said I am not too old to do this! And if I could just come back for one year I could go on

living. So I went back and had a very difficult time rearranging things and getting the money to go there for one year. And I went back to the Wigman school and stayed two and a half years. And that was – I was there I guess probably about the spring of 1931 to June, early spring, probably March, 1931, something like that to June 1933.

It really wasn't much more than two years, and they put me through the three year course, I don't remember if I mentioned that or not, I guess I didn't. They put me through the three year courses and said I had some facility, just some plain facility. I had no ripeness as an artist, I had no idea what I was doing. Not anything, but I adored it and I was thrilled and the happiest and the most inspired thing. But they pushed me in to the second course before I was anywhere near ready, they gave me all sorts of responsibilities, they had me playing percussion instruments for radio programs and trying to come in on the right word when I didn't yet understand German, they had me accompany children's classes on the piano, I can't play the piano. They had me teaching Elizabeth Wigman's class, I didn't know anything about anything.

So that I showed some facility, and I certainly adored it, all those experiences were quite hard for me and eventually they graduated me, realizing that they thought I was farther ahead than I was. Our graduation class – our graduation lasted months. We had to have, we had to create dances for ourselves and for groups and teach classes and all sorts of things. And when they finally graduated me, rather reluctantly, they said, "We thought you were farther along than you are."

Now, I was there at a very crucial time and I am so thankful for it. I think the combination of my artistic means and what I was given in Germany was about the most favorable advantage that a person can possibly have. Again, nourishment, nourishment, nourishment for my artistic needs. And I was there, as I said I guess I've given the dates already, and this was a time when Germany – it was coming near the end of probably the most creatively fruitful time that Germany has ever had. As a result of the first World War material values were swept away, people were back to the natural. The minute material values are swept away, the creative forces within the human being are called upon to create experiences of value on a more immaterial basis. And this was the time of the Bauhaus, the visual arts, settled in the Bauhaus, it was the time of many, many, many –

(Interruption in tape)

BM: I think our country is beginning to realize this and I think there are some things that are being written about it, this fruitful time. There were many, many explorations in all the arts,

the visual arts, painting, music, drama, and of course, dance. I don't remember – it's just too bad, if I could just name a few of the musicians, a few of the painters, and few of dramatists, the names would be so well-known, and any historian could of course look them up.

Now the most important thing, I think I've already touched on in this tape although it may have been earlier, was what I've just said. The sweeping away of all the conventions and material things and the rigidity, rigid structures, and what you'd call over here the establishment, I guess. So that all sorts of real, true, fresh impulses could come right up from the earth and right up from the people. Now, I went to the Wigman school, but there should not be too much emphasis put in my life on Mary Wigman. The Wigman school, Mary Wigman herself, was only the flower of a very broad and deep democratic movement in the arts and in dance. As people all over in recreational groups, in the schools, in amateur groups, and rhythmic gymnastic groups, and expressive gymnastic groups were getting away from all the regimentation of rigid gymnastics and one, two, three, four! And discovering expression, expression in movement.

So quite naturally out of this grew these dance schools, and these dancers I think of the name of course [?] I think of course before Mary Wigman, were the experimenters of Rudolph Laban and of course the musician [?], that was his time. Oh, I could just go through my books, when I get them I'm going to get my books up in a cabinet here eventually and I will be able to refer you to the very definite names that were connected with this period. And to be there at that time, and to be in a school – it was one of many schools, of course Mary Wigman was the supreme representative in dance of this. She had schools all over Germany and her school was supported by the social democratic government and her students – she had a group, in fact when I was over there studying, she came over here with her group. I really was taught relatively little by her, more by her sister, Elizabeth, and the other teachers who went to school. The school was in Dresden, and I was really a part of this democratic art activity that was characteristic of Germany in those ages which we have never reached here, not by a long shot.

The interesting thing, I don't know, there's so many things I want to talk about. I want to talk about Dresden, but I want to talk about this country's approach to Germany at that time. Dresden – this was kind of at the end of the period. Germany had suffered excruciatingly during the first World War, had been beaten, had been humiliated, had been torn apart and had suffered excruciatingly. It had never been able to recover. And this was the end of the period in which they were coming to the end of the road. I was in Dresden, and I'd been in communities where many people were poor but I'd never been in a city where everybody was poor. A



whole city where nobody had enough to eat. The students would eat one meal a day and try to put everything in to that. I remember, as I think I said to you before, one egg was the greatest luxury, the greatest luxury. We'd buy little, tiny portions of coffee at huge prices and I, with only enough money to last for one year and staying for two and a half years, more than two years, was considered a millionaire. And I had a really hard time because I saw people suffering so terribly and I did try to share, and I did try to help so that I myself pretty much put myself in this position. I remember I used to dance furiously all day and I would have for lunch one small yogurt and one, just a little tiny piece of plum cake which I would get down at a milk store. I became very, very, very thin. In fact I remember the students looking at me, of course we would all change clothes in the dressing room, "Barbara, you look like a chicken!" And I guess my breastbone did. But everybody was suffering.

It was also a very neurotic time. These were the war babies who had grown up during the first World War, there was neuroticism all over the place, just the very kind. There were many different countries there, there were Romanians and Poles and I suppose a few French and a few English and a few Americans, not many, a few, so it was a very moving and impressive time to be there, a very historical time to be there. And we all danced furiously and we all loved it and we all grew and we all learned a lot.

Then came the time, then came — I was in my last year, and in January 1933 Hitler was made Chancellor. As I say that was the time when everybody thought he wouldn't last a day, and by the time he had lasted a few weeks everybody was struggling to figure out what to do. One of my own — in the Wigman school, my business manager, he said "Oh, I hated it, hated Hitler, hated the Nazis," I mean you either were a Nazi or a communist or a social democrat or something, and you knew what you were. We thought, well, there's nothing to do, he's making headway, we can't stop him. We better join the Nazi party to bore from within. That's what I mean about confusion and not knowing what to do. In the first place, we're artists, we don't have anything to do with this, next place, it's like a steamroller over us, what do we do, we can't stop it, maybe we can get with it? But never, never with the acceptance of Hitler. Hitler's a — oh, I've heard Hitler speak. A mad man! I used to stand up on the Dresden row which looked way way down on a meadow by a river and thousands and thousands and thousands of people listening to him speak. And his picture in lights over them and the loudspeaker and his screaming, screaming, and whenever you see in television caricatures of Hitler, I mean they're almost real. Screaming, screaming.

And yet I have many interesting living experiences there. I would rent a little room in a home and I talked with people and

different kinds of people. I remember the first people I lived with, the man, a young man with a wife and a family, said, "Hitler, he wants to do something for Germany. Maybe he can." In other words, Germany was flat on its back, I can not stress it enough. It was a humiliated, devastated, broken up country, all the pride gone. Anyone who said "Germany's going to get on its feet again and Germany's going to be for Germans," might have been heard. At the same time I lived with a Seventh Day Adventist family, the most beautiful, beautiful family, quiet, religious, who of course just couldn't understand it and thought it was just inconceivable. So, but this was a huge party growing, and moving in to the school, investigating the school because the school had been supported by the social democrats and anything that they supported was bad in the Nazis' eyes.

And I was dancing, we had sometimes opportunities to dance outside the studio. And I noticed that they – we had, I noticed that they selected – I don't even remember that far back, but it's in my feeling and in my memory that because my name was Mettler and because my hair was not black that it was alright for me to dance in these programs. But I know that my accompanist' name was Sokolova, which was a Romanian name, and that was kept off the program. I also know that I had to cover my midriff because it was bare. Hitler – you see, a woman's role was kinder, kucha... what's it... kuchen... the kitchen, the children, the church [kinder, kuchen, kirke] was a woman's role. And a German woman doesn't smoke. And all that sort of thing, and a German woman I guess doesn't bare her midriff. So I had to cover my midriff.

Well all I can say is it was bewildering and if you had a tunnel vision towards graduating and towards your school, these things are just bewildering. Well I guess I should tell you about the strike that I led. They were bewildering to this extent. I'm afraid I've always been a little bit of a rabble-rouser, and I'm not at all proud of this, not at all. There came a time which was after Hitler had started making his changes when our class teacher, he was a man and I cannot remember his name, we loved him. Suddenly he was removed. We never saw him again. And in his place was this assistant of Mary Wigman. Give it to us, it was a few months before graduation, and our teacher, who had taken us right through that year, was removed without a word to us! And another person who I just disliked intensely was put in his place.

Well we were all mad. The class was furious. Well, you know young people, instead of rounding somebody up, and saying what's going on here, we need to know, tell us, we were just mad! And I led a strike against Mary Wigman. She was giving a class that afternoon and she gave one not very often. And the school used to pour in to her classes and honor her, and I led them out. So there were very few people in that class. And I look back on that with

much chagrin. I have things happening in my own studio where they have no idea what's going on behind the scenes and they put up some sort of a show, you know, not this kind, not so much anymore but there used to be times when things I was doing had to be done. And the student body wouldn't know. And they would just – instead of coming and talking it over and seeing what was going on they would just put on some sort of counter-action.

But this, I look back on, I've even written to Elizabeth Wigman about this because it is dreadful. It turned out later that this man had been removed because he had five different bloods in him, he had some German I guess but he also had Javanese and he also had Dutch and he also had, let's see, Dutch, Javanese, I don't remember, but he had five different bloods in him and the Nazis wanted Germany for Germans. Oh, we had to change the name, a whole new set of themes for graduation dances, all having to do with Germany. But it happened so fast and we were so weak in it that nobody could foresee, not anybody could foresee what was ahead. It's easy enough to look backward but you can't see what's ahead.

So I had those two experiences – you see, I was in Germany when the Reichstag was burned. And I knew the confusion, who burned it? The Nazis said the communists burned it. I got back here and Allan instructed me in everything, and it was the Nazis who set it to frame the communists. This was the sort of thing that Allan knew and could throw complete light on everything that I had experienced, with a more, riper, political viewpoint. And then I got back here. I think that's perhaps all I can think of right now about Germany. I was very Germanized and very sad to leave. I cried and cried and cried on the train to [city?] that night, I remember. And I got back over here.

Interviewer: But I believe you told me, Barbara, that the studio was taken away from Mary Wigman

BM: Later. Much later. The war came, and there was not much contact, I tried to keep in touch with Elizabeth Wigman and Mary too, and tried to settle things when things got very very bad and tried to help. But we couldn't get the facts, now that I think of it. We couldn't get the facts, the facts were not coming truly across the ocean. And I learned later that Mary Wigman's school had been taken away from her by this assistant, [name?], whom I said we didn't like, was put over us, and her husband, Hans Hoffstein, Mary Wigman's accompanist, they had both joined the communist party. They had been her assistants for years and years and years. They had come over to this country twice with her, they had taught classes, and she was driven out. And I know that she just, as I spoke to you and John, she was terribly criticized for not leaving Germany. But all I can say is, do you just up and leave your country when things get bad? That is a big question in my mind.

Hitler was just the opposite of everything that the school and the whole social democratic government and everything – it was a turnabout of the most dreadful order, and we have horrible things going on in this country, perhaps more dominant than is even known, and we don't all just up and leave.

So, in fact, she didn't leave. Her sister did. Her sister went to East Germany. She went to a town which was later annexed to Russia as East Germany and she couldn't stand that, and escaped by taking an airplane to see her sister and never coming back. I don't have the facts we can get so easily in some of these books, but I have a wonderful little magazine that tells a little bit about this time which I'll try to find. We don't – I don't know much about it but it certainly was a miserable, miserable, miserable time. And some dancers became Nazis! Others like Mary Wigman just rattled and tried to figure out what to do.

Interviewer: And yet this is to me a very puzzling phenomenon that – when Germany was in such a ferment of creativity you said material emphasis was at its lowest, people had to turn to non-material – creative resources, any celebration of life had to be not in terms of material things but rather in terms of art, creativity, people got all into nature. I think there were groups of young people who camped and there was just an attention to the body and care for health including health foods. And I think the point that I wanted to make was you said earlier in conversation that this was not a little cultish sort of thing which different groups took up as you feel occurs in this country, but rather that it was a general cultural phenomenon and that the mass of people, apart from very conservative people, tended to be swept up in this more non-material culture and ferment.

BM: I'm probably exaggerating that, very conscious of our country now. Everybody looking down on these young people wanting nature foods and nature healing and all that sort of thing, as kind of queer. And the young people themselves may be approaching it rather superficially or faddishly. Now I think I'm wrong saying it was the whole culture, if it wasn't for the whole national socialist party, more naturalistic parties would have been developing and the whole country would have been that way. But as I say, the most liberal schools were of movement and were supported by the social democratic government, you see we had a social democratic government who supported these things. Meantime, communists were – I mean the national socialists were coming up as opposition so I guess that all these forces are at work all the time. It just seemed so natural and so all around there whereas here it seems very, very, very, culty and looked down upon by the general culture. It's like a subculture. I never felt that there. And it wasn't just because I was in the arts.

Interviewer: But the Nazis did pick up on the whole health movement, the whole outdoor movement, and then some of them got what was already going on so that we were able to pick up a wave of sentiments like, yes this is good, and now we'll show you what to do with it politically and it'll go to Germany's greater good.

BM: Absolutely right, that is exactly it. In fact, Allan gave me a book which expresses it so well. I learned a lot from it because it had a lot of movements in it which were good but it always veered toward, as you said, toward Germany. Yes, yes of course.

(Interruption in tape)

BM: I think that it would be important to get a feeling now of what was going on in this country when I came back from Germany. And how I fit it in to the picture. This was in 1933 in the depths of the depression, in fact with Franklin Roosevelt as president. Now, I settled down in New York because I knew that that's where the American dance was and I felt quite alienated. I had been so living in Germany and really not paying attention to what was going on over here. Although I very well knew about the depression because there were some financial problems, I was supposed to get some money from this country and the banks, they wouldn't accept anything from this country because the depression had closed everything down. So I thought I'd better see what was going on in the depression – excuse me, going on in New York City.

So I sniffed around in some of the other studios, some of the major studios, Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, those two particular names which were the best known. And for me it was very flat and very uninteresting after what I'd had, so I didn't stay. And I eventually ended up opening my own studio.

Now the important thing I wanted to say about this was what the depression did to the arts. Same situation exactly that I was speaking about in Germany. Material things had been swept away, you couldn't buy it, you couldn't buy anything! You couldn't pay to see a dance performance, you couldn't pay to get a dance lesson. So everybody who sat through the same situation said was, you're going to do nothing anyway.

Recreational dance groups started, people walked out of the studios to form their own groups. The dancers couldn't buy costumes, couldn't even pay for half of the trimmings that they wanted, so they wore simple clothes, got back to basic fundamentals, and everybody was experimenting. Experimenting wildly in every possible direction. And it was perfectly natural, of course there were also social movements developing, workers, the workers dance league, and then the New School for Social Research was opening up, and of course Franklin Roosevelt was trying to help

the artists – I can't really remember, there was a WPA, Works Progress Administration, there was a, oh, I can't remember, there was an administration which paid artists to study and to teach and to do all sorts of things. It was an extremely lively time.

And I was full of dance and wanting to get out and collecting people around me, and I started in a rented studio, 66 5<sup>th</sup> avenue which is where my dance studio was for a long time, and then I finally found a tiny place, maybe about two or three times the size of this room, tiny place, on 3<sup>rd</sup> street with the elevator going past the window, that and Washington Square, and that was my first studio of my own and was I proud of that! It had a tiny balcony and a bed upstairs and all this space for dancing. Oh, I didn't have many students! But I did have some. And I was there for a while.

But meantime – I'm really jumping over, when I was in my rented studio, I lived on Bank Street, and that as I said is where Allan used to read Karl Marx to me all night and we discussed and talked and talked and talked about all sorts of things. Now he was – it was greatly therapeutic, there was a great deal of therapy going on as it always does when you're concerned with expression and all that sort of thing. And Allan was always very much interested in helping people and in movement as therapy and it helped me very very much to get my feet on the ground in this direction. I had just been a dancer dancing, and I just wanted to dance, and I think it was very much Allan's influence that made me take more interest in the handicapped and in the health – two aspects of dance.

Now, there came a time then, the thing that I wanted to say, well let me just see, I want to get all these facts in good order. I felt that I very much needed a better studio than my own so I went around town trying to find one and no one would take me because I told them frankly that we used drums. And this was LaGuardia's time and his anti-noise campaign, we were supposed to keep as much noise pollution as possible out of the city. Nobody wanted me, so I finally went to Carnegie Hall and they put me up in a rickety old building behind them on 56<sup>th</sup> Street which they owned and there I had a studio with a little room in it for living, and the kitchen, it was a place to live and do work. Do you want that turned off? If you do I'll turn it off.

(Tape ends)

Hampshire College Archives

MG7: Barbara Mettler Archive, Carton #22, Tape 2