

**Barbara Mettler,
Relation to Isadora Duncan. 1976.**

This is Barbara Mettler speaking. I'm at the Tucson Creative Dance Center. It's March 10th, 1976. The question has been asked of me, "Has my work been influenced by Isadora Duncan?" The answer is yes. I knew nothing of her when, as a child, I loved to dance freely to my father's piano music. But later, when I saw Irma Duncan's group dance, and when I read Isadora's book, "The Art of the Dance", I felt more deeply moved than I had ever been moved before. I have always loved to dance and I felt dance to be a natural, basic human expression.

My entire professional life has been devoted to discovering ways of making dance as a creative art activity available to all people. Like Isadora Duncan, I have seen America dancing. And I have felt that those who do not dance are deprived. My studio is a kind of laboratory to try out all different ways of teaching dance so that anyone at all who wanted to do it could.

My only studying of dance was done in pre-Hitler Germany at the Mary Wigman Institute in Dresden. I was there for two and a half years and received a diploma in June 1933. When I came back to this country, I was dissatisfied with the dancing that I found here because of the extreme emphasis on technique. At the Wigman School we had been given a very creative experience. Like Isadora Duncan, I love music and feel it deeply. But I have never used it for background for dance, nor have I derived dance from it. To me, dance is the pure art of body movement. Movement is its substance. But because movement is audible, we must consider sound and the art of sound, music, as a part of our dancing. Of course movement is also visible, and so the visual design is important. Music is action, and so the dramatic element is a part of it. But I want to speak here about the musical implications of my work. I was known in New York as the dancer who hated music because I took away all music from our movement in order to study the pure movement of dancing. Gradually, out of our pure movement came studies in sound and movement and we made our own music, as well as making our own movements. Rather than using music as background to dance, I wanted our movement to be musical. I wanted our movement to sing.

Another tie with Isadora is my belief that improvisation is the most creative approach to dance. At the Wigman School we had done improvisation, so when I started to dance on my own I used it but usually as a preparation for composition. And there came a time when I began to experiment with group improvisation, and from that time on this has been my main work: to find movement themes and dance themes for individual and group improvisation. Today, large group

improvisation is my greatest interest. After six years in New York I established a summer school in New Hampshire and during the winter I went about the country experimenting with all different kinds of groups. After thirteen years in New Hampshire, I was in Boston for six years and then came out to Tucson, Arizona where I built the Tuscon Creative Dance Center. I have always danced with my groups but I have never been much interested in solo dancing. I would rather dance with people than for people.

Throughout the years I have talked and shown my work in twenty-seven states and in Canada. I have had invitations to teach overseas which I have not been able to accept. At the Tuscon Creative Dance Center, my classes attract students from all over the country. In fact we do not have nearly enough room for all who want to come. I have published 8 books and produced 5 films, all of which are used very widely in this country and abroad. Many of the aspects of my work which I have always stressed but which were at one time opposed by other dancers and the laymen are now becoming quite popular: free, creative movement expression, stressing individuality, stressing group work, improvisation, audience participation. We have always had our audiences take part as much as they could in our demonstration programs. My work is the study and practice of the art of body movement. Of course it has many byproducts which are desirable today. It's recreation, it's therapy, it's education. We have many school teachers studying with me here and the University of Arizona college of education gives credit for any course which I give. The future of my work will be a continuation of what I have always done, hopefully on an ever-ripening level. I hope to be able to show in the near future some of the beauty of large, group dance improvisation. Of course, I could talk forever about my work, but that's all I'll have time to say today.

Hampshire College Archives

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