

TEN ARTICLES ON DANCE



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THE ART OF BODY MOVEMENT

by Barbara Mettler

INTRODUCTION

The Movement Basis of Life

We live in a world of movement. Like a fluid within and around us, receiving and transmitting our impulses, uniting us with each other and with the whole of the physical world, movement is the medium through which we experience and express life.

Being so much a part of our existence, it is taken for granted like the air we breathe. Only when it is denied us do we become aware of its importance. Try to sit perfectly motionless for the next few minutes without moving a single muscle of your body. It is impossible. With great effort you may be able to control your arms and legs and maybe even your eyelids and nostrils, but you cannot stop your breathing or your heartbeat or the muscular contractions of your stomach. Whether you are waking or sleeping, these and other vital processes continue, carrying you along the stream of motion which is life. Complete motionlessness would be an indication of death.

Our body movements determine our patterns of living. Work, play, combat, study, worship, love and all our activities are characterized by distinguishing movement patterns. It is not necessary to hear what two persons are saying to tell by their movements that they are having an argument, telling funny stories, doing some form of work, playing a game, or making love.

Any restriction of mobility is a handicap to a living body. So is the impairment of any sensory function which limits capacity for perceiving movement in the world around.

Like ourselves, the world around us seems to be perpetually in motion. As far as we can see through the telescope, whole universes are hurtling through space at tremendous velocities, while at the other end of the cosmic scale the microscope reveals an endless realm of invisible motion. Even the apparently substantial matter of which such objects as tables and chairs are made consists actually of electrons whirling about their nuclei in movements as phenomenal as those of our solar system.

All that we know about the outer world comes to us in the form of movement. The experience of touch is the perception of movements of our skin caused by direct contact with some movement of our environment. Sound is the brain's interpretation of the movement of our ear drum in response to a particular kind of air movement called a sound wave. Sight is an image on the retina of the eye projected by the molecular movements of light and focused by movements of the accommodation eye muscle. Similarly all sensory experiences depend on both a movement of the en-

vironment and a movement of the sensory organ.

Movements of our environment are experienced in terms of the movements of our own bodies. Things which we touch, hear, see, or otherwise sense recall movements which we have made, or imagined making, in relation to them. A piece of satin feels smooth to the touch if our fingers slip easily over its surface. A sound is heard as high-pitched or low according to the tension in our own vocal cords required to produce a similar sound. An object is seen as distant or near depending on the movement we should have to make to cover the distance between it and ourselves.

Movements of our environment, perceived through our senses, are transformed into movement responses. In response to a sound, our throats may tighten and our entire bearing undergo a corresponding change. A particular sight may cause us to assume a certain posture or make some movement toward or away from the thing seen.

All that we sense becomes a part of us and shapes us according to the movements we make in response to the things sensed. Thus the form of a living being develops according to its functions.

Our body movements determine our body structure. Because human beings walk upright we have certain characteristic curves of the spine and a particular formation of foot and hand. These attributes have evolved slowly through countless generations but even in a single life-time we can see the effects of function on structure. An occupation which requires a perpetually distorted body position such as a rounded back or a one-sided body bend will cause a curvature of the spine. Although such a deformity may be corrected in early life, if it is permitted to remain it will become fixed and unchangeable.

Like the body, personality is a functional growth which develops according to its movement experiences. The shape of a personality is determined by all the movement responses made by a person during his life-time.

The Sense of Movement

Our capacity for movement is dependent on the movement sense. Probably because it functions so unobtrusively in connection with everything we do, the movement sense has been less studied and less consciously cultivated than any of our other senses. It is, however, the most indispensable part of our sensory equipment. It may be possible to continue to live while totally blind or totally deaf but the total loss of the movement sense would be incompatible with life. Whereas other senses inform us of events which occur in the world around us, the sense of movement informs us of events which occur within ourselves. It is that faculty which coordinates the various parts of our bodies and enables us to function as an organized unit.

Awareness of movement is based on sensations arising in special sensory nerve endings located throughout the motor apparatus and in the organs of equilibrium in the inner ear. Movement sensations originating in the muscles, tendons, ligaments, joints, bones, cartilage and other tissues are called kinesthetic. Those originating in the inner ear are known as labyrinthine after the bony chamber, the labyrinth, which encloses them. Kinesthetic and labyrinthine sensations form the basis of our sense of movement. No sense, however, functions in isolation. There is a close interaction among the senses, and every type of sensation contributes to our awareness of movement.

The sense of touch is particularly closely associated with the movement sense. It is like the outer aspect of kinesthesia, the former recording pressure from without, the latter recording pressure from within the body. Among simpler animal forms all sensation seems to be united in a single sense which combines the functions of movement and touch and to which reactions to mechanical, chemical, photic and even acoustic stimuli are identical.

All senses appear to be outgrowths of the combined sense of movement and touch. The impact of sound waves against the ear drum, the stimulation of the retina by waves of light, and bombardment of the taste buds and olfactory areas by chemical agents causing taste and smell may be considered finely differentiated tactile-motor sensations. Because of this relationship, all senses contribute to our awareness of movement. Vision is helpful in maintaining equilibrium as we can easily demonstrate by trying to keep our balance with our eyes closed. Hearing can also help us establish our position in space and the direction of our movement. Even smelling can further perception of movement although human beings are less developed in this respect than some of the lower animals.

Movement is an integrating factor among the senses. It can be a good starting point for a program of sensory education.

The movement sense, like all other senses, can be trained. Everyone has a sense of movement, though in some persons it may be particularly acute or dull. Those who have a naturally keen sense of movement may be able to cultivate it on a high aesthetic level. For those in whom it is naturally dull, it is of the utmost importance that, through training, it be sharpened for the sake of efficiency and well-being in daily life.

The question need scarcely be raised here as to what extent a naturally dull faculty can be sharpened. Education assumes that all of us have far to go before reaching the limit of our natural abilities. A seemingly dull sense may be found surprisingly keen after a period of proper training and exercise.

Movement Expression

Movement is our primary medium of expression, upon which all

other means depend. Speaking, writing, singing, drawing, painting, using any tool or instrument, building, all begin with a movement impulse which is then transformed into word, tone, line, color or some other material. In every other medium our inner experience is externalized in some material apart from ourselves. In movement expression, we ourselves are the material. Material, instrument and idea are one in the expressively moving body.

Movement expression is understood when all other means fail. Words are often inadequate to communicate the power of an emotion, in which case we may wave our arms or pound on the table to make ourselves understood. Shades of meaning are much more clearly expressed through facial expression and posture than through the most carefully chosen words. A movement can sometimes bely the meaning of speech, showing insincerity or hypocrisy on the part of the speaker.

Movement reveals personality. A person's movements are characteristic of the personality as a whole, and qualities expressed in movement can indicate qualities of personality. Everyone has an individual way of moving: hurriedly or deliberately, smoothly or jerkily, expansively or narrowly, forcefully or with reserve; according to body structure and temperament in relation to environmental influence. The same qualities permeate every movement which a person makes: his posture, his walk, his hand-writing, his speech patterns. Such traits as boldness or timidity, freedom or restraint, nervousness or calm are easily recognized in a person's movements. Others may be more indirectly expressed according to the complexity of their nature. In cases where normal movement has become distorted through accident or disease, movement expression is no longer expressive of the personality as a whole.

Every movement made in the natural exchange between a human being and his environment becomes a part of the personality. Body movements are accompanied by feelings which may be either the cause or the effect of the movements. Not only do movement habits express personality, they also influence its growth. Habitually loose, undisciplined, careless movements can lead to a careless attitude toward life in mental as well as physical activities. Tense, cramped, limited movement habits can lead to repressions and nervousness. Because of this reciprocal interaction between body movement and personality, it would seem important to give attention to the conscious shaping of our movement experiences.

Movement Education

The need for conscious cultivation of movement experience and expression is particularly urgent at the present time. There has never been an age in which movement was so dominant a factor in daily life as it is now, or when living conditions required finer motor adjustments on the part of each individual. Every day new tools and machines are invented

which require the development of new work movements. At the same time new means of transportation move us from place to place at faster and faster velocities. Unless these conditions are met by a well-developed movement sense which enables us to adjust our own movement impulses to the movements of our environment, there will be a serious strain on the nervous system.

In spite of its importance, the movement sense is the most neglected of all our senses today. Although every effort is made to educate the ear and the eye and to raise such forms of expression as speaking and writing to the highest possible cultural level, our movement expression is left to develop entirely by chance. It is therefore very crude. It has been said that if movement patterns could be translated into speech patterns, the typical movement expression of our contemporary society would reveal itself to be on the pre-cultural level of the cave-man's "Ugh!"

One reason for this is man's growing awareness of himself and his unique place in the animal world. Civilization has brought about a concentration on those attributes which are distinctively human in contrast to those which human beings share with the lower animals. Intellectual activity and verbal expression have been over-cultivated at the expense of more deeply rooted biological resources.

Another factor which has contributed to the neglect of movement as a medium of expression is the perpetuation of old religious beliefs which tend to suppress all traits suggestive of our animal nature. Another is the rise of commercialism with its tendency to exploit natural inertia by encouraging passive observation rather than active participation in life events. The motion picture, radio and magazine industries offer us unlimited opportunity to observe the life-movements of other persons without giving us equal opportunity to create our own movement experiences. At the same time salons of "body culture" offer development through "passive exercise" (massage and machine manipulation), while the clothing and cosmetic industries teach us how to substitute synthetic for natural bodily expression.

A by-product of commercialism is the exaggeration of the competitive element in sports, a field which would otherwise offer some release for the impulse toward movement expression. Participation in games of physical skill for the joy of movement and the love of play can be a healthy movement training, but over-emphasis of the competitive element negates the expressive motor aspects of the experience as well as its recreational value.

These influences lead to a separation of bodily and mental activities, with an over-specialization in one direction or another. As a result, the personality may suffer a lack of balance and develop neurotic tendencies.

The average person's need for movement expression combined with his lack of discipline in this medium creates a chaotic emotional state

which shows itself in various ways. The explosive outbursts of movement in such forms of dancing as "jitterbug", the forced striving for sensational movement effects on stage and screen, the fanaticism of the sports fan who, without participating in the movement, works himself into a frenzy of excitement over the progress of the game, are all symptoms of a repression of the natural urge to express oneself through movement which, finding no normal outlet, bursts forth in distorted forms.

Education of the movement sense toward the goal of cultivated movement expression can further the balance of personality and counter-act the unhealthy effects of over-specialization. By releasing creative movement impulses and directing them into constructive channels, it can help prevent those individual and group neuroses so prevalent today.

Movement education can begin in the home where enlightened parents may guide the child's first movements as carefully as they guide his first speech-sounds toward the formation of intelligent habits. In school it can become a core subject of the curriculum, establishing a creative sensory-motor basis for all other studies and activities. Every aspect of learning acquires new interest and significance if understood in its relationship to ourselves as living, moving human beings. On the college level, movement expression can become a serious study touching every branch of science and art. It is to be hoped that someday there will be whole colleges devoted to professional study and research in this field.

Until recently the study and practise of movement expression has been subordinate to other fields of activity such as recreation, music, therapeutics. This is reversing the natural relationship. Movement expression is not a sub-division of any field but a field in itself underlying biologically all other fields of activity. Only when it is recognized as such will it attract to itself serious students, research workers and creative teachers who will enable it to make the broad contribution to our cultural development which it is inherently capable of making.

A study of movement expression consists of educating the movement sense in relation to the other senses. It approaches movement as an expression of the whole personality: body, mind and emotions; individual in relation to group; human being in relation to environment. Its material is free body movement, dictated by individual body structure and temperament rather than by specialized techniques of work, sports or dance.

A study of movement expression is based on scientific principles: the healthful use of motor organs in accordance with natural laws. Physical laws of motion, anatomical and physiological laws of the structure and functioning of the human body, psychological laws of behavior must be obeyed if efficient movement is to be achieved. But this is not all. As a medium of expression, movement is governed by aesthetic considerations. Movement is not only a science. It is also an art.

Aesthetic Experience of Movement

Movement experience raised to the aesthetic level is dance.

Aesthetic experience is less remote from the practical aspects of living than most people think. Every daily life experience can have aesthetic value if its expressive qualities bring satisfaction over and above its utilitarian function. Aesthetic movement experience is the enjoyment of the expressive quality of a movement for its own sake. The two aspects of movement, utilitarian and aesthetic, are never entirely separate. They overlap and become completely fused in experience. Every movement fulfills some purpose, although its purpose may be only to express an emotion. At the same time every movement has qualities which are potentially expressive and may become the source of aesthetic experience.

Aesthetic experience is relative to the person having the experience. That which is aesthetically satisfying to one person may not be to another. Art is purposeful creative activity directed toward the achievement of aesthetic experience.

Aesthetic values are perceived through the senses and for every sense there is a corresponding art. For the sense of hearing there are the arts of sound: music and the poetry of language. For the sense of sight, we have the visual arts of painting, sculpture, architecture, etc. There are also arts of touch, taste and smell, although in our society these are not cultivated on the same level as the others.

Underlying all other arts is the art of movement, dance, perceived through the movement sense and expressed through body movement. Dance is the primary art experience. All art deals with some objective material: music with tone, poetry with words, painting with color and line, etc. The material of dance is pure movement. Because there is a movement impulse inherent in every tone, word, color and line, all arts contain an element of dance. The more consciously this element is cultivated, the more vitality all art will have.

Insofar as any movement may be perceived aesthetically, any movement is potential dance. A movement may be more or less dance according to the way in which it is perceived. Its dance-value can be determined only by the person experiencing the movement.

Let us illustrate this by turning an everyday movement, walking, into dance. If, in walking, I am conscious only of my purpose of reaching a certain destination, the utilitarian aspect of the movement dominates my experience and it is just an everyday walk. If, on the other hand, my consciousness of purpose is lost in my enjoyment of the movement's expressive quality: its purposeful stride, its lively swing, its steady beat, its constant forward direction - then, in that moment, being dominated by the feeling of the movement, I am dancing. My dance experience may be so strong that it carries over to an observer and communicates the quality of my experience to him. Or it may not, in which case, for him my move-

ment is not dance. On the other hand, an imaginative observer may experience my movement as dance when in actuality for me it has no such significance.

Consciousness of the dance element in movements of daily life furthers efficiency and enjoyment of work and play. To dance means to be carried and swung along by the feeling of the movement with a minimum of effort and a maximum of pleasure. It is the dance element which unites action with thought and feeling, making every physical task less arduous. With our present-day knowledge of the interaction of physical and psychological factors in personality, we should not be content to leave this aspect of daily life undeveloped. Cultivation of aesthetic experience in everyday movements furthers the art of living.

There are various levels of aesthetic experience ranging from the most primitive to the most highly cultivated. Children and primitive people show a spontaneous delight in the expressive qualities of movement quite apart from utilitarian values, which may be recognized as the beginnings of dance experience. Even animals and birds execute movements which appear to be motivated entirely by the enjoyment of the movement itself and may therefore be considered dance movements.

The love of movement for its own sake is innate in human beings and perhaps in all living things. Everyone is capable of dance experience and should have an opportunity to develop this part of his nature. Although some of us may have a stronger urge to express ourselves in one medium than in another, and dancing may appeal to some more than to others, a well-rounded personality implies the free functioning of all innate capacities including the capacity for aesthetic movement expression.

A Creative Approach to Dance

Among primitive people, dance is an expression of the whole of life. It fulfills both a utilitarian and an aesthetic function. It is work, play, science, art, education, and worship all at the same time. Because of a general tendency during the course of civilization toward disunity of various aspects of life, dance has become separated from daily life experience. Dance appears today most frequently as a theatrical technique or social pastime, only occasionally as a creative art. Its real substance, expressive movement, is largely neglected in favor of an elaborate frame-work of costumes, stage-settings, musical accompaniment and story. Very few people have the opportunity of experiencing it as a medium of expression, and the language of movement is little practised and little understood.

There is need today for a new approach to dance which will restore it to its original function in society. Such an approach will be based on a thorough understanding of the creative forces in human nature which lie at the root of all art experience and which find their most immediate ex-

pression in dance. Its aim will be to rediscover basic movement principles which re-establish dance as a universal medium of expression and to develop practical applications of these principles. In contrast to those mechanistic approaches which tend to over-emphasize the technical at the expense of the expressive aspects of body movement, this approach may be called a creative approach.

A creative approach to dance reflects the scientific attitude of our age in its respect for the physical properties of its materials. It tends to break down the rigid distinctions between art and science, between technological and aesthetic achievement. Like the painter, who must understand the physical properties of light and color in order to master the expressive possibilities of his material, and like the musician who must reckon with the physical properties of sound, the dancer must understand the physical, physiological and psychological laws which govern the movements of human beings.

A creative approach assumes that, because all men are able to move, all may enjoy the aesthetic experience of movement: that everyone can dance. It is not content to hold this up as an intangible ideal, but seeks actively to find ways and means available to all people. Its technique is based on movement principles applicable to all human beings regardless of race, sex, age or social background. Its form is an organic outgrowth of its content. Its content is determined by contemporary life experience.

What Is Rhythm?

By BARBARA METTLER

■ THE SUBJECT COVERS too large a territory to be claimed by any single profession or group. However, it is only natural that the modern dancer and the field of educational dance should show an especially deep interest in it.

I remember well when, as a student of dance preparing for my final examination, I was taught to chant in unison with the other members of the graduating class the definition which we had learned by rote in answer to the question, "What is rhythm?": "*Rhythm is an in-ward-ly puls-ing, out-ward-ly per-cep-tible force . . . etc.*" I have forgotten how it ended, and I am not sorry because, in having to start all over again, I have learned that rhythm can no more be explained by a pat definition in a single sentence than can the conception of *life* with which it is intimately bound up as an ultimate, unfathomable reality.

If we are to search for the origin and essence of rhythm, we may have to abandon our field of dance and music for a moment and turn our attention to a larger sphere.

All existence as we know it is characterized by movement. Not only the obviously mobile aspects of nature. Physicists tell us that even those objects which are apparently the most immobile are made up of atoms consisting of electrons and protons which are constantly in intensive though invisible motion. According to science, all matter is reducible in the final analysis to force expressing itself through motion.

We can assume, then, that movement is an expression of *force* in *time* and *space*. The unit of force with which we can reckon may be called the *impulse*. The basic characteristic of impulse is *alternation of stress and un-stress*. Because force is a continuous stream which, though it may be transformed, can never be broken, the tendency to reproduce itself is inherent in the nature of impulse. Periodic recurrence of impulse is called *pulse*. *Rhythm* is the inner organization of the impulse, which creates the living relationship between the points of stress and the points of un-stress.

The dominant element of rhythm is force, which determines the nature of the impulse and its *intensity*. Co-existent, but subordinate, is the element of time, which determines the period of the impulse and its *duration*. Finally, the element of space, qualified by both the other two, determines the position of the impulse and its *direction*.

Rhythm is outwardly perceptible through the dynamic, temporal and spatial elements of its pulsations. The combination of these elements constitutes the *form* of the rhythm and differentiates one rhythm from another. By comparing the elements of one rhythm with those of another, a relative measurement is possible. Meter, or "measure," and "time-beating" are devices for measuring the time element of rhythm and, in so far as the time element is qualified by the element of force, to a certain extent also the intensity. Metronomic timing, however, is con-

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scious regulation of the mind. Rhythm, on the other hand, is universal. It functions in space as well as time. Color, line, area and mass have rhythm, for behind each lies an organic motor impulse.

All movement has rhythm, although the rhythm of certain movements may be more pronounced than that of others. Some rhythms are strong, some rhythms are weak; some rhythms are vivid, some are dim; some are graceful, some awkward; some attractive, some repulsive; constructive or devastating. Nevertheless, each movement has its own particular rhythm. The movements of the microbe are no less rhythmic than those of the stars in the sky. The shattering earthquake and the smoothly rolling ocean wave, the creeping worm and the soaring bird, the hobbling old man and the skipping child—all follow a common rhythmic law.

If everything moves and all movement has rhythm, why are some things said to be lacking in rhythm?

Until now, our discussion has been limited to a consideration of simple, as opposed to complex, movement. A simple movement, in the sense in which we shall now use the term, involves not more than a single impulse. No simple movement can be lacking in rhythm, since rhythm means the inner life of the movement, just as our word "personality" means the inner life of the human being — and it is as impossible to imagine a movement without some sort of rhythm as it is to imagine a person without a personality no matter how undeveloped, inhibited or distorted that personality may be. Yet how few movements within our experience are actually simple in this respect! Even the most limited movement which we ourselves can make, the lift of a finger for instance, involves the use of a number of muscles, each with its individual impulse.

The consideration of complex movement, that is, movement which involves more than a single impulse, brings us to the conception of rhythmic and unrhythmic. *Rhythmic* implies the existence of a basic impulse from which all other impulses flow. A movement is said to be *unrhythmic* when this basic impulse appears to be missing and a variety of uncoordinated impulses conflict with one another. Rhythmic and unrhythmic, then, may be used to mean not with or without rhythm, but integrated or disintegrated in impulse.

Rhythm is the inner force which integrates, and relates the parts of every whole to the whole and to each other. A movement is rhythmic when every aspect of it springs from a single motivating impulse, creating a perfect unity of function and form. Unrhythmic are only those movements which have somehow lost their original reason for existence. Remote from the basic impulse which brought them to life, they have become uncoordinated, meaningless and sterile. Unrhythmic is at best only a relative conception, since behind even the most confused manifestation lies a universal rhythmic law, but, for practical purposes, those movements which show a disintegration of impulse may be considered lacking in rhythm.

So much for technical definition. What of the vital power of rhythm as a motivating force in human ex-

istence?

Rhythm is a dominant factor in both our heredity and our environment. It is evident everywhere in all the great and small movements of nature, recognizable in the pulsing alternations of stress and un-stress and in the orderly integrations of pulse within pulse. What rhythm could be more clearly defined than the course of the plants around the sun, creating the seasons of the year with their alternating warmth and cold? The moon swinging about the earth causes the ebb and flow of the tides. The rotation of the earth on its axis forms the pulse which we call night and day. The rhythm of our solar system creates a whole complex of rhythms of life on the earth: growth and decay, birth and death, reproduction and destruction, activity and rest. The human being can feel within his own body some of the ramifications of the cosmic pulse: the beating of his heart, the circulation of his blood, the rise and fall of his breath, his walking steps.

The daily movements of our lives reflect the larger movements of the universe. Our day is patterned according to the path of the sun across the sky. The activities of our year parallel closely the round of the seasons. Hourly changes of weather affect the course of our work and plan, and even influence the minute movements of the organs of our bodies.

Rhythmic consciousness is the peculiar natural gift of man. It is that faculty which enables him to see an essential orderliness behind the various occurrences of his universe, and to find his own place in the cosmic order. It is a gift which is naturally more highly developed in certain individuals than in others, but it is latent in every human being and susceptible to fruitful cultivation. Rhythmic consciousness enables us to perceive and adjust to the compelling rhythmic phenomena which are in and about ourselves. It can help us establish a sound basis for harmonious living and creative growth.

A study of rhythm, with the aim of cultivating our natural rhythmic consciousness, can be a powerful means of enriching individual and social life. It can begin with a study of those rhythms which are inherent in the movements of our own bodies. These are the rhythms which are most intimately a part of us and which it is of primary importance for us to learn to understand, release and control.

A study of the rhythms of everyday movements can improve comfort, health, efficiency and enjoyment of work. Rhythm implies economy of effort, co-ordination, effectiveness. The man with the ax will cut more wood with greater ease if the swing of his ax has perfect rhythm. Modern industrial experts have made use of a rudimentary knowledge of body rhythm to analyze and increase the efficiency of workmen's movements. Every movement of daily life becomes less arduous, if we apply the rhythmic principle.

A study of body rhythm in the movements of sport can bring satisfactory achievement within the reach of larger numbers of people, by developing latent abilities and helping overcome handicaps. It can also increase the benefits to health, and lessen the hazards of difficult feats. The same may be said of all

recreational activities in which body movement plays an important part. Their powers of furthering creative relaxation and social cohesion increase in direct proportion to the soundness of their approach to body rhythm.

All forms of physical education such as gymnastics, general and medical, can increase their effectiveness through application of the principles of fundamental body rhythm. Rhythm transcends the purely physical. In order to move rhythmically, it is necessary for the whole person—physical, emotional and intellectual—to be centered in a single impulse. Learning thus to center oneself in the fulfillment of a single act furthers psychological as well as physical growth.

It is in the arts that the study of rhythm reaches its ultimate fulfillment. The substance of all art is rhythm: in music the rhythm of sound, in painting the rhythm of color and line, in sculpture and architecture the rhythm of area and mass. Because the substance of dance is the rhythm of pure movement, expressed through the medium of the human body, dance can become the foundation of all the arts. In all arts except dance, our feeling for rhythm is externalized in some material apart from ourselves: color, clay, sound, etc. In dance, it is given immediate tangible form through the medium of the movement of our own bodies.

There have been in the past, and still are today, a variety of approaches to rhythm in the dance. More frequently than might be supposed, the real substance of dance, the rhythm of the moving body, has been subordinate to some other element. Sometimes the dominant element has been music, as in the romantic period of Isadora Duncan. Sometimes, as in the period of classic ballet, body rhythm was subordinate to fixed conceptions of form, acrobatics, pantomimic story-telling, or costume and stage decoration.

The contemporary dance movement, which we call modern, is a reaction against these subordinations of body rhythm. Seeking inspiration in certain primitive art expressions, it has freed the dance from the domination of its associated forms and elevated it to the position of an independent art. Music, costumes and stage decoration, story-telling and technical virtuosity, all of which may play an important part in dance production, have been subordinated to the powerful expressiveness of the rhythm of the moving body. The modern dance seeks rhythm at its source, and uses it in its purest form as a direct means of communication. It allows the innate rhythms of the body free play and organic growth for the expression of human thoughts and emotions.

To summarize: Rhythm is a basic element of movement, and movement is a fundamental quality of life. A serious study of rhythm, based on a scientific analysis and creative application of those rhythms which are within our own bodies, may be considered not only a fruitful educational field but an urgent cultural necessity. It begins with a study of the rhythm of everyday movements and culminates in the art of the dance. The modern dance, more than any other contemporary approach, should be able to emphasize the fundamental significance of pure body rhythm. ■

WHAT IS DANCE?

Barbara Mettler

THE bewildering variety of activities that are known today as dance challenges every honest dancer to ask himself the question: What is Dance?

Perhaps we can all agree at the start that dance is the *art of body movement*, but to come to an agreement about the actual substance of this art may require a little serious thought and discussion.

Art is the shaping of some material to provide aesthetic experience. What is the material of dance? Let me quote from a recent and otherwise enlightening article by a respected aesthetician: "... stone, wood, etc. constitute the materials of architecture; marble, bronze, etc., of sculpture; *the human figure, of dance.* . . ."^{*} This writer's analysis reflects a very common misconception about the nature of dance. The dancer does not manipulate the human "figure" (we presume he means body) but, rather, the *movement* of the human body. This is quite a different matter.

The material of dance is *movement*. The human body is the dancer's *instrument*. By means of his body, the dancer creates movement forms. The body may thus be likened to the sculptor's hammer and chisel rather than to his marble and bronze.

It is true that in dance, as in no other art, material and instrument have an inseparable unity in the person of the performer, but the two are by no means identical and to fail to distinguish between them leads to a confused approach to the study and practice of dance.

Once recognized as different elements, material and instrument can be studied separately, providing a basis for clarity and depth of artistic expression not otherwise possible.

Mastery of instrument (body) and mastery of material (movement) are two interwoven aspects of the dancer's art. The work of a mature dancer combines both. However, a dancer's development may be lopsided, with one capability over-emphasized at the expense of the other. It is not uncommon to find highly trained dance technicians who show a superb mastery of their instrument but whose handling

of their material is on a puerile level. On the other hand, there are dancers whose movement material, though interesting enough, is inadequately represented through faulty technique.

Respect for both instrument and material is characteristic of all modern art, and the modern dancer should make use of all available scientific knowledge to further his understanding of the human body and its movements.

Instrument

The study of his instrument is for the dancer the same sort of problem as it is for any artist. He must explore its expressive possibilities, discovering what it can do and how to make the best use of its natural functions. Just as it would be foolish for a musician to try to make a piano sound like a violin, it is futile for a dancer to try to make his instrument move like anything but a human body. Yet there are dancers who use their bodies as if they were inanimate machines, ignoring the physiological and psychological laws that govern their natural functioning.

Although not everyone is agreed on exactly what constitutes the natural functioning of the human body, there are certain general principles upon which a biologically sound dance technique can be based. There is, for example, the primary rhythmic principle of alternating tension and relaxation which is present in all neuromuscular action. There is the principle of expansion and contraction inherent in breathing, the principle of balance revealed in the upright position, that of arm-leg opposition in locomotion. There is the pendular swing of the limbs at the shoulder and hip joints, the spring-like action of knees and ankles; there are the principles of stretching, bending, twisting, turning, undulating, rising, falling . . . All these and many more can be discovered by studying the human body in motion and applied in endless variation to the development of a comprehensive dance technique.

The psychological aspect of these principles, though less widely understood, is no less important to the dancer than the physiological. An art which uses the live human being as its instrument should rest firmly on the science of human behavior. It is possible for some psychological error in

technique, such as an over-emphasis of muscular tension at the expense of relaxation, to disturb the nervous equilibrium of the dancer to such an extent that free creative expression is impossible. On the other hand, an understanding of personality in relation to movement expression can further a creative approach to dance technique.

Material

Perhaps it is easier to understand the dancer's use of his body as an instrument than it is to understand his use of movement as material. It may be a new thought to some of us that movement, an apparently intangible substance, can be shaped and molded by the dancing body like a piece of clay in the hands of a sculptor.

For the dancer, movement is a material reality having distinct physical properties which can be consciously controlled. These properties are characteristic of all movement (not only movement of the human body) and our study of them is guided by the science of physics.

The physical elements of movement are of three types: *force* elements; *time* elements; and *space* elements. The interaction of these three determines the form of the movement. For instance, a movement may be strong (force), slow (time) and large (space); or passive (force), regular (time) and horizontal (space); or increasing in intensity (force), accelerating in pace (time) and upward (space); etc., etc. As one can see, these are descriptions that could be applied to the movements of a fish, an airplane, or to any body in motion, as well as to the human body.

The dancer manipulates the physical properties of movement for expressive purposes, varying the intensity, duration and direction of his movement in order to create desired movement forms. Conscious control of this material by means of a body disciplined to execute the finest gradations of movement quality, combined with richness of movement ideas, distinguishes a mature dance art.

Content

It is not enough for a dancer to have a disciplined body and a craftsman-like control of the elements of movement. He must also have a well-devel-

^{*} Jared S. Moore, "The Work of Art and Its Material." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. VI, No. 4, June, 1948, page 331. (*Italics mine*)

oped movement imagination which enables him to create interesting *movement ideas*.

Movement ideas are the content of dance. A self-evident fact? By no means. Ask the average member of a dance audience to describe the content of the dance program. The description will run something like this: "The stage setting was . . . , the costumes were . . . , the music was . . . , the dramatic action was . . . ," and so on. But stage setting, costumes, music and dramatic action are not the content of a dance performance! What were the movement ideas?

A movement idea is the mental counterpart of some movement experience, actual or imaginary. Dance is the embodiment of movement ideas in expressive movement forms. Form and technique are only outer shells of the idea which is the kernel of dance experience, and a dance that fails to communicate a movement idea is no dance at all, no matter how beguiling its settings and accompaniment.

A movement idea is a complex process, having *physical*, *emotional* and *intellectual* values. Any one of these values may dominate a dance movement. When the physical value dominates, the dancer communicates his experience of the physical sensation of movement. When the movement idea is dominantly emotional, the dance expresses a mood, such as sorrow or fear. A dance movement with an intellectual emphasis represents a purposeful act like work, play, combat, worship.

The more richly these three aspects of a movement idea are developed and interwoven in the dancer's consciousness, the richer will be the content of the dance. Movement ideas are an outgrowth of movement imagination, a faculty that can be cultivated during the course of the dancer's training as systematically as any other faculty. Development of movement imagination involves the maturing of the whole personality. It is of as much concern to the creative dancer as the development of form and technique.

The embodiment of movement ideas in expressive movement forms by means of movement technique—this is the substance of dance. How often it is neglected today by dancers who, frantically trying to sell their art to sophisticated metropolitan audiences, suffocate it in irrelevant theatrical trappings borrowed from the other arts! Is this not poor business as well as poor dance? No grocer would try to sell an apple for a pear. Why do we dancers



(Allan A. Hammer)

BARBARA METTLER DANCE GROUP

try to sell dance for something other than what it is? Dance is not drama or music or painting or architecture. Dance is the art of body movement. It can speak movingly without benefit of word, tone or color. Words, tones and colors are outgrowths of movement, born of movement impulses which have taken shape in other materials. Speech, music, costumes, stage properties and settings can enrich a dance performance if developed as extensions of the movement patterns of the dance, but their value is always subordinate and the significance of a dance depends on its ability to communicate an aesthetic movement experience with or without the aid of additional materials.

Body movement, the material of

dance, is also the basic material of all daily life experience. For this reason, dance should be the most understandable of all the arts. If it is otherwise today, may it not be because we have failed to present it in its own terms? Perhaps if we dancers would put more attention on the essential substance of dance and less on its trimmings, we might re-discover the fundamental principles of our art which would make it available to all people.

The goal of modern dance has been from the start to establish *body movement* as an *independent medium* of artistic expression. Let us recognize that, in spite of great strides made in this direction, we are still a long way from reaching our goal.

Let us first be clear about the meaning of dance. Then let us explore more fully our material, body movement. It is this material which differentiates dance from all the other arts and makes it a uniquely elemental medium of expression.

MANIFESTO FOR MODERN DANCE

Barbara Mettler

I.

DANCE is the *art of body movement*. Its *form* is determined by its *material*, movement.

Its *technique* is determined by its *instrument*, the human body.

Its *content* is determined by the *movement idea*.

Dance is *aesthetic movement experience*. Aesthetic experience means awareness of the expressive form of the experience over and above its utilitarian function. Any movement may be experienced aesthetically. Its dance-value is relative to the person having the experience.

Dance is a *motor art*, directed toward satisfying the kinaesthetic sense. Its visual and auditory elements are outgrowths of the motor.

Dance is a *creative activity*. It is primarily something *to do* and only secondarily something *to see*.

Dance is *expression of personality*. Since no two persons are alike, no two can be expected to dance in exactly the same way.

Dance is *pure movement expression* rather than interpretation of drama or music.

Dance is awareness of the *abstract elements of movement*: pulse, pace, direction, etc.

Dance is *expressive movement*, not gymnastic drill or acrobatic display.

Dance is an *inner experience* made perceptible in outer form. It may be shared with an audience, but its motivation is not audience entertainment.

Dance is the *central art* because it is equally concerned with force, time and space, whereas other arts emphasize one or the other of these areas.

Dance is the *primary art* because all art begins with a movement impulse.

Dance may be *pure* or *applied* (to recreation, education, therapy, interpretation of music or drama, audience entertainment, etc.).

II.

Modern dance is *pure dance*, *basic dance*, *free dance*.

Modern dance is modern only if it has:

1. a democratic philosophy

2. a scientific basis

3. organic form

A democratic philosophy means:

Creative dance expression is for everyone: everyone can dance. Materials and methods must be found for making creative dance expression available to all kinds of people: old and young, healthy and handicapped.

A scientific basis means:

1. Respect for the laws of movement (physics)
2. Respect for the laws of the human body (physiology)
3. Respect for the laws of human behavior (psychology)

Organic form means:

The form of a dance grows organically out of itself like a living thing, according to its inherent function, which is the expression of a movement idea.

III.

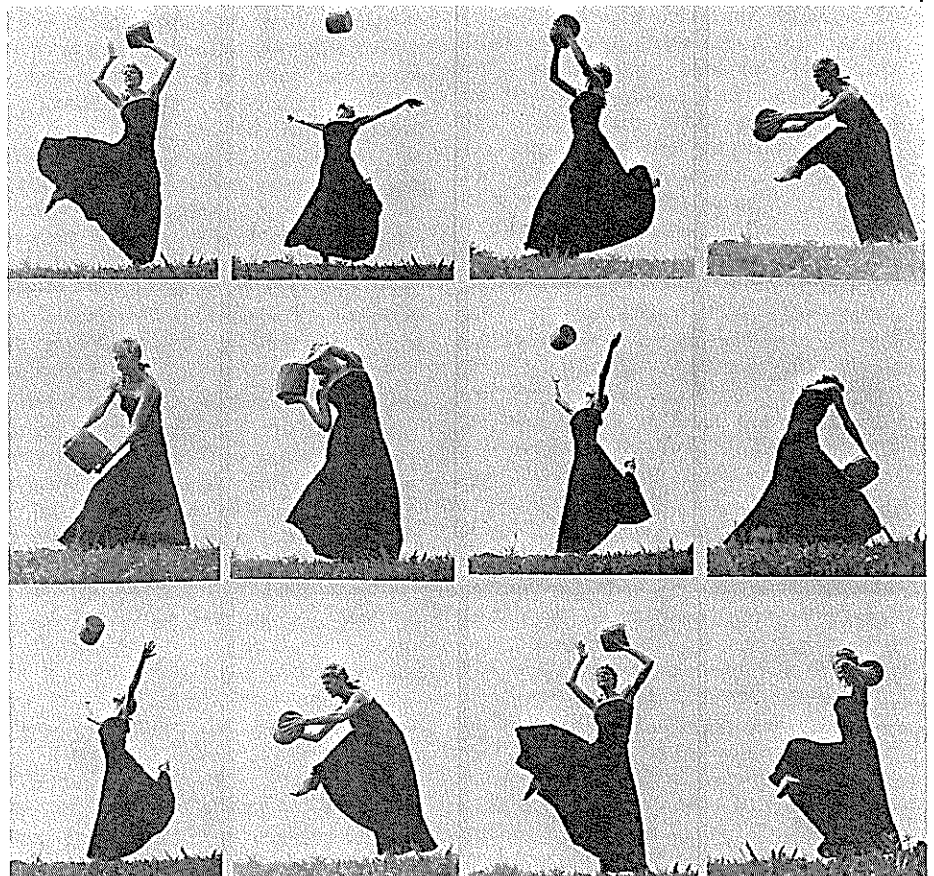
A democratic philosophy can be put into practice by emphasizing:

1. Free creative expression: freedom from arbitrary patterns, freedom for every individual to find his own unique forms of expression according to his age, sex, body structure, temperament and life experience.
2. Creative group expression: opportunity for every individual to find his creative relationship to the group.

Freedom of expression can be achieved by emphasizing:

1. Objectivity toward movement as the material of dance and toward the body as an instrument of expression. This extends dance beyond the limits of the private and the personal.

(over)



BARBARA METTLER

(Allan A. Hammer)

OCTOBER, 1953

2. A direct approach to movement expression rather than a round-about way through music or drama.
3. Relaxation, the natural counterpart of tension, without which no creative movement is possible.
4. Improvisation, which liberates movement imagination.
5. A systematic exploration of all

areas of dance experience:

Form

Force elements

Time elements

Space elements

Technique

Fundamentals of Body Movement

Content

Sensory

Emotional

Intellectual

MODERN DANCE: ART OR SHOW BUSINESS?

Barbara Mettler

ART and show business are two quite different types of activity. Show business is *business*, and business means the barter of commodities. Whatever commodity is involved, the goal of business is exchange. A work of art may become a commodity. It may be bought and sold. But its motivation and goal, its reason for existence is to be found in an entirely different direction.

Art means the creation of a new experience in movement, sound, color, line, texture of some other area for the sake of the experience itself. Its motivating force is the artist's need for the experience. This is an individual need but, if the individual is alive in relation to the world around him, his need will be the need of the group.

The modern dance movement originated as an effort to strengthen the roots of dance as an independent *art*. In its early revolutionary days its vitality was expressed in its emphasis on art as *experience*. There was an honest search for approaches which would uncover the sources of creative movement experience in the average person, in the layman, in every man, woman, and child.

What has happened to this original vitality? What has become of the honest search?

Economic pressure combined with unclear thinking made modern dancers easy prey for Broadway showmen who saw in the lively young art direction a possible "shot-in-the-arm" for decaying show business. The marriage of modern dance with ballet was the result. This marriage has regenerated ballet. But where, oh, where is modern dance?

Where is dance as an independent art, free of domination by theatrical techniques, free to develop in terms of pure movement expression, basic in content, abstract in form, the root of all the arts?

Domination by "The Theater" is destroying the independent vitality of modern dance. What is this thing called "Theater"? It is merely a place, a show-place where art works or non-art works may be shown. Its form should always be subordinated to the content of the work being shown. Modern dance, a new approach to dance, requires a new approach to the theater. But, instead, the conventional theater of our time, so heavily weighted with commercial interests,

is dictating the direction of modern dance so that it now becomes the vogue for modern dancers to refer to their approach as "theater dance."

When we speak of art as experience, it might reasonably be asked, "experience for whom?" This brings us to a discussion of the relationship between dancer and audience.

Dance is not a "spectator sport." It is a *creative activity* which implies that it is primarily something *to do* and only secondarily something *to see*. The honest dancer creates a dance work as an experience for which he himself has a need. It must first of all satisfy him. Because any experience is enhanced by being shared, the dance experience grows as a result of being shared with others. A dance performance is the sharing of the dancer's experience with an audience. Only insofar as the dance work is able to communicate an experience (which depends not only on the power of the work but also on the receptivity of the audience) can it be considered a success.

How many of our modern dance performances actually do this? Can we honestly say that our audiences have *shared* our experience? That they have been moved as we have moved? If not, why not? Perhaps our starting point was not our own experience but rather an attempt to fabricate for our audience an experience which we ourselves have not actually had. Or perhaps we have tried too hard to *entertain*, knowing that entertainment may sell where art may not.

Entertaining an audience is not the same as communicating an art experience. Entertainment provides a pleasant way of passing away the time. The art experience offers an intensified awareness of some aspect of life. The latter requires participation of the whole personality both on the part of the artist and on the part of the spectator.

It is interesting that we have no word in the English language to describe accurately the role of those who attend a dance performance. "Audience" refers to things heard, "spectator" and "observer" refer to things seen. But the dance experience is only incidentally visual and auditory. Essentially it is a *motor* experience, directed not toward the senses of sight and hearing but toward the sense of movement, those sensory

nerve endings which are located in the muscles, tendons, and joints and in the organs of equilibrium in the inner ear. Communication of a dance experience may involve ear and eye but its purpose is to evoke an experience which satisfies the *movement sense*.

Because our modern theater has put its emphasis on techniques which stimulate eye and ear (costumes, stage settings, musical scores, words), it has been little concerned with means which can further the communication of *movement experience*.

Movement experience is three-dimensional in space and suffers from being presented in the two-dimensional frame-work of the conventional theater. A dance can be equally interesting from all sides and should not be created to be seen from one angle only. Moreover, movement experience can best be shared when the distance between dancer and audience is not too great. In this respect the distance and perspective emphasized by theater architecture today is a handicap to a dance performance. The spectator should be near enough to sense the pulsations of the dancer's body in his own muscles. Not only the senses of sight and hearing but also the tactile sense may function (by perceiving the vibrations of the floor and even air currents) to stimulate the movement sense.

Modern dance at its birth was a new approach to dance: new in its philosophy that dance is an independent art, the art of body movement, the most basic of all the arts. It was born to lead in new concepts of art and the theater. Instead, it has turned tail and followed, with the result that it is well on the way to finding itself right back where it started.

The modern dance movement needs to be re-born. Its re-birth is not likely to occur in the framework of the commercial theater but rather in the studios of recreational groups in colleges, schools, and community centers where dance is practised for the love of it rather than for monetary gain. Such groups would do well to consider carefully their approach and make sure that an over-emphasis on audience entertainment and theatrical techniques in imitation of Broadway successes does not distract them from the pursuit of dance as a creative art activity.

CREATIVE DANCE: A GROUP TECHNIQUE

by BARBARA METTLER



The movements of creative dance are treated in this article as real life experiences involving the whole person. The author urges teacher-training institutions to carry on more research in the area of creative dance. Barbara Mettler has been a guest instructor at West Virginia University, the University of Georgia, Louisiana State University, and Gallaudet College for the Deaf. Since 1949 she has been director of creative dance at the Boston YWCA.

Some recent developments in dance education have shown that an approach which we may refer to as "creative dance" can be a powerful means of drawing out the creative resources within the group for the benefit of every individual in the group and for the group as a whole.

Creative dance is a *direct approach* to body movement as a medium of expression. It is a study of one's own movement expression in relation to the movement expression of others. Much of the success of creative dance as a group technique lies in this direct approach to the substance of dance, avoiding round-about ways through other areas of expression such as music or drama which may provide either barrier or escape from the real problems of the material.

Creative dance is a study of one's own personality *objectified* in the movements of one's body. It is work on oneself, but one's attention is turned outward rather than inward. In order to develop craftsmanship in the creation of genuinely expressive movement, it is necessary to have as objective an attitude toward the movements of one's body as the sculptor has toward his clay or the musician toward tone. The fact that one's body is one's *instrument* of expression is secondary in importance to the fact that movement is one's *material*. In creative dance the body may be likened to the sculptor's tool or to the musician's violin. Just as the sculptor uses his chisel to create expressive forms in stone, so does the dance student learn to use his body to create expressive forms in movement. The body is incidental. It is the movement which is the substance of the work. Certainly in no other art are instrument and material so inseparably one with each other and with the person of the artist as in creative dance and yet the dance student learns to work with the movement of his body as an objective reality.

Movement is a physical reality which can be approached by way of force, time and space. It is characterized by such specific properties as duration, direction, and range. These properties

can be manipulated for expressive purposes as consciously as the sculptor manipulates the shape and texture of his clay, or the musician the pitch and volume of his tone.

In creative dance we shape into perceptible outer forms those inner occurrences which determine the fabric of our personality. In making these inner occurrences perceptible to ourselves, we find access to them and can bring them under our conscious control. In making them perceptible to others, we have at our disposal a potent means of communication, especially potent because it is on a non-verbal, sub-intellectual, sensory-motor level.

Movement expression is dependent on the *movement sense*, those sensory nerve-endings located in the motor apparatus and in the organs of equilibrium in the inner ear. It is the movement sense which makes us aware of our own body movements and the movements of others. A highly developed sense of movement enables us to move in harmonious relationship to those around us. Creative dance is essentially a training of the movement sense toward the goal of harmonious individual and group relationships.

Through the movement sense we can perceive the phenomenon of *rhythm* as it occurs in our own bodies: that inevitable alternation of tension and relaxation which gives us the beat of the heart, the ebb and flow of the breath, our walking steps, and all the countless pulsations of energy in nerves and muscles throughout the body which account for our various movements.

Creative dance emphasizes the polarity of tension and relaxation as the source of rhythmic experience within ourselves. It cultivates the experience of alternating tension and relaxation in the individual body as the basis of the experience of alternating activity and passivity in the group body. In order to function as a productive member of a group, the individual must know when to be active and when to be passive, when to lead and when to follow. In creative dance, this is experienced on the sensory-motor level. Each member of the group learns to "sense" in

terms of movement when the group situation requires that he fulfill the responsibilities of leadership or when it requires of him that he follow the lead of another.

Experiences such as these which take place in the studio are real life experiences because they occur as movements and involve the whole person: physical, emotional, and mental. Creative dance offers controlled life experience directed toward the goal of creative group expression. It can become one of the most useful educational materials at our disposal.

Creative dance is applicable to all kinds of groups: adults, children, women, men, healthy or handicapped. It substitutes cooperation for

competition. Assuming that each individual can contribute creatively to the group only in terms of his own individuality, creative dance emphasizes individuality of expression. Since it is impossible to compare quantitatively the expression of any two individuals, there is no opportunity for competition in creative dance.

The value of creative dance as a group technique depends on the quality of its leadership. An increasing interest shown in the subject by educators, parents, psychologists and social workers indicates a need for teacher-training centers where adequate time can be devoted to intensive study and research in this important new field.

New Directions In *DANCE AND MUSIC*

by **BARBARA METTLER**

MOST modern dancers have not yet freed themselves from the inherited tradition of deriving their dance forms from music. Because of this, many modern dance teachers feel handicapped in their work by a lack of what they consider suitable music or musicians.

A careful analysis of the relationship between dance and music will show that dancers are far less dependent on music than they think they are. The true nature of the relationship indicates that dance is in a position to lead rather than follow in the development of the two arts.

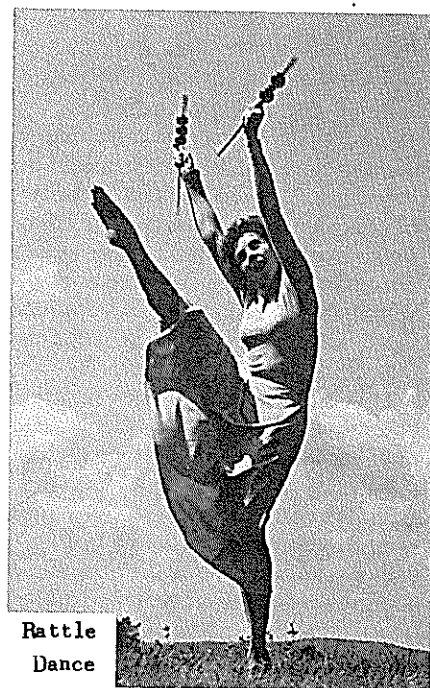
Understanding Movement and Sound

Dance is the art of body movement. Music is the art of sound. A study of the relationship between dance and music begins with an understanding of the relationship between movement and sound.

Sound is a way of experiencing

movement. A sound-wave is a particular type of air movement which sets the ear-drum vibrating. The length of the wave determines the sound's pitch. The longer the wave, the lower the pitch; the shorter the wave, the higher the pitch. The human ear is capable of hearing only certain wave-lengths. Shorter waves can be sensed by dogs' ears and bats' ears. Very long waves impress the human being as tactile rather than auditory sensations.

The movement basis of sound can be recognized at first hand in our own bodies. As we walk, the vibration of the floor can be perceived as sound. The movements of respiration cause air movements which may be audible. Tension in the vocal cords determines the pitch of vocal sounds. In recent scientific experiments it has been demonstrated that muscular contractions throughout the body produce vibrations which



**Rattle
Dance**

when amplified create the experience of sound. It is conceivable that for ears that can hear, sound is inherent in all forms of motion.

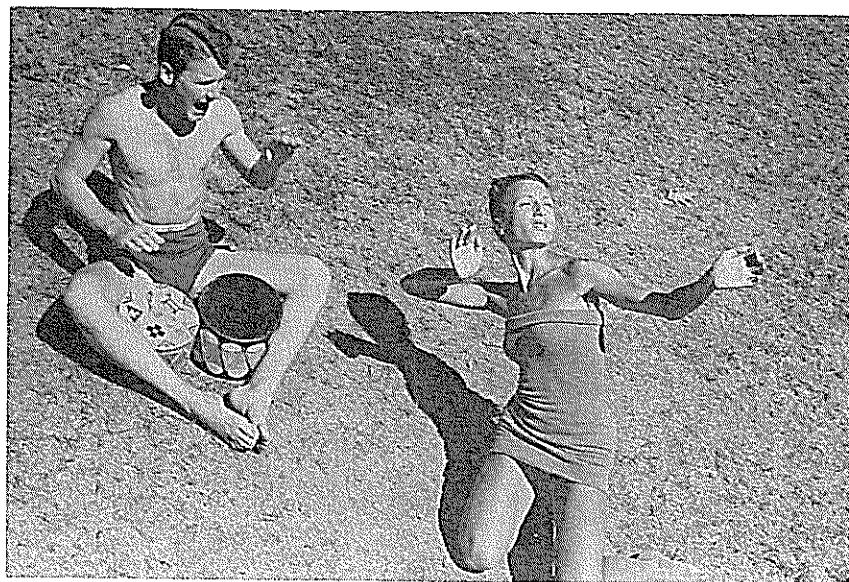
The Dancer's Approach to Music

So, at its point of origin, sound is an outgrowth of movement, and it is at this point that the student of dance should make his approach to music. Let the dancer listen to the sound of his own feet on the floor, the sounds of his breathing, the sounds of his voice. Let him explore as thoroughly as possible all the sounds which can be made by his own body in motion.

He can make a wide variety of percussive sounds with hands and feet on the floor, on walls, and against his own body, and the number of sounds which can be made with voice qualified by movements of tongue, cheeks, and lips seem almost limitless. All of this exploration must be done on the basis of spontaneous movement improvisation, with creative impulses in both sound and movement flowing freely with joyous abandon. Some previous experience in free movement improvisation without sound will have served as a valuable preparation for this sort of work.

This is not material for the classroom only, to be used behind closed doors for the satisfaction of the student alone. There is nothing more

(Photos by Allan A. Harmer)



Voice and Drum Accompaniment

moving for a dance audience than the kind of self-accompaniment described here. If the goal of dance is movement expression and if the goal of a dance performance is audience participation in the creative experience of the dancer, is there anything which will electrify an audience more than the sound of stamping feet or dancers' freely uttered cries?

It is this double impact of sound and movement produced by the same moving body as a result of a single rhythmic impulse which sometimes gives the dancing of primitive people such wonderful vitality. In failing to utilize this deep source of creative energy, modern dancers are needlessly overlooking easily accessible program material.

New Movements and New Sounds

But this is just a beginning of our study of music in relation to dance. Let us go on. By this time the dance student's ears have been sensitized to sound and his muscles have become responsive to movement. He has learned to sing and speak as he dances, making his own free melodies

and word combinations. Let him now discover and make his own musical instruments according to his individual motor-auditory imagination.

First he will look for sound-makers within easy reach in his immediate environment: jingling keys, rustling paper, a rotary egg-beater, glass bottles struck with a knife. The newness of the sounds produced by such utilitarian objects will match the newness of his movement ideas. Modern dance means new movements and *new movements require new sounds*. Just as the whole world of movement is material for dance, so are all sounds material for music. Limiting himself to the use of traditional sounds and traditional instruments is as futile for the modern dancer as it would be for him to limit himself to traditional movements.

From the discovery of sounds in his immediate environment, the dance student proceeds to an exploration of the whole world of sound not only by utilizing freely any traditional instruments which strike his

fancy (whether old or new, from his own culture or another) but by making his own instruments with materials of his own choice, tuned to scales of his own creation.

Music in Modern Dance

The dancer will sometimes accompany himself. Sometimes he will be accompanied by a fellow-dancer whose dance-music experiences have paralleled his own. His training will include studies in pitch and time, and his music will be at all times creatively integrated with his dance.

Professional musicians are not needed as accompanists for modern dance classes. All the necessary resources lie within the group itself. This is not to say that experienced musicians who are willing to study dance and to work from within the group cannot become enormously valuable to the dance program. But the dependence of the modern dance teacher on music and musicians is a factor which is unnecessarily handicapping the development of modern dance. ★

THE RELATION OF DANCE TO THE VISUAL ARTS

BARBARA METTLER

Space-consciousness and Personality.

A human being is a force moving in time and space. The extent to which he is able to control the force of his movements in relation to time and space determines the success of his actions. Success - meaning not superficial acclaim but satisfactory adjustment to environment - is necessary for the healthy growth of personality. Space-consciousness, like consciousness of force and time, is one of the factors which can contribute to this kind of success.

Imagine what it would be like to be entirely without space-consciousness. If we wanted to go for a walk, we would be unable to measure the length of our step and so would stumble over every obstacle. Although trying to walk forward we might find ourselves walking backward, while our efforts to walk in a straight line might result in a curve. Our two feet might go in opposite directions since there would be no basis for their spatial coordination, and we could not even stand erect because the feeling of equilibrium is a feeling for our spatial relationship to the earth. Or imagine another situation: we wish to reach for a book on the table. Having no feeling for the distance between ourselves and the table, our reach might fall short or extend beyond it. We should have a hard time grasping the book in our hand because its position, size and shape, which are pure spatial characteristics, would have no meaning for us.

Such experiences cannot be disregarded as belonging to the world of nightmares. They are common occurrences to persons suffering from ataxic diseases in which lesions of the brain or spinal cord have destroyed motor coordination. The spatial deviations of the movements of ataxic patients are sometimes considered significant in diagnosis and a machine records graphically the attempts of the patient to draw a straight line.

The borderline between this type of diseased space-consciousness and the space-consciousness of a healthy person may seem well-defined, but it is not. Health and sickness have more in common than might be supposed. The range of acuteness of space-consciousness among so-called healthy persons is enormous, depending on the interaction of neuromuscular

constitution and environmental influence. There are healthy persons whose clumsiness in spatial orientation appears almost ataxic under certain circumstances, as when they are confronted with the problem of learning a difficult new motor skill. The child is born with only a rudimentary space-consciousness which develops according to life experience. If unfavorable circumstances thwart or fail to encourage this development, clumsiness and feelings of inferiority will be the result. On the other hand, conscious cultivation can sharpen and refine space-consciousness until spatial orientation becomes an art.

Movement Basis of Space-consciousness.

Feeling for space comes through the movement experience of our own bodies. We sense the spatial qualities of objects because we have moved in relationship to them. We know that a tree is vertical because we have stood beside it, feeling in our own muscles the tension which is required to maintain the vertical position. We know it is tall because we have let our eyes run up the height of it and inclined our heads to look to the top. We know it has thickness because we must walk around it in order to see it from all sides, and we know the trunk is rough because we have moved our hands over the bark. Even our knowledge that the leaves are green depends on movement; the movement of the accommodation eye-muscle used in focusing this particular color on the retina.

The form of the tree is frozen movement, summarizing the life-movements of the tree. A hemlock growing in a thick forest where it comes into conflict with other trees has no lower limbs. A pine growing freely in an open meadow has wide-branching lower limbs sweeping the ground. A birch exposed to the north wind has branches only on its southern side. A little old fir is twisted and gnarled because it has battled with storms for over a hundred years on the top of a mountain. These various spatial forms have meaning to us only because we have experienced movements similar to those which created them. We have felt our own limbs cramped by a too-close environment; we have known free movement in unrestricted space. We have sometimes turned our backs to the wind and bent our heads against the storm. The more we have moved, the more meaning spatial forms have for us. Consciousness of space in relation to our own movements enriches the content of experience.

Every body movement has spatial values which, in relation to its dynamic and temporal values, determine the form of the movement. Our awareness of these values is based on sensations arising in special sensory nerve endings located throughout the motor apparatus and in the organs of equilibrium in the inner ear. Movement sensations originating in the muscles, tendons, ligaments, joints, bones, cartilage and other tissues, are called kinesthetic. Those originating in the inner ear are known as

labyrinthine, after the bony chamber, the labyrinth, which encloses them. Kinesthetic and labyrinthine sensations, in combination with tactile, visual and other impressions, constitute the sense of space. Kinesthetic sensations make us aware of the spatial relationships existing between movements of various parts of the body. Labyrinthine sensations inform us of the position of the body as a whole in relation to the earth. The labyrinthine organs include the semicircular canals, exquisitely designed little structures whose form clearly expresses their spatial function, each one of them being tilted according to one of the three fundamental planes of space: the vertical forward-backward plane, the vertical sideward plane, and the horizontal plane. The organs of equilibrium are closely associated with, but not part of, the organs of hearing, indicating perhaps that hearing was at one time in its evolutionary development more spatially significant than it is now.

The sense of space is actually a synthesis of many types of sensory experience coordinated by the sense of movement. Second only to the sense of movement in spatial function is the sense of touch. Touch is like the outer aspect of kinesthesia, the former recording pressure from without, the latter recording pressure from within the body. The two senses, tactile and kinesthetic, work together in the evaluation of spatial realities. Suppose we close our eyes and move our hand over the surface of the table. It is our sense of touch which makes the contact between us and the table, registering the table's tactile qualities, such as hardness and smoothness. But it is our sense of movement by means of which we judge the pure spatial qualities of the table: its length, breadth, thickness, height and shape. We evaluate its dimensions and shape by means of the movement sensations which we experience in moving our arm in relation to the table. If we make a large movement, we know the table is large. If we move in curved lines, we know it is round.

Visual Experience of Space.

Although the sense of touch is, next to the kinesthetic sense, our most important sense in evaluating space, its range is limited, being confined to objects with which we are in direct bodily contact. A more comprehensive means of evaluating space is the sense of sight. Sight brings us into direct contact with objects not only in our immediate environment but also at considerable distance from us. Henri Bergson remarks on this unique quality of sight as follows: "A man born blind, who had lived among others born blind, could not be made to believe in the possibility of perceiving a distant object without first perceiving all the objects in between. Yet vision performs this miracle".

It is interesting to note that, from an evolutionary standpoint, the so-called "higher" senses, hearing and sight, seem to be outgrowths of

the "lower" senses, movement and touch. (It must be remembered that in this context higher and lower do not mean superior and inferior, but rather later and earlier evolutionary developments because, if the senses were to be compared as to their importance and indispensability, the lower would take precedence over the higher.) The sense of movement and its counterpart, touch, represent the only sensory equipment of some of the simpler animal forms. Higher up in the evolutionary scale, reactions to light and sound appear as ramifications of the sense of touch. The ear and eye seem to be specialized organs for the reception of certain types of tactile stimuli. Hearing is the perception of the stimulation of the ear drum by waves of air. Vision is the perception of the stimulation of the retina by molecular waves. To quote Bergson again: "Vision, having its origin in the stimulation of the retina by vibrations of light, is nothing else in fact but a retinal touch".

Vision performs the miracle of enabling us to perceive attributes of objects at a distance. In this it is unique among the senses. Although our sense of hearing and our sense of smell receive stimuli originating at a distance, they give us no direct information about the source of the stimuli. Close your eyes and listen to the ticking of a clock. You know it is a clock ticking only because you associate the sound with a visual (or tactile) image. If the clock is out of reach, you will have to open your eyes to verify the impression.

The eye is able to bridge this gap in space between ourselves and distant objects because it is sensitive to light. Visual perception is entirely dependent on light, and we live in a world without visual significance until it is illuminated. Light, which originates in the sun, is reflected toward our eyes in various ways according to the nature of the material on which it falls. Our visual sense perceives the reflected light in the form of an image of the objects which have reflected it. The eye thus perceives environmental objects only indirectly through the medium of light, and light itself is visible only on being reflected by some object.

The eye is not the only organ which is sensitive to light. The entire surface of the skin has this same type of sensitivity. The following paragraph from Fritz Kahn's "Man in Structure and Function" helps to clarify this point as follows: "Man has lost the hair coat of the animal; in place of it the skin has gained a new function. It has become an organ adapted to receive and to utilize radiation, for no higher organism has such direct relations with the radiant energy of its environment as man, whose nakedness is not a primitive condition, but the result of a long historical development from animal to man". Among the important effects of light on the human skin which Kahn lists are these: reddening and tanning, elevation of blood pressure, stimulation of the phagocytes, increased muscular tonus and nervous activity, creation of vitamin D.

These facts tend to strengthen the relationship between the organ

of sight (the eye) and the organ of touch (the skin). The eye appears to be a highly specialized receptor for the radiation which the skin also utilizes.

The eye's peculiar sensitivity to light enables us not only to determine the position, size and shape of things but also to experience color. Color is a quality of light. Each color we see represents a separate wave-length in the wave-trains of radiation which come to us from the sun. The skin is also sensitive to various wave-lengths (colors) of light: ultra-violet and infra-red light have very different effects on the skin. However, the experience of color as red, yellow, green, blue, etc., is uniquely visual. Aldous Huxley in "The Art of Seeing" characterizes the eye as Organ of Light. It is perhaps even more unique in its function as Organ of Color.

Light, with its corollary color, is the essential element in vision, and yet the substance of visual experience is not so much light itself as that which is revealed by light. We are more conscious of the forms of objects than of the light which falls on them, although it is only through light and shade and variations in color that we are able to recognize these forms. The visual contact with our environment is thus peculiarly indirect. We are able to perceive distant objects without having direct physical contact with them, and it is actually not the things themselves we see but the light which falls on them.

Perhaps it is this indirect quality of the visual experience which enables it to achieve a degree of intellectuality which other sensory experiences do not attain. The remoteness of bodily contact which is characteristic of vision tends to throw the emphasis on the psychological rather than on the purely sensory-motor aspects of the experience. Intellectuality may either strengthen or weaken the vitality of a sensory experience, depending largely on the degree to which the particular sense has been cultivated in isolation or in relation to the other senses. The more completely vision is integrated with other sensory experiences, especially the experience of body movement, the more will its tendency toward intellectuality strengthen rather than weaken its creative functioning.

Spatial Elements of Movement.

Integration of the visual sense with the sense of body movement can be achieved through a creative study of visual-motor expression. Such a study is based on a conscious experiencing of the spatial elements of movement.

Every movement has definite spatial characteristics which may be perceived visually as well as kinesthetically. The most basic of these are position, direction, dimension (size, range or amplitude), and shape. These are relative, rather than absolute conceptions. The position of a moving body (or the direction, dimension or shape of its movement) has meaning for us only in relation to something.

There are four basic types of spatial relationship: 1) relation of the movement to the surrounding space, 2) relation of the movement to points (bodies or objects) within the surrounding space, 3) relation of the movement to the earth, and 4) relation of the movement to the structure of the moving body. A movement may therefore be spatially defined as follows:

1. In relation to the surrounding space, its position may be central, peripheral, background, foreground, top, bottom, side, etc.; its direction may be centrifugal, centripetal, from background to foreground, from side to side, top to bottom, etc.

2. In relation to points within the surrounding space, its position may be beside, behind, in front of, etc., and its direction toward, away from, around, over, under, etc.

3. In relation to the earth, a movement may be vertical, horizontal, etc.

4. In relation to the structure of the moving body, a movement may be forward if the front of the body is leading, or backward if the back of the body is leading, etc.

Position. Whenever we move, our movements are partially determined by the position of the body at that moment. For instance, if our position is central (in relation to the surrounding space) our movements will be different than if it is peripheral. If we are standing beside a person we shall move differently than if we are standing behind or in front of him. In a horizontal position our movements will take a different form than in a vertical position. If we raise the arms overhead, turn the head to one side or stand on one leg, the movements which follow will take shape according to the position which we have assumed.

Because the physical aspects of living are inseparable from the psychological, every position of the body is accompanied by a certain feeling. For example, the fact of being in a central position may create a feeling of power which would not be experienced in a peripheral position. Standing beside a person may make one feel comradely, whereas standing behind or in front of that person may establish an entirely different psychological relationship. The horizontal position is more passive in feeling than the vertical, unless the horizontal position is tense, in which case it may express discomfort. Raising the arms overhead may create a feeling of reaching upward, signaling to someone, exultation or despair, depending on the exact position of the various parts of the body. In the same way, turning the head to one side or standing on one leg may express any number of feelings according to the personality of the one who assumes the position.

For each individual, every position of the body creates an individual feeling, and no two persons experience the same position in exactly the same way. However, there are certain general feelings embodied in every

position which enable all human beings to understand each other through the language of movement.

By moving consciously from position to position, trying to "sense" the particular feeling inherent in each, we can sharpen our sense of position and develop this aspect of our space consciousness.

Direction. Every movement of the body follows a certain direction, and each direction is capable of awakening certain feelings. For example, when we move from the background into the foreground of a space, we may have feelings of growing self-importance which may be quite the opposite if the direction is reversed. In moving toward or away from a person or an object, we may have feelings of attraction or repulsion. Moving forward (with the front of the body leading) may have an advancing feeling in contrast to moving backward, which may feel like a retreat.

Dimension. Movement has dimension (size, range, amplitude). It may cover a large or a small territory. In feeling, it may be one-, two-, or three-dimensional. Its structural dimensions may be long or short, wide or narrow, thick or thin. Experiencing in movement contrasting qualities such as largeness and smallness, wideness and narrowness, awakens contrasting feelings such as freedom and restraint, boldness and reserve.

Shape. The shape of a movement is basically either curved or straight, rounded or angular. Curved, rounded movements are more relaxed and natural, creating a feeling of harmony and well-being. Straight, angular movements require more control and create feelings of tension.

Spatial elements of movement are experienced continually in everyday life. The position of our bodies changes constantly according to the nature of our activities; we stand up, sit down, raise the arms, turn the head and assume innumerable other positions during our work and play. The direction of our movements is dictated by necessity; we move forward in crossing a street and step backward to avoid a passing car. The range of our movements is large when reaching for a distant object and small when doing close work. We follow a straight path along the block, then change to a curved one when rounding the corner.

All of these spatial experiences tend to remain on the unconscious level. Learning to experience them consciously enables us to make use of them creatively in both motor and visual expression.

Elements of Visual Form.

Line. Movement creates line. Every movement of the body traces a linear pattern in space which may be perceived visually. Line is a primary element of visual form. Everything we see has some linear quality which is the result of a movement impulse. The line of the hills which we see silhouetted against the sky has been created by once powerful move-

ments of the earth's crust. The winding river draws a sinuous line on the surface of the earth as it moves toward the sea. The line of a tree trunk is the result of the tree's persistent movement upward toward the light. The lines of the human body have evolved through age-long movements of life, struggle and growth.

Area. As the result of movement, a line may broaden out into an area. The line of the mountain ridge becomes the area of the mountain top. The line of the river widens into the area of the sea. The line of the tree trunk, continued into the branch and twig, becomes the area of the leaf.

Volume. A space enclosed by areas becomes a volume. The areas of the mountain sides enclose the volume which is the valley. The walls of a human dwelling are built to enclose volumes in which to live.

Mass. Through the action of some force, a volume may become a mass. The bowl of a valley may be slowly filled by the mass of a moving glacier. The volume created by the brink of a chasm may become a rushing mass of waterfall.

Texture and Color. Line, area, volume and mass are the basic elements of visual form. Created as movement patterns in space, they have all the spatial characteristics of movement: position, direction, dimension, and shape. In addition, visual form has attributes of texture and color. The direct experience of these qualities is limited to the skin and the eye and may be shared only indirectly by the kinesthetic sense. Nevertheless, insofar as the sense of movement forms the physiological and psychological basis for all the other senses, experiences of texture and color can have a movement feeling.

Visual Expression.

Learning to visualize the spatial patterns created by our own body movements and to feel the movement impulse inherent in every line we see integrates the sense of sight with the sense of movement and gives added vitality to both motor and visual experience. It may also be a starting point for visual expression.

The spatial patterns created by a body moving in space may be transferred directly to graphic and plastic media. As we walk in sand or snow we cannot help leaving a visual imprint of our motion on the ground. The same experience may become a consciously creative one if we devise various types of locomotion such as scuffing, jumping, creeping and rolling, for the purpose of producing unusual and interesting visual patterns. In the same way, if we stand in front of a large blackboard with chalk in one hand or both, rhythmic movements of the arms and body will create visual patterns which have free, organic form. The same freedom of movement may be employed on a smaller scale in working with charcoal or finger paints on a large piece of paper pinned to the wall or spread out on the floor.

Any material may be used to express movement qualities in visual form. The line of a particular movement might be reproduced in string or wire, depending on its textural feeling. A movement having a feeling of area might be cut out of paper, or painted with the flat of the hand or a wide brush. A movement having a quality of volume might be reconstructed in paper, cardboard or cloth. A movement with a feeling of mass might be modeled in clay.

Feelings of texture can be expressed both in movement and in visual media. Sandpaper, cotton, glass, textiles, etc., provide excellent materials for textural experiments which unite the creative functions of movement, touch and sight.

Although movement itself is colorless, movement experience may have a feeling of color. This feeling should be cultivated on a biological rather than an intellectual-associational basis. Color is a quality of light, and we know that light has a direct effect on movement. According to human experience, light produces growth and expansion, whereas darkness (absence of light) results in restricted motion and decay. The fact that red is associated with activity and violet with repose has a physiological basis: the colors toward the red end of the spectrum require more tension on the part of the eye muscle in focusing them on the retina than the colors toward the violet end. It would be worthwhile to develop a theory of color psychology based on biologically founded sensory-motor reactions, to replace the currently popular theories which are less solidly founded on intellectual association.

Body Movement in Relation to Spatial Environment.

A living organism finds its relationship to its environment through movement. In the course of time its movements take on the spatial characteristics of the environment and, reciprocally, the character of the surrounding space is influenced by its movement. An understanding of this natural exchange could become the starting point for a broad program of cultural development.

The human being's spatial environment begins with the clothes he wears and the objects he handles, continuing with the architecture of his houses and the plan of his cities to the landscaping of his countrysides. Only man among all the animals is foolish enough to refuse to adjust himself to nature's outlines and to create an artificial environment which fails to express adequately his natural functions. For the sake of fashion, he often wears clothes and lives in houses that inhibit rather than encourage his natural movements, endangering his health and efficiency.

A thorough knowledge of the spatial laws of movement enables us not only to adapt ourselves creatively to those aspects of our environment which are unchangeable, but also to shape our self-made environment in

such a way as to encourage our creative life and growth. A body covering, whether it be a dress or a hat or a shoe, should follow the lines of the body in motion. Only in this way can it become a practical and visually satisfying form. A house exists for the purpose of sheltering moving human beings. The daily life movements of the family that lives in it should dictate its architectural forms.

If a creative movement training were part of the educational program of our schools, we should learn to move about the world with less awkwardness and clumsiness. Clumsiness breeds disharmony and discontent. Lack of spatial orientation in the physical world can mean a warped outlook on life. If designers of clothes, tools, houses and cities had a greater understanding of body movement, they could take a positive role in the evolutionary process by shaping man's environment to further his creative growth.

Creative Dance and the Visual Arts.

The experience of body movement raised to the aesthetic level becomes the art of dance. Dance is the integrating factor among all the arts. It is equally concerned with time and space, thus overlapping on the one hand the arts of sound (music and poetry) and on the other the arts of sight (painting, sculpture, architecture).

A study of dance can be a powerful impetus to visual art expression. By releasing creative movement impulses, it frees the personality for all types of expression. By awakening the sense of space and cultivating it in a visual-motor direction, it establishes a functional basis for the creation of visual forms.

Just as every sensory experience involves a movement impulse, every art contains an element of dance. The more consciously this element is cultivated, the more complete will be our art expression.

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ARENA OR PROSCENIUM ARCH?

By Barbara Mettler

Dance is a motor experience, just as music is auditory and painting visual. The fact that experience of movement is more inner than the experience of either sound or sight (being dependent on nerve endings deep within the muscles) should not tempt us to follow the easy course of neglecting the purely motor elements of a dance production in favor of visual and auditory ones.

A basic motor element of dance is its three-dimensional quality, and dance experience is weakened for both dancer and spectator when it is distorted to fit the two-dimensional picture-frame setting of the proscenium arch. A far more satisfactory setting for a dance production is a central stage with the audience sitting all around.

Dance educators are in a favorable position to use this type of setting, especially if they have access to a gymnasium with bleachers on two or more sides. Where there are no bleachers, several rows of chairs around an oval or circular area can provide satisfactory seating space for quite a large number of people. This latter arrangement cannot, of course, accommodate as many spectators as a large auditorium with a stage, but are we to measure the success of a dance performance merely by the number of people who attend it? Is it not more realistic to measure it by the number of spectators who are actually moved by the experience? Moreover, a truly successful dance program can be repeated any number of times if the seating of the hall is too limited to take care of the entire audience at once. Some colleges already have circular theaters, and in time there will be many more.

The dancer who creates his dance for an audience sitting all around frees his movement in every direction, gaining naturalness and spontaneity. His attention is shifted from the outer appearance of his dance to its inner structure, strengthening its vitality. The audience seeing dance from all sides gains a more intimate understanding of movement as a medium of expression, approaching it less critically and more creatively, while sharing more of the dancer's experience.

The technical problems of presenting "dance-in-the-round" can be easily solved if one keeps one's attention on the over-all purpose of a dance program: to evoke in the spectators as enlivening an aesthetic movement

experience as possible. To this end a performance may be preceded by a few introductory remarks and interspersed with occasional explanations to relax the audience relative to the unfamiliar aspects of the program and to focus its attention on its most important features. Under a skilled director, the audience may even be led through some creative movement experiences of its own, such as using one hand to contrast slow and fast movements, curved and straight lines, regular and irregular time patterns, etc. Informality in dancer-audience relationship can further the success of a dance production, especially in an educational institution.

If the dance has a story, musical accompaniment or costume, these should be developments of the movement idea, and the idea itself should grow out of a genuine feeling for dancing in the middle of an area. This feeling can be cultivated in the dance classes where students sit around the edge of the room to watch those who are performing in the center.

It would be false and futile to superimpose central staging as a new technique on dances that have been created to be seen from only one side. Central staging is not a technique. It is a new creative impulse in dance, and as such it is doomed to failure unless it is approached creatively.

Stimulated by this new impulse, dance educators may want to free themselves from the restrictions of conventional dance accompaniment and put musicians as well as dancers into the arena. This is more successful where the musicians dance and the dancers make music (as do the author's groups, like many ethnic groups all over the world), but it is also possible where there is the usual separateness of function, provided there is willingness to dispense with the piano. Other instruments, such as drums, wind and stringed instruments, accordion, etc. can well be used in the arena and are even better for dance accompaniment than the piano.

The problem of lighting is the only serious difficulty. Overhead lights are best and the boxing lights with which some men's gymnasiums are equipped serve the purpose well. Special lighting effects are unnecessary. All electrical efforts should be directed toward concentrating a sufficient amount of light on the dancing area. In any case, if the technicians and stage crew will spend as much time as is usually spent on stage settings for school and college dance productions, a satisfactory solution can always be found.

Above all, there must be a shift of emphasis from dance as a remote, predominantly visual spectacle to dance as a shared, vital movement experience. Whoever believes that dance is creative activity rather than passive entertainment, that dance is for everyone, and that the role of the spectator is to participate as fully as possible in the creative movement experience will find that, once he has entered the arena, he is reluctant to go back through the proscenium arch.

**IMPROVISATION:
THE
MOST
CREATIVE
APPROACH
TO
DANCE**

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IMPROVISATION: THE MOST CREATIVE APPROACH TO DANCE

by Barbara Mettler

The author, seen at right, is a graduate of Smith College and the Mary Wigman School in Dresden. She has had studios in New York City, New Hampshire, Boston, and since 1963 in Tucson, Arizona, and has conducted workshops and demonstrations in more than 25 colleges and universities around the country.

It is in the nature of movement that when a pendulum has swung as far as it can go in one direction, it must inevitably swing back in the opposite direction. Perhaps this principle is at work in the field of dance today. Dance seems to have reached the limit of its swing in the direction of theatrical techniques and audience entertainment, so that now there is developing an outspoken need for dance as *creative activity*.

Creative activity means creating something yourself, not letting someone else create it for you. It means participating actively in the creative process rather than attending passively to someone else's creative work. All art is activity: something *to do*, not something to sit and watch others do. The artist creates a work because he himself has need of the experience. We are social beings, so an experience is enhanced by being shared. One person may enjoy another person's art work if he has sufficient background of creative activity himself to share in the artist's experience, but when art is dominated by show business it suffers as art.

Art means the shaping of some material into forms which satisfy the artist because they express some feeling within him. We all have a need to create forms which express our feelings, whether it is in the arrangement of furniture in a room or the choice of paint for a house, or whether it is in the creation of abstract forms of movement, sound, color, line, words or wood. There is something of the artist in everyone. Let us not segregate the artist from the rest of society. It is true that some of us have more need than others for creative art work, but there is some of this need in everyone. It is a need which concerns the individual, the group, and art itself. There can be no healthy art until more people are creating.

What does it mean *to create*? To create means to make something new, something that has never existed before. How is it possible to make something new? How do we know that it has never existed before? It is sure to be new if it is an expression of *you*. You are new. You have never existed before, and there



Photos by Bill Sears



Improvisation (Cont'd)

has never been anyone like you. No two people are exactly alike and insofar as your work expresses your unique individuality — your personality, feelings, rhythms — it will be new. It will be creative.

Everyone is creative. Our creative imagination needs to be liberated and cultivated, and in some of us it will function more readily than in others, but let us not make the mistake of thinking that some people are creative and others are not. Rather let us put our attention on finding ways of making creative activity available to everyone.

In my studio we stress dance improvisation. Improvisation, as we practice it, can open the doors of dance as a creative art activity to everyone. Improvisation means making up the dance while you are dancing. It means following your own movement feelings in the creation of your own movement forms. In improvisation, the dance expresses the individuality of the dancer. We consider improvisation the most creative approach to dance.

Improvisation offers dancers of every age, on every level of experience, of every physical and psychological condition, opportunity to create dances in accord with their true nature and needs. Let me stress the word *nature*. It is natural to express ourselves through movement, and feeling for esthetically satisfying form is innate. The creative teacher's role is not to superimpose arbitrary movement patterns or to dictate rules of dance-making but to draw out and cultivate on the highest possible esthetic level the student's natural movement resources and feeling for expressive form.

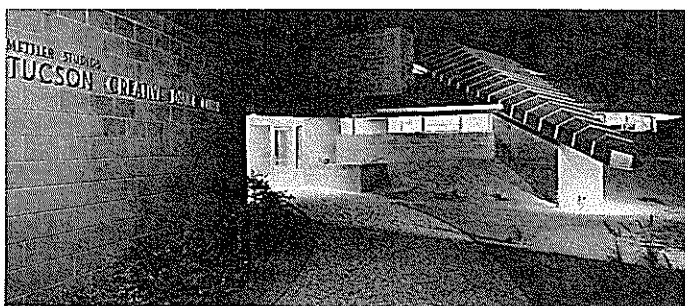
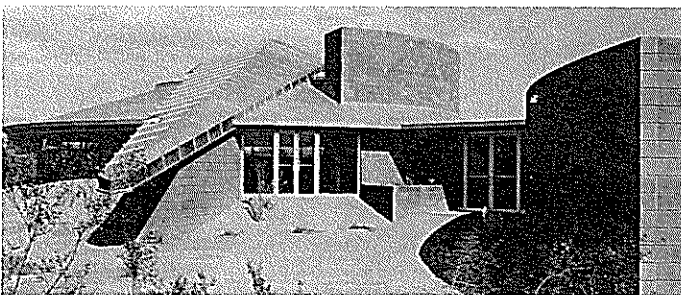
In my classes we offer specific themes for improvisation, unlimited in number because new ones are continually growing out of the old. They are presented in the form of carefully graded movement problems, for dancers on every level of experience, covering all basic elements of dance: problems of the

body as instrument; problems of movement as material; problems of force, time and space; problems of movement, sound, sight; individual and group problems; problems for small groups and large ones; problems of dance in relation to music, speech, visual design and drama; problems of costume, setting and accompaniment. Improvising in all these areas, the dancer develops awareness of the expressive movement possibilities of his own body and the ability to use his body in the creation of expressive movement forms.

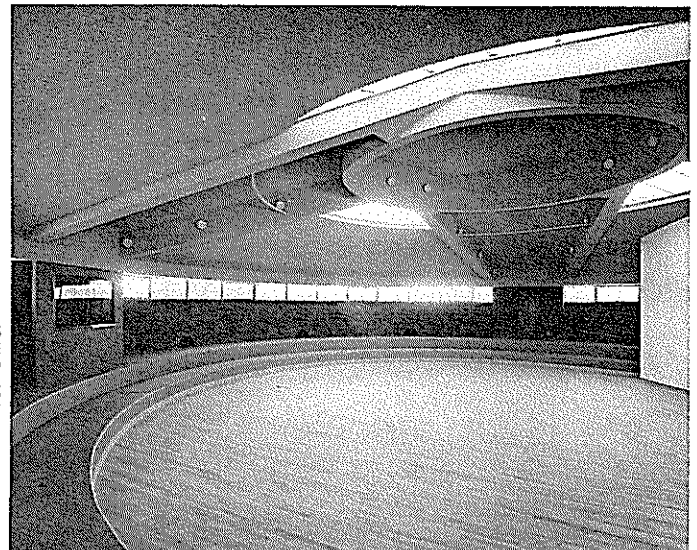
What about discipline? Is not improvisation a kind of self-indulgence in which we let inner feelings flow out in a vague, undisciplined sort of way? Quite the opposite! I know of no more severe discipline than improvising on a given theme and trying to make the improvisation a completely satisfying dance. There is no escape. It is not merely a preparation for something which is intended to be satisfying someday in the future. It must be satisfying here and now.

Technical facility grows out of systematically pursued improvisational dance studies. The teacher gives themes for improvisation according to the needs of the class. If the students are heavy on their feet, let them improvise on the theme of lightness. If they are always up in the air, let them improvise close to the ground. Perhaps their leg movements are limited or their hands inexpressive, then they should improvise a dance study using that part of the body only. If their movements are too tight, let them try to express feelings of looseness. If they move too slowly, they should explore fast movement, and so on. As you can see, these are *movement themes*, not literary, dramatic or musical themes. We do not derive dance from any other art.

Dance is an independent art — the art of body movement — the basic, primary, central art. Just as movement is basic to all life activities, so is dance basic to all the arts. In our study of dance we find that movement is audible and visible as well as kinesthetically perceptible, so the dancer must be concerned not



Left and below: Miss Mettler's studio was designed, according to her specifications, by architect John H. Howe, a member of the Frank Lloyd Wright group, which has its winter headquarters at Taliesin West in Scottsdale, Arizona. The studio is circular "to break down the barriers between dancers and spectators" (who sit on the steps). Opposite: A student improvises accompaniment as others improvise in dance.



Ted Offret

only with movement but also with sound and sight. We learn to use music and speech and visual design and drama as part of the creative activity of dancing, creating our own accompaniments and costumes and settings. When a dance needs a sound accompaniment, the accompaniment is improvised at the same time as the dance. The dancers either accompany themselves or are accompanied by other dancers. Voice, hands and feet, drums and all kinds of instruments are used, the dancers choosing freely whatever suits their needs.

Many dancers derive their rhythm from music, but we derive music from the rhythm of our dance. All natural movement has rhythm. Rhythm means pulsation: the rising and falling of force (energy) as it flows along in time and space. Rhythm is the life of the movement. It is the dancer's major concern. All our dance studies are studies in rhythm, in all of its many aspects, whether silent or with sound.

As the individual dancer becomes at home with himself in his own forms of movement expression, he is able to find his place in a creatively functioning group. One of the most interesting aspects of our work is group improvisation. No two groups are alike and no two are expected to dance in the same way. Like every individual, every group creates for itself its own movement patterns according to its nature.

Just as stretching, bending, twisting, springing, swinging, are natural movements for the individual body, there are movements which are natural for the group body. It is natural for the members of a group to move toward each other, away from each other, around each other, over and under each other; to move simultaneously or in succession; to make the same movements or contrasting ones; to be active or passive in relation to one another. As in the individual body, the structure of the group body depends on the number, relative position, and individual characteristics of the different members. Group movement depends on group body structure. For example, a group of five can move

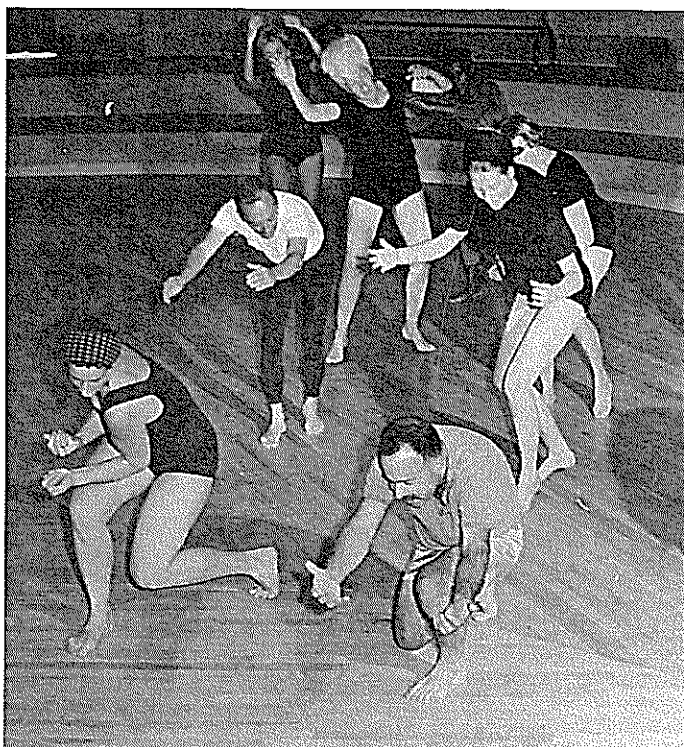
in ways which are impossible for a group of three, the movements of a circle of dancers are different from the movements of a line, a group of children moves differently than a group of adults. We have many themes for group improvisation, emphasizing force or time or space relationships, every one of them offering a different type of creative discipline. Sometimes we have a leader within the group, sometimes we do not. A leaderless group improvisation, for those of us experienced in this way of work, is the most challenging and the most enjoyable of all dance experiences.

The dancer, like every artist, must develop craftsmanship. Craftsmanship means the ability to handle instrument and material in the creation of satisfying forms. This requires objectivity. The dancer should handle his instrument (body) and his material (movement) as objectively as the sculptor handles chisel and stone. He must have thorough knowledge of both. Through improvisation the dancer can develop craftsmanship to the point where the distinction between improvisation and composition tends to break down.

Improvisation and composition are two different kinds of dance experience. At any time movements discovered in improvisation may be fixed in a satisfying sequence for the purpose of repetition. A composition is a form which can be repeated. An improvisation is a one-time thing. Although we spend most of our time improvising, we also compose, letting our compositions evolve out of our improvising. Sometimes the form of the dance is only partly fixed, leaving room for improvisation. There is danger in trying to repeat the exact form of a creative dance experience. Like any living thing, it may be killed in the attempt to capture it. We do not use the word "choreography." Choreography (in its Greek roots) means dance writing, and we wish to stress dance as a motor, not a graphic, art. Dance is movement and, whether improvised or composed, a dance lives only in the dancing.



Alfred A. Cohn



The most creative moment of a dance is when it is first being created. Improvisation is a continuous process of creation, uniting content, form and technique in an integral whole. The *content* of a dance is the inner experience which the movement expresses. The *form* is the outward perceptible aspect of the experience. The *technique* is the means of perfecting the form. Today dancers put so much attention on technique that both form and content suffer.

The form of a dance should be an organic outgrowth of the content. Content is feeling. When I use the word feeling I do not mean specific emotions such as fear, pain, rage. The representation of specific emotions is more the function of drama than dance. Dance expresses *movement feelings* which cannot be put into words. Every movement we make is accompanied by diffuse emotional states which cannot be verbalized but which the dancer can use with awareness and control. Like all psychological occurrences, movement feelings are only partly conscious. That is why it is a mistake to approach dance creation with too many words, too much analysis, too much criticism. Dance cannot be wholly intellectualized. It must be experienced, felt. Dance improvisation is a conscious tapping of the unconscious sources of creative power.

My studio is circular because we wish to liberate dance in all directions, as a three-dimensional art. Audiences, who are welcome at any time, sit on steps around the perimeter. This arrangement provides a very intimate relationship between dancers and audience, which seems to me to be in accord with the needs of our time. The average person has so little opportunity for creative dance activity himself that he needs to be brought into close contact with the dancer's action. The proscenium arch may provide a suitable frame

for a remote and predominantly visual picture, but we want our audiences to have an authentic movement experience.

Our approach to dance performance is not a conventional one. We spend comparatively little time making special preparation for public performances because we are performing all the time. Whether there are many spectators or none, our dancers when improvising are presenting as ripe an art work as they are capable of creating at the time.

Audiences enjoy our dance improvisations. As the form of the dance evolves before them, they are able to share in the creative process. Very often a member of our audience will say, "This is the first time I have understood what dance is all about." Our performances make observers not only want to dance themselves but to feel that they can, and this is exactly what we are aiming for. We would rather dance *with* people than *for* them, and all the work of my studio is directed toward breaking down the artificial barriers which stand between the average person and dance as a creative art activity.

Improvisation means being wholly involved in the creative process, deep in the esthetic experience of movement. Esthetic experience means joy in the expressive form of the movement for the sake of the experience itself. We live in an age wholly dominated by utilitarian values. Hence so little time for enjoyment of dance as creative activity. Often I am asked, "Where does this dancing lead?", "Where will it get you?" No artist asks such questions. He creates for the joy of creating. Enjoyment of the creative experience for its own sake, rather than for some utilitarian gain — is not this the essence of art?

END