This text on the principle and studies from the Organic Form and Unison lessons accompanies a video with clips of Barbara teaching this material. Time stamps refer to the place in the video where each section begins.

**Barbara Mettler Teaching Dance**

*Organic Dance Form and Unison Movement*

Related Material: *Materials of Dance as a Creative Art Activity*  Chapter 6

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**OUTLINE**

**ORGANIC DANCE FORM**

- One Movement at a Time  **0:15**
- Creative Pause  **0:40**
- One Movement at a Time with a Creative Pause Between Movements  **1:26**
  - Partner Study: Moving in Alternation  **4:35**

**UNISON MOVEMENT IN PARTNERS**

- Unison Dance with a Leader  **5:31**
- Unison Dance with Leadership Changing
- Unison Dances without a Leader

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**ORGANIC DANCE FORM**

*One Movement at a Time*  **0:40**

Organic dance form is one of the basic pillars in Barbara Mettler’s approach to dance. To help students experience organic form in dance, Barbara relies on the fact that movements occur one at a time as an impulse of muscular energy rising out of rest to a peak of activity and returning to rest. Much of the time, that rest—or pause—is almost imperceptible; but in these studies, the pause is accentuated so that the dancer can attend to how one movement is born out of the preceding one. The kinesthetic sense plays an important role in organic form. Because Mettler saw dance as expression of formed feeling, she emphasizes paying close attention to kinesthetic sensations both while moving and pausing.

**Creative Pause**  **1:26**

The term “creative pause” was coined in 1922 by German educational reformer Fritz Klatt. Rather than having a static held feeling, the creative pause is a moment of open receptivity to the feeling in the muscles created by the previous movement. This feeling guides the dancer to the next movement that the body wants to do. Once students can sense how the form of the movement evolves organically, accentuating the pause between movements is no longer required.

To help integrate the whole body into each movement, Barbara would also suggest that dancers exhale at the beginning of each movement impulse. In this lesson, she also clarifies that “one movement” depends on how the dancer senses the movement impulses. A single movement can last a long time, with minor impulses within it, as long as the dancer feels the movement as a whole expression of one major impulse.
Partner Study: Moving in Alternation

People dancing together can also sense each other’s single movements. The partner dance of moving in alternation with each other is a basic study for learning to develop themes in group dance improvisation. For this study within the Force Element, it is important that dancers do not merely change alternating positions (which would be a spatial focus), but that they sense the movement impulse of their partner and respond with a movement that naturally follows.

Beyond simple movements evolving from each other, the concept of organic form also applies as dance themes evolve from each other. In group dance improvisation there is often a creative pause at times when a movement theme has fulfilled itself and the whole group waits as it senses the next theme’s beginning. Thus, organic form is one of the key principles that allow people to create meaningful group dance improvisations together.

UNISON MOVEMENT

Studies in unison movement do not necessarily need to follow an introduction of organic form. (In fact, in Barbara’s Summer Dance Course of these videos, they were not introduced in sequence.) However, they can make a good progression because in order to easily express complete unison, dancers need to attend to how their movements are naturally evolving.

Here Barbara uses a mirror relationship between two people as an easy way to intuitively sense unison movement in partners. A mirror relationship may not apply, however, in other group forms, such as in a circle of dancers, where the group members must sense how the form of the circle is moving, rather than their relationship to the leader.

Barbara gradually builds the ability to move with leaderless unison by first having the class improvise with constant leadership, and then with exchanging leadership, and finally with no designated leader. She gives some hints about leaderless unison saying:

“You’ve got to be plenty loose. If you’re standing there on stiff knees with tight arms, you’re not going to make it... You need a little more relaxation and waiting for the thing to work. You see, something has to happen. Either your knees are going to bend or you’re going to start swaying or losing your balance or something. And it is so inevitable and so natural, then both of you will feel it. Whereas, if you are trying in any way to do something that isn't inevitable [it won't feel united.] ...”

“This was a very important study, to go all the way in not leading. With a little bit more experience, it isn't that nobody leads. It's that you both lead and that you both follow. In other words, if something feels right to one, you can sort of hint at it. And if it's what the other one is really feeling too, it will happen. But that's very, very different from one saying, ‘This is what has to happen’ or ‘This feels right to me.’” In the group dances the intention shifts from, ‘This is what I am doing,’ to ‘This is what we are doing.’

by Mary Ann Brehm
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