

*COMPOSITION IN PURE MOVEMENT

MARY WIGMAN

CHARGED as I frequently am with "freeing" the dance from music, the question often arises, what can be the source and basic structure of my own dancing. I cannot define its principles more clearly than to say that the fundamental idea of any creation arises in me or, rather, out of me as a completely independent dance theme. This theme, however primitive or obscure at first, already contains its own development and alone dictates its singular and logical sequence. What I feel as the germinal source of any dance may be compared perhaps to the melodic or rhythmic "subject" as it is first conceived by a composer, or to the compelling image that haunts a poet. But beyond that I can draw no parallels. In working out a dance I do not follow the models of any other art, nor have I evolved a general routine for my own. Each dance is unique and free, a separate organism whose form is self determined.

Neither is my dancing abstract, in intention at any rate, for its origin is not in the mind. If there is an abstract effect it is incidental. On the other hand my purpose is not to "interpret" the emotions. Grief, joy, fear, are terms too fixed and static to describe the sources of my work. My dances flow rather from certain states of being, different stages of vitality which release in me a varying play of the emotions, and in themselves dictate the distinguishing atmospheres of the dances.

I can at this moment clearly recall the origin of my *Festlicher Rhythmus*. Coming back from the holidays, rested, restored by sun and fresh air, I was eager to begin dancing again. When I stepped into the studio and saw my co-workers there waiting for me, I beat my hands together and out of this spontaneous expression of happiness, of joy, the dance developed.

* A statement on the relation of her work to music especially prepared for this magazine by Miss Wigman during her American tour.

My first tentative attempts to compose were made when I was studying the Dalcroze system. Though I have always had a strong feeling for music it seemed from the very start most natural for me to express my own nature by means of pure movement. Perhaps it was just because there was so much musical work to be done at that time, that all these little dances and dance studies took form without music. A German painter observing my modest experiments advised me to go to Munich and work with Von Laban who was also interested in such dancing. On Laban's system of gymnastics I founded my body technic; and during this period of apprenticeship I continued the gradual evolution of my own work.

After years of trial I have come to realize in a very final way, that for me the creation of a dance to music already written cannot be complete and satisfactory. I have danced with several of the great European orchestras, and to music (always generically dance music) old and new. I have even attempted to work out Hindemith's *Daemon*, and some compositions of Bartok, Kodaly, and other contemporaries. But while music easily evokes in me a dance reaction, it is in the development of the dance that a great divergence so often occurs. For usually a dance idea, a "theme," however inspired, by a state of feeling, or indirectly by music, sets up independent reactions. The theme calls for its own development. It is in working this out that I find my dance parting company with the music. The parallel development of the dance with the already completely worked out musical idea is what I find in most instances to be functionally wrong. Each dance demands organic autonomy.



So I have come gradually to feel my way toward a new re-integration of music with the dance. I do not create a dance and then order music written for it. As soon as I conceive a theme, and before it is completely defined, I call in my musical assistants. Catching my idea, and observing me for atmosphere, they begin to improvise with me. Every step of the development is built up co-operatively. Experiments are made with various instruments, accents, climaxes, until we feel the work has indissoluble unity.

My *Pastorale* was developed in the following way: I came into my studio one day and sank down with a feeling of complete relaxation. Out of a sense of deepest peace and quietude I began slowly to move my arms and body. Calling to my assistants I said, "I do not know if anything will come of this feeling, but I should like a reed instrument that would play over and over again a simple little tune, not at all important, always the same one." Then with the monotonous sound of the little tune, with its gentle lyric suggestion, the whole dance took form. Afterwards we found that it was built on six-eighths time, neither myself nor the musician being conscious of the rhythm until we came to the end.

The monumental *Totenmal* which we presented in Munich last year was accompanied by a whole orchestra of percussion instruments. During the period of preparation these instruments were handled by dancers. The improvisation of dancing and music was so dovetailed that in the long hours of practice the girls dancing constantly changed places with those making the music. The final result was one of the greatest possible harmony. In group creations, as in my individual work, movement and sound are always evolved together.

Working with a group my effort is to seek out a common feeling. I present the main idea, each one improvises. No matter how wide the range of individuality, I must find some common denominator from these different emanations of personality. Thus, on the rock of basic feeling, I slowly build each structure.

Of course all that I have said here should be accepted as a very personal credo. I do not propose to erect a general system for I am a firm believer in individual freedom. Creative work will always assume new and varying forms. Any profound expression of self for which its creator assumes responsibility in the most complete sense must give authentic impetus to a new or an old idea in art.