

# Karen Barbee Workshops

## Making Previously Learned Content Relevant

### Combinations – Repurpose, Restructure, or Reveal!

In these days of workshops filled with learning full choreographies, how can we ensure that we all get something useful from our time and money spent?? Learn some exercises for taking combinations from dances learned by placing them into other music, and then stretching or compressing the movements and phrases to make them work! The process itself often creates beautiful new choices for movement!

In this workshop, we will learn a piece of a choreography – to the music that inspired it, and then repurpose the phrases into other dissimilar music choices.

This workshop is meant to teach dancers how to reuse material *using the music as the reason for change*.

### Combinations – Evolution and Growth

This is yet another method for extracting the maximum use out learned combinations OR using our own combinations as a springboard for new movement. In this workshop, we will learn several combinations (and/or you can bring your own!!), and experiment with how many ways you can “shrink” or “grow” your combination in size and dynamics AND how many ways you can reframe/reinterpret the combination in your own mind to generate other similar ideas for movement.

This workshop is meant to teach dancers how to reuse material *using the movement as the basis for change*.

## Movement

### Drills – Technical versus Organic

Logic-intensive, muscle-and-brain-challenging body work makes us stronger dancers – for sure! But purely technical drills can sometimes create a habit of robotic movement that becomes hard to break. Choreographies become busier and look like a drills class themselves! Yikes! Organic Drills, i.e. simply following a seasoned dancer in her movement (ala 1970’s style learning) can reveal a more emotional, genuine, melodic path of movement that, when combined with the technical work, produces a fuller experience for everyone. Compare, contrast, and combine the two styles of drilling!

## **Drills in Motion**

Strong, precise torso articulation, while never easy, is easiER done when stationary. Work thru designing and implementing exercises, footwork, and combinations to challenge your torso technique, create interesting movement patterns, and *at the very least* learn to what extent you are relying on your feet and legs to bolster the action of your core.

## **Focus on Footwork**

It's not always sexy, but it's critical! Many come to this art form with little or no former dance training and an intense desire to learn what their torsos can do! But.....there comes a time in your belly dance journey when you wish for more interesting ways to move around the stage.

Inherently focused on developing balance and aerobic in nature, this workshop will review many simple traveling steps and then work thru exercises for dissecting and recombining them. The result will be more interesting traveling options and a greater awareness of how much can be communicated simply by the way we choose to navigate the stage.

# **Improvisation**

## **The Road to Performance Improvisation**

So you can dance a choreography and you aren't afraid to get up and dance to live music! But are your movements – when performed in a live music setting – relevant throughout the piece? Or perhaps only in the obvious places? To what extent and how quickly can you pick up on the overall structure of a piece of music, subconsciously index it, and relate relevant movement to it as it repeats – without looking like you've done all of that? Is it really a performance if the steps executed are the same ones that would be done on a crowded dance floor while wearing blue jeans?

In this workshop, we will develop a toolkit for getting good at identifying general musical frameworks. Watch how it not only trains you for that live music opportunity – but speeds up your ability to understand a selection and get to work on it in any format.

## **So You Think You Can Dance.....To Live Music!/Becoming Well Versed in “Versions”**

How many times have you heard a band play a song by another band – and you’re singing along – and you get it wrong because they changed the structure of the song from the original recording???

And so it is with live music. There are as many “arrangements”, many “versions” of a piece of music as there are musicians who play that music. In this workshop, we will select a piece of music and dance to several versions of the same piece. Learn how to predict, prepare, react, and rebound as necessary to own the version you are delivered. If nothing else, you will never hear music the same way again! Develop an awareness of cultural nuances in arrangements of music and some insight into the boundaries for artistic licensing. There might be “10 songs every belly dancer should know”, but what VERSION of those 10 songs!!??

# **Musical Interpretation for Choreography or Improvisation**

## **Music Mapping - Closing the Gap between Sound and Movement**

Most of us can interpret a piece of music if we are able to hear it a few times and have a few days or at least a few hours to work on it. But what are we doing to be able to react in the moment to the sounds we hear – while still being connected to the fundamental structure of a piece of music?

How many ways can you hear a piece of music? Stretch your mind and find new ways to translate musical phrasing to movement. Learn to listen at various levels of detail, hear shapes, hear emotions, create story lines, etc. in an effort to trigger more options for movement in your head and in your dance. Work with Karen thru exercises to enable you to do this quickly so that you can move on to relevant Performance Improvisation!!

\*\*\*This workshop is actually taking the “Road to Performance Improvisation” workshop to a deeper level.

## **Music to Movement/Movement to Music – Choreographic Considerations and Inspired Improvisation**

“This music sounds playful.” “This song sounds very linear in this section.” “The nay in this song suggests arm work to me.” These can all be valid ideas for movement. But what do you do when “playful”, “linear”, and “arms” keep coming across as the same thing for you over and over? Or what do you do when you must dance to a piece of music that sounds monotonous and repetitive to you. We all hope to embody the music when we dance; but sometimes we must decide on varied movement first and then listen for reasons to make it match.

This workshop is yet another way to expand our possibilities when reaching for appropriate movement in any setting.

\*\*\*Similar to the two “Combination” workshops but without the benefit of the starting combination! This would be appropriate for a more advanced group OR as a day two after the “Combination” material had been covered.

### **Eliminating the “uhs” in our dance.**

Have you ever been distracted by a public speaker overusing “uhhhh” to collect their thoughts, remember their place, or fill a gap of time while they think of something else to say? Or how about the public speaker who overuses a phrase (‘at the end of the day” is a big one here!) What are your dance “uhhhs”? What are those things that you do – sometimes over and over and over – because you aren’t aware of their overuse? Or, if improvising, is there one thing that you do when you get lost? As it happens, are you still listening and staying within the general framework of the music? Have you thought about owning it (within the context of your piece) and using it as an opportunity to really connect with your audience?

How can we become aware of these habits, break them and/or use them to our benefit? Work with Karen thru exercises to reveal those “uhhhs”, catch them, blend them, use them as transition or as a launch into the next intentional movement, and/or as a way to show ‘em more of your personality.

## **Drum Solos**

### **“Where Do We Go From Here?” – Exercises For Live Drum Solo Success!**

- 1) Growing/Developing Rhythms – basic rhythms can be filled, extended, embellished, and evolved. Practicing patterns of these actions can enhance your ability to follow a drummer, develop a sense of what will come next, and eventually even control the process!
- 2) Freeze vs. Float and everything in between – How do you NAIL that strong accent OR own your miss if it isn’t there? Explore movement styles, use of body parts, and technical exercises in control that will develop your ability to never look wrong during a live, improvisation drum solo. 😊
- 3) Remember “if you train to dance to live music, everything else is a piece of cake” – Ahmad Ghafour, bandleader of the Byblos Band in Houston, Tx. This workshop will make you better at ALL drum solos!!

### **Drum Solo “Chunking”**

I am sometimes amazed at some of the new drum solo recordings and how hard drummers are working to explore unique patterns and riffs. It takes a lot of work to do this! And the reason why is good news for dancers.

There are many “standard” drum solo riffs in Arabic music. When you are familiar with them, drum solos become much easier. When you are familiar with them, some of the new material on the market isn’t as scary because you can easily identify its relationship to a “standard”. And when your

awareness of this is at the forefront of your mind, you can break thru your most common choices of drum solo movement and create a truly unique interpretation – even to the standard patterns.

In this workshop we will break a drum solo into “chunks” (1 or 2 riffs per chunk), and work with *several* movement options to that chunk before moving on to the next. Bonuses of this exercise will be an appreciation for the many sounds that a drum can make, lessons in transition, and how to own the inevitable “false start”. 😊

### **Drum Solo – Developing Your “Accentometer”**

All accents aren’t created equal. How well does your body reflect that truth during a drum solo? And what makes an “accent” anyway? Is it the use of a major muscle or is it about covering a great amount of space in a short amount of time or is it the use of opposing body parts and direction or a weight shift or a toss in the head or the throw of an arm? All of that? Some of that? How is an accent affected by the amount of “space” you put around it?

In this workshop you will work thru some Drills and Technique for optimum muscle recruiting and awareness of what you already do versus what you don’t do. We will have fun with assigning value to our accents and moving up and down a scale of intensity to make sure we have all possibilities covered.

## **Musicality**

### **“Ornamentation in Arabic Music” – acknowledging versus attacking**

Sometimes we want people to notice our earrings and necklace, but not at the expense of noticing everything else about us! Right? And so it is with the embellishments in Arabic music. They can be quite compelling for interpretation and focus and yet, they are still just that: embellishments *to something else*.

Oftentimes, because of the unfamiliar nature of the music, the phrasing, and certainly the language, dancers tend to grab hold of singular sounds or short phrases as stepping stones of safety. But this can read as “dancing from one punctuation mark to the next” if those stepping stones aren’t viewed in their proper context within the entire piece of music. :-/

In this workshop, we will consider a plethora of possibilities for relevant, contextual interpretation of these beautiful musical nuances and how to use them – or not – to enhance our overall presentation.

### **Taksim and Mawal – Texture, Tactics, and Taste**

Work with various instruments and voices (Arabic and English!) in planned and improvisational exercises to ensure that your accordion doesn’t look like your nay doesn’t look like your violin doesn’t look like the voice of Hakim doesn’t look like the voice of Christina Aguilera! Discover and reinforce

what makes those differences as well as to what extent you calibrate between an emotional interpretation and a literal interpretation of improvisational works.

In this workshop we will work with Taksim and Mawal interpretation in their raw form and then overlay that experience onto some popular musical selections that contain improvised sections.

### **Discovering and Developing Your “Hearachy”**

Are you a melody dancer or a rhythm dancer? What pulls your attention first? And if “it depends”, what are the factors that define those dependencies? And can you bring yourself to ignore your first response? Explore ways to hear music in multiple ways in an effort to keep a repetitive song interesting, break “choreographer’s block”, and allow/force yourself to create new possibilities in your movement.

In this workshop, we begin with a song or two that **everyone** knows and gradually work towards less popular, more difficult arrangements. The revelations promise to be priceless!

### **Do You See What I Hear? (Choreography Dissection)**

Have you ever watched a dancer or a troupe and wondered why certain movements are placed where they are? I hope so! While matching the music is beautiful; literal matching at all times can fall flat. Some tracks of sound might be better left to general emotional interpretation while others are practically embodied. This choice of recognition can vary across the piece. Enjoying eachothers’ performances for the sake of joy and inspiration is a wonderful thing. But there is always so much we can learn from eachother and how we choose to craft a dance. I know that **\*\*I\*\*** often want to ask someone why they did what they did at 2:33 into their piece!!!

In this class, **\*\*I\*\*** provide a map of a piece of music and do the dance several times. The students observe and log their observations of why I do what I do. Then I have to explain my choices. (Note: This topic is usually a good “after lunch” topic) Banter is welcome and encouraged!!

## **Zils**

### **Finger Cymbals – as instrument AND a tool for awareness**

You don’t have to have a goal to be the next zil-wizardress to benefit from using finger cymbals in your practice! We will build finger cymbal patterns from the most basic units of rhythm, work thru zil-provisation exercises (matching zils to movement then movement to zils) and develop your listening and syncopation skills.

At the very least, you will heighten your sense of rhythm, broaden your awareness of your arms and hands, and enhance your coordination. In the end, you might BE the next zil-wizardress without even trying!

### **Be Your Own Live Drummer!**

In this workshop, we will work thru a series of exercises whereby we will 1) listen to some common drum solo patterns and mimic them on our zils, 2) create a few patterns of our own, 3) create movements that match our patterns quite literally (the easier path), and ultimately 4) create our own dance to our own sound that weaves in and out of literal translation of the sound.

Each of these workshops is *completely* unique and creates a “zil song” that is representative of the participants!

**Complete choreographies, partial choreographies, or combinations** in Karen’s unique style - to music of her choice or yours and at any level – are also a workshop option. Sometimes it’s fun to let early registrants vote on a piece of music for her to use to create a choreography. 😊

