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DANC 4800

20 April 2018

Ephemeral Reality: My Graduating Presentation in Dance

My Personal Aesthetic

My previous dance background prioritized clean technique in a variety of dance genres, which truly prepared me for a university dance program. My aesthetic has shifted since the start of my college career, but continues to be supported by my strong technical foundation. As my knowledge of dance, in general, and of myself as an artist continues to evolve, I find that my passion for movement stems from innovation and the opportunity to deepen my understanding of my body's capabilities. I am intrigued by the unknown and unfamiliar, which allows for growth, and I strive to be a lifelong learner in the art form. I am constantly curious about the possibilities of movement within the human body, prioritizing the body's physicality through space in choreography. As I engage in performance, choreography, and improvisation of professional artists, I am inspired by how uniquely each body moves: the complexity of the pathways, dynamic range, and use of the kinesphere. I am also intrigued by the postmodern aesthetic because I believe it adds substance to the layers of choreography.

My work, *Ephemeral Reality*, is a strong reflection of who I am as an artist because it prioritizes the use of the body through differing dynamic efforts and spatial patterns. The structure showcases forceful shifts of energy and lively connections between dancers. When considering a driving concept for movement development, I immediately connected the elements that I find pleasing in choreography to characteristics of my dreams; creativity, details, and unfamiliarity. The complexities of each are similar in aesthetic and would provide me with a strong base for my exploration of my personal aesthetic throughout the process.

Conceptual Development

My process began during the fall semester when I created *...to the unconscious* in DANC 3800, Choreography in the Community. I have always had a fascination with how the human brain interprets

and manipulates thoughts and experiences into dreams. I often found myself writing down the specific details of my dreams when awaking from sleep. It was when I began to notice recurring patterns in my dreams that I further researched the possible meanings and theories of these elements. I learned about the complexity of dreams; why and when do they occur? What might your dreams mean in waking life? What insight can they offer in regards to your personal psychology? I found immediate interest in this topic and realized how this concept could diversify my choreography and support my personal aesthetic.

As an initial starting point for my work, I proposed a two-section piece that would emulate a “theme and variations” structure. I planned to begin with a narrative that would take place in waking life or real time. This structure would then be repeated with significant deconstruction, as if in the state of a dream, throughout the second section. However, as I began thinking more about movement creation, I realized I no longer had interest in a narrative portion of the work because I solely wanted to explore movement capabilities and expand my creativity to achieve growth in the process, an element important to me as an artist. While conceptually, in the past, I have told stories through my choreography, I chose not to portray a specific storyline in this work because I found greater interest in spending more time in a dream-like exploration, where the concept would provide clearer intention for movement and structure. This shift in layout for my work gave me more freedom to discover a wide range of elements that would later become a holistic piece of choreography, reflective of my personal aesthetic.

Movement Development

My hunger for growth has challenged me in my creative process for my Graduating Presentation piece. I found myself choreographing with consistent focus on exploring new patterns and pathways in order to expand my artistic range. I also find interest in the specificity and intent of movement. These focal points in my choreography have directly connected to my conceptual ideas about dreams. In the creative process, I explored multiple elements in dreams that could provide a wider range of dynamic qualities in my work. Recurring elements of my dreams that I utilized for creation of new material include being somewhere unfamiliar, being restricted in a variety of manners, being somewhere with a large body of water, and occurrence of extremely specific details that I remember clearly upon waking. In the

rehearsal process, I began by teaching a variety of phrases initially developed in DANC 3800. After teaching three phrases, I experimented with the movement structurally, through groupings, variations, formations, and other “toolbox” elements. I also worked with Merce Cunningham methods of chance within the first few rehearsals in attempt to step beyond my habits of creation. Initial “play dates” gave me insight in regards to how I tend to format my movement. I noticed patterns of accumulation, sudden shifts of energy, and postmodernism. I chose to experiment with postmodern elements throughout rehearsals to complicate my piece’s structure. Postmodernism was represented through sporadic moments, which further support the format of my sectional and disjointed dreams.

During one rehearsal, I asked dancers to create solo material with a prompt inspired by the recurring elements discussed above. For example, Katherine Kennedy created a movement phrase with the idea that something terrible happened to something important of hers. Kylie Vinitiski’s solo was inspired by the simple idea of crying. Darion Mayrand and Savanna Yu each choreographed unique material based on the prompt that they are in a rush and unable to make it somewhere on time. I asked Lexi Ringquist to make a phrase that was detailed-oriented and included specific numbers. Lastly, Erin Cotham created the “water phrase” that was inspired by the movement of water. Each phrase naturally utilized unique states of tension or chaos in the body that amplified the work’s dynamic range, that was representative of my personal aesthetic, while also connecting dream factors into the choreography.

I then worked on utilizing these movement phrases in the structure, mostly by methods of chance. For example, Darion Mayrand/Savanna Yu and Lexi Ringquist’s duet began as my random choice to place their phrases together in the space. Once together, I noticed the extreme contrast in dynamic and speed that worked together efficiently. Another moment that occurred by chance was Erin Cotham’s “struggle” section downstage right where she was restricted by an external factor. My choice to have her exit was prompted by the fact that she was left without a way to secure herself as part of the linked pose upstage due to the even number of dancers.

Throughout the process, I consistently concentrated on ways to add layers to the structure and movement. Phrase work was diversified by editing factors such as time, dynamic attack, space, and

inclusion of different gestures throughout the piece. The gestures I built brought attention to the head, with the intent of further supporting the concept of the work. My original phrases were mostly shifted in dynamic toward a more hectic appeal through the use of quick time, free flow, and strong weight efforts. I looked for ways to complicate the structure through methods of layering, and worked to discover unfamiliar pathways in the body; a defining factor of my personal aesthetic.

My Piece's Title

I decided to title my piece *Ephemeral Reality*. Ephemeral, meaning brief or fleeting, is used as an adjective to describe the word reality. While dreams may contain elements of our realities in waking life, our dream state is not our reality. However, when I am dreaming, my emotions, thoughts, and experiences seem to be just as vivid and believable as they are when I am awake. For this reason, the title *Ephemeral Reality* explains how I feel in my dream state. The combination of details, emotions, environments, and people unite to create a fleeting reality for me. My dream state has become so realistic to the point where I have woken up sobbing or even began to send a text that I was crafting in my sleep. The brain's ability to create a new world of experiences, emotions, and people, for me, is fascinating and realistic in my state of sleep.

Musical Choices

When searching for music, I wanted contrast between compositions to provide an additional layer of complexity and to support the varying movement qualities. One day while browsing, I discovered a song called "Logic of a Dream" by Explosions in the Sky. I was simply intrigued by the title as it directly related to the concept driving my choreography. The title of this piece of music was understandable as I listened to its structure. It begins in a calm state of electric guitar and abruptly transitions into a blaring synthesizer. As the piece of music continues to unfold, it changes aesthetic dramatically. I found a clear connection between the structure of music and my dreams, as they both shift suddenly without warning. I enjoyed the initial calmness of this music because I knew the beginning of my piece would represent the transition into the dream state from waking life. I chose the second piece of music, titled "ONDE MANTIS" by Kangding Ray for its strong, driving beat. This piece also provided a feeling of being

rushed or frantic that I often encounter in my dreams. The clear 3/4 meter of the bass gave me the ability to provide my dancers with counts and landmarks so they could be confident in the timing and dynamics of the movement, as well as be in unison with one another. Unison of the dancers is important to me because I feel it provides a stronger sense of awareness and gives clarity to the stylistic nuances in the phrase work. The last song, titled “Le Processus” by Matthew Banks, brings the piece to its climax of intensity by providing a variety of dissonant sounds that heighten the intended mood of the work and showcase the dynamic elements of the choreography. In this final section, the dancers move with felt time, yet in relation to the music, as there is a lack of meter to follow. The music’s individual sounds are distinct, yet act cohesively to support the intent of the work.

Overall, the music was chosen to support the aesthetic of the movement, which was the most important aspect of my project for me to showcase. My music analysis was a tool for me to visualize the overall structure, as well as have a more vivid understanding of the timing and accents so I could best use them to highlight certain elements of the choreography. The music analysis also assisted me in determining the overall structure of piece, such as where it would reach its climax.

Production Elements

As a choreographer, my main focus tends to lie on the physicality of the movement and the visual patterns created through space. My intended goal for all production elements was to enhance the choreography, as well as assist to produce a vivid world for my piece. Through the lighting design process, I learned the importance of a cohesive relationship between the dance and the lights. When initially creating my design, my eyes were very focused on the choreographic moments that were most important to me. With dramatic movement and music, I hoped for the lighting to match the complexity of the piece. These visions led me to an initial design that was far too busy, as well as a distraction to the movement in space. A large number of cues occurred, where drastic shifts were happening too quickly, not allowing the world to settle fully. The audience would also not have the opportunity to experience the established dynamics of the choreography overall. After a chaotic, first technical rehearsal, I sat down with my Chair, Megan Slayter, to reevaluate my intentions for my design. Together, we worked to

establish a variety of worlds I wished to portray, and searched for opportunities for subtle cues that still complimented the world I created. Each cue's purpose was to highlight and enhance my favorite elements of choreography. Before creating new cues in the light board, I solidified my visions of each world and determined where exactly in my piece those transitions would occur. I envisioned a new design with saturated colors, isolation, and an overall dramatic and dark appeal through worlds that shifted between colors and intensities to add complication.

After adjusting my design drastically, it demonstrated a stronger through line and aesthetically dynamic appeal. I chose saturated "Soft Golden Amber" gels for the SL heads to highlight the dancers' musculature. I chose "Aquamarine" for my SR shins that appeared almost as no color, but still provided for cool worlds that would be created in the design. Undulation gobos were placed in SL shins and SR heads, which created dramatic lines on the dancers' bodies, further pulling the audience's focus to the movement. I chose to have the black curtain as a backdrop to support the overall dark and eerie world I envisioned.

The first world created was a dim and colorless look that included haze which emulates darkness when falling asleep, to support the concept of the beginning section. From there, I transitioned into a dark moment that further dimmed the stage, representing the conclusive journey into a deep sleep state, leaving the dancers in a quiet, motionless world. When the dancers awaken, they have entered into their dream world that begins with a lack of clarity in regards to their environment, a storyline, or the people around them. I chose deep blue backlight with contrasting ambers in the heads to create an intensely colorful world that appears almost unrealistic. The next major shift in worlds occurs with the dynamic change in music, where movement, music, and lighting become tense through eerie rhythm and hues of red. I consider this section to be a frustrating or stressful state for the dancers in their dream, where the red color focus supports the intended mood. I equate the tension in the movement and lights to the feelings experienced when, for example, something horrible happens to something you really need, or when you are running late for something extremely important. From this warm world of tension, the piece transitions energetically into the "water world", characterized by light blue backlight and a wavy

patterned gobo. The gobo creates water-like patterns on the floor and on the dancers' bodies to show how the dancers are fully engulfed by this world, as well as to bring the audience's eyes to the movement. As Carmen Alvarez begins a solo different in effort, the backlight isolates her, adding intensity through deep colors while still remaining in the water world.

The next change brings the dancers into a cool, electric world of bright backlight, widening the stage space so each individual can move across the space and be seen in a wider sense. My goal for this world was to serve as a transition into the moment in the piece where there is a shift in connective energies between dancers. The lights narrow for the duet between Lexi Ringquist and Erin Cotham. This initial cue is warm, intimate, and isolated to draw the audience's focus in towards their movement conversation. As others join their world, the stage once again expands and deepens into the amber hues, enhanced texturally by the re-introduction of fog and gobo.

The trio remains in a world of ambers and reds while isolating center stage. As Kami Miller is left alone in the space, the energy shifts into a cool world much different than the last. I utilized the downstage left high side to light Allie Renner at a low intensity, who lurks over Kami Miller as she begins solo movement. The lights become brighter in intensity and more spread across the stage space as the accented crash occurs in the music and others intrude Kami Miller's world. When we see Allie Renner join Kami Miller upstage, the high side follows her to highlight their connection and the anticipated collision of their worlds. A sudden transition into franticness occurs as they separate, where I placed a "bump" in the design to create a flash. The light then widens across the space and includes undulation gobos from a variety of angles to provide sharp rays of light through the air. I chose this cue as my strongest gobo cue because the dancers run and slide across the space, intersecting the laser-like rays. This warm world remains intact through the end of the unison section, continuing to highlight certain elements such as Erin Cotham's struggle and the center stage lift. In conclusion, I returned to the dim, colorless world where the piece began. My goal was to bring the audience back into the dancer's world of uncertainty, as well as leave the viewers with unanswered questions as the music and lights faded.

The dancers' costumes, make-up, and hairstyle for *Ephemeral Reality* remain true to my goal of showcasing the work's movement and structure. There is complexity in the layers of my work, and I was most interested in featuring the patterns created in the piece, as well as the physicality and intensity of the movement performed. That being said, I chose to costume my dancers in basic nude spandex shorts and tank tops. Nude was my choice of color because it blended with the skin tones of my dancers. I provided uniformity that allowed the audience to focus on the movement of the body without distraction, as well as highlight the textured lighting patterns on their skin. I chose shorts and sleeveless tops so the dancers' musculature could be seen through the movement, showing the physicality and effort of the body. Nude socks allowed for my dancers' feet to slide dynamically across the stage in various sections. To further justify my costuming decision, human beings are most vulnerable and exposed in the nude. This feeling of not being able to hide, and always being in the spotlight, is another element I see frequently in my dreams. Similar to the cleanliness of the costuming, I chose a low ponytail for my dancers' hairstyle to keep the hair out of the way and not distract from the physicality of the choreography. Makeup design for the piece was a basic neutral smoky eye and brown lip to enhance and deepen the face's features under the stage lights.

Production Coordinator Role

I am very interested in lighting design and other production elements of concert dance, so I found it fit to take the role of Production Coordinator in our concert. Although I did not have previous experience serving as run crew or stage manager in other concerts, I have been intrigued by lighting design since I took Lighting and Staging for Dance. Through volunteering, I gave myself the opportunity to design lights for Orchestis pieces in 2016 and 2017, with the hopes that this extra experience would familiarize me with production skills necessary for my Graduating Presentation. I was the lighting designer for Marissa Quivey and Amy Russell's Orchestis duet that was also performed at ACDA, where I was given the chance to recreate my lighting design in a new theatre space. These previous experiences brought me additional skills and confidence to take the role of Production Coordinator in the Graduating Presentations Concert.

Through this role, I felt as though I was an active leader for my peers. Along with the completion of tasks regarding a variety of paperwork, I provided assistance to my fellow classmates in regards to overall production of their individual designs during technical rehearsals. I was present at all technical rehearsals to further mentor my peers on adjustments to their designs throughout the process leading up to opening night. During these rehearsals, I also updated all paperwork, assisted in training run crew, and helped to generally maintain the performance space. Through this process, I gained knowledge in the area of computer software such as VectorWorks and LightWrite to create documents such as the light plot and magic sheets. The technical process also taught me how closely I needed to pay attention to details and changes in production in order to keep the paperwork accurate. In general, this role gave me a list of additional responsibilities to attend to in order to better serve my cohort and successfully produce our concert.

Final Presentation Evaluation and Reflection

Before beginning my process, I was nervous, yet excited to be working with a large and strong cast of dancers because I did have choreographic experience on a group larger than four people before this project. Although I would not consider choreography to be my top strength or passion as an artist, I found this project as an opportunity to challenge myself and further explore my personal aesthetic. I utilized my strengths throughout the process, which helped me in preparation for productive rehearsals. My strengths include organization, timeliness, versatile movement qualities, and attention to detail. I found that with or without a clear plan of what exactly I would accomplish, my rehearsals were productive and insightful. My approach for each rehearsal was to enter with a checklist of tasks, and we would move through the checklist as necessary. I require personal time to analyze my work, so much of my planning and idea development occurred outside of rehearsal. Each night following rehearsal, I would watch my rehearsal video multiple times, analyze my progress, and begin making changes to be implemented at the following rehearsal. It often took me a considerable amount of thinking time to study my work and determine exactly what I wanted to adjust. I focused deeply on strengthening my work the best I could in the time allotted, which was why I always entered rehearsals with a plan of action.

After working with a group of twelve dancers, I learned that I prefer to have a larger number of bodies with which to work. I believe having more dancers provides for additional opportunity in spatial structure and complexity. The importance of having second cast dancers was also reinforced, as one of my dancers was only able to attend one rehearsal per week due to a scheduling mistake in the audition process. By using ten dancers in performance, with two as second casts, I always had an extra dancer or two to stand in the place of anyone who was absent at rehearsal. This allowed for me to continue making progress while maintaining the correct configuration of the work.

I also learned the importance of clarity in demonstration and verbal instruction while teaching new material. The dancers' execution of the movement was an effective representation of whether or not I was clear enough when giving new movement or adding elements to the structure of the piece. I had vivid images in my mind of what I wanted from my dancers, but I sometimes lacked descriptive explanation of my ideas. At times, this caused misunderstanding and discrepancy in the initial outcomes of my directions. Through the cleaning process specifically, I learned to effectively communicate and demonstrate my ideas to my dancers so that they had a better understanding of my intent.

I am so incredibly proud of my dancers and their performances of *Ephemeral Reality*. I believe my dancers were well rehearsed and demonstrated precision in the execution of my choreography as a whole. They carried rehearsal notes that I addressed into their work on stage and were confident in each presentation. They utilized a wide dynamic range, an intelligent use of musicality, and a large kinesphere, each representative of my personal aesthetic. From performance to performance, there were a few minor moments that did not succeed as they normally did, but each were average, live performance mistakes that were easily fixable and not obvious to the audience.

The final lighting design was sophisticated and complimented the structure of my work, making it a cohesive piece of art that was brought to life. Due to the complexity of my lighting design and the number of cues, it took the Stage Manager time and practice to successfully time each transition. All cues were correctly executed during performances, successfully highlighting the choreography as planned. During the Saturday shows, there were issues with the fog machine, so there was not as much output as

we had rehearsed with during the week. A lack of density of fog toward the end of the piece made my running and sliding section's gobo cue less linear in the air surrounding the dancers. This mishap diminished the intensity of the cue, but again, was an unexpected technical performance issue.

Overall, I was extremely satisfied with each performance. I watched from the wings feeling proud of my dancers' work and what I worked so hard to produce. The audience's responses were full of excitement, and their level of energy for my dancers was a rewarding surprise to me. I constructed a complex work that left the audience with question, surprise, and intrigue. I was so lucky to work with this incredible cast of focused, determined, passionate, and talented artists to conclude my B.F.A. experience. I believe *Ephemeral Reality* was a strong representation of my exploration of my personal aesthetic in dance, as well as an application of my knowledge gained in the art form.