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DANC 4800

April 20, 2018

In the Beholding Eye

As I look at the world around me I see patterns, from something as simple as walking and running, to nervous habits and communicative gestures, to complex personal relationships. As I sit and watch these actions take place, I see diversity in dynamics, effort, time, intent, spatial correlation, and so much more, almost as if it is one big dance. I see a dance that is natural in the body rather than forced, real in intent rather than staged, and creative through simplicity rather than complexity. To me, these elements create a beautiful work of art that we often forget is a possibility in creation with the medium of dance. Complexity is also beautiful and makes amazing art, but sometimes choreographers, including myself, can get caught up in the making of something original and intricate that they forget how wonderful simplicity can be and how much a simple, strong piece can stand out in today's world that is filled with complexity. With my work, *In the Beholding Eye*, my goal was to challenge myself to use the everyday patterns that I see around me, along with more simplistic ideas, to create something strong and beautiful without feeling the need to be original and innovative. Though, through this process, I created something that was original and innovative, even without that specific intent.

During the beginning of this process, I was a Teaching Assistant for the Beginning Modern Technique class, and one day they were given the assignment to create their own choreography. Though most of the students had little to no dance experience, they were able to come up with ideas that were simple yet beautiful. In noticing this, I came up with the idea to use

people in my piece who were not dance majors and had minimal dance experiences in order to infuse their simple and fresh ideas into the heart of my piece. To find these individuals, I contacted professors who teach beginning level technique classes, as well as the Experiencing Dance class. These professors then reached out to their students and shared the opportunity that I was offering to them. At the end of this process, I had casted five members of all different majors, from music to sciences, and was ambitious to get started.

To begin creating my piece, I created a list of broad instructions like “jump, take three steps into a slide, etc.” and gave it to my cast, instructing them to create a phrase. After, I had them perform the phrases in different groups and was really amazed with the variation and how the phrases all complimented each other nicely. From here, I found which phrases worked best together and developed complimentary groups from them and I began to create more material within these groups. To continue with the idea of bringing out the unique simplicity of the non-dance majors, I encouraged them to work with the more experienced dancers to create phrases based on assignments. In groups of trios, duets and quartets, my cast worked with concepts of negative space, weight sharing, canons, hand gestures, and manipulation. I then took the material they developed and began piecing it together and manipulating it in terms of time, space and effort to create my work. A great example of this is the three solos between Amy, Carmen and Lauren that turns into a trio. I began with having each of them entering the space from different wings of the stage at different times. I altered their pathways to really fill up the stage and also played with asymmetry in their locations on the stage. Since their phrases were about the same length and I had them entering at different times, I instructed the dancers to alter the speeds of their phrases. Amy slowed down her phrase, Carmen maintained her original timing, and Lauren

sped up her phrase so that they would all finish at the same time and could begin their trio. As I continued to play with the order within my piece, I began to add in progressions of relationships.

Kami and Jacob have one partnering phrase that works with filling the negative space and created a feeling of hesitancy and awkwardness, as well as a partnering phrase that is filled with weight sharing and physical connection that creates a feeling of trust and familiarity. Within these two varied phrases, I saw the progression of a romantic relationship. To further this, I took the first, more hesitant phrase and encouraged the dancers to speed up the movement and to not create fluidity in transitions to truly capture the awkward and unsynchronized relationship. With the second, more trusting phrase, I advised the two to take their time and really share weight within the movement to establish the trust and the comfort within the relationship. To set up the progression, I created two moments in the beginning section where they meet due to chance, creating a sense of fate and destiny that pulls the two together. The first takes place in a cab that is created through a rectangle of light and the actions of calling a cab and opening a door. In the cab, I wanted to really capture the awkwardness of sharing a space with a complete stranger. The two barely make eye contact and are giving in to nervous habits, like the twiddling of fingers. Also, to help the audience feel the mood within the cab, I honed into the moment by prolonging the time, maintained the silence and left the rest of the stage empty. To allow for their relationship to come full circle, I end the piece with the two entering the cab together and resting their heads on each other's shoulders to really show the difference and progression they have endured.

The phrases created by Alyssa, Mariam, Sarah Taylor and Will each created a sense of playfulness and wonder, reminding me of children. Together, these four and I created a phrase that achieved the appearance and feeling of clapping games. With these claps, I played with the

different rhythms that could be made, including a polyrhythm and a rhythm from a well-known clapping game called “concentration”. In order to add variation, the phrase also includes a sense of playfulness through patterned rolling, pulling, falling and the poking of another’s forehead. With this poking, I encouraged the dancers to play with time and effort to create variation and personality within their approach to the poke. Throughout this piece, the quartet has an element of progression, but also an element of preservation. Though everyone else progresses in their relationships over time, Mariam and Sarah Hagadorn’s characters remain in a friendly and playful state throughout. Meanwhile, Alyssa and Will’s relationship begins in a conflicting manner as Alyssa shows a constant annoyance with Will through not wanting to participate in his fun and games. In the end, Will gives up in trying to get her to participate and Alyssa flips her stance and forces will to play games with her, creating a new conflict. This conflict creates a new dynamic and a change in effort as the two throw each other through the space and roll around frantically. In order to create variance throughout these relationships, I sometimes broke up the quartet. I created a duet with Mariam and Will that gave a variation in the amount of space used compared to two duets between Will and Alyssa and Mariam and Sarah Hagadorn that interweaved and filled the whole space. I also worked to split up the unison phrase between the duet by adding repetition and opposition in directions.

Amy, Lauren and Carmen had created phrases that used strong lines and sharp movements. When put together, these phrases complimented each other well. To create more material, I encouraged the trio to create a phrase that included canons and hand on manipulation. Together they created a phrase that included finger snaps and has an overall feeling of a teenage clique. As I previously mentioned, I combined their individual phrases with the trio through manipulation of time and space. Within this trio, I wanted to establish a form of leader of the

group. To do so, I spatially placed Amy in the middle of the trio and had her take a moment of expectant expression towards Lauren when she is not in her correct position. From this attitude and sense of cruel leadership, progression is shown through the beginning of rebellious acts from Lauren and Carmen as they begin to become more individual and break away from Amy's original phrasing. Due to these rebellious acts, Amy becomes frustrated shift in mood occurs. The three girls begin to fight, Lauren and Carmen against Amy and they begin to shove and throw each other through the space.

The phrases created by Arden and Larkin complimented each other through quirkier movements that involve elbow initiation and one footed hops. I began to create their relationship by manipulating their spatial pathways and having the two begin at the same time. Since the two never came into contact, the movement created a sense of individuality with no relation, therefore I instructed the dancers to find moments of eye contact with each other and to really see each other within the space. After they applied this connection, the two phrases became a duet of individuality and awareness. In order to generate more material and progress their relationships, I had the two work together to create a duet phrase using cause and effect, physical contact and mirroring. Using this guidance, the two created a phrase that has a sense of discovering one another's boundaries and results in tension and a want for the exploration to stop. The phrase involves smaller more intimate motions, therefore I placed it downstage so that the audience can see every detail and really connect with the exploration and reactions that the two dancers experience. In the end, their relationship comes full circle through the repetition of their beginning phrases but the two are now close together and complete new movements that involve physical contact that is friendly and helpful.

Overall, these relationships each progress differently and develop more with each interaction. With these relationships, I struggled most with truly showing the characters and their interactions to the audience. At first, my dancers were unclear of their intentions within movement, and their more pedestrian interactions were too quick for an audience to read. To fix these issues, I had my cast break down their character as they saw them, and with the information they had been given. I asked them to give their character a name, list characteristics and emotions towards those they have relationships with and what they may wear on a basic day. After this instruction, my dancers were able to analyze their intentions and play with how their character would react within the situations they experience. I also encouraged my dancers to slow down their pantomimed interactions and really embody the situation through their character. When they took this advice, the interactions became much clearer and were more apparent through an audience member's eyes. This experience of diving in depth with characters so that they can truly come to life opened my eyes a lot. A majority of my choreography has been abstracted, and through the use of literal interactions with pantomime and characters, I have challenged myself and am more aware of how to approach this type of a piece.

Another issue I had during this process came with the trust I had put into my cast members who were not dance majors. From the start, I did my best to explain to those five members that this project is a huge commitment, and I laid out the days and times they would need to be available. Though I did this, I do not think that all of them realized how much commitment this project needed. Throughout rehearsals, I was encouraging to my cast, making sure that no one felt incompetent. I explained that it was okay to make mistakes and to ask questions. Though I thought I was being as encouraging as can be, I unfortunately did not read that way to one of my cast members. A month into rehearsal, Sarah Taylor messaged me saying

that she needed to withdraw from my work. She felt overwhelmed and felt as if I was expecting too much from her. I was understanding because I know that this process is a lot, especially for someone who is new to it. Due to her withdrawal, I was down a cast member half way through the process. Luckily, I had cast an understudy, Sarah Hagadorn, for my piece who could step in and learn her part. Unfortunately, she is a dance major and has a higher experience level than I preferred. Looking at the piece now, I do not think this fact of experience had a large effect on my work and I think it still came across in the way I intended.

Working with non-dance majors brought forward quite a few other challenges for me. Absences and late arrivals with little to no warning was a challenge for not only me, but for those who were gone. Due to the little experience with picking up choreography quickly, when my cast members were late or absent, they fell behind and limited my ability to move forward. Also with less experience, when the cast members were always present, they still took longer to get the order of steps within the phrases down. In order to fight this delay, I would continue to move forward while having my dance major cast members run through phrases and help those who were struggling. The last big challenge I faced was the need to cast another understudy. A little past halfway through this process, Larkin became ill and her ability to perform became unclear. Not wanting to lose the feeling of less experience, but being short on time, I reached out to freshman dance major, Tyler Korff. Tyler joined our cast and learned Larkin's part in order to ensure her character would be portrayed in the performance.

The music for this work was being created simultaneously with the movement. Working with non-dance majors had its bonus, as one of my cast members, Larkin, is a music composition major and has the goal to compose music for dance. When discussing the possibility of her joining my piece, she brought forth the idea of also composing the piece. This experience was

unique for me in more ways than one. It was unique because I have never worked with a composer before this project. I was challenged to explain what I wanted the music to be in terms of mood, concept, length, and meter. It was also unique because Larkin was not only informed by the explanations I gave her, but also by her own experiences with being a dancer within the piece. She was able to pull more than I could explain to her in music terms by the instruction I gave while choreographing and how the movement made her feel. Together we captured a clear city soundscape that creates an atmosphere of everyday life within a world that we all live. This atmosphere allowed for the creation of relationships, as well as a possibility of felt time and natural flow. Following this atmosphere was a rhythm with the ability to drive the dancers into motion. The strong rhythm combined with a reoccurring melody allows for a building of the relationships as they expand through larger movements. This mood shifts as the beat disappears and the tones become more legato with a minor tone. As this shift happens, the music supports the hesitant duet between Larkin and Arden, as well as the fights that take place between the trio and between Will and Alyssa. The next section of movement is not fully supported by the mood of the song. As Arden and Larkin, as well as Kami and Jacob, have friendly, cheerful duets, the music continues to stay in a minor tone. Though this is the case, within the music there are summery chimes that occur within the atmosphere and lighten the mood, creating support for the positive relationships that take place on stage.

To continue to enhance my ideas, I chose very pedestrian costumes for my dancers that were light blues, pinks, and grays with some denim. In order to capture the lightness of the piece, I went with more spring-themed clothing including dresses, short-sleeved shirts, but also long-sleeves and some jackets. I also chose for my dancers to wear shoes to capture the idea of being outside, immersed in society. With these ideas, I also had to capture their characters. To do this, I

had the quartet wear more child-like clothing. For example, Will wore a patterned graphic tee and Sarah wore a sunflower themed graphic tee. The trio wore more stylish outfits that captured the materialistic element. Amy wore a dress and heels that were able to capture Carmen's attention in the first section. She then changed to white sneakers to allow for more mobility without losing the style of her outfit. Lauren and Carmen wore the same blue shirt with different layers, including leggings versus jeans and a denim jacket versus a cardigan. Kami, Jacob, Arden and Larkin had more freedom in what they wore. They each play an adult who has individualistic taste and the only importance was to capture their age. I think Jacob's character was captured nicely with his gray pants and button-up shirt. The biggest issue I had with costumes was the loss of the blue tones in the fabrics when combined with the lights on stage.

When creating the lighting, my main goal was to support my concept. To do so, I chose a blue cyc color to represent the sky, a whitish yellow LED color to represent the sun, warm amber shins and stage right heads, and blue stage left heads. I also chose to add a special downstage right that created a rectangular confined space to resemble a cab where Kami and Jacob have their first and last interactions. As I designed my lighting, my goal was to compliment the overall feeling of the interactions taking place on stage. I added warm lights, amber high sides, shins, heads, and increased intensity as the quartet took place so I could compliment the energy that took place on stage. When the trio was on stage, I took out the warmer lights, and added the cool high sides and blue scrollers and decreased intensity to capture their nonchalant attitudes within the piece. I continued to do this throughout, using warmer colors for happier and friendlier interactions, and switching to cooler colors for the lower energy or less friendly interactions. When I was done, the placement of the cues and overall feeling captured the piece nicely, but my warm scenes had so much amber in them that the blues in the costumes were hard to see. Due to

this, I had to go back in and add more cool light. To do this, I changed my heads from ambers to blues, increased the intensities of the blues, decreased the intensities of the ambers and added some blue front light to make the blue tones apparent on stage. Another issue I came across was the color I chose for the cyc. The blue I picked was too similar to the color in some of my costumes causing those tones to be lost on stage. I went back and I chose a more vibrant blue that was different enough to not match the costumes, but not too different that it did not compliment the costumes.

In this process, not only did I have to choreograph and design my piece, but I also served as the Casting and Schedule Coordinator for the show. I scheduled the auditions, rehearsals, and warm-ups for the entire process. With help from Laura Cornish, I put together a production schedule that allowed enough time for everyone to design their lighting, tech their piece, warm-up and get ready for the show. Overall, this went smoothly, other than some confusion with roles during the process. At a couple points, some of my fellow Graduating Presentation members would overstep and begin working on a task that has been specifically assigned to another member. In the future, I would suggest that the members read everyone's role in order to establish theirs and everyone else's responsibilities.

In the performance of this concert, my cast did great. There was a little bit of hesitancy and nervousness from my non-dance major cast members, but this was to be expected. As a group, they did well in taking time with their relationships, portraying their characters and continuing to play and explore previously mentioned ideas. When I added enough blue to the lighting, the costumes looked incredibly detailed and were highlighted quite nicely. We had some issues with injuries and lighting problems over the course of the weekend, but by the last

show, all was well and the performance was as it should be. I am very proud of my cast and all the hard work they have put into this piece.

Now, as college comes to an end, I want to continue creating works that explore personal, human relationships. I will continue to spend time in breaking down the characters within my works in order to fully develop their purposes and intentions within their movements and interactions. These character developments will be most helpful in my musical theatre choreography. Encouraging my cast to not rush through their interactions and watching my work from an audience's point of view, rather than a choreographers, will allow me to ensure that my messages get across and are understood. This piece has pushed me to take a step back and look at my work as an evaluator, a lighting designer and an audience member. Through my many beholding eyes, I have created and witnessed beauty.