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DN 310- 002

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Final Self- Assessment

When I originally decided to come to The University of Alabama, I was determined to study Theatre in order to enhance my technique and foundation of story-telling. After going through the audition process and instantly building relationships with the incredible faculty, I knew that this was a place that I would fully flourish. Eager to begin my college experience, I began to research the core curriculum for my major. As I browsed courses, I soon noticed that dance classes were not a part of the normal track for Theatre majors. For the first time, I realized the possibility that I may have to set aside one of the most important parts of my life for the next 4 years. This saddened me because dance was my first introduction to the community, artistry, and story-telling. Fortunately, after speaking with students and faculty, I was able to sign up for my first dance class after my Freshman year and was given the opportunity to continue dancing my Junior and Senior year.

Taking time off of dance definitely had an impact on me and my overall ability to move artistically through space. Thus, stepping into the studio for the first time after a year was difficult for many reasons. I felt that I had lost a lot of my personal style, technique, and flexibility. I had a lot of work to do in all of my classes and after having taken DN 210 and Jazz with Ja'Morris, I definitely improved a lot, however there was still more work to be done. This past year, I was so grateful that I was given the opportunity to take DN 310 to continue to push myself in a style of dance that I found very exciting and challenging. I knew that the choreography and technique would be hard, however, the most demanding part of this course

was taking it online. Though I was nervous, I decided to view my circumstances as a learning experience and rise to the occasion with hopes of gaining an invaluable experience.

The first combination that we learned was “I Got Rhythm” from the Musical *Crazy for You*. Since this was our first assignment for the semester, we were reminded of the importance of researching before beginning any piece of choreography. For this piece specifically, I had never seen the musical or listened to the music before. For this reason, my first step was to do a simple Google search. When researching I look for the composer, book writer, choreographer, and any other important assets to the particular production. After this, I wanted to gain a better understanding of the show and the plot so I could understand where this song was placed in the story. It is essential to know the given circumstances or the moment before the song because it affects the entire piece, especially how you are moving through the choreography and how you are portraying the character. Once I have read all that I can on the musical, I head to YouTube to see if there are any videos of the original choreography. This is an important step in my research process because I am able to see the intended style of the choreographer and the final product.

“I Got Rhythm” was an upbeat, tap number with very high energy. I decided to work on this dance in my laundry room because it was the only floor that my mom did not think would get ruined by my shoes. The most difficult part of this dance, in my opinion, was the rhythm. In addition to this, I had to adapt some of the movements to make sure that I would not run out of space. Overall, I thought that I did well in this routine given the space I was in. I am not sure how I managed to do all of it with 4 feet of space, but I was very proud of myself in the end. I definitely needed to work on my sounds in the time step section and the placement of my hands. I think that I was afraid to move too much, due to the confined space.

The next routines we learned were two Fosse Pieces: “For You” from the musical *Pippin* and “Beat Me Daddy” from *Big Deal*. After doing my usual research and learning the beginning of “For You”, one thing that I really wanted to work on was musicality and style. I watched the original choreography for inspiration and I noticed that even though all of the women were in sync, they still had a lot of individuality. This made me realize that I needed to work harder in order to sit in the pocket of this piece. While I worked outside of class, I focused on making the movements feel good on my body. When I did this, the choreography immediately looked and felt more natural. Though that was my goal, I still had to remember the specificity of Fosse’s choreography. Fosse is very particular about movements, pictures, shapes, and how it all ties in with the music. I focused on finding the contrast between sharp movements and more subtle moments within the choreography. I also listened to the music repeatedly throughout the weeks so that I could hear the beats that Fosse intended the dancers to hit. All of these steps helped me in this routine, but it really started to come together for me when I began to utilize my acting skills. This was important because it set the tone of the piece and completed it. Reviewing my performance, I felt that I had a good understanding of the choreography, the style, and the story. One thing I can continue to work on is being more grounded. Nonetheless, learning this routine taught me the importance of studying music, and the importance of finding balance between style and technique.

Working on *Big Deal* was very difficult for me because it did not feel natural in my body at all. This was definitely a routine I wished I could be in the studio for since there was so much traveling involved. Aside from my lack of space, this was still a difficult routine because of use of technique and flexibility. In a routine like this, there is no room to fake technique or flexibility due to the many turns, leaps, and extensions. Thus, I was reminded to work on my warm-up

more often in order to improve in these areas. Once I filmed myself doing the choreography I instantly noticed how “squished” I looked. I should have worked harder on modifying the routine to fit my space (which is a useful skill to have for auditions anyways). I also felt that I needed to pay special attention to transitions. My previous work on the quality of movement in choreography definitely helped in this routine. Even though my leg may have not been as high, I was still able to land certain moments because of the way I choose to hit them.

Another technically challenging piece this semester was “Turn it Off” from *The Book of Mormon*. I remembered that I struggled with this piece at the beginning. The timing felt impossible, the directions were confusing, and it took STAMINA. I could mess up one step in the routine and the entire thing would fall apart. On the bright side, I finally got a tap board! Nevertheless, the process of learning this choreography proved, once again, that practice makes perfect. Each day I would take one section of the choreography and run it over and over again with the videos on Facebook and then on my own. Eventually, I was able to put it all together before working on the acting portion of this piece. Unfortunately, I had never seen the *Book of Mormon*, so I read articles to get the context of the show and this particular scene. Now knowing how extravagant this entire show was, I wanted to make sure my acting matched the energy of the music. One thing that this piece also forced me to do was think about the foundation of tap dance. Drawbacks are something that I have always struggled with in tap, therefore, I really had to take the time to slow down and try my best to re teach myself this step. In the end, I felt that I was connected to the routine and it was very clean due to my understanding of the characters’ circumstance and because I took my time with the choreography.

The last few dances we learned were some of my favorites and challenged me in new ways. For starters, Jesus Christ Superstar was an incredible opportunity to research an artist and

style that we do not often get to study. I loved learning about Camille A. Brown and thoroughly enjoyed going through the resources that were posted on the Facebook page. The experience of researching Camille really opened my eyes to how much the backstory of a choreographer can influence their work. I was also inspired seeing a successful Black woman in this industry. It is so important to include women like Camille in conversations about impactful artists because their influence is just as large as many other notable artists. In addition to this, I found her style not only entertaining to watch but to perform. I believe that its simplicity really connected the audience to her work because it allowed everyone to feel as if they could get up with the cast and dance along with them. However, even though it may have looked simple, this dance actually made me feel like I was going to pass out. Learning the combination was a good reminder that it may not be as easy as it looks. As I worked on this routine, I noticed that it came very natural to me because it had a lot of hip-hop elements to it. I used the music for energy and really had a good time with this combination. There were so many moments where the choreography was intentionally not specific, so it definitely forced me to think about how I could make it my own. When I look back at my recordings, I see that I still need to work on being grounded and really releasing so that everything looks bigger.

I was so grateful to be able to take a class from Andy and his associates and to hear how his iconic visions came to life. The backstory of his choreography inspired me to really let the world around me influence my work. Like Camille, Andy's choreography was also rooted in hip-hop and movements that people use everyday, however, it was very specific, left little room for interpretation, and every movement had a story behind it. When learning his choreography I had to really pay attention to detail because if not, it looked as if something were missing when I went back and watched videos of myself. One thing that I noticed about Andy's work is his

attention to the details within the music. It was a new way to choreograph and introduced us to a new way of listening to music. His insight on the role of dancers in a show how the choreography frames the story because it tells the audience what to look at was very beneficial. Discussions like these allowed us to not just study the choreography itself but how to create choreography for ourselves. This was the perfect piece to round out the semester for me because I felt like a lot of things I worked on throughout the year had improved. For example, my arms were better, I felt more grounded, and maintained stamina and character.

As I reflect on the semester, I feel like I met many of the goals that I set for myself. Primarily, I wanted to succeed in learning choreography through a screen. This was really important to me because after the pandemic, people will continue to use technology and the internet to audition and teach because of how efficient it has been this past year. Throughout the year I was able to grow in this way by paying closer attention to details, learning how to switch directions through a screen, and how to dance in a small amount of space (which is something we will encounter in almost every audition). As I grew in these areas, I began to recognize my strengths in musical theatre dance. For example, I have a strong sense of character and thrive in upbeat dance numbers that involve hip hop/ jazz choreography. However, some of my weaknesses and areas of improvement include my feet, turnout, arm placement, and flexibility. I feel that the easiest way to improve those skills is to utilize the warm-up that we learned in class. It features basic ballet technique that will help redefine my technique that has been neglected. In order to improve my arms, I believe that it would be beneficial to continue to film myself when I dance. This way I can see what I am doing wrong and fix it quicker because I am more aware of it.

Overall I really enjoyed this class. I felt that each routine introduced a new challenge and an opportunity to become a stronger dancer and performer. If I were able to take this class again, I think that it would be fun to do a choreography unit where students could create something inspired by an already existing style. Nonetheless, this semester was an amazing experience and I am forever thankful that I was able to be a part of it and continue to do something that I have loved all of my life.