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DN 310 Dance Styles III

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Final Process Paper

As someone who has grown up in consistent dance classes and considers dance to be one of their stronger suits, I was really excited to be back in an up-beat musical theatre styles class. Aside from DN 210, I have actually never taken a semester-long course dedicated to just musical theatre dance genres so I was very excited to explore different styles within a seemingly already specific category. My comfort zones are definitely in high energy jazz/musical theatre styles so I was nervous to step into something like a hip-hop or a less technical piece. My love for a brisk jazz number is coupled with a comment I receive often, that I settle into playing things “too cutely” or “too pretty”. Overcoming this habit is something I definitely intended to do over the course of this semester. With each different style we worked on throughout the semester, I found it easier and easier each time to settle into them. The sooner I became comfortable with the style alone, the sooner I could allow myself to just ‘be’ and allow myself to just be me during the choreography, aiding in my problem of oftentimes making combinations look “too pretty”.

Something else I have consistently struggled with as a dancer is retention of choreography in a short amount of time. For instance, in a dance call setting. While we didn’t have too many exercises like such where choreography was thrown at us and expected to be performed that day, I do still feel like my retention of choreography improved. I rediscovered how important it is for me to go over the combination by myself directly following the class that

it was taught during so that I can make sense of the choreography and transitions for myself. When I was having particular trouble, I found it helpful to also write out the steps in my journal. Understanding of why things happen provides me with intention and thus helps me immensely in remembering the moves.

As I previously stated, my comfort zones, which I would also consider my strengths, are in high energy, technical numbers. I attribute this to the fact that I have the most experience in big, showy productions composed of vivacious, big dance numbers as well as the fact that I just find these styles to be exceedingly fun to both watch and perform. My background in dance has prepared me to be able to execute technical moves which I also feel lends to my comfort in these styles. While I already felt ease in this, I do feel like I improved greatly in many facets within my comfort zones as well. I believe that my control and balance is at the best it has ever been in my dance career. I have previously struggled with turning of all forms whereas I felt these things coming easier to me than they had in the past. Another area I felt great improvement in is my performance. With every combination, I could feel my curse of being “too cute” melting away little by little.

Another area of musical theatre dance that I feel confident about is tap. Tap is my favorite style of dance and I find it the most fun to perform. In previous tap classes that I have taken, while performance is always an important aspect, it has never been the main focus. Circling back to fixing my curse of being “too pretty” when I dance, I had a lot of fun this semester exploring letting my body loosen up while tapping. Because I felt more comfortable from the onset with the tap combinations, I feel like it allowed me to explore more personal choices and loosen up more than in other styles. I believe I was successful in all of my tap performances this semester.

In other styles, I wasn't so comfortable. While I was originally very nervous to start it, I ended up having a lot of fun and found a lot of freedom in Camille Brown's *Jesus Christ Superstar* combination. It first felt very unnatural to me as I do not have as much experience with hip hop styles. However, once I didn't have to worry about memorizing the combination and could focus on the details, it began to feel more and more comfortable. Personally, this further reminded me the importance of working on my retention because it is only after I do not have to worry about messing up the steps that I am able to have fun and show my own self through the choreography.

Something else that helped me in my performances was my understanding of the show that the combination came from. Before each combination that we started, I researched a lot surrounding it. I would start by reading multiple synopses of the show to understand where this number fell in the arc of the plot. I watched videos of different productions doing the number we were learning as well as the scenes/numbers before and after the one in question, if I could find them. I would research all those on the production team, focusing mostly though on the director(s) and choreographer(s). I found other shows they had been involved in and delved into the style of those shows as well. More often than not, the choreographer's other shows were stylistically similar and watching videos of their other choreography helped to understand the style of the one we were learning.

It was also very important for me to pick a character to become and establish that character's own arc throughout the show and thus within the number. The more I implemented this process, the more I could feel it benefitting my performance.

Something that I still need to improve upon is my retention of choreography. Over quarantine I started taking random online dance classes through zoom where you learn an entire

combo during one class, much like the classes we took with Andy. I have kept up this habit through this semester and I can really tell how it is aiding in my ability to quickly recall choreography. Beyond this, taking these classes has opened up my experience to many new choreographers and styles that I wouldn't have access to otherwise.

If I were to take this class again, I would like to do more dance-call-like classes. By that, I mean similar to when we learned *A Chorus Line*, where we are taught the combination quickly at the beginning of class and then expected to perform it by the end. This exercise was eye-opening to me as I was reminded of how my nerves and frustration can easily get in the way of me doing what I know I would be otherwise capable of. The combination was fast and long and I simply wasn't keeping up enough to be able to retain the choreography. I was too stuck on getting little details right, when I should have been more focused on understanding the choreography as a whole. It is this detail-oriented mindset when learning choreography that serves me as a blessing but in this case, a curse. I know that if I continue to engage in classes like that, that I would see my retention abilities improve.

I had a marvelous time in DN 310 this year. I felt my confidence grow more than in any dance class I have taken before. I also feel that my skills have noticeably improved. The environment in the classroom was always supportive, uplifting, energetic, and positive. I thoroughly enjoyed all of the combinations we learned and will continue to practice them so I can use them for future self-tapes. I am so grateful that this class was able to be a light amongst the most uncertain of times. I have a smile on my face as I reflect on this semester and am very much looking forward to taking this class again next year.