

Ally Bryant

DN 310

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Self-Assessment Paper

Walking into this class, having already taken it once before, I felt much more prepared and more confident in my abilities. Not that I felt like I was the best dancer, but I felt as though after all of the dance classes that I had taken over these past three years in college there had been growth. I knew that I was equipped to take on this class and I was fully prepared to work my butt off outside of class. Over the course of this semester, I tackled dance combos that I never thought that I would be able to do. From extremely fast tap combos to the specificity of Fosse I learned what areas I still need to work on but I also learned that I am much more capable than I give myself credit for. I also discovered how important it is to research the dance styles that we would be doing in class as the more I knew about the time period and the choreographer the more prepared I felt and it was easier to pick up the choreography.

The first combo that we learned in this class was "Dancing in the Street" from the musical *Motown*. It is a jukebox musical and actually contains 66 songs which I did not know before researching it, and was choreographed by Patricia Wilcox and Warren Adams. This was a great dance to learn first as it was a high energy and up-tempo number. We learned it pretty quickly over the course of two class days and I felt like I was able to pick up the dance steps as it was being taught and I didn't feel behind. Getting back into a dance class after not getting to dance as much as I would have liked to over the summer this was a perfect way to get back into the swing of things. Even though we didn't get a grade on this combo there were two big things

that I took away. Though this was a high energy number, I couldn't let myself be wild in my movements or else I looked out of control. This dance lives best when it looks effortless and yet intentional. Also, though I would never be cast in this musical, the song was so indicative of the time period in which it came from and the freedom that the music spoke to helped me to feel free and not judge myself.

For our second combo, I was exceedingly nervous walking into class. We were going to be learning the tap number "Anything Goes" from the musical *Anything Goes*. I had looked up the number and the choreographer to familiarize myself with the style and what to expect as tap has never been my strongest suit and what I had watched made me feel a little overwhelmed. We were learning the 2011 Broadway Revival choreography by Kathleen Marshall. While it originally ran on Broadway in the 1930's during the Great Depression it was still highly successful. It just shows you how powerful art and theatre are especially in our seemingly darkest times. It was also originally choreographed by Robert Alton with a Broadway revival in '62 choreographed by Michael Smuin. The musical has actually been revamped a couple of times adding to the book, and music and lyrics were written by Cole Porter. As we were being taught the combo over four class days, I was slow to pick up the steps and found myself falling quickly behind and feeling slightly discouraged, especially after the first week of learning it. I went into the dance studio during dance lab time, over the weekend, and also before class to work on it. The steps in and of themselves were not difficult and I found that I could do everything very slowly, it was mostly the speed and the transitions that were tripping me up. Slowly as I continued to work on it and with help from my classmates I could see myself improving. I knew the combo like the back of my hand and was able to do it almost up to speed. When it came time to show the combo I felt confident in my ability to do this dance and knew

that I had prepared as much as possible and felt like I could just have fun. I got the majority of the sounds and the specificity of the arms and just tried to live in the world of this song. This was the highest grade I had ever received on a dance combo, a 100, and I felt so accomplished after performing it as I knew that all of the outside work had truly paid off. Also researching the show and watching multiple videos helped me to find my character.

For the third combo, we were taught "Too Darn Hot" from the musical Kiss Me Kate. I had looked up what I could find on the musical, because while I was vaguely familiar with it I had never seen a production before. I found out that it was originally choreographed by Hanya Holm but we learned the 2019 Broadway Revival choreography by Warren Carlyle. It was interesting because we watched a video where Carlyle talked about how and why he choreographed this the way he did which helped me to understand the dance more as there is no singing. This dance wasn't necessarily technically difficult but it was very fast-paced with a lot of jumping mixed in with a lot of specificity in counts when you were supposed to be hitting certain movements. I found that while it didn't take me that long to pick up the steps, I struggled the entire time we did this number in really hitting all the movements on their respective beats. My partner was Maddie Plunkett and while we did try and practice, something that gave both of us some trouble was the improv section. Even though we had tried to work something out, when I watched the video of us doing the combo I could see that it just looked a little sloppy and wasn't as intentional as it could have been. I would say that of my entire performance overall I looked very hesitant in all of my movements and missed the sharpness and specificity that needed to be present at certain parts. Though I definitely had improved from when we first were taught the combo, this is a dance that I could continue to work on and try and not hold back from any of the movements. Watching it back I realized that I really should have recorded myself doing this

dance before we showed it and this is something I utilized for the next combinations. Because even though I thought I was doing certain things watching myself I realized what I was missing.

The fourth combination was the one I was the most nervous about once I had taken a look at the syllabus. It was Rich Man's Frug from *Sweet Charity* which was choreographed by Bob Fosse. The style of Fosse just does not really live in my body and when we had done Blackbird last year in 310 it was the combination that I did the worst on. Everything is so specific from the hand movements to the feet. But more importantly it is all about lengthening and about the lines created by the body and elongating yourself as much as possible when called for. For some reason, I feel it the most in this style of dance, I find it very difficult for me to straighten my legs when they are supposed to be straightened. We worked on a lot of Fosse-esque exercises in class to try and find where this lived in our bodies. Learning Fosse combinations, I have realized that while they are not usually very fast or even that technically challenging, I feel drained after working on them for an extended period of time. The song takes place at the Pompeii Club; home to all of the rich patrons. The dance lived in this sort of mixture between poised and snooty, looking down on the world and everyone around them, and getting a little crazy by the end. We learned the third section of this which was called the "Big Finish". This was supposed to be the latest craze of dance, the Frug, and since we were doing the last part it was supposed to be a little more wild and had elements of the previous two sections, "the Aloof" and "The Heavyweight". This was also a group dance and I was with Ann Marie, Anne Dillon, Daniel Fobes, and Will. We met several times to work out how we wanted to approach this as a group, as it was the synchronicity of the group that really made this dance work well, which is what we saw watching other groups. I felt like we all worked really well together and when we presented after watching our video no one stood out in a bad way.

The fifth combination was the Opening tap number from *42nd Street*. Though I was not as prepared as I should have been for the first day when we learned the combo, as I thought that we were just being tested on Rich Man's Frug, I learned my lesson and researched it after that day. It was choreographed by Gower Champion, who I found out had actually died the afternoon of 42nd Street opening performance, only hours before. Another thing is that this opening number is an audition in and of itself. We started right from the beginning of this number and I immediately became overwhelmed by the "brush hop shuffle step flap shuffle step stomp" time step. Overall this was probably the most challenging dance that I learned all semester. It was very fast and the steps were just not living in my body. After learning the entire combo I proceeded to watch multiple videos and practice it at different speeds. I worked with a lot of people in class and as it got closer to having to perform it for the final I could see that I had significantly improved from the first day of learning it in class. Though I still wasn't perfect, I had improved greatly and even was able to do the weird time step with the arms and everything. When I did it for the final I felt so accomplished and that I had done everything possible and was very proud of where I had ended up. While there is still much for me to work on especially in regards to tap I am proud of how much I have grown over these past three years.

The last combo that we were going to learn was "It's Time to Dance" from *The Prom*. This show was actually choreographed by Casey Nicholaw who coincidentally also choreographed *Legally Blonde* which is the musical we will be doing next semester. I knew that us doing this style was intentional and an audition of sorts to see how quickly we would pick up this dance and see how it lived in our bodies. I honestly felt the best about this combo out of everything this semester and picked up the steps much more quickly than any of the other combos. There was a lot of timing specificity within this dance and while the steps were not

technically difficult, one of the challenges was making sure that each count and each step wasn't hit too early. It was very easy to anticipate the movements but I found that my confidence in my abilities for this dance allowed me to really just have fun and let loose and live in the world of this song. It didn't hurt that this musical is set at a high school which is something that I identify with energy wise. What I worked on with this dance specifically was making sure that I wasn't getting sloppy with the movements even though I felt comfortable with the steps and staying grounded and sharp with my movements. I worked on it at dance lab and videoed myself doing the dance to make sure that I wasn't rushing and that I wasn't morphing the movements but staying true to the original choreography. On the day of the final I got up to perform and I personally have never felt better about anything that I have done in 310. I felt confident in my knowledge of the steps and the character I had created for myself and just allowed myself to just perform and let all of the work I had done come through.

Overall, this semester has taught me a lot about myself as both a person and as a dancer. Since I will be graduating soon, I have thought a lot about how I was as a freshmen and the growth that I have experienced here at UA. Freshmen year I couldn't have done any of the combo's that we were taught in this class and while there is always more to work on I am very thankful for the schooling that I have received and the positive environment in which I have been able to learn and grow and fail and succeed. Knowledge is the power and the more you know the more equipped that you will be to handle yourself in an audition as the style helps you to understand what you should be doing if there is an improv section and also what you should wear and how you should carry yourself. I also learned that sometimes it doesn't matter if you don't get all the steps if you look like you are just living in the world and giving it your all.

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