

McKenzie Rivers

DN 310

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Final Self-Assessment

This semester has been extremely dance heavy and I feel I have seen significant growth in myself and my abilities as a dancer. In addition to DN 310, I am also taking Advanced Jazz DN 351 and was cast in *The Pirates of Penzance*. Throughout my college career I have always been nervous to take 310, worried that I would not be able to succeed. I have been pleasantly surprised though, that it has not only been such a rewarding experience but also my favorite class of the semester. I struggled with learning many of the combinations but found that extensive extra practice outside of class was key. For this self-assessment I will be reflecting upon my struggles, triumphs, and research within each style of dance we worked with this semester.

We began the semester with “Dancing in the Street” from *Motown: The Musical*. This is a jukebox musical, which includes many different famous songs from the Motown era and is based on the life of Berry Gordy – who founded Motown record label. It premiered in 2013 on Broadway and was choreographed by Patricia Wilcox. She also choreographed the 2016 revival. “Dancing in the Street” is performed during the section of the show where the famous Motown singers present their most well-known songs. The choreography is extremely lively and sharp but also connected to the ground. It is a joy to dance to this fun music but I struggled with hitting the more sharp movements. At the beginning there is a double pirouette, which lands quickly into a position with one arm on one shoulder and the other out to the side. I do not have a very clean double, so I went

with a clean single. This was a great piece to start the semester with since it required us to really get into our bodies and feel the movement on the beat. The music has a strong downbeat and it is noticeable if you miss a piece of choreography. I worked hard to sharpen up my positions and I think I was relatively successful although I need work. I also had not danced in my La Duca's in a while, so it was a quick re-education in dancing in heels. The research I did on the show helped me to understand the style better and facilitated in informing my movement.

The next combination we learned was the title piece from *Anything Goes*. The show premiered in 1934 and Cole Porter wrote the music. It has been revived on Broadway and in the West End many times since then but the 2011 revival is the one our choreography comes from. This revival is my favorite since it includes the lovely Sutton Foster. Kathleen Marshall, who also choreographed *The Boys from Syracuse* and *Babes in Arms*, choreographed the revival and won a tony award for Best Choreography. I was very excited/nervous to begin this piece since I love tap but it also is very challenging. This number is a 'cheesy musical theatre' piece with intricate tap that must look 'easy'. This song takes place at the end of Act 1 and is a spectacle piece. I struggled to pick up this choreography at a fast pace. When we were in class I felt very overwhelmed and frustrated that I was having such a hard time. I broke the choreography down into 3 sections, which helped me remember it. I used the videos taken in class and slowed them down so that I was able to break down each movement and learn it. This was for our first graded showing and it required me to spend many hours in the studio working to get the choreography memorized and as clean as possible. Once I memorized it I started to really have fun with it. Instead of dreading having to go in small groups and show the class, I

actually looked forward to it. This is why I love tap because I feel like once I get it, I get it, it may not be the cleanest but I can at least keep up and have fun with it. I performed it at 90%, which was a good tempo for me and received a 42/50 and was very happy! I was given the notes that I needed to work on specificity and my upper body, which I agree with wholeheartedly. I am very proud of myself for my work on this choreography, I never would have imagined I could even attempt the Broadway choreography of *Anything Goes*.

In continuation with the Cole Porter theme, our next combination was “Too Darn Hot” from *Kiss me Kate*. It premiered in 1948 and was also revived multiple times, the most recently in 2019. Warren Carlyle, who also choreographed the revival of *Finian’s Rainbow* and *A Christmas Story*, choreographed the show. The interesting thing about this number is that it really does nothing to further the plot; it serves as the showstopping opener to Act 2. I thought it was very helpful that we watched the YouTube video interview of Warren Carlyle breaking down the choreography of “Too Darn Hot”. It gave great context and background information and aided in informing my movement choices. The movement is fast, lively, and taxing on the body. I thought the partner work was very fun especially because I was partnered with Desiree. I definitely struggled with needing to loosen up my upper body but stay grounded in the floor. I thought a lot of the movement looked really awkward on my body and had a hard time overcoming the thought that I look a little crazy doing it. Memorizing the steps for this piece came easily to me, which I felt showed progress in my ability to pick up choreography. It was very hard not to burn out by the end of the song, especially with the 12 jumps. I tried my best but I did receive the note that I pooped out by the end of my showing. Learning this

taught me the importance of cardio for dancers because you have to have the stamina to make it look easy.

Next was “Rich Man’s Frug” from *Sweet Charity*, famously choreographed by Bob Fosse. It premiered in 1966 and has been revived many times since. I love Fosse’s style and the fact that he created a new style because he felt like the current styles looked awkward on his body has always resonated with me. I did a lot of outside research to help inform my performance and I loved watching and learning about the intricacy within each of the pieces he put together. When we worked on the classic Fosse walk across the floor, I had a little trouble getting it to look normal. My back did not want to stay parallel with my legs and I had to work on the ‘heavy coat’ look. I had an easy time picking up this choreography and I had fun doing it. I worked hard on trying to embody this style and make the body positions look sharp. I always need to work on my overall sharpness, however, because my arms can get a little wild. I think it is great that we were able to do Fosse in class because it is such an iconic musical theatre style and it is beneficial to have had experience in it.

Finally, we finished the semester up with two pieces that would make up our final: The opening of *42nd Street* and “Time to Dance” from *The Prom*. I was nervous about having to work on two pieces and have them ready for the final. I actually saw *42nd Street* in the West End when I studied abroad in London, so I had some prior knowledge and context for the show. Learning this piece was a struggle and I had to break it down thoroughly and slowly. I was not able to get the intricate time step with the arms but I could do it slowly with no arms. I felt like I was able to pick up this tap choreography more quickly than the choreography from *Anything Goes*, which I feel shows definite

progress. *The Prom* was the real struggle for me. I don't know why but I had the worst time memorizing the order of the steps. It took me hours and hours to get this to a place I was happy with. I think *42nd Street* took a back seat because I was so focused on learning *The Prom* and it definitely showed. I had to do a lot of research on the show and the choreographer, Casey Nicholaw, since I was unfamiliar with this new show. I feel like a lot of shows now are being done in this style, so it was really helpful to immerse myself in learning this piece. I was really proud of myself for my showing of this for the final. I was able to keep up with all the dancers in my group and make it look fun. I think that it showcased my progress as a dancer this semester very well.

Overall, I think I improved significantly as a dancer and a performer this semester. I feel much more confident. When I think back to DN 210 I can't believe how far I have come. I still have a lot to work on but now I know that if I put the time in, I can look good doing difficult choreography. I feel much more connected to my body and the versatility of the pieces we learned in class expanded my knowledge of Musical Theatre choreography and allowed me to research all different types of shows. I am incredibly thankful for the opportunity to take this class and be in a program that fosters the growth of dancers, even when you previously would not consider yourself one.

