

5-2022

No One Leaves the Stage: An Analysis of How Queer Dance Strengthens Individual Identities and Communal Bonds

Katie Milligan

The University of Southern Mississippi

Follow this and additional works at: https://aquila.usm.edu/honors_theses



Part of the [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Milligan, Katie, "No One Leaves the Stage: An Analysis of How Queer Dance Strengthens Individual Identities and Communal Bonds" (2022). *Honors Theses*. 838.

https://aquila.usm.edu/honors_theses/838

This Honors College Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors College at The Aquila Digital Community. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of The Aquila Digital Community. For more information, please contact Joshua.Cromwell@usm.edu.

No One Leaves the Stage: An Analysis of How Queer Dance Strengthens Individual
Identities and Communal Bonds

by

Katie Milligan

A Thesis
Submitted to the Honors College of
The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment
of Honors Requirements

May 2022

Approved by:

Candice Salyers, Ph.D., Thesis Advisor,
School of Performing and Visual Arts

Jennifer Courts, Ph.D., Director,
School of Performing and Visual Arts

Sabine Heinhorst, Ph.D., Dean
Honors College

ABSTRACT

The senior choreographic project *Isolated Together* focuses on the way in which creating a safe space to share individuals' authentic selves allows for the growth and development of the entire community. Within the live performance of this work, all individuals are essential to the unified whole; therefore, once visible to the audience, no dancer leaves the stage. Along with the choreographic intentions, the choreographer develops a unique understanding of queer dance based on Clare Croft's ideas to frame a proposal for how dance practices can be inclusive of all individuals. This paper explores how the project allowed the choreographer to expand her practice of queer dance by relying on reflection, collaboration, and intuition to ensure that each dancer is seen, heard, and valued throughout the process.

Keywords: authenticity, community, choreography, collaboration, inclusivity, individuality, safe space, queer dance

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to dance artists and activists both present and future. May you have the courage to remain authentic to yourself and your values while making space in the world for all to join on your journey.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to all of the dancers who dedicated an entire semester to the creation of *Isolated Together*. Jayme Carroll, Francie Davis, Caulondra Davison, Natalie Sunseri, and Rodarius Washington: I could not have done it without your commitment to collaboration and play throughout the process. I am so grateful for the time we spent together and cannot wait to see each of you thrive. Thank you to my parents who continue to encourage me to chase after my dreams. Thank you to the Honors College and The University of Southern Mississippi for requiring a Thesis because I am beyond grateful for the knowledge I have gained throughout this process. Thank you to my Thesis advisor Dr. Candice Salyers for your constant support and encouragement throughout the entire Thesis writing process. I have learned so much from you and am forever grateful for the impact you have left on my life. To all of my dance professors: Brianna Jahn Malinowski, Lauren Soutoulo Smith, Kelly Lester, Katherine Moore, Stacy Reischman Fletcher, Julie Hammond, Cass Simmons, and Dr. Candice Salyers: thank you for instilling in me a desire to grow and develop my own way of moving that does not need external validation. Because of each of you, I have grown a more nuanced understanding of my own dancing body and no longer strive to move like the person next to me. I am a wiser individual because of the collective knowledge you have each poured into me, and I could not imagine where I would be without your influence. Lastly, thank you to all of the artists who came before me and gave me the permission to be myself regardless of what I have learned from my lived experiences. I strive to remain courageous and authentic because of your example.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	viii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	x
CHAPTER I: CONTEXTUAL RESEARCH.....	1
Navigating Space	3
Awakening Authenticity	4
Moving Inclusively	7
CHAPTER II: CREATIVE PROCESS	15
CHAPTER III: PERFORMANCE ELEMENTS.....	27
CHAPTER IV: POST-PRODUCTION	32
APPENDIX A: CREATIVE PROCESS.....	36
APPENDIX B: CREATIVE PRODUCT	42
REFERENCES	52

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1. Individual "strange" solos; Photo by Kelly Dunn	27
Figure 2. Dancers connected, pointing outwards; Photo by Kelly Dunn.....	31
Figure 3. UNO cards rehearsal; Captured from choreographer's journal	37
Figure 4. Reflection prompt, individual movement qualities, play; Captured from choreographer's journal.....	38
Figure 5. Social dance reflection; Captured from choreographer's journal	39
Figure 6. Dancer's responses regarding dance empowerment and favorite social dance form; Captured from choreographer's journal	40
Figure 7. Improvisation and social dance phrase creation; Captured from choreographer's journal	41
Figure 8. Caulondra Davison, Jayme Carroll, Katie Milligan (choreographer), Natalie Sunseri, and Francie Davis in costume prior to performance.....	42
Figure 9. Caulondra Davison alone on stage; Photo by Kelly Dunn	42
Figure 10. Dancers performing "strange" solos; Photo by Kelly Dunn.....	43
Figure 11. Natalie pointing to the audience; Photo by Kelly Dunn.....	43
Figure 12. Canon in the square phrase; Photo by Kelly Dunn.....	44
Figure 13. Dancers see each other for the first time; Photo by Kelly Dunn	44
Figure 14. Francie and Natalie during the framing section; Photo by Kelly Dunn	45
Figure 15. Dancers in square facing one another; Photo by Kelly Dunn	45
Figure 16. Dancers jumping in square; Photo by Kelly Dunn.....	46
Figure 17. Dancers look towards the audience; Photo by Kelly Dunn.....	46
Figure 18. Social dance phrase; Photo by Kelly Dunn	47

Figure 19. Francie carries Caulondra; Photo by Kelly Dunn.....	47
Figure 20. Dancers unite hands; Photo by Kelly Dunn	48
Figure 21. Dancers point from various levels; Photo by Kelly Dunn.....	48
Figure 22. Dancers rest on one another; Photo by Kelly Dunn	49
Figure 23. Front of RDC concert program.....	49
Figure 24. Back of RDC concert program	50
Figure 25. Program information for RDC concert.....	51

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

LGBTQIA+ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual

CHAPTER I: CONTEXTUAL RESEARCH

To remain authentic to myself and my values, I make every effort to foster an inclusive way of considering how dance may serve as a means to bring individuals with different cultural backgrounds and life experiences together. In “To Dance is To Connect,” dance scholar and philosopher Kimerer LaMothe works to define dancing, “as an activity that provides humans with the knowledge we need in order to connect with other humans in mutually life-enabling ways” (LaMothe 110). As society and technology continue to evolve, humans have unfortunately begun to “connect” with other humans in life-squandering ways such as through comparison, consumption, and criticism. This deceptive connection unfortunately has the tendency to leave individuals feeling less like themselves and less than others (Lee and Whitaker 1). Rather than relying on external technologies to forge such ideal images of oneself and superficial relationships with others, my research explores how humans can use their bodies to form enduring connections with themselves and others. In this way, acts of dancing can be ethical necessities that encourage humans to move in ways that hold a balance of individual and social bodily becoming. LaMothe states, “to be human, we are, and must be, always becoming both” (LaMothe 135).¹ Specifically, my research will examine how dancing queerly is beneficial to fostering the dualism of both individuality and community through analyzing the linkages between space, authenticity, and inclusivity.

The word “queer” is most commonly known as a categorization for individuals who do not identify as heterosexual or cisgender. In the acronym, “LGBTQIA+,” queer

¹ Individual and social beings

serves as an umbrella term that encompasses all sexualities and gender identities that defy heteronormative standards. In a sense, this definition of “queer” alludes to its inclusivity of all members within the community who would rather not place distinct labels on themselves (Dilley 457-8). For the purpose of this research, the term “queer” is defined as a mode of being and doing that works to include individuals who feel rejected or out of place by society. I find it important to note that I identify as queer by both definitions, and it is not my intention to erase the identities of individuals who define themselves as queer because of their sexuality or gender.

Dancing queerly, therefore, refers to dancing in both the sense of movement and creative process to be inclusive and give a voice to those who are often marginalized by a larger society. According to dance scholar and historian Clare Croft, there are five key sentiments within what queer dance should and might embody:

(1) that women and feminism are central to any queer project; (2) that social dance and concert dance hold equal import; (3) that through anti-racist and anti-colonial labor, queerness must always work to challenge white privilege; (4) that queerness has challenged the entrenchment of the gender binary; and (5) that queer dance happens across an expansive map, both global and regional.

(“Meanings and Makings” 3)

By following these principles, queer dance converges with several fields of study and is innately opposed to discrimination, misogyny, racism, transphobia, and homophobia.

Queer dance is political and shaped through activism and scholarship in which the concept of queerness challenges all members of society to move towards a more accepting future (Queer Horizons 57). Through her investigation of what it means to

dance queerly, Croft recognizes that the act of dancing is capable of revealing all possibilities of how bodies can experience life and love together.

Navigating Space

In order to practice dancing queerly, spaces must be developed that allow all individuals to reveal their most authentic selves. Because queer dance has the power to make people with a multitude of life experiences visible, it is of utmost importance to create a safe space so that all participants feel secure. For the purpose of this research, the term “safe space” refers to a time and place that values equity, inclusivity, and diversity in which an individual is able to thrive with no shame or fear that they will experience discrimination, harassment, or harm. Additionally, it is important to note that safe spaces, which evoke a feeling of safety, may not always be harmless for those who enter. For example, the gay nightclub *Pulse* in Orlando, Florida was once deemed a safe space for members of the LGBTQIA+ community; however, in the summer of 2016, a mass shooting occurred due to an invasion of this space by an intolerant individual. Because of this and other breaches of safety, members of the LGBTQIA+ community may struggle to feel safe in any space regardless of their acceptance by the other people present. All humans deserve easy access to safe spaces; however, navigating space to find a welcoming place of inclusivity is often easier said than done for many marginalized individuals.

A queer dance space should be a safe space of acceptance, discovery, and growth for all people. A queer dance space, both on and off stage, should not be one of judgment, exclusion, or disapproval. Unfortunately, Clare Croft did not experience an offstage queer dance space during her time researching at the New York Public Library’s

Dance Collection Archives. She was targeted for entering the Dance Collection's women's restroom in 2016 by a male police officer assuming Croft did not belong in the women's restroom based on her presentation. As a white self-identified cisgender butch lesbian, Croft felt threatened and fearful in the women's restroom after an invasion of this space by the male officer as well as intimidated by the questioning of her own right to be in that restroom. Croft states that offstage spaces, such as the restroom, may be used as sites to "work to 'navigate' and 'undo' patriarchal codes" ("Locating Lesbian Identities" 45-6). These lesbian feminist spaces, which strive to be free of patriarchal standards, have been known to offer a place of security and escape for many women through gender solidarity; however, these spaces are historically not fully accepting of women of color or trans women. Nevertheless, it is necessary for queer dance spaces to provide a place of security for all regardless of their sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, or ability. Marginalized individuals rarely have the ability to navigate space in society to be seen and valued because of patriarchal standards, so queer dance spaces must work to abolish these codes of living so that all feel welcome. Everyone's identity is valid, and dance should be a means to express and grow into our true selves rather than a place that rejects part of ourselves.

Awakening Authenticity

Although dance does have the incredible ability to reveal myriad possibilities of how bodies can experience life and love together, it is imperative to have a queer dance space in order to awaken true authenticity within all participants. For the purpose of this research, the term "authenticity" refers to people being true to themselves without fear of being who they are; owning one's identity is key to being authentic. Truthfully, being

completely authentic is nearly impossible without having an established safe space. For example, lesbian feminist activist Jill Johnston urged women in the 1970s to share their lesbian identity in a safe way that makes that aspect of their identity only visible in certain public spaces and to certain individuals but not fully legible to all members of society (“Locating Lesbian Identities” 47). In these more covert ways, women were able to claim their identity and be visible in public spaces. This authentic visibility is powerful because it sheds light on non-stereotypical aspects of life that marginalized individuals experience. It is imperative to be authentically oneself to feel fulfilled and accepted, and dancing queerly is capable of providing a safe space to fuel this authenticity. Performing in front of audiences makes dancers’ bodies and identities visible in an incredibly intimate way. In unsafe dance spaces, dancers may shy away from their authentic selves; however, in safe queer dance spaces, dancers are more empowered to genuinely perform and uninhibitedly create while making their authentic selves visible for all participants to connect with and witness.

Unfortunately, not all choreographers and performers have been afforded the opportunity to perform in ways that reflected their personal lives and histories. As an African American gay man in the 1950s, Alvin Ailey worked to make masculine African American dancers visible on the concert stage. Under Lester Horton, American dancer and choreographer, Ailey formulated a hyper-masculine performance persona that greatly differed from his authentic self. He established the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center to promote the arts and preserve African American culture, and his contributions remain in New York City today (“Alvin Ailey” 1-2). In 1958 he created *Blues Suite* which was inspired by his childhood in the segregated South. In this dance, he avoids any

movements that could possibly portray homosexuality. In the United States during the 1950s, homosexuality was commonly looked down upon and even considered to be a mental disorder by the American Psychiatric Association (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual: Mental Disorders* 38-9). Nevertheless, Ailey may have chosen to present dancers in an overtly masculine way due to fear of the perception of homosexuality. Because of his historical context, Ailey's choreography accentuated masculine stereotypes of African American men instead of reflecting his own lived experiences (DeFrantz 347-8). In terms of my research, *Blues Suite* simultaneously does and does not fit my definition of dancing queerly. *Blues Suite* does work to include individuals rejected from society, as Ailey makes space for the African American male dancer to be seen on the concert dance stage. However, his dance fails to meet my understanding of queer dance, as it does not shed a positive light on the true nature of what it means to be an African American gay dancer in the twentieth century (DeFrantz 347-8). Ailey is not at fault for his avoidance of homosexual desire on stage, as he was not in a safe time or space to present such works because of the intersectionality of his marginalized identities.

By contrast, self-trained hip-hop dancer Mourad Merzouki shares his intersectional identity through his choreography. In France, he works with many dancers in genres ranging from contemporary to breakdance and uses their individual strengths to cultivate a unique movement vocabulary. In 2015 Merzouki choreographed the dance, *Pixel*, which uses projections to situate the dance in a way that blurs the lines between reality and illusory space. This dance and other hip-hop dances in France work to make the humanness of minority individuals visible because their dancing does not subscribe to

stereotypes. French urban dance gives minorities a space to be seen by the public eye through performance and outreach by providing dance experiences to members of the community. This engagement increases the visibility of dancers with diverse identities and shows individuals of the same minority groups what is possible through dance. By having a diverse collective of individuals, French hip-hop dance serves as proof that it is possible to integrate people with many different identities within one community (McCarren 364). Rather than refusing to acknowledge difference, French hip-hop dance acknowledges and celebrates diversity. By making marginalized individuals visible through dance, queer dance occurs by working to include those who are often kept hidden by society.

Because many queer artists are often marginalized members of their communities, they may create work in support of their community or as a means to build community with others. Croft states, “to be queer is perhaps always to be looking for partners and allies, making space with others in a world that would ask you to be alone and quiet” (“Meanings and Makings” 24). Through this statement, Croft positions queer artists in a manner that suggests they live in search of finding and maintaining community in which they are able to make their authentic selves visible. She upholds this idea by stating, “dancing queerly is never done alone” even in solo works (“Meanings and Makings” 26). Queer dance is always bigger than oneself; therefore, it can never be done fully alone.

Moving Inclusively

While researching how queer dance shapes individual identities and communal bonds, I have come to realize that the particular movements people dance are truly what can bring them together in community. Dancing queerly provides a safe space for

authenticity and vulnerability, which allow dancers to create emotional bonds with one another. These bonds aid in the development of both the self and the collective. Additionally, dancing queerly aims to be inclusive of all identities, which further promotes the ability for individuals to be their authentic selves.

To include both community-based and professional dancers in the conversation of how dance functions in communities, I have considered ways in which Contact Improvisation may serve as a means to dance queerly in order to build community. Contact Improvisation, founded by Steve Paxton, is a dance practice that allows individuals to explore movements of their own body in relation to others through a form of physical touch (Paxton 40). Contact Improvisation's emphasis on exploration and discovery allows individuals to be their authentic selves by not enforcing an ideal to strive for or movement to master. When considering Contact Improvisation as a means to build community, it is important to consider the limitations it presents when expecting a form of touch from participants. As performance studies scholar Royona Mitra states in her discussion of British-Bangladeshi Muslim artist, Akram Khan, many cultures have different understandings and relationships to touch. Dancers from these cultures may feel that they must relinquish part of their cultural values to participate in Contact Improvisation. In his interview with Mitra, Khan acknowledges the challenge of participating in Contact Improvisation as he states that he just "melted into the group" and "found his way to hide" (Mitra 391). One may argue that Contact Improvisation is not queer dance if it does not pay careful attention to cultural differences surrounding touch; however, I consider Contact Improvisation to be queer dance when expanding the concept of "contact." Contact Improvisation can be queer dance because of its focus on

establishing relationships between dancers. Considering “contact” as a mode of relating to another human more broadly than sharing weight or touching another body allows Contact Improvisation to be more culturally inclusive in a way that allows individuals to remain true to their authentic selves and values.

After considering the politics surrounding touch, a more nuanced definition of Contact Improvisation that relies on human connections, not solely through physical contact, is necessary for Contact Improvisation to be more inclusive of individuals who do not feel comfortable touching regardless of their reason. Innately, Contact Improvisation is a form of dance that can never be done fully alone because it always relies on a connection with at least one other human. From her experience as a dancer and scholar, Ann Cooper Albright suggests that this dance practice exists as a duet form as she describes a common exercise that begins many Contact Improvisation classes: “Two people stand facing one another, eyes closed” (Albright 39). While remaining present and open, contact improvisers listen and respond to their partner’s movements with careful attention. This reactionary practice yields inventive movement made possible only by the combined efforts of the dancers involved. Through its ever-changing nature, Contact Improvisation allows dancers to be their authentic selves in each and every movement. Nothing is expected. Nothing is planned. There are no gender roles. All abilities are welcome. Everything is exploratory and requires both trust and willingness to learn about oneself and others.

Dancing queerly, especially through Contact Improvisation, requires great vulnerability with oneself, other dancers, and audience members. By embracing this vulnerability, dancers are able to experience the connectivity and community that dance

brings. While equating dance to “social cement,” LaMothe comments that this binding agent “is thought to function as a result of physiological changes induced by the experience of communal bodily movement, resulting in an ‘expanded emotional solidarity’” (LaMothe 115). Nevertheless, dancing enables community bonds to build because movement encourages empathy and emotional awareness. According to LaMothe, there is a profound reciprocity between individuality and community that occurs through dancing:

Individuals are individuals first *before* entering into social relations. Once they dance, individuals *become* bound to one another by their own personal experiences of pleasure. They feel loyalty to the group, even love for the group, for granting them this experience of themselves. In pursuit of their own pleasure and power, they thus align their actions with those of the rest so as to help the group endure. (LaMothe 115)

When individuals come to love the act of dancing, they do not want to spoil it for themselves or others; therefore, they can become more attuned to the needs and feelings of the people with whom they move. Community bonds built through Contact Improvisation remain incredibly strong, as this way of moving requires more exploration and self-discovery which leads to individual development.

All bodies experience life in vastly different ways, and dance is capable of heightening these individual identities and experiences while fueling the growth of the community as a whole. The act of dancing provides an outlet for community participants to explore their creativity, and this creative action yields silent benefits to each participant—whether that be a greater sense of purpose, self-worth, self-respect, or

agency. For example, *The Water Project* is a community art project coordinated by Laura Woods that works to provide a dance experience for unhoused persons in the United Kingdom. They were never labeled as “homeless” during the project and were treated with dignity. Participants in the project were encouraged to create movement, and a participant named Shauna is described as thoroughly enjoying the process of creating (Houston 245). Shauna’s experience in *The Water Project* allowed her to “explore parts of herself” and develop a greater sense of self-respect. In reflecting on her creative participation, Shauna mentions that she would, “come home buzzing on a high doing something creative with herself, not buzzing on a drug” (Houston 245). Dancing can bring dignity to excluded members of society by providing them with a voice and control over their movements. Nevertheless, it is important for choreographers to enter communities of excluded individuals with the intention of providing a creative outlet, not of creating social inclusion. By setting the intention to provide individuals with a creative outlet, choreographers are best able to actively engage community members in a way that honors their individual expression rather than promote the choreographer’s agenda. In doing so, they may spur a chain reaction that initiates social inclusion; however, this result should never be the initial intention of action.

By allowing individuals to “present themselves in the way they choose, not as others choose to see them,” choreographers may provide participants with permission to take away the masks they place on themselves when around others (Houston 241). This concept is at the heart of queer dance because all individuals are given a voice and included in the conversation. By creating queer dance experiences, choreographers are able to create a safe space for dancers to divulge their authentic selves to a group.

Through this careful approach, choreographers can provide rich artistic experiences that allow participants to gain valuable personal and social benefits that encourage them to meet themselves where they are, not where others believe they should be.

A dance collective cannot have a cast of dancers with identical identities and experiences; therefore, choreographers should work to maintain and support each dancer's individual identity. Visible and non-visible differences between individuals can be accentuated or concealed through dance. Unison movement often accentuates similarities among dancers and creates a visible representation of a mass community in which individual bodies merely add to a number. Unfortunately, unison movement often requires complete relinquishment of self to the choreographer's movement experiences and preferences. In this sense, unison dancing may not allow all bodies to participate. However, unison movement can also highlight important individual identities. While commenting on Arnie Zane's and Bill T. Jones' *Rotary Action*, dance scholar Susan Leigh Foster notes, "their unison celebrates the discrepancies in their height, mass, and style of motion" (Foster 431). Zane and Jones were a bi-racial gay couple who choreographed dances that valued physicality, commented on identity, and explored the visibility of the dancing body. By approaching unison dancing together, Zane and Jones are able to remain true to their authentic selves and movement tendencies. Unison does not have to mask the identities of the dancers performing; rather, it can be used to show how the differences of each individual come together to create a diverse collection of beings who bond themselves in community through dance.

Inclusive unison dance is not an easy or quick task; however, it allows for all dancers to have an equitable experience that "does not lead to a lowering of standards"

(Shibata 446). Choreographer Lucy Bennet explores these ideas through her specialization in creating inclusive dance for both physically and mentally disabled dancers. After dancing with Stopgap Dance Company, an inclusive company in the United Kingdom, Bennett became their Artistic Director and was able to use her passion for working with dancers who have a range of abilities to formulate her approach to choreographing inclusive unison material. When choreographing, Bennett uses a series of compositional strategies to find a middle ground among all dancers that reflect several aesthetic threads of an initial base phrase. Each collective of dancers she works with collaborates to establish a unique movement vocabulary that “harnesses the creative advantages that diversity offers. It proves that ‘the whole is greater than the sum of its parts’” (Shibata 452). Bennett’s choreography and choreographic approach perfectly exemplify queer dance, as she challenges her society to move towards a more accepting future by making disabled bodies visible on the concert dance stage. Additionally, Bennett actively seeks ways to include marginalized individuals of society and does so in a way that fuels growth both within each individual and the community as a whole.

Individual growth can inspire community growth because stronger individuals make for a stronger collective. Dancing queerly removes the boundaries set in place by society and gives freedom to choreographers, dancers, and audience members to position their personal narratives and identities into any movement situation. Doing so may allow them to be more seen, valued, heard, and understood by individuals who are different from them. Simply moving together in an uncontrolled manner, such as in Contact Improvisation, strengthens group bonds and ensures a collective trust and emotional understanding of all dancers involved. Queer dancers and choreographers must work to

ensure that differences remain highlighted, never diminished. The unique life experiences of each individual are important, and they should remain present and visible in queer dance.

CHAPTER II: CREATIVE PROCESS

Research in the School of Performing and Visual Arts can take many forms and utilize a variety of perspectives. Students may approach their research from aesthetic, anthropological, historical, philosophical, cultural, pedagogical, and creative perspectives, as well as a combination of these methodologies. Qualitative data collected in students' research may include information obtained from written texts, movement observation, film analysis, participant observation, and from their own creative processes. When the written component of a thesis emerges primarily from the artist's creative project, we expect that the writing both reflects and expands upon the work carried out by the choreographic or performance portion of the thesis project. Following the work of the Practice as Research in Performance initiative, which originated in 2001 at the University of Bristol, we regard artistic processes to be significant in and of themselves as well as vital approaches to learning and theorizing.² As Dr. Vida Midgelow, long-term chair of the Conference of Dance in Higher Education in the UK, proposes, "practice as a mode of research acknowledges that there are fundamental epistemological issues that can only be addressed in and through practice" (Bacon and Midgelow 6).

Below is documentation of the dance "Isolated Together." The Dance Program regards the choreographic and performance process as half of the thesis project. This written document reflects on the dance itself and fulfills the other half of the thesis requirement. Note: Viewing this recorded documentation is not the same as witnessing

² Salyers, Candice, et al. *School of Performing and Visual Arts Honors Research Statement*, 2019.

the live performance; however, it is essential that the reader of this thesis witnesses the recording as it is referred to throughout the entirety of this paper.

Recorded Documentation of “Isolated Together”: https://youtu.be/QgOzjq_CbQU

Each puzzle piece is unique and essential to the creation of a whole image. Without one piece, a puzzle cannot be complete. Similarly, each person in society is unique and has something to offer the whole. As a genderqueer lesbian, I consider myself different from many people; however, being different is nothing to be ashamed of. Luckily, my differences allow me to offer unique contributions and ways of considering many different topics and situations, such as dancing queerly, that may not be widely considered. As a society, it is important to celebrate what makes us different and use those differences to come together for the benefit of all. Similarly, as I was preparing to create my senior choreographic project, I imagined a dance that would showcase the power of different individuals coming together in community. I wanted my dancers and audience to feel connected to the work no matter their personal and cultural differences; however, I still wanted an important aspect of my life to be present through this piece. As a queer individual, I have felt isolated and out of place in various spaces, and I wanted my dance to reflect this experience. After talking with my cast, I began to realize that this feeling of isolation due to difference is a common human experience since no two people are the same. My choreographic work, titled *Isolated Together*, surpassed my hopes for creating queer dance because it not only considered an experience that my dancers and I had in common, but it also allowed me to feel more accepted despite my differences.

*Isolated,*³ Caulondra enters stage left. Feeling alone and unseen, she struggles to keep her head held high. Natalie, Francie, and Jayme finally notice Caulondra and point towards her from the wings. Knowing she is finally being seen, Caulondra breaks out of her languid, stuck gestures into full-bodied, airy movement. She is a different person and mover with the support of others. Together, they paint the stage with their individuality shining through. Four distinct people with different lived experiences come together for a beautifully diverse collection of qualities and movement. Although isolated in space, the dancers move as though they are connected by some commonality. The dancers are “*Isolated Together*.”

Isolated Together became different than I originally imagined my choreographic work would be; however, I am incredibly grateful for the happy accidents that occurred along the way to shape it into its performance state. Many of my initial ideas did remain constant throughout my process as I had a clear message I wanted to communicate through careful consideration of movement invention,⁴ staging,⁵ focus,⁶ qualitative differences,⁷ and costuming. When conceptualizing the beginning of my piece, I intended to have gestural movement,⁸ inward focus, and separation in space. As my creative

³ This chapter intersperses discussion of my creative process with movement description from the performance itself.

⁴ Act of creating unique movements and phrases to later be used and arranged in the context of a larger work

⁵ Position of dancers on stage relative to one another and the audience

⁶ Where a dancer is looking for specific movements

⁷ Movement qualities that change the effect and appearance of a movement without changing the actual movement

⁸ Smaller movement that does not expand beyond the dancer’s kinesphere; often a single body part

process progressed, I saw my dancers establish relationships with one another through an increase in focus on each other and closer relation in space. These seedling ideas from the beginning of my process bloomed into the finished product for performance.

Positioned in a square not noticing one another, the dancers travel along the edges of the shape. Grounded, continuous, reactive movements line the square. As one dancer circles her arm, the next releases into the phrase by exhaling to initiate the collapse of her torso, foot, and arms. This pattern continues until Caulondra finishes rocking on the ground to meet up with the others. They finally move in unison. They see each other for the first time.

No two people are the same, and they should not be forced to fit into a mold prescribed by someone else – even a choreographer. I wanted each of my dancers to decide on a movement quality to embody during the dance in order to show their individuality and reflect their preferred way of moving. In allowing my dancers to choose how they moved throughout *Isolated Together*, I hoped they would find ease and comfort in the movements I provided them. The movement qualities that each of my dancers chose included “hard hitting,” “successive,” “airy,” and “indulging” (See Appendix A). I hoped for these qualities to remain visible throughout the entirety of the piece to show that each dancer is unique even when performing the same movement. These qualities were ever-present in the initial solos of the dancers; however, they faded away throughout the piece. Rather than having my dancers plan how they would perform these qualities, I simply instructed them to rely on the feeling of their bodies while moving through the set choreography. Having more time to coach these qualities may have resulted in greater clarity; however, their natural blending of qualities showed me just

how much we, as individuals, shape and are shaped by our community. Even though each of my dancers were firm in their qualities, it was nearly impossible for them to move without being affected by everyone else on stage. This phenomenon resulted in a beautiful harmony of group qualities influenced by each individual dancer.

In order to create *Isolated Together*, I relied on reflection, collaboration, and chance. While creating initial phrase work, I began by journaling and choosing several words on which to base my movement phrase. This practice of translating words into movement became a common method used in my rehearsal process, as I found that it best allowed my dancers to infuse their voices into their movements. Based on the original phrasing that my dancers or I created, I worked to combine their movements and transform them to better mesh together. During our third rehearsal, I provided my dancers with the prompt: “Reflect on a time in your life that made you feel isolated/alone. What made you feel that way? Describe the emotions you felt” (See Appendix A). My dancers and I spent time writing in response to this prompt, chose five words from our writing, and created a phrase of gestural movement from their chosen words. In the days between our rehearsals, I watched the recorded documentation of their created movements, chose one movement from each dancer, and found ways to string these movements into one single phrase. Each dancer created their own thought through movement; however, I wanted one thought, not six. By breaking down each dancer’s phrase into singular movements, I was able to find places to smoothly transition into and out of our six different phrases.

One of my favorite and most successful moments in rehearsal occurred because my dancers and I collaborated in creating a “social phrase” to embody common social

dance forms we grew up dancing. This phrase occurred towards the end of my dance as my dancer's began to sense their community and connection to one another. Rather than remaining isolated, they began to move in support of one another. To create this social phrase, we each stated our favorite social dance, came up with one movement for each, and strung the movements together into one phrase. This phrase consisted of Caulondra's favorite *Jamaica Funk*, Francie's favorite *Footloose*, Natalie's favorite *Bunny Hop*, Jayme's favorite *Dice Roll*, Rodarius's favorite *Milly Rock*, and my favorite *WAP*. This rehearsal was the most fun and allowed everyone to equally contribute to the creation of a unique social dance by sharing something from our lives and families. Through that experience, I learned the value of establishing trust, connections, and friendships with my cast. When these aspects of relationship are built, feedback is more freely given and understanding is always present. Rather than placing movement on bodies, I used collaboration that was made possible because of the openness and support of my dancers. This method of creation allowed me to trust the process more and relinquish some control. Working with my dancers allowed me to create material I never would have conceived alone, and it was reassuring to know that I could always turn to group practice to get out of a creative block. Because of what I learned through this process, I always want to have an open, collaborative, trusting environment that ensures that all dancers feel comfortable expressing their feelings about the work or movement phrase. In this way, I will create an environment that makes queer dance possible.

Additionally, I heavily relied on chance to structure my piece, as I did not want to micromanage all of the details. The chance method, developed by Merce Cunningham in 1953, allows choreographers to surprise themselves and allow for the dance to develop

without forcing it to happen (Brown 106). Through chance, my dance came to life as it was intended to. One of the clearest uses of chance in my choreographic process included using UNO cards to scramble, or rearrange, movement. My dancers each created one movement based on the word “strange” then I numbered each movement based on the order in which my dancers were standing in the room (See Appendix A). Next, I gave each of my dancers UNO cards numbered one through seven and instructed them to shuffle the cards and lay the numbers out in front of them. The order of the cards on the floor became the new order for each of my dancer’s “strange solos” in the beginning of my piece (See Appendix B). After the numbered cards decided the new order of movement, I randomly gave my dancers three additional cards, which were a combination of reverse and wild cards, that would signal them to repeat a movement or remain in stillness. By using this method, I hoped every dancer would have a different placement of the number “four” because it included a slap and look that opposed the qualities of the other numbered movements; however, all of my dancers laid out their cards with the number four placed last. This occurrence was the first happy accident of many in my process, as I listened to the cards instead of changing them to fit my vision. Because of using this method of chance and taking my preconceived ideas out of the process, I developed a new love for creating based on something outside of myself. I usually base my choreographic structure and individual movements on the musical score that will accompany the dance. However, I took a very different approach in this choreographic process which led to aesthetic discoveries that I would not have made on my own. Without these tools, the aforementioned canon in the square would not have occurred (see movement description on p 16). Smooth transitions into and out of different

sections would not have occurred. By thoughtfully designing and implementing structures that allow me to break free of my preconceived ideas about movement and choreography, my dance manifested as it was intended. These happy accidents made my dance what it was, and in the future I will continue to put structures into place that allow for happy accidents to occur because of this process.

The most difficult and stressful section of my dance was the very end, as I was trying to force the appearance of connections and stage images within Contact Improvisation so that it would have some similarity for each performance. Within my creative process, I instructed my dancers to improvise through negative space, and I recorded this improvisational play. After watching this recording on my phone, I identified six images that I believed were interesting. Then I had my dancers move through each of these images on specific counts while improvising in between. After practicing this section for multiple rehearsals, I could not make the sequence look like what I wanted because the movement was too truncated for my aesthetic preferences. Therefore, I had to make the hardest decision of changing this section during our final rehearsal. When I guided my dancers to remove the idea of the goal images and timing, they moved continuously together, and I finally became happy with the ending of my dance. The end was different every night, and that was both scary and exciting for me as a choreographer. Unfortunately, I do not have video recording of each performance night to fully describe the nuances of each improvisation. However, moments of connection and separation continuously shifted as dancers came in and out of reach of one another.

After being isolated, the dancers finally join forces and improvise to create movement that would not be possible without the unique gifts and ideas that each

one of them brings. Intertwined. Continuous. Responsive. The dancers continue to move in support of one another to the very end of the piece. No one leaves the stage. All are essential to the whole.

Next, I have learned the importance, and sometimes lack thereof, of having a vision for what comes next. From my perspective as a choreographer, it is not acceptable to force something to happen because of a vision you want to see come to life. The framing section (in which Natalie and Francie share the first moment of physical contact in my piece while Caulondra and Jayme frame the stage with a repetitive plié and torso undulation) taught me this important lesson because although I knew what I wanted, after watching the performance, I realized that what I wanted was not what the dance needed (See Appendix B). I was so focused on the position of dancers in space being satisfying that I failed to recognize that it was not necessary. After trying to force that section to fit my idea for multiple rehearsals I should have let it go or approached it from a different angle. Creating this section and the ending were two of the most vivid moments in rehearsal when my piece did not seem as if it would come together. I was stuck and wanted to force the dance to happen. Thankfully, I have learned not to force anything and to allow my next choreographic project to simply happen.

After watching *Isolated Together*, I now notice that the piece is confrontational in nature. Not only do the dancers seem to confront themselves and experience change throughout the piece, but they also confront the audience. Natalie's direct pointing towards the audience and the collective's eye contact with audience members are two of the most aggressive moments in the piece (See Appendix B). When first deciding to use finger pointing as a motif, I drew inspiration from the finger pointing children often do to

ostracize others who may be different from them. Although meant to signify intentional exclusion, the finger pointing in *Isolated Together* became much more significant. While viewing my work, I noticed that the point towards the audience grabs my attention and ensures that I am a part of the dance's world. These movements encourage audience members to reflect and take a look inside of themselves. I hope *Isolated Together* caused audience members to evaluate how they value individuals who are different from them, how they benefit their own community, and what unique gifts they offer.

Through this choreographic process, I have learned invaluable lessons that I will cherish in future choreographic works. First, I have learned that collaboration is essential in my process because I always want my dancers to have a voice in their movements. Rather than being compliant and accepting everything that is given to them, I hope my dancers stand up for what they desire and for what they believe to be just and true. By taking control over their bodily movements, they may grow in confidence and find a new inner strength that opens the door for them to approach the seemingly impossible. These qualities are also innate desires I have for myself, and I recognize that taking control over how I move my own body is the first physical manifestation of such empowerment. Additionally, I have learned to trust the process and relinquish some control to chance. Oftentimes, the dance will tell me what needs to happen if I just let it. When something does not feel satisfying or successful, I have permission to change it.

Through the creative process of *Isolated Together*, I have learned that dancing queerly and creating queer dance performance work is not an easy undertaking. As discussed in my Contextual Research chapter (see page 2), queer dance considers multiple lived experiences while recognizing that each person offers something unique to

the world. In order to even begin conceiving of all of the life experiences different from one's own life, an individual must be dedicated to learning and remain responsive when applying their new-found knowledge. Without actively seeking out new information and having conversations with a diverse range of individuals, it is nearly impossible to grow in your acceptance and understanding of those around you. Creating a safe space is a necessary component of queer dance because it is the foundation from which all growth comes. Taking time to cultivate the space I desire for myself and for my dancers is one aspect of my creative process I will continue to refine. I always come to rehearsal with a plan, and most of the time I spend planning involves the creation of the choreographic components of the performance piece. In the future, I want to be even more focused on the process over the product; however, I do believe that the creative process of *Isolated Together* was my first step in the right direction. After re-evaluating and shifting my priorities, I will dedicate more time to developing actionable ways to foster a space and community of support that encourages my dancers to be authentically themselves. The individual growth and subsequent collective growth of my dancers is more important than the finished performance piece. A live performance exists in finite space and time; however, the process that yielded such creation has the power to foster immeasurable growth.

As I close the process of *Isolated Together*, I look forward to the creation of my next piece, although I am uncertain when or where it will occur. I am excited to choreograph on a new collective, gain insight from their experiences, and use the knowledge I have gathered this year to enhance my future work. *Isolated Together* has

taught me that I always deserve a safe space to be my authentic self and that my work as a queer dance artist is not complete.

CHAPTER III: PERFORMANCE ELEMENTS



Figure 1. Individual "strange" solos; Photo by Kelly Dunn

Live dance performance is important in the world because it provides an opportunity for people, process, and production elements to come together. It allows audience members to truly connect with the dancers and environment of the piece. Certain aspects of live performance do not translate the same when watching the recorded version of the same dance. The feeling one might experience after watching a live performance is more intense and visceral than that of a video recording because the breath, emotion, energy, and essence uniquely manifest for each single viewing of live performance. By being in the same space as the performers, audience members contribute to the energy in the room and are able to open the space for dancers to be their authentic selves. Audience members who give their full attention to the performers and actively encourage their performance through conscious engagement and response become an additional source of inspiration for the dancers. Knowing that the people in the space are there to support and encourage, dancers are able to intimately reveal more of themselves

on the stage. Conversely, recorded performances do not provide dancers or audiences with this same energy, thus taking away some of the true performative nature of the dance.

Isolated Together needed to be a live performance because the intention of the work was to find ways in which dance can help bring individuals with different backgrounds and life experiences together to form a welcoming community. Additionally, each run of the dance is locked in time and space as a unique gift to the audience, dancers, and me as the choreographer. Each live performance only exists until the dancers leave the stage together; however, the experience of each performance can remain with all participants in their imaginations beyond this time and space. Artwork can offer each participant a unique piece of information that is directly related to their lives. Although all audience members saw the same movement, each individual experienced a nuanced meaning.

The improvisation at the end of the performance causes the dance to change each time it is performed, and this variation provides life and newness. If recorded, *Isolated Together* would live as one stagnant, never-changing performance, which is the opposite of its nature. Like all individuals and communities, *Isolated Together* is dynamic and ever-changing. By occurring as a live performance, the piece had the opportunity to evolve, grow, and become more comfortable in its own skin. Re-introduction into the same space each performance night allowed the dance and dancers to feel safer and ready to be visible to new audiences.

Although I did not avidly search for the “right” song to accompany the dancing, I found the perfect piece of music while listening to a study playlist. As discussed in my

Creative Process Chapter (see page 20), another happy accident occurred in my process because the music that strongly inspired my piece just happened to be playing on one of my study playlists. Once hearing “I Will Find You” by Audiomachine for the first time, I was brought to tears by the emotions it caused me to feel (See Appendix A). Because this piece of music had such a visceral emotional impact on me, I was confident it would evoke similar emotions in the audience while they witnessed my piece. While designing the production of *Isolated Together*, I consciously considered the audience because I wanted to condition them to receive the meaning I intended while also making space for their own unique connections to the work. As mentioned in the Contextual Research Chapter, queer dance must be political and shaped by activism. *Isolated Together* comments on the ways in which individuals exclude others and themselves from people who experience life differently, and I wanted my audience to recognize that change in this behavior pattern is necessary. By using an emotionally engaging piece of music, I provided audience members with auditory stimuli to further connect them to the movement and emotional state of the dancers.

The costumes my dancers wore included different colored cutoff shirts with mesh black joggers. The similarity of the costumes helped to show that all of my dancers belonged to the same community; however, the variation in color allowed for distinction and individuality to be present. The diaphanous nature of the pant legs further accentuates the nature of live performance being incredibly intimate and vulnerable. *Isolated Together* made my dancers visible, and no piece of fabric could serve as a mask to shield them from the audience. Just as queer dance strives to increase the visibility of marginalized individuals, live performance provides the outlet for this visibility to occur.

In the production process of *Isolated Together*, I carefully considered choices in all production elements so that each component would reflect the larger context and purpose of the dance.⁹ Additionally, notable connections arose between the staging and lighting choices. The dancers begin separate from one another and grow closer together in space. Similarly, the lighting transitions from cool to warm tones to show the growing comfort dancers experience with one another and the audience. The cold, lonely atmosphere of the cool lighting parallels the feelings of my dancers as they recognize that they are different from one another. The neutral shade similar to direct sunlight which occurs near the middle of my piece represents the moment of hard reality that often strikes as one takes an inner look to discover ways to more deeply connect with others. In this moment, a person is ready to proactively change their circumstances by working on themselves without seeking the external validation from others. In a sense, they finally see the sunlight shining at the end of the “tunnel” and are ready to take the path to get to the warmth it will provide. This section of the dance signifies a breaking of boundaries put up in attempt to protect oneself. It is the moment of realization that vulnerability is exactly what is needed to help oneself by helping others.

Following this moment, the dancers grow closer together in space, and the lighting shifts to more inviting warm tones. As the dancers grow to accept the differences of others, the warm lighting provides an atmosphere of comfort and acceptance. The warmest shade of lighting and closest proximity in space, to both the audience and one another, occurs at the very end of the piece as the dancers move together through Contact Improvisation. The physical connection of the dancers reflects the growing connectivity

⁹ Queer dance that encourages the authenticity of individuals to fuel community growth

they share after cultivating themselves to grow their community. Their individual gifts finally join forces to create movement that would never exist without this sharing of self. This final culmination of gifts each dancer offers one another allows them to grow into their most authentic selves as they realize that as a community, we are all *Isolated Together*.

Empty, dark, cold, and feeling blue, the stage space is the tundra of isolation. The pulled-back curtains accentuate the expansiveness of the dancer's lives; however, there is something missing. No longer empty, the stage holds four individual dancers striving to find the balance between their individuality and collective selves. The sun appears to brighten the stage and the lives of the dancers. Still alone, but on the same journey, each dancer works to grow themselves as the sun grows a flower. The warmth and newfound comfort of connection flood the space as the dancers claim their authentic selves and fuel one another with their unique gifts. The stage is this collective's home.



Figure 2. Dancers connected, pointing outwards; Photo by Kelly Dunn

CHAPTER IV: POST-PRODUCTION

As a choreographer, I approach dance as if it is capable of speaking to all human beings by unlocking quintessential truths about life. Rather than merely thinking of dance as a means of expression and creativity, I have learned that dance truly is research that helps one to understand the world. Recently, I have been reading books and listening to podcasts outside of the field of dance, and everything I have encountered in these other fields, I first figured out through the creation of and research behind *Isolated Together*. Through dance, I have discovered how my life fits into the world and how I want to live my life with an everlasting desire to learn more. There will always be something I don't know, but dance has the power to provide me with all the answers and foundational knowledge I need.

Through my past year of research, I have discovered invaluable ways to approach my creative process and artistic endeavors in a more inclusive and holistic manner. I have also challenged my own prior practices and ways of thinking that make me a more well-rounded scholar, artist, and human. Growing up, I experienced dance in a competitive studio and dance team environment, in which the goal was for the team to move in the exact same time and way as each other. By being in complete unison, having every angle of our wrists and heads exactly the same, I learned to believe that unison and precision are what made a dance "good and worthy." I learned that every single body in the dance must be exactly the same, and this ideal is not only harmful to dancers whose bodies are being pushed in ways that exceed their anatomical abilities, but it also compromises individual identity. Through approaching the creative process by emphasizing the unison of the finished product, the movement and individuality of each dancer is stripped away

as they become merely a number in a visual spectacle. That previous description is what I thought I wanted to contribute my vision, artistry, and energy to. Luckily, the research I have done has opened my eyes to the harmful practices within the competitive and dance team environments. Rather than complying with what I know to be true in these areas of dance, I am ready to transform the tradition and approach these settings in an inclusive manner that allows for all dancers to be open and responsive to the process. Correction: I *want* to be ready to transform the tradition in these environments; however, I know that I must first become firm in my actions and confident in my abilities. In order to do this, I will continue to learn, journal, read, listen to understand, have hard conversations, and most importantly, put myself first. Without working on myself prior to entering these exclusionary settings, I am afraid that I would resort back to what was engrained in me for over ten years: perfection over progress, competition over compassion, mass over individual. By gaining consciousness and clarity in knowing myself, my intentions, and my actions, I am capable of making waves as an individual in the traditional way of approaching any situation.

As my collegiate experience comes to a close, I am grateful for the ways in which it has impacted me both in the present and future. As a choreographer and teacher, I will hold this research at the forefront of each and every creative process or class setting. By choreographing *Isolated Together* while conducting my contextual research, I was able to put into practice some of the ways I hope to hold rehearsals in the future. First, it will always be my goal to harbor a safe and brave space for my dancers, students, audience members, and myself. I always want participants to feel safe enough to be vulnerable with one another, reactionary to the art, and authentically themselves. In such a space,

judgement and hierarchy does not rule; everyone's voice is heard, and creativity is the priority. In order to create such a space, it is essential to act transparently and with integrity. By remaining open, honest, and reflective with everyone involved, including myself, I will be better able to serve those around me. Lately, I have noticed myself criticizing others for professing one thing while practicing another, and that realization is a cue for me to turn inward and analyze my actions to see if I am truly doing as I say. Throughout my life I will strive to act with integrity while respecting myself and others in all circumstances.

In the creative process of *Isolated Together*, I learned that discussion, play, and collaboration fuel my artistry; therefore, I will continue to allow these approaches to be present in my future processes. My artistry is closely tied with who I am as a person. Therefore, making discoveries through exploration while talking with and learning from others will lead me to become a more fulfilled and fuller version of myself. Through these processes, I will then be ready to help others grow through my artistry. Because of my research, I have learned that life truly is a reciprocal process in which all people and parts are essential to the unified whole. Without the support of my community, I would not be in the place to help support others. Because of this communal giving and receiving, I would also like to implement more community bonding time for dancers with whom I work. Being able to experience life together, not only in the studio, fosters a greater sense of trust amongst the collective. In the future, I hope to one day open a non-profit dance company that is comprised of individuals who share similar values, including that all human beings are deserving of being, seen, heard, valued, and loved. As

a choreographer and/or artistic director, I believe that it is important to start with a small collective and use our strengths and passions to help grow our larger community.

This research has empowered me to use my strengths and creativity to work towards social change through queer dance. I want to make an impact, and I want my voice to be heard. Just as I hope my dancers take and make space for themselves and one another, I will be pushed outside of my comfort zone to take my space in the world while making space for others' voices to be heard. To be transparent, I do not know the exact details of how this work will take shape in my life, but I know that I will not be fulfilled without trying. I am scared to try to make change, but I am even more scared to stay silent and compliant. I might start this feat isolated, but I know others will come together and join in the effort. In a sense, our world is always and forever *Isolated Together*.

APPENDIX A: CREATIVE PROCESS

1. Link to “I Will Find You” by Audiomachine:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x6FYFLdWdiY>

2. Movement description of each numbered movement for the UNO chance choreographic process:

- 1- Torso collapses as knees bend and hands touch the floor
- 2- Hands touch shoulders as both elbows circle before rolling through the body to place hands on the floor
- 3- Body curves to one side as the right leg lifts
- 4- Hands slap thighs as head sharply turns to the right
- 5- Knees buckle in as upper body collapses over
- 6- Shoulders and right leg lifts as fists clinch
- 7- Right leg crosses over left; hands and focus release to the right

REHEARSAL #2

MONDAY - 5:45 NOT
6

1. DECIDE ON MAKE UP OPTION

- EXTRA STUDIO TIME, ZOOM, "HW" MEET FOR 30 MINUTE
↳ WRITE + MAKE PHRASE + SEND VID

2. PLAY A SONG TO STRETCH / WARM-UP

3. REVIEW OLD CHOREO AS GROUP

- TRY W/ DIFFERENT PAIRINGS + CANON

"MAYBE DUETS W/ DIFFERENT QUALITIES?"



- * 2 SLOW, 2 QUICK "PICK UP TOGETHER?"
- END LOOKING TO PARTNER
- * 2 UP/JUMPY, 2 DOWN? INVERSE

4. CREATE "STRANGE PHRASES" USING UNO CARDS

- TEACH MOVES ASSIGNED TO NUMBERS
- GIVE CARDS #1 - 7 - SCRAMBLE, WATCH
- ADD REVERSE/REPEAT AND STILLNESS OR WILD CARD (3) - WATCH
- * SEE IF ANY MOMENTS ALIGN, DECIDE POWS + QUALITIES
- ~ ALL ENDED W/ 4... ~

* IF TIME: - DEVICE PHRASE TO GROUND + JUMPING / BIG

- WRITE ABOUT SOMETHING THAT MAKES YOU FEEL ALONE / ISOLATED - CREATE 'SMALL' PHRASE BASED ON WRITINGS / FEELINGS EVOKED

* 1 - TEAM PHRASE FROM SR. CHOPED (ALL PAIRING FROM) TURN TO SIDES

STRANGE MOVES

1. NATALIE COLLAPSE (#1)
2. JAYME ARMS TO FROG (#2)
3. FRATNY LEG (#3)
4. CAULONRA SLAP/LOOK (#3)
5. RO COLLAPSE (#3)
6. ME SHOULDERS (#1)
7. ME CROSSER (#2)

Figure 3. UNO cards rehearsal; Captured from choreographer's journal

REHEARSAL #3

1. WRITE : REFLECT ON A TIME IN YOUR LIFE THAT MADE YOU FEEL ISOLATED / ALONE ; WHAT MADE YOU FEEL THAT WAY ; DESCRIBE EMOTIONS FELT

CREATE : CHOOSE 5 WORDS + CREATE A GESTURAL MOVEMENT FOR EACH WORD (SHORT PHRASES)

2. WHAT IS A QUALITY OF MOVEMENT YOU FEEL BEST FITS YOU / YOU MOVE THE 'BEST' WITH — NO DUPLICATES

FRANNY — HARD HITTING
CAVLONDRA — AIRY / LIGHT / GRAVEFUL
NATALIE — SUCCESSIVE — HIT / GOO / NOODLY
JAYME — ENDOULGING / FLOWY
RO — RIPPLE / WAVE

3. PLAY W/ BEGINNING POSSIBILITIES

- FEET OUT OF WINGS W/ CAVLONDRA
SOLO FROM LAST WEEK
- POINTING
- CONSENT TO TOUCH + PERFORMING A GENDER POSSIBLY DIFFERENT THAN YOU IDENTIFY
- GENDERED POSING — MASCULINE, FEMININE, NEUTRAL
- CIRCLE SLOW AROUND SELF, GLITCH TO OPPOSITE + CHANGE BACK

4. PLAY W/ FRUNGS / STAGINGS FROM LAST REHEARSAL : C — STILLNESS , N — FASTER
F+J : DISCONNECTED DUEL

Figure 4. Reflection prompt, individual movement qualities, play; Captured from choreographer's journal

REHEARSAL #6

1. GO OVER FEEDBACK * SOMETHING YOU ARE GRATEFUL FOR TODAY; SOMETHING YOU LOOK FORWARD TO TOMORROW
- 2- WHAT DOES DANCE DO FOR YOU? HOW DOES IT EMPOWER YOU? * READ FROM LADSTONE
 - * 1 THING + MAKE GESTURE
 - SOCIAL DANCE IS BIG IN COMMUNITY.
 - * WHAT ARE SOME SOCIAL DANCES YOU LOVE + FAV STEPS?
 - TALK ABOUT CLASS SATURDAY - GRAVITY + MOMENTUM ALWAYS IN PLAY; ENERGY IN ALL DIRECTIONS; IMPROV THINKING ART THAT
3. TEACH SHORT GRAVITY / ATTRACTION PHRASE - PLAY W/ DUET + STILLNESS (INCORPORATE POINTS + GESTURE)
4. CONTACT IMPROV IN DUETS STARTING APART + LEADER / FOLLOWER ACTIVITY W/ 1 STATIONARY; 1 MOVING (STATIONARY FOLLOWS MOVER)

Figure 5. Social dance reflection; Captured from choreographer's journal

WHAT DANCE DOES FOR YOU?

- ^{PO}GIVES PURPOSE
- ^PGIVES CONFIDENCE
- ^KGIVES MODE OF EXPRESSION
- ^JGIVES WAY TO CONNECT W/ OTHERS
- ^JGIVES CHANCE TO CONNECT W/ SOMETHING BIGGER - FIGURE OUT VALUES + PERSONALITY
- ^CDANCE IS ME

SOCIAL DANCE

- ^{PO}MILLY ROCK
- ^PFOOTLOOSE (2 FRONT, 2 BACK, 1 FRONT, 1 BACK, HIT, HIT CREW)
- ^NSWING (FLIP LIFT) - BUNNY HOP
- ^JDICE ROLL
- ^WWAP
- ^CROCK BACK, FRONT STEP (CHA-CHA) R, L, R - JAMAICA FUNK

Figure 6. Dancer's responses regarding dance empowerment and favorite social dance form; Captured from choreographer's journal

REHEARSAL #1

1. F + N : IMPROV W/ NEGATIVE SPACE ^(LOOK AT ONE PARTNER)
J + C : SLOW REPETITION OF GESTURE ^(PICK UP C THEN J W/ GESTURE)
EXPLAIN WHAT I WANT NEXT → IMPROV THE STRUCTURE
2. CREATE SOCIAL DANCE PHRASE TOGETHER
3. CONTACT IMPROV + LEADER / FOLLOWER (MOVING / STATIONARY)
→ ALL CREATE ONE MOVEMENT FOR EACH
- LOOK FOR REPETITION OR COLLECTIVELY DECIDE

Figure 7. Improvisation and social dance phrase creation; Captured from choreographer's journal

APPENDIX B: CREATIVE PRODUCT



Figure 8. Caulondra Davison, Jayme Carroll, Katie Milligan (choreographer), Natalie Sunseri, and Francie Davis in costume prior to performance



Figure 9. Caulondra Davison alone on stage; Photo by Kelly Dunn



Figure 10. Dancers performing "strange" solos; Photo by Kelly Dunn



Figure 11. Natalie pointing to the audience; Photo by Kelly Dunn



Figure 12. Canon in the square phrase; Photo by Kelly Dunn



Figure 13. Dancers see each other for the first time; Photo by Kelly Dunn



Figure 14. Francie and Natalie during the framing section; Photo by Kelly Dunn



Figure 15. Dancers in square facing one another; Photo by Kelly Dunn



Figure 16. Dancers jumping in square; Photo by Kelly Dunn



Figure 17. Dancers look towards the audience; Photo by Kelly Dunn



Figure 18. Social dance phrase; Photo by Kelly Dunn



Figure 19. Francie carries Caulondra; Photo by Kelly Dunn



Figure 20. Dancers unite hands; Photo by Kelly Dunn



Figure 21. Dancers point from various levels; Photo by Kelly Dunn



Figure 22. Dancers rest on one another; Photo by Kelly Dunn



Figure 23. Front of RDC concert program

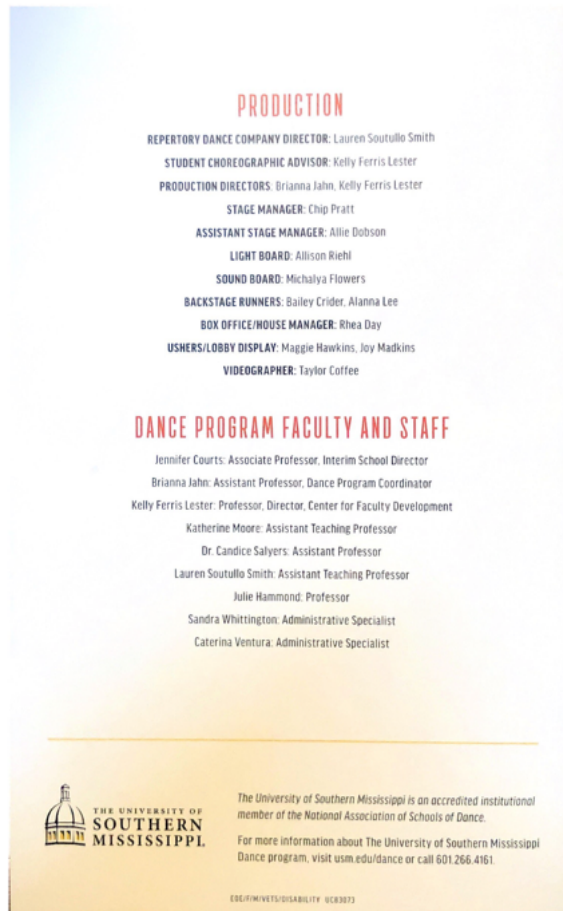


Figure 24. Back of RDC concert program

NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Welcome! The Southern Miss Repertory Dance Company (RDC) is proud to present the first of two fall dance concerts. Our concert this evening features dances choreographed by dance faculty and senior dance majors.

We hope that tonight's performance inspires you to attend more of our events this year. Look for the upcoming season on our website at usm.edu/dance and follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram!

Lauren Soutullo Smith
Repertory Dance Company Director

TECHNICAL DIRECTION AND LIGHTING DESIGN FOR ALL DANCES BY EMILY COLEY

THIS TOO, SHALL.

CHOREOGRAPHER: Lauren Soutullo Smith in collaboration with the dancers

MUSIC: "Duet for Two Solo Violins and String Orchestra" performed by Kristjan Järvi, written by Steve Reich

DANCERS: Jaymie Carroll, Meagan Cobb, Natalie Davis, Kathryn Marchand, Mikail Samuels, Damien Seymour

MOVING TOWARDS

CHOREOGRAPHER: Kathryn Marchand

MUSIC: "Three" and "Six" by Sleeping at Last
"Place de l'étoile" by Triomphe

DANCERS: Gabby Bass, Meagan Cobb, Emaleigh Ousterhout, Brittany Tolbert

PROGRAM NOTE: The enocogram has taught me so much about support. It taught me how to support myself and support others who are different from me. This piece was a journey on learning how to support others through dance. Through supporting each other, we grow together and move toward something special.

I LIVE IN GREEN

CHOREOGRAPHER: Brooke LeGrow

MUSIC: "Dilex playing in another room, but you are in a dream: Crackling vinyl, birds and cars," by Dreamscapes
"Smells Like Content" by The Books

DANCERS: Jaymie Carroll and Mikail Samuels

APPRENTICE: Keldric Holmes

KAMIONDRA

CHOREOGRAPHER: Brianna Jahn in collaboration with the performers

MUSIC: "13.8" by Edgar Meyer, Stuart Duncan, Chris Thile and Yo-Yo Ma
"Earth Breath" by BLOOM

DANCERS: Caulondra Davison, Katie Milligan, Damien Seymour

Special thanks to the three performers for being open to this process, giving of themselves, and allowing me to choreograph their portraits.

ISOLATED TOGETHER

CHOREOGRAPHER: Katie Milligan

MUSIC: "I Will Find You" by Audiomachine

DANCERS: Jaymie Carroll, Francie Davis, Caulondra Davison, Natalie Sotseri

APPRENTICE: Rodarius Washington

A SHADOW'S WEIGHT

CHOREOGRAPHER: Brian Martinez (guest artist)

MUSIC: "Oceanography" (Rhythmic Pulse Edit) by Lauge

"Shutdown" by Apparat

"For Alina" by Arvo Pärt, Alessandra Celletti

"Amber Decay" by Kängding Bay

DANCERS: Madison Johnson, Tim O'Toole, Emaleigh Ousterhout, Mikail Samuels

Natalie Sunseri, Brittany Tolbert

REHEARSAL DIRECTOR: Katie Milligan

Figure 25. Program information for RDC concert

REFERENCES

- Albright, Ann Cooper. "Writing the Moving Body: Nancy Stark Smith and the Hieroglyphs." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 10, no. 3, 1989, pp. 36–51, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3346440>. Accessed 13 Apr. 2022.
- "Alvin Ailey." Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, 16 Nov. 2020, <https://www.alvin-ailey.org/alvin-ailey-american-dance-theater/alvin-ailey>.
- Bacon, Jane and Vida Midgelow. "Articulating Choreographic Practices, Locating the Field." *Choreographic Practices*, vol 1, 2010, pp. 3-19.
- Brown, Carolyn, et al. "Four Key Discoveries: Merce Cunningham Dance Company at Fifty." *Theater*, vol. 34 no. 2, 2004, p. 104-111. *Project MUSE* muse.jhu.edu/article/169648.
- Croft, Clare. "Dancing toward Queer Horizons." *Theatre Topics*, vol. 26 no. 1, 2016, p. 57-62. *Project MUSE*, doi:10.1353/tt.2016.0000.
- Croft, Clare. "Introduction." *Queer Dance: Meanings and Makings*, edited by Clare Croft, Oxford University Press, New York, 2017, pp. 1–33.
- Croft, Clare. "Not Yet and Elsewhere: Locating Lesbian Identity in Performance Archives, as Performance Archives." *Contemporary Theatre Review*, vol. 31, no. 1-2, 2021, pp. 34–50., <https://doi.org/10.1080/10486801.2021.1878504>.
- DeFrantz, Thomas. "Simmering Passivity: The Black Male Body in Concert Dance." *Moving History / Dancing Cultures: A Dance History Reader*, edited by Ann Dills and Ann Cooper Albright, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, CT, 2013, pp. 342–349.

- Diagnostic and Statistical Manual: Mental Disorders*. American Psychiatric Association, 1952.
- Dilley, Patrick. "Queer Theory: Under Construction." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, vol. 12, no. 5, 1999, pp. 457–472., <https://doi.org/10.1080/095183999235890>.
- Foster, Susan Leigh. "Simply(?) the Doing of It, Like Two Arms Going Round and Round." *Moving History / Dancing Cultures: A Dance History Reader*, edited by Ann Dills and Ann Cooper Albright, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, CT, 2013, pp. 427–438.
- Houston, Sara. "Dancing around Exclusion: An Examination of the Issues of Social Inclusion within Choreographic Practice in the Community." *Contemporary Choreography a Critical Reader*, edited by Jo Butterworth and Liesbeth Wildschut, Second ed., Routledge, New York, 2018, pp. 237–249.
- LaMothe, Kimerer L. "To Dance Is to Connect." *Why We Dance: A Philosophy of Bodily Becoming*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2015, pp. 108–136.
- McCarren, Felicia. "Minority Visibility and Hip Hop Choreography." *Contemporary Choreography a Critical Reader*, edited by Jo Butterworth and Liesbeth Wildschut, Second ed., Routledge, New York, 2018, pp. 358–371.
- Mitra, Royona. "Akram Khan on the Politics of Choreographing Touch." *Contemporary Choreography a Critical Reader*, edited by Jo Butterworth and Liesbeth Wildschut, Second ed., Routledge, New York, 2018, pp. 385–397.
- Paxton, Steve. "Contact Improvisation." *The Drama Review: TDR*, vol. 19, no. 1, 1975, pp. 40–42, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1144967>. Accessed 13 Apr. 2022.

Shibata, Sho. “Inclusive Choreography: Lucy Bennett and Stopgap Dance Company.”

Contemporary Choreography a Critical Reader, edited by Jo Butterworth and

Liesbeth Wildschut, Second ed., Routledge, New York, 2018, pp. 444–457.

Taber, Lee and Steve Whittaker. “Personality Depends on The Medium: Differences in

Self-Perception on Snapchat, Facebook, and Offline.” *Proceedings of the 2018*

CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, 21 Apr. 2018, pp. 1–

13., <https://doi.org/10.1145/3173574.3174181>.

Whittington, Karl. “QUEER.” *Studies in Iconography*, vol. 33, 2012, pp. 157–68,

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/23924280>. Accessed 11 Apr. 2022.