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A Senior Thesis: "Performing"

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A Senior Thesis

"Performing"



By Michelle Felten
2003

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The Mindset of a
Performer

“Dancing is like life. The lessons of one are the lessons of the
other.”

~Savion Glover

The journal of a performer

I want to dance!
When the sun catches the aspen leaves
They dance;
When it flecks the grasses and mottles the streams
They dance;
When the dark storm bends the black branches
And the wind whips up the waves
They dance;
The bird swings on the elm twig,
The sap races in the tree,
Horses run in the pasture,
Mist fairies glide to and fro in the valley,
Cloud children play in heaven,
The stars sing and dance,
And I want to dance!
I can be raindrops.
I can be leaves and bending grasses,
Gold-mottled streams and running horses,
Racing sap and the hidden heart of flowers.
I can be firelight and moonlight,
A child of the night mist and a sister of the stars.
All the world sings and dances,
And I am a child of all the world. I want to sing, and –
I want to dance.

By: Margaret B. McGee

I began dancing at a young age of 5. I loved dance, the music, the people, and the movement. I never missed a class and often took extra if I could. For many years my best friends were all people I had dance classes with. We all were a family who supported each other by cheering one another on when we performed, congratulating each other when we did well, and comforting each other when things didn't go just right. As I got older I joined a company in Los Angeles and I entered a new dance world. This world was much different than my close family. This world was one of competition to get a part, to get recognition from a choreographer, and to get a job. I had entered the

professional world, where people fought to stand at the front of the class or lead the across the floor and when someone did well it meant you had to do better. This world was a lonely, isolated one, which sucked the enjoyment out of dancing for me. I hated going to class and made up millions of excuses why I couldn't go. After quitting dance for many years I missed moving, I missed the people, and I missed the music. Choosing to dance at Loyola Marymount was the best decision I could have made. The department reminded me of my dancing experience when I was young; I had found the nurturing family environment again. Although I have struggled against my own demons, I have received so much encouragement from my fellow dancers and mentors.

1/27/03

A true performer knows that a performance can never be perfect. It is possible to be close, but there is always something he or she can improve. As a dancer I feel every person, no matter how talented, has room for growth. In order to continue growing as a dancer the first step is realizing perfection can never be reached, but still striving for it by setting goals for yourself. Today Judy told me I would be keeping a journal of five performance goals specific to me and five relating to every dancer. At first I thought this didn't seem too difficult because I set goals for myself all the time. When I sat down with a paper and pen trying to narrow it down to five, I found it was much more difficult.

I as a person and as a dancer tend to over analyze everything including

my dance ability. This over analysis causes me to constantly critique myself and then set a number of goals. When told to limit those goals to five I had to pick the most important recurring goals I have. Once I thought about the goals that I continuously try to reach I knew my five. My most important goals as a performer are to have more confidence in myself and as a dancer. By having confidence in my dancing I will be able to take ownership in my movement. I will also be able to create a strong stage presence that an audience can appreciate. Improving my technique is a goal that I will always have. No movement is ever performed the exact same way each time correctly, but my goal is just that. Adapting to different choreographers' styles is something I struggle with. Therefore a goal I have is to be able to take any choreographer's style of movement and put it on my body and make it look natural. When performing it is easy to get nervous and anxious, so that is why another one of my goals is control. No matter what the circumstances I want to always make sure my dancing is controlled. My last performance goal goes hand in hand with the rest; it is to have abandonment in my dancing. In order to have abandonment I need to be confident with a strong sense of technique and control and a grasp of the style of dancing I am performing.

These are my five performance goals. Each one is so closely connected to the other, yet still individual. These goals most likely will never be achieved, yet striving for them will help me become the best dancer I can be. As for five goals that apply to everyone I want to observe a little while. Always focusing on my

critiques I don't realize what everyone as a group can improve.

2/1/03

After taking some time to observe all dancers as a whole I came up with five goals each one would benefit from. The first and most important is that when performing as a group the dancers of that group should feed off of each other. When dancers feed off of each other's energy the performance quality of the piece rises tremendously and is more interesting to the audience. Like myself, everyone should have the goal of perfecting their technique. By having clean and consistent technique a group performance will look more like a group performing rather than a bunch of individuals. Although, I would like to say this next goal should go unsaid, it needs to be said that everyone should always try to do things full out, especially when rehearsing and most definitely when on stage. When a dancer always does things full out the choreographer will have a strong sense of what the final project will look like. The last goal that every performer should have is to adapt the choreographer's style to their bodies.

This past week I paid close attention to the goals that were specific to me. In order to combat my confidence issues I am trying to force myself not to hide in the back corners during class. This is a huge obstacle for me because I find comfort in those corners, but it is that comfort that is holding me back. I talked with Paige about this issue and she suggested trying to overcome the idea of trying to blend in by standing in front of the classes where I am most

comfortable and then slowly trying it in other classes. I noticed I don't just have this issue in my dance classes, but also in my regular classes. I am afraid to speak up because I am afraid of saying something wrong. My main confidence issue that I have noticed is the fear of being wrong. This also carries over to my technique and why I am so obsessed with trying to do everything technically correct. I realized that I learn by listening to every correction the teacher gives in general and applying it to myself. Style is an area where I unconsciously hold back. Paige told me she noticed that if something is unnatural to me I automatically change it to a style that I am comfortable with. What I need to do differently is forget all my background and learn each movement like I have never danced before. This is a lot like my goal of abandonment. I have really tried to let go and let things happen in my body. Holly suggested that I focus on moving my body in unusual ways to fully execute movement. I have been attempting this, but I feel like I look awkward. This is a big risk for me, I am really trying not to hold back, but in turn I feel like I am losing control of my movement. Since control is also one of my goals I have found it difficult to balance abandonment and control. I need to find the ratio within myself. I learn this balance by allowing myself to be wrong in order to find what's right.

2/8/03

This week I was able to apply all of my goals, the Michelle specific ones and the ones that I felt the entire group could work on. The hardest goal for me

to work on and improve was my confidence. I have had such horrible confidence for so long that the road in the other direction seems so incredibly long. It is so hard to believe in yourself when you've been so negative in your self-talk for so long. I have found that it helps when a teacher encourages me and tells me when I am doing something well. I find that in the classes where my teachers are complimentary and positive I am more confident in my dancing. I continue to work on my technique as usual listening to every correction the teacher gives. For example in ballet when Scott gives corrections to someone else I try to make the same corrections on my own body or make sure I am not making the same mistakes. I wish we had smaller classes so that teachers could pay more attention to each individual. I have learned that the reason I listen to other's corrections is because not only do I need to work on technique, but also so does everyone and most corrections apply to everyone. Style is also something the group and I myself need to work on. Struggling with this goal I find that by holding back I will never grow as a dancer and I just need to risk looking stupid. Paige always says she will let us know when we are too much, too big. I have really begun to try to give it my all when I dance and trust my teachers to let me know when it is too much. This goes along with control and abandonment. I am learning that abandonment leads to style, but sometimes you need let go some control. Modern movements sometimes require allowing yourself to be off center in order to perform a movement correctly. This scares me a great deal. I fear letting go, abandoning my control, and letting the movement happen. I find

his fear continues to hold me back. Just like the fear of looking stupid affects my confidence. The fear of letting go affects my movement. All of which affects my performance. Performing in a group helps alleviate some of my fears because I am not alone. It is especially helpful when you can feed off the other dancers for energy and even confidence. In "Jolene" all the dancers are performing something new and unusual in their bodies. By feeding off the other dancers I am given some comfort and less fear. It is still so important that we continue to use each other to help our performance. I have learned that by doing this I suddenly have more energy and I push myself more. Going along with the group, teamwork is so important. Pieces are more successful when everyone works well together. It is so important when members of the group help each other understand choreography. Trying to do my share in the group I have tried to perform full out every time. This is extremely difficult, but important. Everyone in "Jolene" needs to work this. When people don't do things full out formations get thrown off and the choreographer has difficulty seeing if their choreography works.

2/15/03

I had a set back with my goals. I seem to be at a wall that I can't get around and it has no door. My confidence, abandonment, control, technique, and style seem to be getting worse. I am in a total funk. I feel like I am a horrible dancer. I hurt my back and I feel like such a wimp. Although the pain is

more intense than when I broke my ankle, it seems like something I should dance through. I talked with Holly and she believes it is Sciatica or something dealing with my sciatic nerve. I am going to go to the doctor as soon as possible. Its weird how when something goes wrong in your body it makes you question your dancing ability. I can't apply the goals because all I keep thinking about is how bad I am. In fact I am doing the reverse of my goals and my negative self-talk is back.

2/22/03

This entire week I have not been able to dance because of my back. I have been going to a chiropractor every day and he showed me how off my spine is. After the adjustments I have had such a greater sense of my spine and the spines of others. Although because of my inability to dance I have not been able to apply my goals, but I have been able to watch other people. By watching classes I realize technique that I need to work on. Observing class has changed my bad attitude. Not being able to dance is the worst thing ever. I have pushed aside the attitude of believing I am a bad dancer and now all I want to do is dance.

2/28/03

I actually danced full out this Thursday. It was extremely scary to push myself because I didn't want to feel the pain again. This fear is a total setback

for me. All the goals I was working on and the progress I was making seem to have disappeared. I am back to step one again. I found myself trying to blend in again rather than risking and being in front. I find that I am extremely cautious and not allowing the abandonment to create style. Instead I am too focused on technique and control. Even feeding off the group hasn't helped me that much. I am fearful, fearful of hurting it so bad that I can't do the show. Over spring break I am going to relax it and go to the doctor. When I come back I have to leave my fear on break. This is it, my last show, my senior year. Worrying about injuries is getting me no where.

3/14/03

I choose to take the entire break off in order to rest my back and give it some time to heal. Doctor's have told me that my back will heal much faster if I take time off dance. Unfortunately, this was not an option until spring break. Normally I would look forward to taking time off to relax, but instead because I was told not to dance I wanted to more than ever. I felt like a child when a parent tells them not to touch something, which makes them extremely curious and want to touch it that even more. Knowing that I couldn't and shouldn't dance was like dangling a chocolate chip cookie in front of someone who is allergic to chocolate. Dancing is my passion, my release, my survival, when I can't dance it is like depriving food from a starving animal. When I don't dance I am unhappy, irritable, and depressed. Although I had a week off of school that I

should be enjoying, I wasn't able to do so. Instead, outside of work I sat around, slept, and trouble concentrating on anything. Most people hate going back to school after a break, I on the other hand, could not wait.

On Sunday, 3/13, I danced for the first time in a week at rehearsal. I approached rehearsal with mixed emotions. One emotion was excitement to be back doing what I love. I had a little more spring in my step Sunday afternoon knowing that I would dance that evening. The overwhelming emotion that I was feeling was anxiety. I was anxious because in rehearsal my performance is everything. I always have this overwhelming fear that a choreographer regrets casting me in their piece. This fear causes me to work ten times harder to achieve the choreographer's approval. This fear caused my anxiety because I knew that I would be fighting a war within myself that evening. The war would be between wanting to work hard in order to achieve the constant approval I seek of the choreographer against the fear that I have of injuring myself further or feeling the excruciating pain I had experienced. This anxiety was an enormous roadblock for me. I walked into rehearsal with even less confidence than I had before. I was dead set on blending in. If I could just blend in then I could test how much my back could handle without the choreographer thinking I was slacking. In this instance I know Paige understands that I am injured, but because it is not something you can see physically I feel like people are always judging me, thinking I am a wimp. The anxiety caused me to stress about every little movement. The stress consisted of my constant self-analyzation and worry

as to whether or not I was doing it technically correct, powerful enough, or stylistic enough. I was analyzing every area I had set goals for myself. Because I was analyzing my abilities to achieve those goals I didn't believe in myself that I could achieve those goals. My mind had taken over the functionality of my body. With so much controversy going on in my head I was finding it difficult to pick up the material Paige was teaching. My mind was everywhere thinking about everything, everything but the one thing that I needed to be focusing on. I realized that my anxiety had shut down my thinking brain, and was making it more difficult to learn the material I was being taught. I left rehearsal that night feeling horrible about my performance. I was mad at myself because I could have pushed my back more, mad at myself because I just blended in, but most mad at myself because I didn't trust myself. Again at rehearsal the next night the battle continued. Even though I knew I had set goals of things I needed to work on, I couldn't seem to implement them because I didn't trust that my body could do it. I felt that I shouldn't have confidence because my dancing did not warrant it. I felt that my style was all off, the more I tried to achieve abandonment the stiffer I grew, and the more I tried to perform it full out I felt myself pull back. My mind was winning the battle over my body and I didn't know how to stop it.

I doubted all the training I had received over the years. I needed an observer to be honest with me and prove or disprove my brain. So, the next morning in my conference with Paige and I asked her if she regretted casting me

in her piece. It was a question that had plagued me for awhile. The reason I felt it was true is because with my mind analyzing anything and everything I understood that the fact that I was in the back the most of the dance was because Paige was trying to hide me. Even though some of my friends had said things to dispel my beliefs I would have to hear it from the person who meant the most. I was put somewhat to ease when Paige told me that she didn't regret having me in her dance and in fact she was glad to have had this opportunity to work with me. She told me that if I were doing anything inherently wrong she would definitely let me know. I asked her if I had made any progress with some of the goals she had given me, but she apologized saying that with the pressure to get the dance done she hadn't really been able to watch anyone. I left the meeting feeling some sense of relief, but still a little anxious.

In my classes the next day I felt the necessity to attack my brain. I decided to try something different, instead of focusing on what I need to work on and what I need to fix, I decided I needed to take a day and just dance. I felt that it was necessary to dance without using my brain. I am in the midst of reading the book The Inner Game of Tennis, and Gallwey the author explains that sometimes you need dance like you are unconscious. He explains that the body knows what to do the mind just does not trust that. Today I decided not to conduct any negative self talk, instead I was going to dance. I was going to dance the next few days like no one is watching. To me to dance like no one is watching is to not worry about looking stupid or doing something wrong, to feel

the music and the movement in my body, and just let the dance come out of me. This is an extremely difficult thing for me to do because it is impossible for me not use my brain. In anything I do from work, to class, to homework, to conversing with friends I analyze how I acted, spoke, and performed to realize everything I did wrong. I am constantly concerned with my mistakes than recognizing what I do well. I tried in dance to dance like I was unconscious, which is one of the most difficult things I have ever done. It was with the great help of the music that I was able to abandon my brain and awake my body. Over the next few days I felt more comfortable in what I was doing. Previously I felt like a Frenchman trying to speak the English language, dance to me felt foreign. I knew the steps, but they didn't feel natural in my body. By losing my mind, I felt at home again with movements that have been drilled into my body since I was six years old. I didn't feel like an outsider trying to do something foreign, I instead felt like a dancer dancing. Ignoring my mind I also was performing things more full out than I had originally thought I would be able without a great deal of pain. I realized that I was in a way babying my back. I wasn't trusting that it would let me know when something was too much. Rehearsal on Friday went much better than earlier in the week. I was finally picking up the movement. It is weird to think that the less I thought about learning the movement, the easier it became. This is opposite everything I had ever been taught. I always thought that being able to pick up dance quick was the responsibility of your brain, but I am now realizing that it is the responsibility

of your body. Over the years my brain taught my body new movements, but now it is time for my brain to take a break. At rehearsal I was able to be more confident in myself that I knew what came next and therefore some of the worry disappeared. The lack of confidence, trying to blend in, and fear of style was easing due to the absence of worry. I now didn't want to blend in; instead I wanted everyone to see me and what I was doing. I had to overcome the feeling that because I was in back I wasn't worth anyone watching me. It doesn't matter if people watch me or not, what matters is if I enjoy what I am doing. When I constantly consider what everyone thinks of what I am doing, it takes all the fun out of what I am doing.

3/21/03

This week I really wanted focused on the goals that I set for myself at the beginning of the semester. Last week I focused on letting my body perform without interaction with my mind like Gallwey advises in his book The Inner Game of Tennis. This week I want to learn how to interlace the application of goals and the ability to trust my body in order to become the best dancer I can be. In order to bring together body and mind I had to come to and understanding that the goals were observations of things that I could improve, but remind myself not to conduct any negative self-talk. This is a difficult task considering my habits of being extremely critical of myself. It is important for me to remember that they are simply goals that don't have to be achieved

immediately. So, no matter if I was in class or rehearsing I gave a great deal of thought to each goal. Before I would enter the dance room I would think about the goals I had set for myself and how I could achieve each one of them.

The first goal that I have been battling since I was about twelve years old is confidence. Confidence is not something someone else can give you, it is something you need to find deep within yourself. It has been my negative self-talk in the past that destroyed my self-confidence to the point it is now. I have come to realize that it is because of my lack of confidence that I tend to stay in the back corner of the room during dance classes. It is my thought that if I remain in the back corners out of center view I will be able to blend in. I like to blend in because I have this ridiculous fear of looking stupid. What I really need to make myself understand is that we all look weird or stupid at times, and it is through this weird look that we learn what the movement really is. It takes a person to be wrong to understand what right is. No one is on the sideline waiting for me to mess up so that they can make fun of me; in fact everyone is more concerned about himself or herself to even notice me. While I can say all this, it is hard to really believe it deep down. Instead I allow all these fears to overcome me and restrict me to the back corner of the room. By blending in I don't have to put myself on the line or subject myself to criticism, but I also will never be seen. If I ever want to go anywhere with my dancing I have to be seen and be confident. I watch dancers like Susi Jenkins and Sabrina Garrison and admire their confidence. Watching them dance I never see any sense of

fear, although movements may be new and foreign to them they allow their bodies to experiment without doubting their abilities. I admire how they lead across the floors, stand in the front middle of class, and are asked to demonstrate movement phrases. Their confidence allows them to stand out in a class and not blend in to the background. It is this confidence that will take them far in the dance world and it is also this confidence that I wish I had. Combating my issues with confidence I tried this week to escape my safe invisibility land and enter the vulnerable world of standing out. I made myself, reluctantly, stand in the middle of class. I may not make it to front and center immediately, but I am trying to leave the dark corner that I have put myself in for so long. Although it is a scary thought to be leaving my safe world, I find that just the small change of where I stand in class actually makes me work harder and pick up movements quicker.

I think that if I am comfortable with my technique my confidence will continue to build. That is why it was important to me that one of my goals be technique. When I think of a really good technical dancer I think of Jackie Wesley. Everything she performs seems to be executed with flawless technique. She is as close a technically perfect dancer as any human can get. I as a technical dancer am not horrible, but I have lot of old bad habits that I can't seem to break. I know that I have trouble keeping my shoulders down, especially on turns yet it is so hard for me to stop doing it. I always listen in class to the corrections that the instructor gives to the entire class and try to

apply them to myself. Although this is extremely beneficial because we all tend to make similar mistakes, it isn't enough. Maybe because I have done such a good job at blending in I often am invisible to direct corrections to my own body, which is why I tend to feed off others corrections. All in all knowing what a dancer can do wrong in certain positions and seeing myself make those same mistakes is an entirely different story. Gallwey in the book The Inner Game of Tennis explains that sometimes we must observe ourselves making the mistake to finally understand the correction. By moving out of my dark corner and to a place where I can see myself in the mirror I will be able to observe myself. Gallwey also suggests watching someone else doing it correctly and your body will naturally follow. Paige also stressed to me that I choose someone to watch and observe. I chose Jackie as a person to watch each movement and allow that to rub off on me. In rehearsals I watch how Jackie performs the new movement first and then try to imitate her. I find it really helps when I have something to follow. My body does respond better to having a visual example instead of verbal corrections.

In addition to admiring Jackie's technique I also admire the control of her movements. She has the ability to make out of control movements look that way yet still having complete control. I find that I often try to perform so big and strong that I surpass my capabilities and end up looking chaotic and out of control. While it is important to be a big strong presence, it is even more important to be in control of your movements. In Paige's dance the majority of

movements are "out of control movements" yet as a dancer in the piece you must have absolute control or your movements will just look like one chaotic mess. In rehearsal this week I have really focused on balancing control with making the movements big. Again I found myself watching how Jackie performs the movements and trying to imitate that. I found it extremely difficult to maintain the power in my movement while staying in control. Speaking with Paige she said that my ability to perform so strong and big was an asset of mine. The more thought I gave to my goal of control the more I have begun to think it is a battle that needs to be fought in my head. I need to trust that my body will only do as much as it physically can and that it will not let itself get out of control. It is my brain that is creating the out of control feeling that I experience. I have to believe in myself, have confidence in my abilities and the control will come.

It is also so important that I have some confidence in myself in order to allow myself abandonment. I worry so much about everything I do that the worry carries over to how I perform the movement. Before I walked in to classes and rehearsal this week I tried to clear my mind of worry and remind myself that it is just class. When I worry my body stiffens and I lose the ability for the full the range of movement in anything I do. Instead my torso remains stiffly in line with my head and my extremities are the only real things creating movement within my body. I strive for abandonment giving me the ability to move my body to the full fluidity and power that each movement should have. I

watch Gina Johnson in class use her torso to accentuate each movement and give real texture to the phrase in class. Holly gives us the framework in modern and it is our responsibility to make it performance quality. I watch how the framework Holly has give evolves in Gina's body and I stand in total admiration. She took something that was one-dimensional and made is three-dimensional by simply letting go, dancing with full abandonment. When I performed the same phrase I too tried to let my body take over and escape the stiffness is so readily performs. I found it helps that while I am waiting my turn to perform if I move my torso around in weird and unusual ways I continue to keep that sensation when I take the floor. This sensation reminds me to have more mobility in my core and if gives me a sense of that very same torso in connection to the fluidity of the phrase.

This sense of abandonment will allude to the ability to pick up different dance styles with more ease. This was extremely apparent to me when I went to rehearsal Saturday and we finished learning the end of the "Jolene", which is a mix of hip-hop, modern and jazz. My natural instinct is to take the movement and make it fit in me to what is most natural. Paige has told me that I often take new movement and put it in words that Michelle's body understands. She tells me that I make someone else's style into my style and what I am comfortable with. As she taught this new section I tried to pretend to myself that each movement was completely new, something that I have never done before, and tried to watch each little aspect of that movement. It is like I have to pretend

that I have never learned how to dance and that each movement is completely new and unrelated to anything I know. In addition it is important that I focus on imitating how Paige performs that movement and not changing it to what feels comfortable in my own body. Paige told me that its OK for things to feel weird in my body, its OK for me to feel like I am doing something totally wrong, that realistically I am probably doing it just right. She continued to explain that the reason that I probably feel like I am doing it totally wrong is that its movement that I am not used to and therefore is new in my body. When learning all the new movement I tried to keep in mind that it is good to feel like I look like a fool or feel uncomfortable, because in fact I am actually allowing my body to learn a new style and no reverting back to my own comfort zone.

Applying each goal to my body and my mind is a challenge within itself. I never realized how much we could be our own roadblocks. In most situations it is not our physical abilities holding us back, it is our fear. Overcoming my fears in everything I do, is the most difficult challenge I have in dance and in life. It is my fear and only my fear that will keep me from being the person I want to be.

Who I am as a

Performer

“Whenever there is sadness,
You must dance away your tears.

Whenever there is loss,
You must chance yourself to the moon.

Whenever a child is born,
You must dance an unbroken circle.

Whenever you fall in love,
You must dance together and find
How dancing and contentment are the same.”

~Nancy Wood

Coaching a Dancer into a Performer

As a dancer in Paige Porter's "Jolene" it was important for me to meet with her to discuss my goals, my accomplishments, what I need to augment in my performance, my technique, and strategies for performing. My first meeting with her I was extremely nervous, I wanted her to be honest, but at the same time I feared how harsh truth can be. I walked into the small studio filled with apprehension, anxiety, and fear. I was asking a brilliant choreographer and dancer to tell me all the things I was doing wrong. Within minutes of the beginning of the meeting all my fears died. I could tell that Paige was here to help, to enhance my ability as a dancer and performer because she cared. Her genuine concern to help me was exactly what I needed.

The first meeting consisted of me telling her of my past and my background. I explained to her how I was injured badly and ever since I don't feel that I dance well and will never be able to dance how I used to. I explained to her that before my accident I was confident in my abilities, but having to come back and start over I was disappointed with myself. I told her that I felt that I had been out of dancing so long that I had lost touch with the current style. I quite dance at an age where most students develop their own style and tried to return at an age where personal style influenced each dancer's performance. I spoke about all my insecurities and Paige listened. She told me this explained a lot. She now understood the hesitance in my dancing and my lack of confidence. This first meeting focused on her understanding who I was as a dancer, what I hoped to accomplish by meeting with her, and how she can

assist in that.

It was in the next meetings that we discussed what steps I should take to augment my performance. Paige said she noticed watching me that if I don't understand movement instead of trying to learn it, I change it into something that I do understand. I had always thought I lacked style, but Paige explained that it's not that I lack style it's that I have too much style and don't allow myself to learn new styles. I lack the versatility to pick up new styles. My fear is holding me back. She suggested that I focus on learning movement like I had never danced before. When I watch someone demonstrate a movement I should examine each part of that movement, instead of assuming I can do it. By breaking down even the simplest movement I will discover things I never saw before. This was extremely difficult for me. I noticed that I would automatically tune out a teacher when they were demonstrating something I thought I knew how to do. In the next few classes and rehearsals I kept my eyes and ears open, not allowing any misinterpretation in what was being demonstrated.

Paige also felt that in addition to approaching dance like I had never danced before I needed to find someone in each class who is executing the movement well and imitate them. This was surprisingly helpful as I would watch Jackie in rehearsal and examine the slight movements in her body that create the full movement. In modern I found myself watch Gina, who had an incredible ability to flow with the movements. I watch were she initiated movement from and what parts of her body remained stiff while others remained tight. In ballet

I watched Susi Jenkins and the way she held her body as she executed every step. In each style of dance I recognized the differences in just the way each dancer held her body. This made me realize that I was not differing my body stance with each style of dance, instead I remained in the same position and expected my arms and legs to change.

Another suggestion Paige had for me was to move my body in unusual ways as I am walking to class, in class, at work, anywhere. I need to begin to teach my body that it was OK to let go. In rehearsals she would tell me if I was letting go too much, but my job was to unleash my torso and allow it to move with me. I found this to be the most difficult task of all. For some reason my torso was extremely connected with my spine. The slightest movement looked robotic, when flow was the ultimate goal. I continue to work on this everyday in everything I do.

When it comes to confidence, Paige noticed the affect of my lack of confidence on my dancing. Her plan was to have me stand in the front of classes out of my deep dark corner. This would be uncomfortable for me, but it would also put me in the spotlight, which tends to make me perform better. She said that she noticed in class and rehearsal when I was put on the spot a different dancer appeared compared to the one who just wants to blend in. She told me that I am extremely good at blending in. Paige said that I am a beautiful dancer and I should express that and not hide it.

Week after week we discuss my same hang-ups and obstacles. I get

discouraged but Paige constantly reminds me that it takes time to reverse the years of mindset that I created. She told me that she notices baby steps each time she sees me and not to expect too much. Other people may not notice the battle I am fighting or the advances I am making, but if it feels different to me for just one minute then I am moving in the right direction.

The one thing Paige suggested that I don't work on is technique. I need to stop focusing on making sure every toe is perfectly pointed and instead focus on letting go. It is her belief that my obsession with technique is part of what is holding me back. I will perform movements technically correct without thinking about them, what I need to focus on is changing my style and adapting to other styles.

Paige's fifteen-minute talks every other week have given me a great deal of insight into myself as a dancer. I have been forced to face my fears head on. No more comfort zones.

I have become less of an outsider in class and more of a member of the community. I am learning that I do belong there. I have the talent that the others possess, I just need to learn how to use it. I realize that no one is watching my every movement waiting for me to make a mistake, if anything they are applauding my improvements. Worry is getting me nowhere; risk is the only way to grow. The other members of the LMU community are faced with the same challenges and often with the same hang-ups as I am. I learned that we all are supportive of each other and realized how wonderful this community is.

As an individual I still battle confidence everyday inside and outside the dance room. The more I allow myself to believe the other dancers' feedback the more I am beginning to believe in myself. I cannot expect so much of myself to change over night; it took years to get where I am, so it's going to take time to change all of that. I realized that I am a very sensitive individual that takes everything to heart. I am learning how to let things go and not over analyze everything that is said to me. The hardest lesson I am learning is how to believe in myself. Until I believe in myself, it doesn't matter how much anyone else does.

I have grown by becoming open-minded to all styles of dance. I am allowing myself to look awkward in order to learn other dance forms. I never thought I would be able to do half the stuff Holly's class does, but by being courageous and open-minded I surprised myself. I found the more confident I was in myself the easier things became, the more the movement flowed. Learning that the mind can be your worst enemy, I am growing because I am paying less attention to it. I realize it is good to make mistakes, or I will never grow.

I still have a lot of growing to do. My biggest challenges are trust in myself and confidence. As an individual I am too calm sometime, too worrisome, too restrained, which causes me to hold back as a performer. I need to learn how to let go, to relax, and not take things so seriously, when I can do that I will be able to reach my peak performance. I have noticed that when I am on stage

a part of me does come out of my shell. For some reason the stage is where I am most confident. Being a good performer means being confident and happy with who I am as a person. This isn't just something that affects dancing it affects the person I am. No second-guessing, no doubt, believing in myself on and off stage will make the person I want to be and the best performer I can be.

The Art of Performing

“There’s a reward in dancing that’s indescribable... the mental and physical coming together. And when everything is right... there’s no other feeling like it and you remember that and you’ll do almost anything to feel that again.”

~Robert Weiss

The Inner Game of Tennis

The Inner Game of Tennis focuses on just that, the inner thoughts that can control your athletic performance. Gallwey's book is based on the principles that every game is composed of two parts. These two parts are the outer game and the inner game. The outer game is played against an external opponent to overcome external obstacles and to reach an external goal. (Gallwey xix) The inner game takes place in the mind of the player. In this game your own mind is in fact your opponent. The goal of the inner game is to overcome obstacles, which can be lapses in concentration, nervousness, self-doubt, and self-condemnation. (Gallwey xix) The inner game is often the most difficult to win because in order to succeed one must overcome all habits of the mind which inhibit excellence in performance.

We often hear that we are our own worst critic. This example of the inner game is another way of describing that theory. Those professional sports players, dancers, actors, and singers that have achieved success have done so because they have been able to master the art of relaxed concentration, which Gallwey believes, is the true basis for self-confidence and way to win the inner game. Gallwey further states that overcoming the common hang-ups of competition the player of the inner game uncovers the will to win which unlocks all his energy and which is never discouraged by losing. (Gallwey xix) Although the book The Inner Game of Tennis uses tennis to relate to these two games, the idea of the inner and outer game is relevant in any athletic or mind competition.

Although I have never played tennis before in my life I was able to directly associate with everything Gallwey was saying with myself. On page 5, Gallwey writes "I know what I am doing wrong on my forehand, I just can't seem to break the habit." In dance I often know what I am doing wrong or can evaluate my mistakes, yet I find it extremely difficult to break those bad habits that have been imbedded into my brain for years. The more I focus on fixing those bad habits the more I concentrate, analyze everything, and tense up making it more difficult to perform the movement than before I discovered the bad habits. Gallwey explains that this is the problem of trying too hard. People often try too hard to correct something, which in exchange makes it even more difficult. This is because images are better than words, showing is better than telling, too much instruction is worse than none, and that trying too often produces negative results. (Gallwey p.7) For example, I might be having a really good turning day, but the second I start analyzing why my turns are better this day than normal and try to exercise control the streak ends. The reason I was able to turn so well was because my concentration was effortless. Mastering the art of effortless concentration is invaluable in whatever you set your mind to whether it is tennis explained in this book, dance, or a game of chess.

In order to understand how to achieve effortless concentration to the point of unconsciousness Gallwey explains that one must understand that the self can be divided into two. These two selves are the "I" and "myself". The "I" gives instructions and "myself" performs the actions. The key to getting better

at anything relies on the successful relationship of the two selves. (Gallwey P.11)

Often the problem is that self-one, "I", and self-two "myself" don't trust each other. Self-two as the doer knows how to perform an action. If it is making a mistake it will adjust itself without needing to be critiqued. Often self two learns best by watching someone performing the action correctly and imitating that performance. Gallwey suggests that the steps to get it should consist of 1) Nonjudgmental Observations of yourself seeing what is happening rather than noticing how well or badly it is happening, 2) learning how to get the clearest possible picture of your desired outcomes, 3) learning how to trust self two to perform at its best and learn from success and failure, and 4) nonjudgmental observation of change and results. (Gallwey P.68-69 & P.13)

Often the problems that occur with self-one and self-two the ego-mind, self-one, causes an interference with natural capabilities of self two. In my own life I often allow this to happen when I overanalyze myself too concerned with technique and control. According to Gallwey I need to realize that my body knows the movements and trust it to perform them. Quieting the mind is what I need to do and to doing this means less thinking, calculating, judging, worrying, fearing, hoping, trying, regretting, controlling, jittering, or distracting. (Gallwey P.18) Every one of these characteristics just listed are characteristic of my entire personality. Reading Gallwey has awakened my mind to why I have hit a plateau in my dancing. I am unable to grow and at times feel like I am getting worse because my self one is controlling my self two. The hardest thing for me to do

will be to learn how to let go of the human inclination to judge my performance and myself. I judge myself every time I perform a combination across the floor, in front of an audience, any time I move. These self-judgments, Gallwey explains, have become self-fulfilling prophecies. I am becoming what I think. (Gallwey P.20-21) What he suggests we do to help this mindset is to acknowledge one's own or another's strengths, efforts, accomplishments, etc. This can facilitate natural learning where judgment interferes. Another way he suggests to combat the negative self-talk that I experience is to let go of the mental self-instructions and focus all my attention and trust on the body to do what it is capable of doing. Gallwey suggests that if we let ourselves loose touch with our ability to feel our actions by relying too heavily on instructions we can seriously compromise our access to our natural learning processes and our potential to perform. (Gallwey P.49)

Although the book was written with the tennis player in mind, it can appeal to anyone who plays a sport, dances, sings, acts, talks, plays chess, anything. This book addresses our own negative self-talk and how it impacts our inner game. Gallwey gives suggestions of how to overcome the ego-mind and allow the body to act. He explains how to let go of our consciousness and experience through our bodies what is best for our performance. Gallwey teaches us how to win the inner game so that we can continue to be competitive in the outer game.

In the book The Inner Game of Tennis the author Timothy Gallwey stresses the need for a performer to take risks. To ignore the mind and allow the body to perform. He stresses that the body can be trusted will perform best, when we can quiet the mind. Peter Brook furthers this notion with the idea of keeping movement alive. This can only be done by not allowing movement to become repetitive and not to follow some set order of instructions; instead a dancer must risk and commit themselves to the movement.

What is it to fill a space?

As a dancer dancing is enjoyable within, performance is what entertains others. The art of dancing is the ability to share with others the gift that you have been blessed with. Sharing this gift does not simply mean repeating steps that you have been given, it means performing to an audience and captivating them. Peter Brook in his book The Empty Space, defines what performance means for an audience. "I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged." (Brook P.1) Filling a space is not performing, whether it is theatre or dance. Performing is to fill a space with style that is alive, new, innovative, and different.

Often people take center stage and recite movement that they themselves and many others have been doing for ages. Until I reached college this is what I believed dance to be. I was trained to focus on technique, precision, and timing.

As I performed as a group it was important that everyone was doing the same thing the same way. "We fall into a trap of copying what has been done or assuming that it must be done a certain way and only that way." (Brook P.14) This was the type of dancing I was performing, and only my parents could appreciate the beauty in it because they were my parents. Any other audience member is soon put to sleep after watching piece after piece of the same movement just with different dancers. It was when I began dancing at LMU that I realized that I was missing dynamics to my dancing. I was so stuck in dancing to receive praise for perfection, and not for my performance quality. When a performer receives a compliment on one way of execution; they then might feel committed to performing exactly that way and lose that sense of risk and aliveness that makes it interesting to watch again and again. (Brook P.37) I was personally responsible for my lack of growth as a performer.

When a person dances for precision and not for feeling their dance is dead. It will only be a short while before all of the audience is bored due to the lack of dynamics. While it is important to have good technique, it is even more important to indulge yourself into the movement you are performing. Brook stresses the need to keep dance "alive." It is important to risk while you are on stage, allowing your body to dance and not be overshadowed by your brain. Merce Cunningham, a modern choreographer, was able to keep his dancers alive on stage by never allowing routine. It was important for his dancers to have strict technique, but not to allow it to be a restriction. His pieces were based on

allowing his company members to experiment with improvisation while performing. This improvisation created spontaneous movement that was fully alive, attracting the audience's attention because no one knew what was going to happen next.

The key to a successful performance is keeping it alive. We learn what it means to keep a performance alive through experimentation. "Our aim for each experiment, good or bad, successful or disastrous, was the same: can the invisible be made visible through the performer's presence?" (Brook P. 52) Making the invisible visible is what Brook considers the magic and illusion of a peak performance. This can be as simple as making an invisible prop seem real. The purpose is to make the dead alive. Brook stresses creativity, individuality, and risk, but he still understands that repetition, practice, and practicing creative change are important in good theatre.

Like I stated before repetition can hinder us as performers, but it is also important for performers to be prepared. The question is when repetition "denies the living" and when it is a tool to keep a performance alive. This is a skill that a dancer invested in performing must learn. Keeping a performance alive with the use of repetition means taking yesterday's actions and transforming them into the present. Representation of movement has a large impact on the dynamics of performance. Brook considers this a renewal of life. (Brook P.126) When an audience is entertained they become active and assist the performer in bringing their movement alive. An audience can be active

creating goals and motivation for a performer. It is the responsibility for the dancer to take risks to attract the audiences attention. (Brook P.127) Once an audience is engaged there are no limits to what a performer can do.

Performing is an art that many dancers pay little attention too. They feel if they are trained well in the movement, the audience will then be impressed by their dancing. Engaging an audience is so much more than dancing movements correctly. To engage an audience a dancer must also be a performer. This is what brings a dead theatre alive as Peter Brook States in his book The Empty Space. He suggests experimentation and risk as keys to keeping movement alive. Pauline Koner takes the idea of performance further. In her opinion there are many aspects that have a direct correlation on the entertainment value of a performance.

The Elements of Performance

"There were excellent technique and choreography classes, with enthusiastic students working day and night to get the most from this summer session. They could move beautifully. They could choreograph – what was bothering me? Then it dawned on me: many of the students had no inkling of how to perform. They looked wonderful in the studio, but their performance fell flat when they were on stage. I suddenly realized that knowing how to perform is a very special art." (Koner xi)

As students of dance, often much of our training is focused on technique and composition. It is constantly drilled into our heads that as performers, technique is the most important thing. I myself have taken class after class

where the teachers focus is correcting the placement of our arms, or the execution of a jump, and ever questioning the quality of our performance. Pauline Koner would strongly disagree with this teaching technique. While technique is an extremely valuable asset, knowing how to perform is what captivates audiences. " Primary interest is not technical ability – it is either there already or will be acquired – but in transcending the mechanics and finding the spirit of the movement." (Koner 2) I find in my own dancing experience that I focus so much on perfecting my technique that I loose the real meaning behind my dancing. It may be that I focus on what people can tell me I am doing wrong, rather than going behind my shyness and immersing myself in the doing and being. Focusing on the technical aspects of the movement I am loosing the passion and expression of what I am doing. By allowing myself to let go of my own insecurities and divulging in the movement I will then be able to become my own unique dance personality, and in the end find a fuller enjoyment in what I am doing. It is beneficial for any performer to understand the elements of performance, whether or not they are instinctive performers, in order for them to reach their full potential. Koner's book on performance elements is one of few that address the actual art of performing.

Koner feels that the primary elements of performance are emotion, motivation, focus, dynamics, and movement texture. Each element is of equal importance to the overall being of a person. When combined that can greatly enhance a person's performance quality. Koner feels that the emotion and

motivation are self-explanatory. As living human beings everyone feels some type of emotion and motivation. Each performer just needs to realize that these elements can contribute to their ability. Koner stresses that the most important elements for a dancer to learn and understand are focus, dynamics, and movement texture.

"Focus is to the mind what gravity is to the body." (Koner 5) Koner feels there are six different types of focus, which are all integrated into our thinking and feeling. The different focuses are inner, directional, area, magnetic, body and dramatic. It is essential that at least two types of focus are used at all times, but the one that is absolutely always necessary is inner focus. It is the inner focus that makes a dancer an artist by engaging in total concentration from the core of their being. I find that inner focus is often hard to engage in because the performer can not allow anything in life to distract them. The action of committing to the inner focus is extremely challenging for me because I have a lot of things constantly running through my mind that I find it hard to let them go, even if only for a short amount of time while performing. Koner explains that inner focus must combine with any of the other types of focus to create a full performance. Most important is that the dancer is completely involved. "If performers keep involved, if they believe deeply in what is happening, whether moving or stillness, the audience cares. (Koner 10) "The word involved is the key to any true performance." (Koner 14)

The first type of focus that a dancer can vary is directional focus.

Directional focus has the ability to introduce a dramatic idea by acknowledging points of attention. A dancer uses directional focus when they look and see, by concentrating their eyes and mind on a specific still point in a specific direction. Area focus is broader than directional because it isn't limited to a specific direction. "Area focus involves areas of awareness: a concentration of mind and eyes to encompass a specific area. It is a concept dictated by motivation that internalizes the size of the performer's space rather than accepting the given space (studio or stage) as an absolute. (Koner 15) This is important to every performer because dance space can vary from venue to venue, but this should not have an affect of the outcome of the performance. "Inner focus transforms the performer into the artist. It is the total concentration from the core being." (Koner P.21) Magnetic focus is when an external force controls a performer; this leads to a great deal of creativity in dormant people. (Koner P.25) Body focus is something I really need to focus on, especially in modern dance. "Body focus creates a heightened awareness of a particular part of the body, both for the performer and viewer." (Koner P.29) The last focus of the six, is dramatic focus which includes theater in our performance, as dancers we need to create a character for our dance and make that character believable to ourselves and the audience. (Koner P.31) Focus is an extremely important part in a dancer's performance. The audience's view of a piece can rest entirely on the focus of the dancers. Focus is more important than perfect technique or flexibility. I tend to worry too much about these aspects of a dance, and too little on the

qualities that focus can bring. Those performers who truly captivate an audience are those who have mastered the art of focus.

Also important in performing are Dynamics which keep interest alive. Dynamics can be in movement by varying the time, space, range and transitions. A performer can also create dynamics by varying their energy and intensity. A choreographer can change dynamics through the use of color. What keeps a performance interesting are changes through dynamics and movement texture. Movement texture is what we practice everyday in class. It consists of the use of accents, sustained movement, a point of pulse, awareness of weight, suspension, isolations, rebounding, and other choreographic devices that we are introduced to in Laban Movement Analysis. (Koner P. 52-58) Props and costumes are also important aspects in a performance. They are responsible for the outward appearance of a dancer. As an audience we are definitely affected when we see horrible costuming, but it is not the basis of whether or not we like the piece. Dynamics, movement texture, props, and costuming have some influence, but the true test of a performer is their focus. A performer comes from the inside and no matter how little or much they are wearing on the outside, it is the inner spirit that draws us in or pushes us away. Pauline Koner introduced ideas to me that I had never really thought of. I have always believed that if you look like you are having fun and enjoying what you are doing, the audience will also enjoy your performance. I was just touching on the basis of focus. It is important that all dancers understand the true art of

performing and not focus entirely on the execution of movement.

As important as trusting the body is as Timothy Gallwey suggests, the importance of uncertainty and experimentation that Peter Brook feels is necessary to keep dancing alive, and the elements the Pauline Koner feels are crucial in being a true performer, it is equally important to evaluate yourself. Jean M. Williams suggests that it is equally important to consider what is in your head, while being set straight by outside observers. Williams stresses the importance the mind had in achieving optimal performance. It is the study of sports psychology, which is gain momentum that evaluates the mind in order to achieve peak performance.

Sports Psychology

Many athletes today are drawn to the subject of sport psychology in assisting them achieve peak performance in their sport. Sport psychology is a new but growing field that is concerned with the psychological factors that influence the participation in sport and with the psychological effects derived from participation. Sport psychology is gaining popularity because people look to it to find a competitive edge. This includes everything from learning how to control concentration, how to limit and manage stress, improve confidence, and increase communication skills within a team. Contrary to what was previous thought that sports were based in physicality, it is found that what contributes to

peak performance is 90% mental. Understanding the important role the mind plays in performance confirms that both physical and mental factors are required for peak performance; it is vital to realize that this perspective focuses primarily on the observable skill of the performer and not their artistry. (Williams P.155)

Understanding sports psychology can be extremely beneficial for a dancer who also seeks peak performance. Brook stresses one step in achieving this is to promote the development of a positive motivation for success rather than a fear of failure. It is important to seek feedback on a performance because feedback can correct misconceptions. (Williams P.37) We are our own worst critic, which does not allow us to be constructive when it comes to evaluating our performance. "Feedback also creates internal consequences by stimulating athletes to experience positive (or negative) feelings about themselves, depending on how well they performed in relation to their standards of performance." (Williams P.37) I obtained feedback from Paige Porter on my performance in rehearsal in order to motivate me to set goals.

It is extremely important as an athlete to set goals, making a plan for change. Having a specific standard of proficiency on a task usually within a specified time limit is what Williams suggests on P.163. Frequently athletes set too specific or challenging goals, it is important that the goals we set are realistic, general, some for the long term and some for the short term. I set many general goals for myself over the course of this semester such as gaining confidence in myself as a dancer in the long term. For the short term I set goals

to improve my technique such as keeping my shoulders down while turning.

Just as important goal setting is one must also identify strategies for accomplishing these goals. (Williams P.187) In the achievement of goal setting it is important to have someone monitoring and assisting your progress. I was fortunate to have Paige aiding me in my success. Paige helped me develop strategies to help be successful in achieving my goals. This is what the author calls developing a coach-training program. "As a general rule, coaches should respond to skill errors with corrective instruction that tells each athlete what she or he can do to improve the skill performance. Also, praise and criticism should be given contingent to or consistent with the level of performance that was exhibited." (Williams P.88)

The significance that researchers have placed on the psychological part of the game is what has lead to the growing interest in sport psychology. (Williams P.59) Confidence, focus, mood, and imagery play important roles in peak performance. Since sports are now considered 90% mental it is important to evaluate yourself in performance while setting goals for improvement. Just as valuable as personal evaluation is external evaluation by a coach or teammate. It is important to get another perspective to make sure your perception of your performance is not skewed. Williams suggests being coached in this, having someone assist you identify goals, set plans to achieve those goals, and evaluate progression.

Post-Concert

Reflection

"...more than technique, line, proportion, and balance. It is as if the performer and spectator come together to hold in their hands a bird with a broken wing. The creature can be felt to stir, to struggle for freedom. Its life responds to human warmth; its wing might brush your cheek as it flies away."

~Gelsey Kirkland

Post Concert Reflection

On March 25th, 2003 I was full of anticipation. I was going to perform "Jolene," which I had been working so hard on. I had never examined each movement of a dance so thoroughly than the movements in this piece. I was studying what it takes to be a true performer and I was driven to prove that I was not only a dancer, but also a performer. Of all the pieces I have performed in the faculty and student concerts in the past two years, this piece has been the greatest challenge for me because it was most foreign to my body. The aches and pains of muscles that had never been worked or positions my body has never been in were going to pay off.

During warm-up I was cold, shaky and quiet which are traits that I usually possess when I am nervous. Usually, I only get nervous right before I go on stage, but tonight I was nervous hours before. I had worked so hard on changing my performance qualities and adapting to new movement. Tonight I would see if these weeks, months of preparation had paid off. Although the lights were shining brightly which would cause most dancers to be hot; I was freezing out of nervousness. I felt unprepared because we had just recently finished the dance, not to mention the last minute changes we had made. I feared that I would forget, not trusting that my body had absorbed all that had been thrown at it in the last few weeks. It was opening night as we were all applying our makeup. I was unconcerned with my makeup and hair, which was completely out of the ordinary for me; instead I kept running through the dance

in my head. Even as we were standing in the wings I wasn't watching the number before ours, I was moving around in uncomfortable weird ways loosening my body for the piece that I was about to perform. I was throwing my torso here and there, rolling it, swinging my arms, trying to break myself of convention and allow the dance to roll through my body. In addition to preparing my body for the performance, I was mentally preparing. The dance is about a woman who believes that the only man she will ever love is being taken away by Jolene just because she can. I thought about how that would feel, relating it to a situation in my life. To me, dancing is a way to express emotion. It was extremely important to me that the audience understands the emotion of the song through my movement. Creating a character that I could relate to was crucial in creating the emotion needed for this dance.

Sitting on the floor waiting for the music to begin and the curtains to open I was a wreck, I continued to think about the character I had created, but as soon as I started moving I entered the zone. I let go of my insecurities and my mind, and allowed my body to do what I had been training it to do. The uncomfortableness that I had felt earlier in my costume, feeling overweight, fearing my shirt would rise up exposing my stomach, or fright that my slit would rip higher than it already was, had disappeared. The fidgeting I had done prior to taking stage and right before the curtains opened, was gone and all that mattered was my dancing. I didn't notice the lighting or the audience; all I saw were those on stage with me feeding my energy. This dance was so powerful

that although it required a large amount of energy and stamina, since none of us ever leave the stage, I wasn't tired because I was driven by the emotion.

As I danced on stage with the other Jolene dancers, I felt part of the community. Throughout rehearsals I feared that I wasn't good enough and that everyone was better than I was. These feelings led me to feel apart from the group, but as I dance with them under the lights I had never felt so at home. We all were in the zone giving it every ounce of what we had. In rehearsals we all had difficulty making it all the way through the dance and towards the end our energy would begin to disappear. Maybe it was the audience, the anticipation, the excitement, who knows, but I saw our potential heighten. Suddenly the Jolene dancers had the stamina of 30 football players. During transition changes I saw emotion embodying all the dancers, I had never seen my fellow dancers so engaged in what they were doing. It was incredible the vibe on stage of support, encouragement, and connection. We weren't several dancers on stage, we were one, we were "Jolene". As the dance ended and we walked off stage the camaraderie was incredible. We were all hugging each other and smiling like we had just won a gold medal. I had never felt that after any other dance. Usually all the performers leave the stage and rush to change for their next piece, but no one did that until they congratulated every person that just exited the stage.

This piece was a huge challenge to myself. I was forced to risk looking stupid or out of place in front of an audience. I was performing movement that

felt completely foreign in my body. Always so focused on control, center, and technique I had to throw that all out the window and allow my body to be fluid. I fear to no end looking stupid which holds me back in my dancing. Talking to Paige she told me that she would tell me if I looked stupid, and right now I looked stupid not letting go. Taking the stage I vowed to let my body do whatever it wanted and to allow the audience to feed that. It was an unusual sensation to feel my body moving in ways I don't know if it ever had, but knowing that it was right. It was proof right then and there that I think too much and don't trust my bodily instincts. With each night of the performance I gave my body more and more trust allowing it to feel the music. I didn't know that as a person I could allow physicality take over my mentality. The emotions that I had conjured up thinking of my own experiences in relation to "Jolene" allowed my physicality to take over and truly express my feelings.

The greatest accomplishment for me was when Paige approached me Thursday morning after our second show to tell me that she was very proud of me. She told me she saw the release in my body and congratulated me on achieving my ultimate goal. Her feedback meant everything to me because she had always been nothing but honest. As friends and family came to each performance and commended me on my performing I actually believed them for once. Normally, I would think they were just being nice, but I actually believed for the first time their compliments. Each night my performance varied. Some nights I was more emotional than others, some nights I was stronger than

others, some nights I even had more energy than others, but each night was a success in a long difficult road I had traveled.

This concert performance created a new awareness of confidence within me. I went back to Denise's jazz class with confidence and stood in the front, not in the back corner where I had always felt most comfortable. I realized that the most important part of dancing was to take ownership of my movement. I will get nowhere by staying in my safety zone. By pushing myself beyond the comfortable limits I learned a new way of dancing, which I will take with me in the future. It is more important to give too much and then tone it down than to not give enough. For the future I will have more trust in other people's criticism and quiet some of mine. Dancing on stage Saturday night for the last time at LMU I was ultimately satisfied with myself, knowing that I had given it everything I had and that I didn't hold anything back. I will miss LMU, performing, and dancing among such amazing people, but at least I can be confident that I went out with a bang.

What is Dance to Me?

“The dance is one of many human experiences which cannot be suppressed. Dancing has existed at all times, and among all people and races. The dance is a form of expression given to man just as speech, philosophy, painting or music.”

~Mary Wigman

What is dance?

When most people think of dance, they think of choreographed routines usually performed to music that combines technique, talent, and metaphor. This is dance, but there are many other forms of dance that are excluded from this definition. The operational definition of dance is "movement organized in such a way that the use of energy or force in time and through space leads to literal or abstract expression. Dancing can be done alone or in a group. It can be performed for self or in front of an audience." This organization of movement can be as advanced as a triple turn in to a grande jete, or as simple as running and jumping. It is not the actual movement that creates a dance, but the way that movement is organized to make a whole. Until this semester I had a very narrow mind as to what exactly dance is. I was one of those people who linked dance to choreographed routines that demonstrate technical ability. I learned from this class and styles and forms that dance is so much more. Dance always uses space, time, motion and energy to express meaning. This meaning can be literal or it can be purely physical, it is up to the choreographer. Dance can be experienced alone and in groups; as a participant or audience. Dance is life. Like Martha Graham said "I think the reason dance has held such an ageless magic for the world is that it has been the symbol of the performance of living."

Why do people dance? People dance for a number of reasons, they dance for joy, exercise, to express themselves, therapy, for the body soul connection, to find freedom within a discipline, for worship, to tell a story, for entertainment,

and to earn a living. Dance can be a solitary experience of self-expression where the dancer dances to discover feelings and ideas, make thought and feeling connections, release tensions, and become self-aware. Dance can be a social event where communities of people dance for and with each other for spiritual, recreational and courting purposes. Dance can be a performance for others where the dancer intends to inspire, entertain, or enlighten the audience through movement. In Chapter 1 of *The Power to Dance* the author explains many different reasons for dance, "Courting and courtly dances; wedding dances and funeral dances; dances of healing and dances of instruction; dances to arouse, amuse, or uplift onlookers; dances to usher in the seasons and dances that appeal directly to the gods; dances that tell stories and dances that seek to create a formal beauty that cannot be put into words: There is no end to the variety or purposes to which the dancing body can be put." I think of all the reasons to dance the ones that I find most important are dancing for spiritual reasons, to express oneself, and to tell a story.

Many types of dance are comprised completely around the spiritual implications. For example as explained in *Dancing: the Pleasure, Power and Art of Movement* by Gerald Jonas, "Through dance, the Hopi get in touch, quite literally, with the forces of nature that govern the world. The ultimate purpose is to bring rain to the patient crops in the fields." In the same article he also discusses the Yoruba of West Africa, "dance is typically grounded, with movement directed not upward but down toward the life-sustaining earth.

Yoruba cosmology recognizes two closely related realms of existence: the tangible world of the living and the invisible world of gods, ancestors, and other beings.” Dance is such an important part of many cultures' spiritual relations. It is through dance that many people find a connection to their God or Gods. Native Americans have no other way to pray for rain than through a rain dance. They also have dances for many other prayers and celebrations. Dance is the basis for their connection with their Gods.

Dance is also key for some people in allowing them to express themselves. Some people are shy, others have trouble finding the words, and dance is an outlet for them to express themselves without having to speak. For example with the heart-tearing events that took place in September, many people struggled to find the right words to say or how to comprehend these horrendous events. Through the use of dance as a form of expression they were able to convey their feelings without finding the perfect words and also release the tensions this event caused and understand the implications it had through dance. Dance is not only for performance purposes of expressing one's self, dance can also be therapeutic. I know from personal experience when I am upset and hurt and need an outlet I put on a song that conveys my emotions and choreograph a dance to express my feelings. I find that this helps a person let all the anger and frustration out, allowing them to heal and grow.

Dance is also used to tell stories. For example in the video, the King and I, dance was used as a metaphor. In the video of West Side Story dance was

the metaphor for the cultural tensions. Like the use of dance to express one's self, dance can tell a story that anyone can understand no matter what language he or she speak. Dance bypasses all language barriers, which allows it to be used as an interpreter. This is also why it can be said that dance is human. To be human means to make relationships, to express hopes and dreams, to envision beyond what is, to develop and employ empathy, and to make willful relationships. Dance meets all of these criteria and therefore it is more human than the spoken word, and unlike the spoken word dance is universal. Dance is pre-lingual. It is movement that has the ability to open that place in us that allows our hearts to open. In Edward Hall's *Beyond Culture* he states, "It can get in beneath the level of language where we are all more similar. It can preserve the language of the heart and soul." To be human is to have a soul and dance has a soul. In the video on Aboriginal dance we were told that ancestors feel dance in their souls. Dance has the potential to bring together diverse peoples who may not share a written or spoken language or value system, but who share the instrument of dance, the human body.

The instrument of dance is the human body; therefore to dance is human. There are no intermediaries like a musical instrument; instead dance is performed human being to human being. As dance builds humanity it can also de-humanize people. Dance has so many positive aspects, but with all the positive there has to be a drawback. De-humanization occurs in dance when trained dancers have the ultimate goal of perfection. Human beings are not

perfect and to strive for anything close is absurd and unachievable. In the jazz and ballet dance world there is the "idea" of the perfect dance body, someone tall and very thin with not an ounce of fat on their bodies. This idea of perfection has led many in an unhealthy de-humanizing goal centered on being as thin as possible. Many endure prolonged starvation, sometimes developing eating disorders. Marion Woodman said it best in the *Archetype or Stereotype: Human Potential Through Dance* when she said, "Loving discipline is one thing; whipping a pedigree animal into submission is another. The problem of the deadly perfect is a killer not only in dance but also in our culture. Addiction to perfection blinds people into compulsive drivenness to control more, possess more, and excel more. The "more, more, more" focus in one specialized direction is not natural to life. Certainly in the artistic world it achieves exactly what many artists want: an escape from life. They hate ugliness, war, absurdity, chaos, loss of control." The goal to associate a ballerina to be with the gods of fairy tales as seen in the video on classical dance is another example how dance can also de-humanize.

Dance can teach us more than any textbook about a culture. I believe that every person in the class benefited from the experience of studying other culture's dance. The first of our guests was Karen Golden the storyteller. She was among my favorites. Listening to her tell her stories I was able to get insight on the Jewish religion and into her own personal culture and traditions. She had an amazing ability to draw her audience into her stories captivating our

minds. Through her storytelling I was able to gain insight on the values of the Jewish religion and those of her immediate family. I learned a lot about her as a person also. She was incredibly outgoing and open, generously sharing herself with all of us. I could not have asked for anyone more amazing.

Dulce was the next guest for me to experience. Her presence had a completely different effect on me than Karen's. I appreciated her use of the Venn Diagram and the blender when explaining the accumulation of her culture and dance form and that of the Western world. Her Philippine dance form is performed to tell a story. I enjoyed how although we may have not understood the words in her dance, we still were able to understand the dance. Her use of gesture to convey emotion was remarkable. Watching her perform and the way she used breath exaggerated the metaphor of the dance even more. I also appreciated how she then taught us a dance from the Philippines and how there was a man's part and a woman's part. Actually performing her dance made all that she had lectured and performed alive in my body with an entirely new respect.

Lady Walquer Vereen spoke to us about African American Dance. Although she did not perform a dance, I was able to learn just as much from her as from the others because of the way she used her voice. So filled with energy, her voice was difficult to ignore. From Lady I learned that all colors project feelings upon people. I also learned that the body has a basic rhythm and when that rhythm is slightly thrown off everything is affected. I learned that rhythm is

everywhere in everything including color. It is the connection with color and rhythm that African American culture has such a close relationship with the demi-gods. I found it interesting to learn about the different gods in their culture, for example the god of sickness known as Babalu Aye. The dance we learned representing each god gave me the closer insight into this interesting culture.

Moving on to Native American culture taught by Gerry was more difficult to understand. We learned the dance carrying the basket up to the gods, but I was still a little confused on the exact meaning. I did come to understand the importance of personal stories in the Native American culture. I enjoyed listening to each person's personal stories because I feel it opened up each person in the class to each other on a whole new level. I appreciated the honesty and risk that people took. One thing that I did find limiting was the lack of compassion by Gerry at the end of some really touching stories. I came to the conclusion that this lack of compassion was probably another part of her culture and how they prescribe to react to situations like that.

Ramaa was incredible. She had it all, combining the history of Indian dance and how it was originally a temple dance performed by chosen ones and how today it is now performed for entertainment purposes, but continues to carry with it many religious aspects. I found it interesting that she prayed to the floor before she began her dance. I learned that East Indian dancing is focused on dance as a metaphor. When we watched her perform I could understand the entire story even though she did not say a word. Her entire body including her

face was an active participant in this performance. I enjoyed having the opportunity to learn so of the movements for words and phrases. This helped me to understand the story of her dance, which I probably would have still been able to understand without her explanation due to her amazing performance abilities.

Rolanda came and spoke to us about Hawaii and I learned many things about their culture that I had never know. For example I did not know that originally Hawaii was ruled by a king and that when the missionaries arrived they forced the Native Hawaiians to assimilate. It was disheartening to me to hear that for a while Hawaiians were not allowed to Hula dance and because of this lost some of their culture. They lost some of their culture because Hawaiian culture is encompassed in the Hula and the chants spoken while dancing are actually the oral history. Hula means language of the heart, and dance is everything to their culture, or the heart of their culture.

Although I have studied ballet for many years I was unaware of the actual origins of it. I was surprised to hear that ballet was for the aristocrats, because in today's society ballerinas are not paid very well. I was also taken back by the fact that many European countries also funded the choreography and the ballet. Ballet was performed for entertainment purposes only and European countries had a high desire for entertainment. Although ballet began on horses or people looking out from balconies, it did not take long for it to transform into more human movement conveying a thought, idea, or emotion. Ballet soon

modernized into a dance form that used props and trap doors to enhance its entertainment value.

This year has been my first experience with modern and at times it seems quite overwhelming with all the information I have been told about it. I find it interesting that modern dance is essentially self-expressive and has at times been closer to autobiographic revelation than any other theater form. Isadora Duncan was influential because she gave the twentieth century dancer the passport to complete freedom. Louis Horst encouraged modern dancers to begin to talk of movements based on the principles of tension and relaxation. Modern dance choreographers developed a dance form so different from the norm that challenged those trained in other fields of dance and continues to challenge people today to let go of their inhibitions and explore something more pedestrian.

In the dance video called *Steppin* I was introduced to yet another cultural dance that emerged as a dance form that established a black identity. Steppin has its own unique style, each of the performers have a great deal of rhythm. It is important that we understand the desire for African Americans to have something to bond them together. Different groups from different areas would bond together to create yet their own unique style of steppin. For example one group performs blindfolded, while the Kappas use canes. A positive outcome with the development of Steppin is that it was somewhere for African Americans to spend their time instead of spending their time in a gang.

The Jitterbug is an important dance form to study because it is the first time that black and whites mixed in a public place. Both groups were dancing for pleasure and for a few short hours they were able to ignore their differences and enjoy themselves. They were all unified in dance, but split when politics hit. The Jitterbug is also known as the swing and began in Harlem. Harlem is known as the world center of entertainment, so it is not surprising that this art form can connect its roots there.

I noticed that although each culture has its own distinct traditions, there were many similarities. Karen's story telling, the dance of Philippines, African-American Dance, Native American dance, East Indian dance, the dance of Hawaii, ballet, and modern all have one similarity, they all use dance as a metaphor. Each dance form uses movement to express the feelings of the choreographer and tell a story about their culture. Obviously this is true of Karen because she is a storyteller. Dolce danced a story that made the entire audience cry because it was a story about her and her father. Lady's story expressed the demi-gods, for each god there was a specific movement. Gerry's dance with our baskets used the baskets as a metaphor for an offering to the gods above and our feet were used to keep contact with the gods below. Ramaa's dance was entirely in story form yet without words, each movement was a word that when organized properly created a story that each and everyone could understand. Rolanda's Hula dance is like the dance of Eastern India, each motion is a word and when arranged properly and story is told. Ballets are stories acted out by

ballerinas, they are like plays done in silence. Modern dance also tries to convey a story with each dance; for example some even use text to enhance their storytelling capabilities. The two dance forms that I discussed that did not use dance as a metaphor were steppin and the jitterbug, these dances are done solely for entertainment and enjoyment purposes.

The differences between each dance form are difficult to determine. Although they each stem from a different culture and have different significance the basic part runs true, they each tell a story. Each story though differences in its significance in their culture. In Karen's culture storytelling is for entertainment purposes only, aimed at capturing one's attention. Lady's dance form tells a story to the gods and asks for their help in return. Dulce's story has more of a personal benefit by helping her express herself and her hopes, desires, and sadness. Gerry on the other hand tells a story of requesting help from the gods of above and below. Ramaa's story began as a purely religious dance in the temples performed by a select few is now performed for entertainment purposes. Rolanda's dance of Hawaii uses the Hula to keep the oral history of their culture alive from generation to generation. Ballet uses dance to tell a story for purely entertainment purposes. Modern dance goes a bit deeper using dance to express concerns, hopes, sadness, or anything else on the mind of the choreographer. Although each dance is created to tell a story, the purposes for each story differ depending on each culture.

I have benefited a great deal from this course. I have always believed that my parents raised me to be open-minded about people and different cultures. When I was young my parents never told me about being African American or Asian, instead they wanted me to know people for who they are and not what they looked like. I was able to do this and had a very diverse group of friends and when explaining them to my mom I told her I had a chocolate friend and a friend with funny eyes. Even as a little kid I saw differences, but concluded them to have no real value; just as some people have brown hair and others have blond, some people have green eyes and others have blue. This class did not force me to become more accepting of other cultures, because I already had this acceptance, but what it did force me to do was actually understand what each culture is about.

This course taught me what makes each culture unique and special. It also reminded me that what I may know as weird in my culture, may be absolutely normal in another. Cognitively, I am able to discuss Hula with my friends from Hawaii because I now know its origins and its significance. I also enjoy showing them that I know certain words. It has given me an opportunity to connect with them on another level. The same goes for my friends of East Indian descent. Before I accepted the red dot on their forehead and their type of clothing, but wasn't aware of the meaning behind it. Thanks to the lecture from Ramaa I now understand and appreciate it.

I accepted the things I may have thought different or even weird of other cultures, but by being introduced to the values of each culture I have found to have a fuller meaning of acceptance. I now not only accept them and their values, I am appreciate that it is those values that make their culture truly unique.

As I mentioned previously, this class has taught me what truly makes each culture unique and has given me a new appreciation for them. I am also taking a Civil Rights class this semester because it is important for me to understand each individual so I can treat them equally without any pre-judgment. This has been an important lesson in my life, but before I can treat everyone the same I have to learn who I really am as a person.

This class has taught me who I am and how I can use what I love to make me an even better person. I have learned that I enjoy dances based on a story and now when I choreograph any dance phrase I want there to be meaning behind it. I also want it to touch the audience like the dances we observed touched me. Like Dolce, I want to make people cry if that is the storyline behind my piece. I have also learned that the most important thing about dance is that it is human, it is innate. The best therapy is to use dance to sort out my feeling. I have had one of the most emotionally difficult years of my life, between the conflicts between my parents, my own conflicts with my grandparents, my battle with depression, my health, and the conflicts in the world I need something to release the tension and for me that is dance. I have

decided my release will be to choreograph a piece or multiple pieces that deal with each of the obstacles I have been faced with. I have difficulties talking to friends and family about these problems, because opening up makes you vulnerable, so the answer for me is to dance them. I am hoping that through dance I will be able to heal or at least come to terms with the conflict in my life.

Why do I Dance?

My Personal Dance Aesthetic

“Those moments when my mind surrenders and my body takes over and moves of its own accord, governed only by muscles and reflexes – falling where it wants, stopping as it can, building the momentum to speed – are the only instances when I recognize true order. The body, outside the mind’s control, moves intuitively.”

~Twyla Tharp

My Personal Dance Aesthetic

Some people are born as leaders, others born as followers, others a combination of both. In dance this can often be the case. The leaders are those who are confident and creative. They want to explore and try new things. They are the ones who create new dance moves and make existing ones more difficult, they are the innovators of the dance world. At the other end of the spectrum there are those who like to follow, these people in the dance world are the ones who like to be taught the material they are intended to perform. These imitators have simply mastered the game follow the leader, performing the movements in the exact same way as the choreographer, and not become dancers. The followers will never be true dancers until they gain the confidence in themselves as creators and get in touch with their inner imagination.

Entering the dance program at Loyola Marymount University I was an imitator, a true master of the follow the leader game. My style directly resembled that of who had trained me. I liked my dance this way, for it was the only way I knew, and was horrified in the first composition class that changed this. I had been trained that everyone must be uniform, performing everything in the exact same way it had been demonstrated by our teacher. In fact discovering your own style was discouraged. LMU was the exact opposite of anything I had ever known. Over the years of Composition classes and Technique classes I have learned that another reason I was a follower is because I was insecure about who I truly was as a dancer. These classes and the pure

experience of being in a nurturing creative atmosphere helped me come to define my personal dance style.

This personal style is my aesthetic. I may have had my aesthetic for many years, but with the guidance of the dance staff I have uncovered this buried treasure. I have found that I have a natural ability in jazz, particularly in very precise strong commercial jazz. Although, jazz is more natural to me, lyrical is not. I find it extremely difficult to let go of the tension and succumb to the light and flowing movements in lyrical. I also found that tap comes very easily for me, although I have not taken it in many years. I have not taken tap in many years because although I may have the ability to perform movements adequately I lack the connection to it. Even some movements of ballet are more natural for me such as turns and jumps. However, most ballet I find extremely challenging and often criticize myself to no end about my inability to perform many things, not to mention my lack of turnout, flexibility, feet, and the long thin body that the typical ballerina has. I also find a modern extremely difficult.

I believe I derive some of my passion for certain styles of dance over others partially based on my pure ability to perform them. Jazz is a natural ability, and may have become a stronger, passionate force for me for that same reason. In the same consideration, I have ability for tap, but still do not have the love. When it comes to jazz, I enjoy how most dances have a very close connection to the music, some even can be considered as musical visualization. I also prefer the strong active movements, i.e. Punching, pressing, wringing, and

slashing found in a lot of commercial jazz. I also like jazz because the majority of the movements are very direct and done with a firm weight. At the same time, I did not used to enjoy lyrical because it was the opposite of this strong, active, firm, direct style. I also did not care for it because I did not have the ability to perform it. Over the years I have begun to transform that distaste into a passion. In fact I think I prefer it more than the typical commercial jazz because it presents a challenge. It is a mountain that I must climb, the further up I get the more it is becoming natural in my body. Ballet continues to be something I lack ability for and even loath in a way, yet I know how important it is to have a strong ballet background and how much it affects all the other types of dancing I do. Modern, although extremely challenging for me, had sparked a love/hate relationship in my body. I don't care for it because it is so hard and foreign in my body, yet I find satisfaction in it because of the challenge it presents me with and the feeling of accomplishment any time I am able to execute something well.

My aesthetic can be simply understood when I dream, about any company I could ever join. Many would want to join a large ballet company like ABT or a famous modern company like Alvin Ailey's, but neither sounds fulfilling for me. My dream would be to tour with a musician like Janet Jackson, dancing on a professional sport's dance team, or most of all being in a Broadway show. Although, I like to watch people perform ballet and certain types of modern, I am fascinated and completely enthralled in performances by talented jazz dancers.

That is the kind of performing I would love to do. I dream about being able to work with famous choreographers such as Tina Landon or Wade Robson. I admire dancers like Ray Leeper, Doug Caldwell, and Tina D'amato. That is my passion, my love.

Even as I claim to be a dancer, and enjoy all different aesthetics there are still those that I do not completely respond to artistically. For example, I know that Ruth St. Dennis, Isadora Duncan, and Loie Fuller are some of the pioneers of the modern dance and we all as dancers owe them a lot by creating the dance revolution in America, yet I do not really enjoy watching their pieces. I watch them appreciating their precision, authenticity, and strength yet I am not entertained nor do I fully understand their artistry. It's like looking at a painting that you know is art and should be appreciated, but at the same time staring at it for a long time to understand what exactly it means. I encourage and applaud their abilities and creativity; I just do not have a connection with their creations. This is how I often feel as I watch tap dancing. I appreciate all the skill they have to accomplish such sounds and movements, yet after a while I find myself uninterested. I understand the dedication, ability, and creativity all tappers have; I just don't personally find entertainment in their performances. With both styles it is not a lack of appreciation for the performers and the choreographers, it is just a difference in personal taste. My dislikes and likes are purely my own, and by understanding what I do not feel connected to or entertained by, I can better understand my own personal aesthetic.

There are other reasons for understanding what my own individual aesthetic is. One of those reasons is that I find a more natural ability in doing jumps and turns, which are commonly found in jazz. Before my ankle surgery I was a jumper, pure and simple. I had larger calves, which helped with height and I learned how to suspend my grande jetes, scizzors, and second jumps in the air. Unfortunately, I was unable to jump for a long time, which gave me an opportunity to perfect my turns, especially complex turn in second/fouette combinations. In addition to having the technical abilities that enhance a jazz performer, I also possess the ability to perform. When I am on stage I come alive, I give it everything I have, and I make my movements meaningful. I live for the audience and the lights. Whether I am tired, upset, sick, or hurt none of that shows when I am on stage, instead I express to the audience the how enjoyable dance can be. On stage I own my movement, and slowly I am learning to do the same in the classroom. I am learning to make even class time a time to perform. As a dance technician we are always critiquing ourselves to do better and even in the past month I still feel like I am overcoming obstacles and making improvements that before I thought impossible.

In order for a person to improve as a dance technician it is imperative that they attend regular technique classes. Although a person may enjoy certain parts of class and loath others, any dedicated dancer knows how important all parts of the class are. For example I love across the floor and combination in jazz, but loathe the warm-up/conditioning part. Yet without the warm-up doing

sit-ups, push-ups, and stretching I would injure my self continuously. In Ballet I don't mind the barre, in fact I enjoy plie, tendu, and degages. I don't enjoy the center floor work, especially the adagio, but definitely prefer the across the floor exercise to both. I know though, that the barre work directly influences one's balance, technique, and ability in anything else they do. In modern I despise the across the floor, especially drill phrases, and love the combination. I know that the across the floor is imperative to build the combination.

Beyond technique classes I have noticed that other classes I have take have helped me improved as a dancer, and most importantly find my own dance aesthetic. The combination of Fundamentals, Intro. to Choreography, Laban, and Styles and Forms has helped me overcome my fears of improvisation and choreography. Each class expanded more on Laban's Effort Graph and its importance in the choreographic process. The combination of classes also helped make improvisation a more natural thing, rather than something I had to force. These classes have taken me from being a follower and nurtured me to become a leader. In addition freeing my body to do what is natural I learned how it works and how to do movement correctly without hurting it. Kinesiology is an essential class for any dancer to understand the body and its mechanics. Principles of Teaching has trained me how to teach a student successfully, providing me with the knowledge of how balance encouragement and corrections. Dance History and To Dance is Human taught me the facts of all types of dance and opened my mind and heart to them. All of these classes

educated me to know and understand why I dance, how I dance, and what dance is my passion, ultimately, uncovering my buried treasure, my aesthetic.

In the short time that I have been a dance major at LMU I have begun to transform myself from a follower to a leader. I am learning to be confident in my dancing and myself. I have also learned how to explore my creativity and artistry through improvisation. Most importantly I have learned what I love most, what is my dance, what is my aesthetic. I have learned that in mind, body, and soul I am a jazz dancer.

Why do Others Dance?

Megan Misslin's Personal Dance

Aesthetic

"It is people's movement that consoles us.

If the leaves of a tree did not move,

How sad would be the tree – and

So should we."

~Edgar Degas

Megan Misslin's Personal Dance Aesthetic

Everyone has their own story when it comes to dance, what their past was, training, and their own personal opinion. It is rare when someone is allowed into another's head to learn his or her obstacles, passions, and preferences. I was invited to understand the thoughts and desires of Megan Misslin, my aesthetic partner. Through our conversation of the past, present and future, I came to realize that many of the thoughts and struggles I felt she felt too. It was at this point that I allowed myself to realize that my feelings and insecurities were completely normal. It is how you deal with those feelings and insecurities that mold who you are as a person and as a dancer. I watch Megan dance and she possesses such talent, grace, and beauty. Behind that cool and calm exterior is a dancer with her own struggles and preferences, some of which I share with her and some different than mine.

Megan began dancing for the sake of loving how it felt. She moved because that was what was comfortable and natural. Movement was natural in her body, and performance was an outlet of expression for her. While many dancers struggle with learning a phrase or picking up movement, Megan was able to recite movement by just imitating her teachers and other students. Dance became a passion very early on for Megan, allowing her to escape the cruelties of life and gave her something to enjoy. Unlike many dancers, Megan began dancing with little instruction about technique. She did not know the right and wrong ways to perform a movement, from what she was taught there was no right and wrong. As she got older and began learning technique she became

obsessed with being correct, being perfect that she lost the passion that had once been her driving force. Although others would compliment her on her dancing, she was not satisfied unless what she was doing was technically perfect. Dance was almost ruined for her because of those people telling her she was doing something incorrect. Technique began to instill doubt in Megan's mind about her abilities. I would have never thought Megan doubted her abilities, because she is a beautiful dancer. Hearing that someone else doubted themselves was comforting, but also saddening to know that the need to be correct had jeopardized our expression and happiness. Megan like myself worries about what others think when they watch her perform. She too wonders if they are examining her technique. As an audience member of her performances I can honestly say that her technique not once comes into question. I enjoy watching Megan because of her depth as a performer, not because her movement is perfect in fact if her movement were perfect it would make her boring to watch.

Megan considers herself a musical theatre dancer because she can also sing and act. Although she considers herself a musical theatre dancer this is not the type of dancing she prefers, it is the type of dancing she sees herself using in the future in a career. Her passion lies deeper in jazz and modern dance. She enjoys blending the two styles to create her own interpretation. This differs from my own personal opinion, which desires jazz in its purest form. It is interesting that like myself, Megan prefers the dance styles that are what her body is most

capable of doing. I also feel this way. The beauty of jazz and modern to her is that she can fit her abilities into them without feeling ridiculous or out of place. She feels ballet is more difficult and unappealing to her because she doesn't have the appropriate body type.

Megan, like myself, is most moved by dances that have a theme or tell a story and one, which has a strong emotional attachment to music. She appreciates dance pieces that are based solely on movement, but is moved emotionally by those that stir feelings inside of her because of the story it tells. To tell her story she uses music to express her feelings, which are often more melancholy creating slower more flowing movement. Her dancing is very closely connected to music, with appreciation to its structure. Music dictates an introduction, body, climax, and conclusion of a story to her. As a member of a dance team prior to college Megan feels a very close connection to creating formations of dancers that are very stagnant and allow for little interaction between the dancers. It is also her dance team experience that causes whole body movement to be most comfortable.

Megan's biggest fear as a dancer is no longer whether her technique is perfect or not, but whether she will continue dancing. I too often have those same thoughts. Will it be possible to lose the passion, because once we are out in the real world we may lack an outlet to dance? I am realizing that many senior dancers are questioning the same thing. Speaking with Megan I realized that nothing can change the fact that we are dancers with our own passions,

preferences, styles, fears, and appreciation. Whether we become professional dancers or dance in our spare time, our heart and mind are set faults and all. Are worries will never cease to exist, but neither will our triumphs. Dance is our love and nothing can ever change that.

LMU Dancer I Admire

**If there were an all-around award in
dance, Gina Johnson would be the
winner!**

"...an art that imprints on the soul. It is with you every moment,
even after you give it up. It is with you every moment of your day
and night."

~Shirley MacLaine

If there were an all-around award in dance, Gina Johnson would be the winner!

I watch Gina Johnson dance with such admiration because I see a person who pours their heart and soul in every movement she executes. She is not merely a puppet performing movements that the choreographer put on her, she is a dancer translating the movement into her own story which she conveys to the audience. So often I watch people perform who know the movements, but they don't own them, they merely do what they are told, lacking the heart and soul connection to what they are performing. This is never the case with Gina, whether it's in class or in a performance hall she gives it all she has. As you watch Gina you are captivated by her energy. She has this amazing ability to steal the audience's attention; in fact she demands it. The confidence that alludes from her movements, makes dancing look so easy. Whether it's watching her perform ballet, jazz, or modern her intensity and ability captivate the viewer.

Watching Gina dance I would have expected her to tell me that she had years of training in all styles of dance, but when I talked with her I found this to be completely untrue. My experience has proven to me that those who have trained a long time in a certain style of dance are normally the ones who perform that style best. Gina is an exception to that rule. To me an exceptional dancer is one who is versed in many styles of dance and can execute each style extremely well. Often you will find dancers who are very talented in one area of dance, but are awkward and unnatural in other styles. Gina is an exceptional dancer

because she is a well rounded. For example, Gina is an incredible modern dancer. She has this ability to take the movements that Holly teaches and turn them into performance quality. She translates the movements into her body and then makes them a phrase. Her technique is impeccable, her strength is apparent, and her abilities are advanced. I watch her in modern class and strive to dance like her. By watching this type of dancing it would have never occurred to me that she had only ballet and tap training before she came to LMU. Gina is not just an amazing modern dancer; she is also a powerful jazz dancer. Jazz is also a dance form that Gina did not study until LMU. It was here in the Burns building that Gina studied another style that she would soon master. She was able to open herself up and adapt to other dance forms with ease. I respect her versatility so much, because this is one area where I find a great deal of difficulty. I am stuck in my ways and find it extremely challenging letting my body experience something new. This ability that Gina possesses to allow her body to learn new unusual movement with ease will allow her to make it in the professional world. Watching a beautiful ballerina, open herself up and perform other styles with attack pushes me to try new things with an open mind and a willing body.

More important than her abilities and stage presence, I admire who she is as a dancer and as a person. I have had the unfortunate experience of meeting many dancers who only cared about their own success and put down others who were not as talented or well trained. Gina is not one of those dancers. While

every dancer should care greatly about their own success, they should still have compassion for those other dancers around them. A successful dancer is one who can use their talent to assist others. We are blessed with the gift of dance and as dancers it is important that we share this gift. This is what impressed me greatly about Gina. Gina was not selfish with her gift, but helped spread it to anyone who needed it. I began Holly's modern 4 class with a great deal of hesitation and fear; it was because of Gina that I achieved the successes I did. When Gina saw that I was having difficulties with a certain movement or phrase she would step aside and help me. It was her guidance, encouragement, and kindness that kept me coming to class and trying my best. Gina proves that you can be an amazing dancer, and still help others who are struggling on the sidelines. Dance isn't just about movement, or performance, it is also about character. Gina proved that she is definitely a superior dancer because her most impressive quality is her character.

It takes a great deal of talent, dedication, and hard work to be successful in one style of dancing. Even more impressive are those few who have been able to master several styles of dance. These dancers are the versatile ones who have a plethora of job opportunities because of their diversity. Gina Johnson is one of those rare, well-versed dancers who have a great deal of abandon to absorb new dance forms no matter how foreign to her body. She is well rounded in modern, jazz, ballet, and tap, and would have no problem with anything else that was thrown her way. Her openness to all styles of dance is extremely

admirable, but even more is her heart. Her willingness to help others and share her dancing abilities is what truly makes her an all around dancer and performer.

A Professional Dancer

I Admire

**How can you not be impressed
when you watch Wade Robson dance?**

“Dance is bigger than the physical body... When you extend your arm, it doesn't stop at the end of your fingers, because you're dancing bigger than that; your dancing spirit.”

~Judith Jamison

How can you not be impressed when you watch Wade Robson dance?

Wade Robson is a professional dancer that I admire for so many reasons. How could you not be impressed by a twenty year old 6-foot-3 male who has choreographed for Britney Spears, N'Sync, and countless others and danced with Michael Jackson and Janet Jackson. In addition he has produced songs on N'Sync's, Britney's, Dream's, and others CD's. He also plans to direct and write movies, which he is currently working on a project with Disney. Wade is one of those child prodigies whose talent seems to be endless. To me what is most impressive about this remarkable young man, is that he is the same age as myself and has already accomplished so much.

One thing that no one can deny is his dancing ability, which is absolutely remarkable. I watch him and forget everything else that is going on around me. My attention is completely his, watching every shift, jump, turn, any movement he makes. I am mesmerized watching the ease in which his body moves. The ability to make everything look completely natural is astounding to me, but maybe it looks so natural because to him it is. I love dance with all my heart, but it was not something that came easy to me, I had to practice and practice and practice. Wade on the other hand is a child prodigy; he must have been dancing as his mother delivered him. What makes Wade a child prodigy is that his formal dance training is nearly nonexistent. In fact he began training others when he was just twelve when most dancers are beginning their more advanced training. This child prodigy was a professional dancer by the age of nine, having

already starred in Michael Jackson's "Black or White," "Jam," and "Heal the World."

His body moves in so many unnatural ways, creating a unique and creative style. I admire his choreography, which is extremely innovative and entertaining. He has gone beyond the traditional commercial jazz and created a blend of jazz and hip-hop movements that is taking over the more technical dancing. I am so impressed by his extremely authentic choreography because for me this is the most difficult thing to do. Being so heavily trained in specific styles, I always find my choreography reflects that training and not my own aesthetic. It is this innovative style that attracts hundreds of dance students to Millennium Dance Complex twice a month to take a class from this incredible young man. He teaches at Millennium just for the fun of it, giving back to the dance world. What is extremely admirable about Wade is his passion about dance. He left his birthplace in Australia to pursue a dream without ever considering failure.

Wade began dancing at two years old while most children are trying to master walking. He started dancing by learning the movements off the "Thriller" music video by Michael Jackson. My parents tell me, I did the same thing. Like Wade I found my love for dance at a very young age, unlike him though I lacked confidence in accepting nothing less than the best. My love for dance is too focused on reality while; Wade let nothing stop him. His passion was so strong that his mother, sister and him moved from Brisbane, Australia to pursue his

love. I admire his ability to leave everything behind to pursue a dream that may never become reality. I think too much of the reality of rejection, of not being what they want, not being good enough, where Wade did not let anything interfere with his dream. I admire those who stick to their beliefs and follow through on them, those who opt for the unknown and not the safe route. Wade proves that dreams can come true if you believe hard enough.

Wade has not only made waves in the dance world, but he has taken his love for dance and carried that over to music. Realizing how influential music is on dance, Wade learned how to play the keyboard in just a year allowing himself to compose his own music for dances when need be. This interest in music also had become a job as he produced songs on N'Sync's new CD, a song on Britney's, and songs on other popular singer's CDs. His knowledge of music has only furthered his love for dance and actually taught him to hear other beats that he may have never heard before. Knowledge of music added depth to his choreographic process and has furthered his career in the dance industry. His plans are not only for the music industry, but also for film, as he hopes to bring back the musical, which he is on his way to doing. This young man is a definite role model to anyone who has a dream and who is wearisome to pursue it.

I find myself directly impacted by him because it proves to me that the dance industry can be broken into and people do make it. Not only is a career in the dance industry attainable if you work hard enough and don't take no for an answer, but any career you have your heart and soul set on. Although, some are

definitely more naturally talented in one field than another, we just all can find our niche.

Summary of

Coursework

"Let the music play,

I would dance away –

Dance till the dawn of the bright young day!

Wild notes are sounding – swift lights are glancing,

And I – I am mad with the rapture of dancing –

Mad with a breathless delight."

~Grace Denio Litchfield

Summary of Dance Studies

- Fundamentals of Dance Composition I
 - I was able to gain a stronger ability to improvise dance movement. This presented a tremendous challenge for me because I am so used to a teacher giving me material to perform, rather than creating the material myself using playful vocabulary.
 - By learning how to be freer with my playfulness in improvisation and using my imagination I was able to better compose and perform dance studies.
 - Never before college had I written about dance. My classes were strictly technique only. It was in Fundamental that I first learned how to speak, read, and write about dance and dancing. I learned to analyze others movements through space using far/near kinesphere, active/passive movements/, etc. making me a more active observer of other's performances.
 - Not only have I learned many things about improvisation, composition, and articulation, but this class has taught me what
- Intro to Choreography
 - I developed a deeper sense of the Laban Effort Graph with an introduction to wringing, slashing, punching, and pressing with the aggressive energy. I also discovered the floating, gliding, dabbing, and flicking.
 - I was able to further distinguish between indirect and direct pathways.

- This class also brought to my awareness the affect of varying energy and space has on a composition. It brings dynamics to an otherwise static movement phrase.
- Dance Styles and Forms
 - The Choreographic process is one of the most difficult for me. This class has taught me other approaches to dance composition.
 - These approaches have taught me to use my environment, to develop a motif, to use a variety of Laban's Efforts, and to use music.
 - I was able to compose in both the solo and group environment.
 - I also was able to follow certain guidelines in order to develop a movement phrase focused on one specific idea.
 - In Fundamentals we learned the basics of Laban's Effort Graph. In Styles and Forms we took it a step deeper, examining the components that make up each effort and the different ways to perform that effort.
 - I also developed a deeper sense of musicality in this class by creating a piece as closely related to the music as possible and one as far from the music as possible.
 - The most important lesson I was able to take from my experience in this class was to learn who I am as a dancer and what my own person dance aesthetic is.
 - I learned that I prefer sharp, quick movements in the active section of the Laban Graph.

- Laban Movement Analysis
 - I learned how to identify in depth the core Laban concepts: body, time, weight, effort, shape, and space.
 - I became familiar with LMA notation, allowing me to write down the movement of someone's entire phrase.
 - Create improvisations using one or more of the Laban concepts.
- Music for Dance/Drumming
 - Recognize and write rhythm not values in traditional notation.
 - Learned how to utilize a computer program to create music.
 - Learned the difficulties of keeping rhythm while playing the drums.
 - Exposed to different songs on the drums and taught how to play them.
- To Dance is Human
 - I was introduced to dance and its political, cultural, and socio-economic connections.
 - Exposed to many different style of dance, and the cultural explanations behind each dance.
 - Building community with fellow classmates as well as connections to different cultures.
- History of Dance Theatre
 - Identify specific historical periods, how they developed and their relationship with music and art.
 - Observe a variety of choreographers and styles and learn how to

characterize them to certain time periods.

- Explored the time periods that influenced movement throughout the world.
- Kinesiology
- Learned the different bones throughout the body and their function in movement.
 - Gained knowledge of the muscular system and which muscles generate what movements.
 - Learned exercises for injury prevention and rehabilitation.
- Principles of Teaching
- Educated on proper stretching techniques to minimize and eliminate injuries.
 - Learned how I learn, the importance of risk, and growth in order to appeal to all types of students.
 - Explored the importance of dance in public school education and the requirements that must be followed.
 - Developed skill to writing lesson plans and incorporating improvisation.
- Ballet
- Acquired a further knowledge of the principles of classical ballet technique.
 - Increased strength, flexibility, and stamina to create a greater sense of ease in my movements.

- Improved musicality, ability, and technique through understanding from the teacher.
- Modern Dance
 - Increased strength and flow through the practice of yoga and modern movements.
 - Increase my dance vocabulary and style, introducing my body to something new and unusual.
 - Developed a connection with the floor and the ability to use your weight to create movement.
- Jazz
 - Furthered my exploration of different styles of jazz dance.
 - Challenged myself to pick up combinations with speed and accuracy.
 - Increased flexibility, ability, stamina, and strength.
 - Continued to improve the technical aspects of movement.
- Yoga for Dancers
 - Developed a strong sense of center.
 - Improved strength and flexibility, creating more control in other dance movements.
 - Discovered an outlet for stress, and learning how to calm the mind.
- Pilates
 - Increased strength, flexibility, and achieved proper breathing habits.
 - Improve strength in arms, legs, back and abdomen.

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