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The Joy and Passion of Dance: Finding the Dance in Everyone: A Study of Choreographing and Teaching the Masses

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The Joy and Passion of Dance: Finding the Dancer in Everyone
A Study of Choreographing and Teaching the Masses

Jenessa Marie Wigler

Mentors:

Professor Teresa Heiland, Ph.D.

Professor Judith Scalin

Professor Damon Rago

In Partial Fulfillment of
The Bachelor of Arts Degree in Dance
Loyola Marymount University
May 7, 2010

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The Joy and Passion of Dance: Finding the Dancer in Everyone

A Study of Choreographing and Teaching the Masses

By: Jenessa Marie Wigler

Mentors:

Professor Teresa Heiland, Ph.D.

Professor Judith Scalin

Professor Damon Rago

The Joy and Passion of Dance: Finding the Dancer in Everyone is a choreographic thesis that focuses on choreographing and teaching a very large group of people who have little or no dance training. My thesis incorporated the affect of dance on the non-dancer and the challenges of choreographing large group numbers of 120 plus people. I would like to prove that everyone is a dancer in some way. From a technical standpoint, I focused on formations, space, timing and natural rhythms, as well as the benefits that dance therapy has on the non-technical dancer. I also focused on the elements of teaching styles. In doing so, I emphasized style, execution and other conditions necessary to create a large choreographic piece of work.

During my choreographic experience, I used my prior experience of teaching and choreographing dance to challenge and inspire the non-trained dancers. I also chose to incorporate various styles of dance in order to recognize each dancer's talents, gifts and personal interests. It allowed me to see who shined in each style. Music was the link that drew everyone together in mind, body and spirit. Ultimately, my goal was to find the dancer in each of young women I instructed, and to help them find the dancer within themselves. Working with a large group of non-trained dancers was challenging but equally rewarding.

Personal Reflections

I was born on [REDACTED] I attended St. John the Baptist parochial school through sixth grade and Orange County High School of the Arts in junior high and high school. Music and dance have always been present in my life. I can remember listening to and singing songs in the car as a young child and bouncing up and down to the beat of music playing. Fortunately, my mother noticed my enthusiasm and interest in dance, so I began to take dance classes at the age of two. From then on, my life evolved around dance, singing and acting. I loved the entire art of performance and experienced such joy when dancing. I tried to get involved with other activities such as soccer and ice-skating, but nothing compared to the passion I had for dance. Though these activities were fun, they never fully captured my spirit the way dance did.

I love being a California girl and although I could have chosen to attend a university on the east coast, my number one choice was to attend Loyola Marymount University. LMU had everything I wanted in a university; it had an accredited dance department, a beautiful and safe environment, a mid-sized student body, and a hugely involved student body. The only thing I wished LMU had was a dance team that competed in national collegiate competitions, but I still was convinced that LMU was the "right place at the right time" for me. In fact, I did not even want to live away from home until I saw LMU's campus I immediately felt at home here because the environment was warm and friendly. After my interview with Judy, I knew most definitely that LMU was the right place for me.

When I arrived at LMU, I was used to a very structured life, full of classes and lessons and performances and competitions. During my freshman year, I learned that my decisions affect my life and that there is a time for play and a time to pay. I do not think that I would have faced the same temptations if I was living at home, and it was important to experience these tests because they shape character and instill personal work ethic. Still connected to my friends at home, I continued to dance and compete with PACE All Stars during my freshman year. Although this complicated my social and dance life at LMU, I am glad I decided to compete that year because we ended up winning our division in international jazz dance at the first World's Dance competition. I am proud to have been involved with this particular competition because I was able to watch dancers from more than fifty countries and because eventually the organizers of this competition want to make dance an Olympic event.

During my freshman year, I realized that dance in college was much different than studio dance or competition dance. I learned to appreciate the dance genres that had never interested me before, like

modern for instance. Although I am still not a huge connoisseur of modern dance, I love when it is incorporated into other forms of dance, like contemporary jazz and ballet. I also discovered a hidden passion for ballet here at LMU. Ballet, prior to LMU, was a form of dance that I knew I had to take, and did take, but never truly enjoyed it. I found it slow paced and repetitive. However, ballet at LMU was more challenging and my outlook of ballet changed mainly because of the positive teaching methods presented in class and because I think that I finally and joyfully understood and accepted the fact that ballet was truly the basis for all dance. Furthermore, I know that I have improved my technique in ballet here at LMU, and that has also impacted all my other dance genres for the better. I am thankful for this development because I definitely developed a newfound appreciation for ballet at LMU. During sophomore year, when I still had an ounce of free time to my name, I was cast into the winter concert and I enjoyed every minute performing in a tap number and the finale. This year, I choreographed two lip sync concert performances for Alpha Phi (co-choreographed Alpha Phi's with Erin Moriarty and Danielle Burdick) and for Alpha Lambda Chi. This was a very trying experience because of the number of students involved and because most of these students had zero dance experience. It was a wonderful experience that I will treasure for my entire life. I only wish I had had more time during my junior and senior year to participate more in performance shows, however I decided to spend my free time teaching and choreographing for a performing arts academy in Palos Verdes. In doing so, I have learned so much about teaching dance and by having this wonderful opportunity I found out not only that I am a good and effective dance teacher but also that I actually love the creativity I can express through choreography.

In the future, I plan to continue to teach dance at the Norris Center for the Performing Arts. In fact, I am currently working side by side a Broadway veteran, Alexis Carra, choreographing a children's musical, "Dear Edwina." This summer I will serve as the dance anchor for their summer camp program that is a huge responsibility because I will oversee all the dance instruction that is given to over 500 students as well as advise each instructor on the showpiece. I will also pair up with Alexis at the end of summer when she directs and I choreograph the musical HONK! I am looking forward to these wonderful opportunities and am grateful that my education at LMU is so valued by my employer. I think that dancing at LMU has enriched my mind, body and spirit and I hope to share that experience with all my students. Since I am a SAG member and Equity eligible, I plan on auditioning for musicals,

including national tours and Broadway shows. I think that I am ready to pursue my career as a dancer, and in the far future I hope to open my own dance studio for underprivileged children.

Since beginning my educational career at LMU, I have changed in so many ways. Entering Loyola Marymount University as a young, naïve and somewhat timid individual; I have emerged as a strong and smart young lady, ready to enter the world with love and passion for dance and an intense desire to give back to my community. I feel that I have a purpose in this world and that I have the education and experience to accomplish all my goals and to live out my dreams. I am thankful that I was lucky to have been given the opportunity to attend LMU because my parents have supported my endeavors from the beginning, and now that I am graduating, I know that I have reached that plateau that they had planned for me long ago. I am so joyful that I was able to attend LMU and appreciate all the experiences that I had in the dance department and being a part of such a smart, talented and warm student body.

Senior Thesis Journal

September – October 2010

Selection of the Theme:

The theme of Alpha Phi's 2010 Lip Sync is "Fame." This theme was not chosen by me, and I was a little upset that this decision was made without me because I would have done something totally different, to me, this seems a little too contemporary and a part of popular culture. Since most of the other sororities usually choose themes like this, I prefer to be different and use material that is not so predictable. Plus, each Lip Sync routine needs to tell a story that usually involves Father Lawton, Iggy, and LMU saving the day; I'm just not sure how we can create a story around this theme, but we will work together to come up with a good story!

I am sure that this theme will work out, however, I just have to be flexible and refocus my thoughts on this theme. Within this theme, we are looking at incorporating different locations of southern California into it as we seek happiness, but only finding happiness here on the LMU campus.

Selection of Music:

So far, Danielle, Erin and I have decided on the opening music and the closing music. For the opening, we are going to use the song "A Brand New Day" from the Wiz. I felt this was a good choice because the song is uplifting and energetic, a great way to start the event. The closing song is definitely going to be "Fame" since that is our theme. During the lip sync we will "visit" Hollywood and the song choice for that is "Hot as Ice" by Britney Spears. These are the only songs that we have selected so far.

This is a grueling process because not only does the song have to fit our theme and be able to tell a story, but it also has to be appropriate for all ages. The music also has to be engaging, danceable, known – but not too known, and fun. Since they have run out of time, I will choose the remaining music on my own. I know I need to add some sort of hip-hop song and maybe one other song too. This is getting really exciting, but the next part of the music selection is making the cuts which can be difficult because we only get about six minutes of stage time, so that is not a very long time to tell our story.

Selection of Dancers:

Tonight I noticed that some of the girls are really natural movers, although they do not have the technical experience, they were able to pick up the choreography easily and retain it. There were about twenty girls who I could see using in the specialized dance sections. They moved well and were extremely expressive while rehearsing which is a good thing because a lot of the contest is based on performance. Some of the dance sections in the lip sync include dancers who are in the same class, and some I need to select based on their ability and their performance skill.

I decided to show everyone the combination for the section I was casting tonight, then I broke them up into groups of ten and had them perform it twice with front row and back rows switching so that I could see everyone equally. Tonight I was casting dancers for "Hot as Ice" by Britney Spears, so I wanted a look as well, they all had to be good looking and sexy. By the end of the audition, I cast one third of the girls. The goal is for everyone to be in at least one dance section as well as the opening number and the closing number.

Selection of Costumes:

Costume selection is always fun, but I just need to keep in mind that I do not have a very big budget, so practicality and reusing items is key! For the first number I decided to use t-shirts from every sorority and fraternity on campus. For one, this is done out of tradition and it also creates a sense of unity between Alpha Phi and all the other Greeks on campus. For the closing number, I had the marketing chairperson order black t-shirts with the Fame Logo on them in silver writing. Pink tank tops with silver glitter will be used for "Hot as Ice" and colorful men's dress shirts will be used for "Pop." I would like to order tank tops for the senior number, but I have to check our budget before I suggest this to Danielle and Erin, I don't want everyone to get excited and then have it fall through. For the bottom, everyone will wear black jazz pants, black socks and black jazz shoes. I think adding color on top and leaving the bottom basic black will look good on everyone and make things less complicated since we will have several quick changes.

Props and Sets:

I had several props incorporated into our routine for the lip sync concert. We had banners and posters and signboards that some of the girls held and displayed. Most of these items we made ourselves out of cardboard boxes and we painted them to look like models of the Hollywood sign in the Hollywood Hills and we also made giant cameras to represent the paparazzi. There really weren't any sets used because the show took place in the gym, so there was not enough room for all the sororities and frats to store sets etc. Even though there weren't a lot of sets or props on stage, the power of having over 100 girls on stage at once made a statement all on its own.

Learning to be Professional during Rehearsal:

Working with a group of non-dancers is very challenging, especially when working with over 100 enthusiastic, dramatic, college sorority girls. Today was an unusually crazy day. It was a long week and the girls were abnormally disrespectful and rude during rehearsal. I think we are all sleep deprived and focusing too much on winning Greek Week, instead of enjoying the time we are spending together and learning this fun lip sync routine.

I was a little shocked at their behavior today; they were rowdy and talking while Erin, Danielle and I were teaching a dance routine. No matter how many times she asked them to be quiet and focus, they ignored her requests and continued talking. I was quite frustrated with this because I could not understand their choice to continue with this behavior, because it just disrupted the learning process and made our rehearsal longer. Eventually, they realized that if they were ever going to get out of this rehearsal, they would have to focus and they did.

Rehearsal:

Tonight's practice I emphasized the importance of lines and formations to the girls. Since most of these girls do not have any dance background, I wanted to make sure that they understood the reasons that lines and formations are important. I had one group watch as others dance, and I had them critique the lines and formations of the other groups. I feel that having them actually critique it themselves, as opposed to me just giving notes, would be a better way for them to understand and for them to also make corrections in their own formations. I think that they also enjoyed being active participants. Lines

and formations are very important in Lip Sync because everything is so visual; the best part about it is that I am able to highlight groups of people. Since there are so many of us, it is hard to see the people in the last row, but by rotating groups on stage, each group could be a little featured. My favorite section in our routine is the last number because the lines have to be perfect because about 130 girls will be on stage at the same time; getting all the girls to their spots and to execute the routine well was not easy, but in the end it will look fabulous during the show. I also think that the formations in our routine helped me as the choreographer because I was able to separate people by ability, incorporating more complex choreography into the routine based on each group of dancers and their ability to pick up the choreography and to execute it. I tried to keep our lines and formations fairly simple because I prefer to see lines and formations that are simple and executes correctly, than to watch complex lines and formations that create "train-wrecks" on stage. Hopefully, the girls will continue to do a good job in this area.

Rehearsal – Focus on Performance:

Tonight's rehearsal, I focused on the performance aspect of the show and how energy, conviction and facials are almost more important than the actual choreography itself. I am, and have always been a great performer on stage, it is second nature to me, and I wanted to share the importance of that to them because during practice I was seeing a lot of "dead-pan" faces. I explained that our routine had to show levels of emotion; smiling alone was not good enough, the judges needed to see our exuberance and they also need to understand the story being told. Since we aren't acting a scene out on stages with words, the only way we can tell the story is with our bodies, our eyes and our facial expressions. I showed them what I meant by doing three sections of our routine, expressing all the different characters by using my face and body. There were a lot of questions tonight because girls wanted to make sure they were "acting" well and not over doing anything. I was really happy with the adjustments they made and the effort they made to give the routine different levels. My main concern was with the girls who are thinking so hard about the choreography that their faces don't emote at all, this absolutely can not happen on stage, I think at the next rehearsal I will work with each group and have them practice it until every single girl in that section is at least looking like they are enjoying what they are doing. One thing that I definitely believe is that technique (whether you are a musician or a dancer etc) without passion is a wasted gift.

Tech Rehearsal:

Tech week is always an exciting time because now all the work in rehearsal will be combined with the sets, props and costumes. Being in charge of the choreographic content of the show is a little nerve wrecking because I feel responsible for it's success. I was worrying about the music cuts and stage space, but now that I have seen the actual space, I am confident in our choices. I am still a little nervous about this concert only because all decisions now lay in my hands, but I am prepared to deal with any issues that may arise.

The first night of tech was very long and tedious. It is the first night that the Aphi girls were in costume and they were kind of unfocused as a result of all the excitement, but after a while they calmed down and got to work. My first interaction with the process happened during a dance change sequence when one group was exiting the stage as a group of dancers entered the stage. During the rehearsal process they had always entered and exited the stage from the same side, however this created a problem when being implemented onstage because they girls were crashing into each other and it left stage right

completely empty. I decided to change the entrance of the dancers to stage right so that as the other girls existed stage left, the dancers could enter stage right with a smooth transition, while avoiding dead space on the stage. In making this change, I also had to change the choreography slightly since from they entered dancing.

We were only able to make it through the first half of the routine tonight because of so many technical issues, however I used the down time wisely by going over choreography with different groups of girls to make sure they were sharp and understood their formations, exits and entrances. I was really pleased with the first night of our "tech" week. I took notes and will deliver them to the dancers tomorrow. I can't wait to perform onstage with my Alpha Phi sisters!

Pre-Performance Rehearsal:

Today was a very hectic day that drained me of all my energy. Today was our actual Lip Sync performance and Alpha Phi has so much to do on this day. Prior to our show, we always get together three hours prior to the show to take pictures. After that is done, we immediately begin to intensely practice. I ran the routine several times, stopping and correcting things as the girls dance. Sometimes this frustrates people because they aren't quite in tune with the purpose for "cleaning" a routine. This is the day where emotions run wild also because people are nervous and people are excited, so they are giddy and intense. I like to keep the atmosphere light but focused because in the end, whether we "win" or not, it is the bond we are making as sisters by working together through choreography to attain a common goal. During our practice, I could see that the weakest "movers" in our sorority were really trying hard not to mess up the choreography, and I appreciated their effort. I was thinking to myself how hard it must be for someone who doesn't understand anything about choreography, staging or performance to actually have to learn a routine and perform it with only about three weeks of rehearsal; it were these girls that I was the most proud of. The time before the show is always the hardest because we feel so much pressure to do our best. I think we will do a great job tonight because I was really impressed with what I saw during rehearsal today.

Performance:

Tonight was our actual performance and I can honestly say that I think the choreography in our Lip Sync looked fabulous. As I watched from the sidelines, when I wasn't dancing myself, I could see that the formations and the lines looked great. I also enjoyed watching the facial expressions of the girls and I was so proud of them. We had a lot of energy and the choreography was the most complex of any of the other sororities. which made me even more proud of the girls. If I could have changed anything, it would have been the paparazzi section because everything was so dark, the props were dark and our clothing was dark, I definitely would have added color to that section. I think I would have also added a section for just the dance majors so that we could have really danced, but in this situation, I think it is important that unity is a key factor. My favorite section of the routine was the final section and the theme to our Lip Sync, Fame. I felt that we were really "on" during this number and the energy and cohesiveness of all of us was exhilarating; I really felt that we were in sync with each other. It is also a number where I used every single girl in, so there was about 130 girls on stage all dancing together. It may not have been the easiest number to choreography or teach, but in the end it was the best number in our show and it looked awesome from the audience.

Discussion of the Dancers:

Overall, I was very pleased with the dancers throughout this process. They had to learn a lot of material that was foreign to them and they executed the movement well. They were sharp and energetic and their performing skills were wonderful. One area that they all improved on through the rehearsal process was focusing on the little things, like their fingers and pointed toes. Although these types of technical aspects are expected in trained dancers, in non-trained dancers, these concepts are a little more difficult to execute. I think I also selected the right girls for the right parts; not only did I base this on their physical ability and their ability to retain the choreography, but I also took in account their personalities so that they would shine naturally on stage. I am very proud of all my Alpha Phi sisters for making the effort and for coming to know the dancers they have within them. In fact, a few of them are going to start taking dance classes because they had so much fun.

Post Performance Self Evaluation

This experience was a wonderful exploration of choreography, teaching and the development of the dancer in non-trained participants. Working with a large group was very challenging and frustrating at times, especially when they were not focusing, but when we all worked together, the reward was wonderful. Watching them progress from being a little awkward in their movement to becoming confident with their bodies, lines and formations was very gratifying. Not only did their movement improve over the rehearsal period, but so did their enthusiasm, the better the understood and executed the movement, the more enthusiastic they became.

Personally, I learned that patience is a huge element in teaching and choreographing dance and I learned how to exercise that during this process. I also had to learn how to create simple movement that would be effective on stage because I had a short time to teach the material and because the girls were untrained. I also was exposed to the production side of creating a show and I enjoyed learning that aspect as well. I think that my main goal was fulfilled because everyone of my Alpha Phi sisters was a dancer on the stage on the night of the Lip Sync Concert!

Aesthetic Statement: The JOY and PASSION of Dance

Dance has always exuded passion and joy from within, a moment in time where I am able to share my love and respect for this art form. Through dance, I have been able to express my emotions, specifically those of happiness, without hesitation. It is not that I am unable to express other emotions through dance, but innately dance equates joy to me and I am consumed spiritually and physically by this deep emotion. The joy I feel is not as simple as the joy one feels when opening a birthday present or spending time with a good friend. The joy I feel from dance extends to a much deeper place, where complete internal peace is sought. As a child, I was never one to openly express my emotions verbally, however, dance created an amphitheater for me to radiate my passion; it was a safe place to feel. Through body movement, my limbs moved naturally to the beat, always enthused and compelled by elation. As I transformed in mind, body and knowledge, dance was always the anchor in my life where I found the freedom to express. In fact, throughout my many years of training, I often found that my body was actually a tool for this expression. After thousands of hours of training in all genres of dance, from ballet to hip-hop, and modern to tap, I continue to gravitate in movement towards the joy I feel when dancing. In ballet, the lift of my core and my limbs always made me feel that I was rising in spirit; it is a subtle way of connecting spiritually to the world. I particularly have improved my technique in ballet here at LMU because I learned to appreciate it more as I studied it in depth. I had previously only taken it because I had to, now I take it because I love it. I have noticed that my core has become very strong and my extensions have improved. Tap dance, one of my favorite art forms, and it allows me to express the complex and intense passion I have for dance. Complex choreographically and musically, tap dance permits my joy to be released with fervor. Although lyrical jazz is not yet considered a true dance form, it will always be the form of dance where I am able to feel the most united in mind, body and soul. The

expressiveness that I am able to achieve through lyrical jazz is almost unexplainable because it is such a surreal experience for me. With each reach movement, whether it is with my arms or a combination of dance movements like leaps or turns, I feel so closely joined with my spirituality; in fact, I have cried tears of joy many times after performing a lyrical jazz number. Moreover, now as a senior and educated dancer, I find that styles that express peace, fulfillment, joy and passion run parallel to my own definition and aesthetics of dance.

Equally important as the genres of dance, music has always played an important role in helping me achieve the aesthetic of joy in my dance. This is because music affects and drives emotion in dance; its beats, rhythms and tempos guide our movements. Having been exposed to so much of a variety of music in my youth, there are really an unlimited number of choices that produce joyful emotion. Typically, I enjoy upbeat music for tap and jazz dances that evoke energy, celebration, jubilation, and excitement. Similarly, I prefer light and lively classical music for ballet, specifically Tchaikovsky's compositions, where complex combinations of body movements coincide with the changing rhythms of the music. The most important choice of music is the music selected for lyrical jazz. It is essential because body movement, whether the movement is a simple gesture or a brilliant leap, must harmonize with the lyrics of the music. Therefore, it is very important that the lyrics chosen allow the dancer to emote. I remember one particular lyrical piece where I danced to the song *A New Day*; this number was a tribute to my teacher's sister who lost the fight to cancer. Although the loss of her sister was extremely painful, this dance was spiritual and joyful in nature because the music was uplifting and the dance represented her sister's ascension and reunion with Christ. These are just a few examples of how necessary music is to me as a dancer and I cannot imagine dance without music, except for tap dance where taps actually serve as a musical instrument, because music is the driving force behind dancers.

Professionally, I would like to pursue a career in dance through education and through performance. Since I have been singing and acting my entire life, just like dancing, and I plan on continuing my journey in professional musical theatre. Dance in musical theatre is a wonderful place for me to express myself through dance for many reasons. In musical theatre, so many genres of dance are used which appeals to my appetite of variety. Musical theatre dance is also very bright and joyful with sometimes a slight seductive flair, which would allow me to combine my natural emotions toward dance with performance. I have already appeared in several musical theatre shows and I remember a dancer named Tony Spinosa who inspired me as a dancer. I worked with him in the musical *Evita*, and he was brilliant in his performance of the tango. Although Tony was not your typical trick jazz dancer, he possessed a certain quality on stage that attracted an audience. His commitment and conviction during the seductive dance was combined with his natural joy to dance and perform, which completely engaged the audience. Another professional five time Broadway veteran who I have had the opportunity to be directed under several times is Jon Engstrom. This man is in his sixties and is brilliant, a mastermind at choreography and dance. His quest for perfection, in timing and in movement, inspires his dancers to develop the same work ethic. He has been very instrumental in my training and I was fortunate to have been cast as Peggy Sawyer, from the musical *42nd Street*, under his direction. Similarly, I currently work with another Broadway veteran, Alexis Carra, who is a fabulous dancer and singer, and a graduate of Yale University. She dances with such joy and passion, exhibiting these emotions with her body and her whole being. I began working with Alexis last summer as her associate choreographer for the musical *The Music Man*, which played at the Norris Theatre in Palos Verdes, California. Alexis and I think with one brain, as she often tells me, because she can begin a sequence of dance movements for a particular number and I am able to assist her by completing the movement. It is quite eerie actually, but she inspires me to pursue my goals and she is a wonderful mentor and friend. I

am currently assisting her with a children's musical, *Dear Edwina*, and this summer we will team up, she as the director, and I as the choreographer for the musical *HONK!* I look forward to every moment I spend with her because she has so much experience and she loves to share her knowledge and talents. Working with, and learning from talented and successful dancers is something that I treasure because these people behold the possibility of dreams becoming realities.

Aside from performing in musical theatre and choreographing, my long future goals are to take the education I received from LMU and utilize it by opening my own dance studio. It is my hope to open this dance studio in an underprivileged neighborhood to offer children a safe place to learn, have fun, and to feel safe to express their emotions. Dance equates joy and passion to me, and I hope one day that I can instill this love and joy of dance into a child who also seeks a place within themselves that is truly happy. Since being at LMU, I have seen the benefits that acts of social justice can have on a community, and I can envision the positive impact that dance could have on a community of children. Dance could serve this community as therapy and as physical activity in addition to the joy this art form brings. Therefore I am thankful that LMU stresses, "giving back" to society and community, because it has revealed another way to use my dance education in a positive way.

Dance is an expressive and communicative art form where passion and technique join together to create beautiful movement. Although expert technique is not necessary to dance; as a dancer who has studied dance in this fashion, I possess an appreciation for the hard work that is necessary to become an accomplished dancer. If I could eliminate anything from dance in general, it would be the elimination of competition in the classroom. Competition has its place, in auditions and in competitive performance, however dance instructors have control over their classrooms and should focus on technique and acknowledge dancers equally on their strengths and weaknesses. Therefore as a dance teacher, I do not permit self-proclaimed divas to initiate competition in my classroom. My classroom is safe and fair, a

place where no one is “better” than anyone else, because dance is a joyful art form. Whether I take my education and experiences from LMU into the world of professional dance or as a business owner, I know that my education from LMU will always thrust me to inspire and to achieve. The joy and passion I have for dance will be shared and transferred to the next generation of dancers because as an educated dancer, it is my obligation and desire to share my gifts and knowledge with others.

Alpha Phi Lip Sync Pics





Running Thread: Dance Therapy

The Benefits of Dance Therapy:

A Journey Through Movement

Jenessa Wigler

Loyola Marymount University

The Benefits of Dance Therapy:

A Journey Through Movement

“Within ourselves, we are all alone” ~ Marian Chace

Marian Chace, the mother of dance therapy as a professional career, described dance therapy as the “combination of verbal and non-verbal communication to enable a patient or group member, to express feeling, to participate in human relationships, to increase personal self-esteem, to develop a more realistic concept of his body image and through all of these, to achieve some feelings of relaxation and enjoyment.” (Sicherman & Green 1980) Dance therapy allows individuals with emotional, behavioral and physical conditions, to express their emotions through dance and body movement. Through dance, these patients are able to achieve improved mobility, muscle coordination and reduced muscle tension. Emotionally and behaviorally, dance therapy is reported to improve self-awareness, self-confidence, and interpersonal interaction, and is an outlet for communicating feelings. (www.cancer.org) In 1943, Marian Chace began conducted an “extensive and atypical recreation program” at St. Elizabeth’s Hospital in New York City. Chace worked with these patients under medical supervision offering her expertise in dance movement. For years she had worked, and was a company member, at the Denishawn School of Dance, where she used dance to aid “adults with special personality problems not sufficiently pronounced to need psychiatric care, and in correcting behavior patterns of children who were anti-social.” (Chace 1945) In an interview for the Science News Letter, Chace stated, “mental patients dance to express their feelings, too. Even when they would rather not talk with other people, they can dance with them.” Furthermore, she explained that these patients used dance as a way of communicating. Through dancing, they could show whether they felt lonely or angry, and that they needed companionship even if they weren’t able to verbally communicate them. (The Science News Letter 1953) The

main goal is to achieve a strong mind-body connection, encouraging the free expression of emotion and thought through dance. Equally important, another goal of dance therapy is to improve both the mental and physical well being of individuals who are not able to verbally express their emotions. Lyrical jazz dance and Yoga will be the areas I focus on to discuss how this mind-body connection frees and uplifts the spirit through dance therapy.

First, it is important to understand what is meant by the mind-body connection. The mind-body connection is a spiritual connection between the mind and the body, interlinking emotions. It is the way our bodies respond to the way we think, feel and act. (www.familydoctor.org) Our bodies are governed by the mind, and our emotions and feelings stimulate the mind, which in turn signals movement through our bodies. Therefore, dance therapy is a perfect therapeutic approach to assist individuals to feel safe enough to express themselves through movement without ever speaking a word. As the connection between the body and mind strengthens, the better one is able to express one's deepest emotions. Marian Chace wrote in a journal titled *Rhythm in Movement as Used in Saint Elizabeth's Hospital*, "Movement about the room, physical action in harmony with a group and relaxation of tension are the aims of rhythm in movement." (Chace 1045) Given a safe place to move and feel, patients are able to non-verbally communicate their deepest emotions, thoughts and feelings through dance and body movement. Without criticism or focus on the technical aspect of dance, free movement is and freedom of expression is the desired goal.

Any dance style or form can be used in dance therapy since the main goal is to achieve a strong mind-body connection, encouraging free expression through dance and body movement. With the ultimate goal of dance therapy aspiring to improve both the mental and physical well being of individuals who are not able to verbally express their emotions. Lyrical jazz dance and yoga will be the areas I focus on to discuss how this mind-body connection frees and uplifts the spirit through dance therapy.

Lyrical jazz dance is a form of dance that combines ballet and jazz dances. An old French saying states, "that which cannot be spoken can be sung, and that which cannot

be sung, can be danced." Lyrical jazz does just that, it combines the emotions that are tied to the lyrics of a song with body movement and expression. Often spiritual in nature, this dance form allows body movements that promote reach and pull. These movements often represent desire, longing, abandonment, and other emotions. Although lyrical dance is not often recognized as a true dance form, therapeutically it allows the individual to relate a song with lyrics that represents their emotions and then to release these emotions through body movements. Since most professional dance companies or dance programs do not recognize this dance form, little study has been done to assess the benefits of this dance form and the mind-body connection. In a general observation, this dance form seems to be extremely popular with the adolescent. In our society, the adolescent is known for having emotional highs and lows several times a day. With so much emotion to express, it is not surprising that adolescents flock to lyrical dance, for it allows them a safe place to express themselves without using verbal communication.

Yoga is another form of dance that can be used in dance therapy. "Yoga practice involves postures, breathing exercises and meditation aimed at improving mental and physical functioning." (Vickers and Zollman 1999) The breathing and stretching allows the body to relax and increases blood circulation. "Yoga is not only for relaxation but to generally benefit body systems." (Wilson 1976) Yoga is an old art form that combines science and dance. The word yoga means "union," representing the holistic belief that intertwines the physical, mental, and spiritual parts of the self. "Some practitioners understand yoga in terms of traditional Indian medicine, with the postures improving the flow of prana energy around the body. (Vickers and Zollman 1999) Yoga has become a popular form of body movement and exercise because it improves all parts of the body. Today, many "see yoga in more conventional terms of muscle stretching and mental resolution." (Vickers and Zollman 1999) The stretching and bending improves flexibility and circulation. According to J.R. and his article *Cancer Patients Aided by Yoga*, he states that after a study was done on recent cancer patients, the "majority of our subjects were clinically depressed," and by the end of the study, "depression had gone down in the yoga group [but] worsened among the women

who didn't exercise." (J.R. 2007) Since yoga is spiritual in nature, it is easy to comprehend how it could elevate the soul and make one feel better. Yoga can also stimulate body organs, glands, skeletal muscles and improve posture. Another satisfying result of participating in Yoga is relaxation, which frees the mind and body of stress and prevents fatigue. (Wilson 1976) There is definitely a connection between the mind and body when doing Yoga; it is as if the two combine offering the patient or participant a level of peace and harmony that cannot be found elsewhere. It also allows the patient or participant to release stress and rid themselves of any emotions that they are not able to release verbally.

Dance therapy is definitely a means to wholly connect the mind with the body, enabling people to release their deepest emotions and feelings through the body non-verbally. Dance therapy proves to be a safe activity to do because it is free of judgment, negation, criticism and debate. When people have trouble expressing emotions and feelings verbally, dance therapy is a healthy option for them to pursue so that they can release their emotions freely and safely in a controlled environment where the goal is to achieve a strong mind-body connection where free expression through body movement is key. It has been proven that many times the usual methods of communication with the mentally ill who do not use verbal speech often fail. However, the dance method can bring patients to a stage where the medics can help them even more because they have achieved a mode of expression of the mind and body. (Science News Letter 1953)

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Dance Classes per Capp Report 9-09

Dance 100 – Orientation to Dance

1. Career Paths
2. Healthy Dancers Need Rest and Relaxation
3. Mind – Body – Spirit Connection through Movement
4. Increased Movement Capacity
5. I think that this class was necessary to give an overall introduction to the Dance Major and all that it had to offer.

Dance 101 – Principals of Movement

1. Learn to use Breath
2. Use of Alignment
3. Mind and Body Connection
4. This class focused on the alignment of the body and basic motions of the body, combined with the use of breath.

Dance 160 – Fundamentals of Dance Composition I

1. Introduction to Dance Composition
2. Timing
3. Force – Energy
4. This class very interesting because it forced me to look at dance in a new way and to understand the connections that occur in dance.

Dance 161 – Fundamentals of Dance Composition II

1. Introduction to Dance Composition (part II)
2. Focus on Space
3. Continued to work on Timing and Force as well.
4. I continued to learn and have an in depth knowledge of dance composition and the interrelations between time, space and force.

Dance 260 – Laban Movement Analysis

1. Flow
2. Weight
3. Space
4. Time
5. Laban was a great class because I became familiar with the elements of dance and also how I have always used them naturally. How each movement was executed and connected also had varied meanings, which was very interesting because simple everyday activities suddenly became a part of dance.

Dance 262 – Dance Styles and Forms

1. Study of Various Choreographers
2. Introduction of several Dance Forms
3. The importance of Practice
4. Theory
5. This class was one of my favorites because I love to learn new styles and I also enjoyed learning where certain styles came from and who choreographed what.

Dance 281 – History of Dance Theatre

1. Evolution of Ballet in Europe and the USA
2. Early Dance Origins: ie. Renaissance Dances

3. Dance as an Art Form
4. Evolution of Modern Dance in Europe and the USA
5. I enjoyed how this class was instructed and how the early origin dances were introduced and explored.

Dance 377 – Dance Production

1. Lighting
2. Costumes
3. Staging
4. Enjoyed learning and helping out backstage.

Dance 378 – Service Project

1. Community Service Project
2. Sharing Dance With Children
3. Teaching
4. Choreographing
5. Loved sharing my knowledge with children and leading the classroom, very rewarding.

Dance 381 – To Dance Is Human

1. Cultural Influences on Dance
2. To Become Observers of Dance in Everyday Life
3. I learned how dance can move from one region of the world, or era, to another generation or geographical location.
4. Storytelling
5. This class was very informative and I loved making the basket and storytelling assignment.

Dance 480 – Kinesiology for Dance I

1. Anatomy
2. Relationship between Major Joints and Alignment
3. Common Dancer Injuries
4. Learn proper Exercises for Strength and Stretching
5. This class is extremely difficult because of the medical based terminology. Although informative, not my favorite class.

Dance 320 – Ballet III

1. I learned several scenarios and stagings of many traditional ballets.
2. I was familiarized with the Music that belongs to many famous ballets.
3. I watched several Ballet films and critiqued them.
4. This was the class that actually sparked a new founded interest in ballet (which had never been my favorite) because the teacher is great and because I realized that ballet can be fun.

Dance 399 – Dance Techniques – Ballet

1. Individual study on Technique
2. Pilates Based
3. Focus on Wellness
4. I enjoy individual study because it helps me grow and focus on my weaknesses.

Dance 202 – Modern Dance II

1. Focus on Energy, Range and Expression
2. Complicated Rhythm Movements
3. Focus on Technique

4. This class was enjoyable and I learned that Modern is not my favorite form of dance because I like to connect movement to the music and the lyric which is quite difficult in modern because there is often no lyrics to connect to. Teacher was great.

Dance 302 – Modern Dance III

1. Focus on Performance
2. Projection techniques
3. Introduction to more difficult movement patterns
4. Dance Criticism
5. Again, I learned a lot in this class and had fun in class, but not my favorite form of dance nor expression.

Dance 397 – Dance of Africa

1. Free Form
2. Learned new style of Dance
3. World Dance
4. Origins
5. I loved this class, so much fun and the movement was uplifting and full of expression.

Dance 399 – Dance Techniques – Modern

5. Individual study on Technique
6. Pilates Based
7. Focus on Wellness
8. I enjoy individual study because it helps me grow and focus on my weaknesses.

Dance 402 – Modern Dance IV

1. Subtlety of Movement and Expression
2. Style
3. Complex Rhythmic Patterns
4. This was not my favorite Modern class, but I still learned a great deal about energy and range of motion.

Dance 345 – Jazz IV

1. Commercial Dance Focus
2. Jazz
3. Hip Hop / Funk
4. Fun class, I enjoyed it and learned another instructor's perspective on jazz.

Dance 353 – Dance Conditioning – Pilates Lab

1. Stretching
2. Use of the Pilates Machines
3. Wellness
4. Pilates Lab is great because it is a private session that focuses on stretching and creating long and lean muscles while focusing on health and wellness.

Dance 398 – Inter/Adv Ballet

1. Understanding that the core is the basis of moving through space, not the limbs.
2. How to work the foot.
3. Mind/Body Connection
4. Learn Complex Enchainements
5. I started LMU not really ever enjoyed Ballet, but since I have been here, I have learned not only to appreciate it, but to actually enjoy it, and to understand and believe how necessary it is for any dancer.

Dance 399 – Jazz Dance Studies

1. Individual study on Technique
2. Pilates Based
3. Focus on Wellness
4. I enjoy individual study because it helps me grow and focus on my weaknesses.

Dance 498 – Stagecraft for Dance

1. Lighting for Dance
2. Props and Sets for Dance
3. Learned to Critique any staged Performance
4. Costumes for Dance
5. This class was very enjoyable and informative, I would have liked a little more hands on application though, especially where lighting is concerned.

Dance 444 – Tap Dance IV

1. Complex Rhythms
2. Complex Step Sequences
3. Mind/Body Connection
4. Tap is one of my favorite forms of dance because it is so technical and musical at the same time.

Dance 462 – Mentorship Thesis – Currently Enrolled

Dance 498 – SS: Senior Thesis Prep – Currently Enrolled

Dance 382 – Drumming for Dance – Currently Enrolled

Dance 384 – Creative Dance Children – Currently Enrolled