

A Trilogy of Modern Solos; Reflecting on Traveling Through Europe and Beyond
Distinction Reflection Paper

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A Trilogy of Modern Solos; Reflecting on Traveling Through Europe and the U.S.

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My Senior Project, *A Trilogy of Modern Solos*, was performed at Ohio State's Department of Dance Senior Concert and explored reflections from my travels and future aspirations in modern dance performance. The trilogy included one self-choreographed solo, one solo choreographed by London-based artist Beatrice Bernstein, and a repertory solo from a Chicago based company Deeply Rooted. This project led me to a greater knowledge of the responsibilities and skillsets needed to cultivate solo performances and this project demonstrated the type of work I intend to perform as a professional dancer.

This project began with my coursework and department performances including Ohio State movement courses, Dance Composition I-II and dance repertory that I performed in two faculty concerts. Other contributing performances and programs included the OSU Dance School Tour repertory/performance program, senior concert performances, and out-of-department performances. I traveled throughout Denmark in the Department's Summer 2019 Dance Denmark Study Abroad summer performance intensive, where the group was immersed in Danish culture and performed an eight-piece program throughout the country in six weeks. In Autumn 2019, I traveled to London to study abroad at Trinity Laban Conservatory of Music and Dance, where I intensively studied movement courses such as Graham, release technique, ballet, a composition course, an improvisation course, and a Rudolf Laban movement theory course. At the time of these experiences, it was difficult to analyze the significance of what these personal growth and kinesthetic experiences abroad encompassed, but these classes gave me a breadth of knowledge and many opportunities to reflect and create this project.

Over the course of this project, I drew on recollections of dance experiences throughout my life. As a young dancer, I trained extensively in contemporary and ballet through the fall and spring months, then studied at summer intensives in 6-10-week summer programs that included

many other dance practices such as African-American dance forms, Horton, counter-technique, Limon, and more. I attended many different summer programs, one being Deeply Rooted Dance Theater's Summer program in Chicago, Illinois. This was during a very significant time in my life at around 15 years of age.

At the age of 15, I was struggling to find myself. I had terrible experiences with friendship, not only at school but also with my studio. This was the summer that I decided to change to a new studio to start fresh. My parents were also struggling with their marriage and my home life was not at peace. During the six-week program at Deeply Rooted, I used dance to explore my emotions with change and frustration. The work and reflection generated by my senior project brought to light how significant that time was for my physical practice and personal independence which inspired me to honor Deeply Rooted Dance Theater and perform a piece of their repertory. This reflection led me to contacting Deeply Rooted and learning the repertory piece, *Surrender*, choreographed by Artistic Director Kevin Iega Jeff.

During the beginning of my junior year Spring semester, the ideas for the overall project began to form. My goals were oriented around my passion for performance, my determination to highlight the upcoming year of travel, and my anticipation of becoming a professional modern dance performer post-graduation. Before I left for my travel through Denmark and Europe, I planned to collect three solos that challenged me as a performer and shared my past, present, and future as an artist. My intention was to include a solo created during my experiences of traveling through Europe in 2019, a repertory piece that honored my time with Deeply Rooted, and finally a solo that represented the studies I discovered in London.

The readings that helped me shape the self-choreographed solo included Rudolf Laban's book *Choreutics*. This book informed me of definitions of movement phrasing that I explored

through Trinity Laban composition and Choreological Studies courses that emphasized these definitions into movement concepts in their classes. I focused on Laban's definitions of location, body design, spatial progression, spatial projection, pathways, and inclination. When challenging these definitions in my solo, I aimed to create movement that connected the emotions I experienced while holding and flipping through the pages of my planner collected my experiences in Denmark and Europe. This movement was first created in improvisation sessions I had filmed in Greenwich Park in London, during free time in a solo, or in my apartment. I explore these definitions by Laban by defining where I was using body design and splicing spatial progression fragment. For example, I had body position A and moved into body position B, I then defined the spatial progression and pathway and changed it to play backwards. While position A and B stayed the same, the progression and pathway was manipulated in order to form a new set of movement. The solo was built off of the body designs I copied from my improvisation but manipulated them in a new way with these definitions to incorporate the knowledge I had built abroad. I wanted the solo to represent the feeling of remembering the memories that impacted me. For example, I had ticket stubs from many performances, museums, plane tickets, and studio tours, that I was able to independently explore and capture the rich experiences I had abroad. I felt the same way when looking at the video diaries I collected and created, which were week by week postings of a scrapbook-like video on YouTube. These recollections inspired me to create a soft, light, and continuous phrase; the spatial projection focused on a diagonal and represented the timeline effect that I felt while flipping through pages.

It was difficult to stick with my proposed plan for my London-based choreographed solo. There were issues in finding resources the same way I was able to find them in the United States; I did not have enough knowledge of or connections to the companies in Europe as I did in the

United States. When I did reach out to an artist that was interested in, there were many obstacles regarding a rehearsal space because Trinity Laban studios are not open for outside projects. Each person who enters the building must be a student, a faculty member, or employed in some way and have a working key card to enter and use the facility. As a guest, there is mandatory paperwork that takes three months for the office to process. My next attempt was to ask a faculty member from Trinity Laban, who is a modern choreographer, to set a piece on me. Faculty anticipated that there would be issues with payment, because I would have to go through the conservatory and pay the conservatory for the space and the additional hours that the faculty would need for my rehearsal. This was incredibly out of budget, so upon the recommendation of the faculty, I contacted a Master of Fine Arts student concentrating in choreography at Trinity Laban to create the solo. This was a success.

Beatrice Bernstein and I worked on the creation of a second solo, which stemmed from reflections of my past-self during my high school years. We had extensive conversations about my feelings on my past experiences with dance. She highlighted significant language in our conversations which inspired the title, *Journey*, and began her initial process. Beatrice mapped out a spatial path of the stage and determined where significant spaces represented significant times of my past. Beatrice decided which experiences would be selected, how this journey was mapped, and where the next experience would take me. The choreography was inspired by my improvisations, directed through Beatrice's prompts, that were based on my high school experiences. The movement vocabulary was tense, heavy, and frantic. My improvisation stemmed from my own search, discovery, and repetition which lead to frustration during those years. Most of my rehearsal time was self-directed and I spent much time determining how I might transform emotions into movement. Beatrice focused on highlighting my hard times and

frustrated feelings, in order to explore a side of me that I don't normally relive or physically explore. She took every opportunity to challenge me and release the emotion.

The third solo in repertory was an excerpt of a piece choreographed by Kevin Iega Jeff (Iega) in 1998 named *Surrender*. When I first reached out to Deeply Rooted, I was directed to speak with Iega on his thoughts about converting his material of the trio into a solo in *Surrender*. Deeply Rooted did not have many existing solos within a piece, and my desire was to have a solo length of two to three minutes. *Surrender* is a piece that is originally 15 minutes long and opens with a trio. Iega extracted a prominent solo to begin this trio and we used this material for the project. I was set up with a company member who has been with the company for years and had personally done the exact choreography I was interested in.

I prepared for this two-day rehearsal process with Dominique Atwood by learning the choreography via YouTube and extensively listened to the words of Nina Simone, which was the movement for the piece. I focused on making an immediate connection this piece. I began listening to the piece of music multiple times throughout the day and journaling where I empathize with her. I also looked further into how I perceived the original piece and recognizing where I felt that the words and choreography directly affected my life and heart. With my past experiences with Deeply Rooted feeling much farther away in comparison to the other two solos that were recollections of the immediate past, I wanted this solo to represent a part of me, even though I was stepping into repertory piece. The rehearsals included many runs at their studio in Chicago and working out technical details that would not have been possible without Dominique's guidance. The movement vocabulary was explosive, broad, and incredibly demanding. In order to execute, I surrendered to the movement in order to fulfill all of its challenges. I focused on its passion and virtuosity with reckless abandon. I felt that when I

explored the physical challenges, I would become tense and have a lack of freedom in movement. I felt most confident when I would experience the solo focusing on the freedom to express my body and surrender to its power. That is when I felt most confident to fulfill the most difficult of phrases.

For the senior concert, the trilogy of solos began with Beatrice Bernstein's *Journey*. My lighting designer and I decided that the three solos needed to have incredibly different lighting concepts in order to create three different universes, representing the three very different stages of my life. I decided to begin with this solo since it reflected on my past struggles that I found with dance. These were the struggles of my past, before my European studies; therefore, it seemed logical to place this piece before the reflection and self-choreographed solo. The lighting captured the drama and angst with dark colors and a very slow fade in. I chose my costume to have distinctive differences in aesthetics of the movement while carefully matching the tone of the choreography. It was very form-fitting with dark colors to match the tones of the emotions that I wished to portray. While performing, I honed in on the feelings of frustration, anticipation, and the confusion felt during a period of change.

During the performance series, I felt a lot of pressure as this piece opened the Senior Concert and also because I felt as though I was opening a book of myself for the audience. I had the responsibility to capture their senses and commit to my performance with power and honesty. I focused on conveying the angst and confusion that I had during the turbulent times of my youth, those which Beatrice and I had spoken about. These concepts were brought full circle as similar feelings of frustration, anticipation, and confusion towards change are so present for me as a graduating senior. As the concert series progressed, my performances became more expressive and vulnerable; in each performance, I went further into this exploration, opening a

side of me that I typically don't expose and became extremely grateful for this experience. In previous performances, I found myself tuning into previous corrections during rehearsals and not pushing boundaries. I usually push the boundaries in rehearsal, but now I had the freedom to explore on the stage more freely since it was my performance project. In the last show, I completely focused on risk and vulnerability.

The second solo was the centerpiece of the trio and reflected my experiences in Europe. If I were to describe my time in Denmark and my entire time abroad with just one word: dream. I wanted the audience to experience the emotional, dreamy bundle of memories that I had collected while traveling through Europe through this performance. The lighting consisted of hazy blues, pinks, and purples, which created soft edges on the stage, similar to my vision of a dream; I wanted the lighting and environment to represent the darkness and blurry vision that a person might feel when they try to remember a dream. I selected the romantic ballad of Dustin O'Halloran's *Opus 23* as the perfect soundscape due to its repetitive, piano narrative as the canvas of my vision for this solo. I found that my solo would be suited to a costume that was feminine, flattering, and moved with the flow of the solo. These elements helped create my vision of what capturing the feeling of remembering sweet, nostalgic memories could look like.

In the performance of this solos, I focused on being clear. Instead of mimicking what I had once done, I represented many times in my life that I felt the audience could hone into, empathize, and experience with. While I performed, I did not want to relive the memories I once had but instead, the nostalgia I felt while watching videos and souvenirs of my travels. This choreography was extracted from improvisations that I filmed and then manipulated certain movements and phrases. This process of extracting from my own improvisations and then copying the body design that I saw in the video caused me to highlight the concepts such as

spatial progression, projection, and pathway. I manipulated the movement by emphasizing the locations of Laban's Scale A that I found through improvisation. I then changed the pathways and focus points of each body design to create a new phrase. Also, I focused on spatial progression and spatial projection in creating a prominent diagonal and I used this diagonal to be the representation to my actual progression through Europe. Using these tools helped connect the knowledge that I gained abroad as a choreographer. To prepare for the performance, I watched my videos and flipped through my planner scrapbook in order to recall these memories. Since I made this work while at Trinity Laban, the changes inspired by Laban's choreutic definitions made the physical work even more special.

The third solo opened the second act of the show, directly after intermission. Rather than music, *Surrender* featured the spoken work in the prominent voice of Nina Simone. Her words are the reflection of one who is explaining the hopes and fears that she will not be seen as who she is, only for her struggles. She recites:

*We've only prayed that you would see us not as those that fought our mothers
And fathers
And brothers and sisters at war.
That amplify personification of one who bares guilt,
But with the knowledge of our challenge
And the acceptance of our penance.
Be us not impatient in our destiny
We open the door to our souls
And allow our beings to be seized in those heartfelt things we cannot see
All that we were cannot be changed
See us as we are; human, whole, and creations of god.
Human, whole, and creations of god.
Our spirits ascend and celebrate, for we have reached the edge of the earth and found it not our
journeys end.
We have reached the edge of the earth and found ourselves within.
I only pray that you will see me as one who loves my mother, and father, and brother and sister,
No war!
That amplify personification of I, who surrender.
To the knowledge of my challenge and my penance.
For we have reach the edge of the earth and found it not our journeys end.
I have reached the edge of the earth and found myself within.*

I chose this solo as the final performance in the trilogy because it represented a surrender to life's challenges. I used these words to carry the emotion and power in my movement. I entered with strong, bright beams of white light. I wore a Deeply Rooted costume from the same time period that *Surrender* was first performed. The color, which was pastel lavender, matched as closely as possible the piece's original costume. While staying true to Iega's choreography, I felt my passion for this movement and gratitude for dance and I ultimately wanted that to shine throughout my performances. To end, the piece faded to black slowly in Simone's last words, making her statement of freedom resound in the darkness.

In this process, I found that each solo had very different elements and stark differences to define the stages of my life. The first solo focused on frustration. The significant spatial pattern in this solo was a circle, that represented the frustrating feelings in my past. The second solo focused on the feeling of a dream. The choreography came from improvisation that I then extracted and highlighted choreographic lessons from Trinity Laban. The emotion stemmed from the curated book I created while I was abroad. This spatial pattern represented the timeline of events I was recalling in the Fall of 2019. The third solo was my surrender to my next chapter. This choreography focused on the strength and surrender. While the first two solos focused on spatial patterns, the sharp, high intensity movement connected to the solo's purpose of pushing my body and mind to take on a previously explored experience into my own timeline to represent the abandon in movement that I have found. My original goal with this project was to demonstrate that I was strong and ambitious.

Before entering the stage, I would listen to Simone's words, close my eyes, and envision the feeling of gratitude for the new beginning to come. As I step into my professional dance

career, I anticipate lots of change and frustration with the moving parts of life, yet I anticipate surrendering and finding my true self within each struggle.

A Trilogy of Modern Solos; Reflecting on Traveling Through Europe and the US was the physical diary of my reflections as a dancer and person. The work's foundation is the memory of feelings and emotions that are transformed into movement and brought to the present. My processes and choices decided before the performances are those that help define each solo as its own memory. The work of finding resources and creating new pieces of two to three-minute solos created a stronger performer within me and a greater sense of responsibility as I pursue my professional career. The results and significance of this project extend to students who follow behind me and feel their passion for performance can be broader than the United States to explore their past, present, and future life on the stage.

During the process, I focused on the linear timeline as the foundation of the trilogy. I put my own perceptions above that of the audience. Upon reflection as a post-performer and creator, work like this needs to have a greater tie for the audience to perceive the work as three key components that create a whole. I would do this by costuming, music, or choreographic decisions. In my original thesis, I wanted this to be a physical scrapbook I can look back on yet I could have also presented this work as something more by using the trilogy as a tool to elevate the experience for the audience and still have each solo as their own individual reflection of myself.

Experiencing the pitfalls and success of artmaking, grant writing, finding artists to collaborate with, and understanding the necessities of rehearsal space were some of the life-long lessons I carry as a future performer and arts administrator. I worked collaboratively and professionally with people of different expertise such as choreography, building management,

production, performance, and the management of musical and choreographic rights. This project encompassed more than being a choreographer and a performer: it incorporated the practice of curating and presenting work while working with the logistics of how that movement can be performed with integrity as it is shared while representing artists that were included in this project by gaining rights for music and choreography. My struggles were held within the insecurity of my past self, and I am astounded to see my work and the work of others within my body. I had a great agency of what this project could be and as I reflect, I notice how scared I was to make the wrong decision. The agency a student is able to have at Ohio State with their senior project can help them realize the power of what making decisions can set in motion for their future self, like I have realized now. I am proud to have experienced the joy of performance and witness the effect on my friends, family, and strangers.

The decisions I have made in this project created a window of opportunity. Deeply Rooted has hired me as an intern as the Assistant to the Artistic Director. The team has expressed that they anticipate the work I do as an opportunity to achieve a full-time job that I will fulfill as time goes on. I had the rich history with Deeply Rooted, but this project brought my ability to reach out, create and fulfill a project, represent myself as a professional, and lead into a future as an arts administrator to light. While working with Dominique on my solo, we talked more about my dedication to the arts and my hope to work in arts administration and performance. We built a relationship and moved forward with connection with newly appointed Artistic Director, Nicole Clarke-Springer. My work with professor of Dance Management, Michelle Sipes, at Ohio State was the water to my growth in order to be confident that I can take on this job. Her mentorship in the interview process and the materials I gathered lead me to grasp the opportunity

and not let go. It has propelled me to have a future as an active participant in a company that I see so much value in for audiences and summer intensive participants just like me.

I am incredibly grateful for the support I received on this project. I was honored to be chosen as the recipient of OSU Department of Dance Undergraduate Arts Research Scholarship for this project. I am finding it hard to say goodbye to performing along this group of exceptional advisors, friends in the department, and family that was willing to travel great distances to see me perform in my college years. I cannot think of a better way to honor my past experiences and lessons. This project from studying abroad, the challenges of being a performer, and the future responsibility of being a professional modern dancer.

Works Cited

Laban, Rudolf. (1966). *Choreutics*. Dance Books Ltd.

Links to Resources:

Journey Performance: <https://youtu.be/WrBgCll4ezk>

Lean In, and Fall Performance: <https://youtu.be/Djr0ExCtpds>

Surrender Performance: <https://youtu.be/LyKWKrXdXdA>

Video Diaries: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLVsM1N1Hi4xrPk859ji-Dhyw3uqhe2H0R>

Journey Rehearsal: <https://youtu.be/MeSwJdfxvc8>

Lean In, and Fall Rehearsal: <https://youtu.be/HrgLf8yLiJI>

Surrender Rehearsal: <https://youtu.be/gWKtByzgupU>

Surrender Original Performance: <https://youtu.be/Ru3EYbgQcYA>