

Abstract

This written thesis includes my research and investigation into the ideologies of cultural relevance, equity and inclusion through the legacy and lineage of the Horton technique at The Ailey School. I examine the history of Lester Horton, Alvin Ailey and my experiences as an Ailey student, dancer and educator for nearly thirty years. I used this knowledge in the creation of my choreographic thesis offering, *Roots and Routes*. In this work I explored the historical and contextual framework of Horton at The Ailey School, while additionally giving voice to the use of this traditional, codified modern dance technique as a foundational tool in the creation of contemporary work.

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

LINEAGE AND LEGACY: HORTON THROUGH THE AILEY LENS, THEN AND NOW

by

Lakey Evans-Peña

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Montclair State University

In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

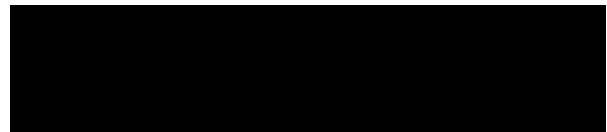
Master of Fine Arts

May 2020

College/School: College of the Arts

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Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful and would like to thank the following people for their support and contributions to the process, performative and written components of this thesis project:

My husband, Rick Peña, and my children Gabriel and Isadora for their patience and love.

All of the Montclair State University graduate faculty; Elizabeth McPherson, Kathleen Kelley, Claire Porter, Apollinaire Scherr, Maxine Steinman, Penelope Hanstein, Neil Balwin, Allen Maniker and Trebien Pollard with special thanks to my thesis sponsor Christian von Howard and thesis committee members Lauren Grant and Jessica Dimauro.

The Ailey School, Melanie Person, and the amazing Horton masters and oral history contributors, Milton Myers, Ana Marie Forsythe, Tracy Inman and Freddie Moore.

My longtime friend Martin Lofsnes, who joined me on this journey in dance and Linda Kent who was instrumental to the artistic fruition of *The Beloved*.

To my wonderfully vibrant dancers; Devika Chandnani, Dominique Dobransky, Paulin Maindron and Ellie Sato.

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Introduction

Horton Through the Ailey Lens: Then and Now is a heritage project which covers the evolution of the Lester Horton technique from the 1920-1950's, the impact of Horton and his work on modern dance pioneer Alvin Ailey, and my present day teaching and dance making practices which are rooted and deeply influenced by these two artists. The prolific movement architecture created by Lester Horton was a conduit for both of these men to share their artistic visions and continues on today as an esteemed vehicle to train dancers at The Ailey School. Horton and Ailey used the Horton technique as an innovative methodology to feed their choreographic process. By creating a technique built to strengthen and empower dancers on a physical and conceptual level, Horton provided foundational tools for dancers to demonstrate their artistic versatility not only in the dance studio, but also through his culturally responsive choreography. Ailey embedded Horton's technique as a kinesthetic tool and cultural construct first through his work as a choreographer and later through the mission of his dance school. Frequently using a narrative approach to create choreographic work, both men chose to build pieces which dealt with the human condition, inviting audiences to engage in questioning perspectives surrounding race, culture and equity. I strive to incorporate these concepts and ideologies in my teaching and choreographic work in the present day. Through my

studio, rehearsal and dance making process, I seek to bridge the historical and contemporary entry points to the Horton technique in a way that enhances my students' understanding of the dance form and uses these two visionaries' breadth of work as examples to challenge their artistic range.

As a pupil and master teacher of the Horton Technique, I use this thesis project to encapsulate the ideologies of cultural diversity, equity and inclusion practiced by Horton and Ailey. This journey will uncoil the historical works and oral histories of these two pioneers to investigate the social, emotional and conceptual impact of the Horton technique as a means to issue forward adaptive pedagogy for students and new choreographic works for audiences based on the principles of their dance lineage.

Rationale

For a very long time, I did not understand what it meant to be African American. As a biracial woman, African American and Welsh American (Caucasian), I always felt like an outlier navigating the world. I lived with my white mother in a white neighborhood and was raised mostly by my white grandparents. I struggled to understand how I fit in racially amongst my peers. A very physical child, I was most at peace when I was moving: dancing, swimming, running and playing at every possible moment. Like many rambunctious children whose parents yearned for a way to focus their child's energy, I started taking movement classes at a young age. Dance classes became a refuge for me growing up. Often one of the only people of color at the various studios I attended, the

pervasive feeling of otherness was with me during classes, but everything fell to the side when it was time to rehearse and perform. There I felt complete freedom to be myself and was rewarded when I received recognition from the audience.

In my 14 years of dance training before college, I had only one teacher who was African-American and never did I have a male dance instructor. This all changed when I was accepted into the University of The Arts in Philadelphia as a dance major. Coming in as a predominantly jazz-trained dancer, I had never taken any kind of modern dance class before until I found myself standing in a parallel second position at the beginning of Milton Myers' Horton technique class. Day after day I danced and listened in awe of this powerful and joy-filled African American man. It's through his teaching practice that I felt connected to a larger sense of diversity and inclusion, the seeds of a cultural kinship began to blossom. By the end of my freshman year, I was forever changed by the technique itself and the tangible skills I acquired which included dynamic shifts and falls, vibrant expression, and physical daring. All of the things that I loved about jazz dance were being asked of me in the methodology of Horton's Fortifications, Preludes, and Movement Studies. There, I found a new sense of power and strength brewing in my body. Both the structure of the technique and the delivery by Mr. Meyers invited me to kinesthetically explore my body and how I might empower myself internally and externally, resulting in a complete shift of my artistic path. No longer focused on jazz dance or my passion for musical theater, I was now committed to seeing where modern dance would take me.

The first time I viewed the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater was during my junior year in college. I became overwhelmed by the beauty as well as the blackness of the company and its repertory. Never had I seen so many incredible dancing bodies on stage, various shades of brown skin, and doing such amazing technical and expressive work. Here was the cultural representation I longed for since I was a young rambunctious little girl. Every part of my being wanted to look like them. I wanted to dance like that and be a part of a company like that. Was it the rich repertory inclusive of modern, jazz, ballet and more? Was it the gorgeous bodies, each unique and varied in aesthetic beauty? Was it the level of expressiveness and performance prowess that reached out and grabbed me? Yes, to all of that and more. The Ailey company was celebrating what it meant to be African American. The choreographic works by Mr. Ailey spoke to our shared experiences through their textured layers of expression, pointing more to the commonalities between people rather than to the differences.

After speaking with Mr. Myers, who was concurrently part of the teaching faculty at The Ailey School, I sought to continue my dance training in New York City at The Ailey School after graduation. I remember with great clarity walking into The Ailey School for the 1992 summer intensive audition. An enormous sense of openness and inclusion came over me as I had never been in the presence of so many dancers of color from all over the world. Thrilled to receive a full scholarship in the professional division program after auditioning, I continued my technical and artistic training at the school for the next two years. The distinguishing factors between this time in my Horton training

versus that of my undergraduate education were the tangible connections to cultural relevance, equity and inclusion that I experienced. I always felt there was an invitation and encouragement by the Ailey School instructors to explore our artistry by bringing our individuality and personal identity into the Horton classroom. This was not something I experienced in other classes and techniques. After so many years of not feeling a sense of belonging, it was through my time here that I found my voice and a better sense of my identity as a person of color by being encouraged to make connections to a history and culture of which I was clearly a part. During my time at the Ailey School we were training to be ourselves, creating a performance practice and artistry inclusive of our personal identities while celebrating cultural diversity. Mr. Ailey himself voiced, “This school belongs to everybody. This is going to be a place where we can make dances, where we can keep the techniques alive” (Ailey and Bailey 136).

Since that first summer, I have spent almost three decades as a student, performer, répétiteur, coach, and master teacher in the dance field with my main focus derived from the Horton lineage. During the last two years in the Montclair State University MFA program I have reflected upon my personal and professional journey, unearthing my preconceived sense of self and cultural identity. Many of the pedagogical readings, research, and conversations surrounding the development of culturally responsive learning environments have enabled me to realize how much I intuitively incorporate culturally diverse, equitable, and inclusive methodologies in my teaching and dance making practices. Using my Horton-Ailey dance lineage as the focal point for this thesis

heritage project, my scholarly inquiry seeks to discover and highlight the historical, social, and contextual relevance this pedagogical approach has in today's contemporary dance field.

Research

Lester Horton

My time spent at the Performing Arts Library at Lincoln Center introduced me to a wealth of information about Horton's life, personality and choreographic process. This included interviews of Alvin Alvin, Jimmy Truitte, Bella Lewitsky, and a television program in dedication to Lester Horton where Carmen De Lavellade, Alvin Ailey and James Truitte perform four of his works: *Sarong Paramibom*, *Orozco*, *The Beloved*, and *The Liberian Suite*. Though each piece is vastly different in content, texture and meaning, one cannot help but notice the infusion and array of cultural movements and references in the work. I have long been fascinated with Lester Horton, the development of the Horton technique and the lasting impact the movement and the man had on the artists who worked with him, most notably, Alvin Ailey. Taking into consideration the generations of vibrant artists this technique has supported and helped foster, I was excited to begin researching the inspirations behind the Horton technique. In addition to expanding my background knowledge of Horton, I hoped to more fully understand the creative impetus, ideas, and reasoning that inspired him to construct a dance technique.

Lester Horton was a prolific teacher, choreographer and creator. Born in Peru, Indiana in 1906, Horton developed an early passion for nature and Native American culture. Moving frequently before the age of ten, he and his parents finally settled in Indianapolis when Horton was twelve. There he spent much of his time at the children's museum participating in classes, storytime and outdoor events. In 1922 he attended a Denishawn concert at the Murat Theater. Performing in that evening's concert were Ted Shawn, Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman. Captivated by the grandeur of the costumes and fascinating exoticism of the dancing, Horton decided to pursue the stage.

He studied ballet and 'cross cultural' movement and, in 1926, was hired as Dance Master and Art Director for the Indianapolis' Little Theater production of *The Song of Hiawatha*. For the production he spent time training in Native American dance and music on several reservations in Indiana and New Mexico. Horton created an outdoor extravaganza replete with bonfires, teepees and a community orchestra playing authentic Native American music. This experience as choreographer, costume and set designer proved pivotal to Horton's life.

Along with Native American cultural influences, Horton was impacted by Javanese, Balinese, and African dance. When he moved to California, he also studied and performed with Japanese dance artist Michio Ito. Many of Horton's interests in cultural and folk dances are reflected in his early choreography and technique. These experiences also played a distinct role in the artistic, socially progressive, and inclusionary

environment he cultivated in his school and company. Often lauded to have had the first racially integrated dance company in the United States, the Lester Horton Dance Theater and school were open to all people of all colors and from all backgrounds. Located in West Hollywood California, the company and school provided a place for black dancers to learn at a time during which they were not able to take class in most white dance schools and studios. Carmen de Lavallade, celebrated dancer, actress, choreographer, teacher, and member of the Lester Horton Dance Theater from 1949-1954 affirms:

Lester was a generous and brilliant artist and humanitarian who knew how to connect with people and how to build them up as human beings as well as dancers. He knew how to find the hidden parts of his dancers and then bring them forward. Lester taught us every aspect of dance and of being part of the dance world. This included teaching us not only dance technique but other crucial things, such as stage etiquette and how to differentiate between healthy competition and the more destructive kind. His reasoning was that each of us is unique and has had unique things to offer as dancers. Thus there is no reason for jealousy. Lester's choreography is logical in that its movements are those that one normally does in such circumstances. He taught not only movement but also underneath, the soul of what we were doing and why we were doing it. He was very much interested in performance, what comes out of my body. Lester also taught us to be open to dance forms from a variety of sources, just as he was. It was this same openness that spurred Lester to transcend the racial climate of his

time and create a truly multiethnic company. Lester, the man, the artist, and the teacher, was a master in each area. (Ailey and Bailey 70)

The essence of those same ideologies can be viewed in Horton's approach to movement. From the 1920's until his death in 1953, he focused on developing a movement technique that evolved from non-balletic corrective exercises to an expressive movement vocabulary that invited dancers to be strong and demonstrative in their physical and theatrical performance. In Horton's words, he created "a technique which will correct physical faults and prepare a dancer for any type of dancing he may wish to follow, a technique having all the base movements which govern the actions of the body, combined with a knowledge of the origin of movement and a sense of artistic design" (Forsythe et al. 9). Those who studied with him speak of dancing for hours at a time in his classes, developing one concept or idea. He was interested in the varied potential ways individuals carried out their movement tasks.

Bella Lewitzky started taking classes at the Horton school as a teen in 1934. She quickly skyrocketed to leading roles in Horton's choreography, serving as his muse for 15 years. During that period, she was also instrumental as a creative artist and collaborator in the development of Horton's technique and new works. Elucidating his creative process, Lewitzky shares,

He came from nothing. He was a maverick. He developed a very separate branch of dance...he began to develop his own vocabulary experimentally. So in the

company I joined, very often the instruction would be how many ways can you rise from the floor and we would all get to work on it. He would be the final artistic selecting voice, but we would all get to learn cooperatively. (Lewitzky interview)

Horton's teachings, process and humanity had a profound impact on generations of dancers in the 20th century and continue through this day. Although he died young, the artists he trained--most notably Bella Lewitzky, Alvin Ailey, Carmen De Lavallade, Joyce Trisler and James Truitte--carried on his principles and methodology. Horton's teachings enduringly serve students at The Ailey School, as well as at multiple institutions across the United States, sustaining a lineage that shapes and inspires dancers, choreographers and educators.

Horton to Ailey

Ailey professed, "The reason I do what I do now is because of this wonderful man, Lester Horton who made me feel, a young black man in Los Angeles, living in the ghetto, that I was meaningful. That I meant something" (Interview by Billie Mahoney).-In 1947, a young African-American high school student named Alvin Ailey began his dance journey at the Lester Horton Dance Theater. Spurred into observing and then taking classes by his high school friend Carmen de Lavallade (who also studied at the Horton school), Ailey took his first Horton dance class with Marjorie Perces, a teacher and dancer in the company from 1946-1950. Though Ailey took classes with many dance

field greats, including Martha Graham, Hanya Holm and Katherine Dunham, the teachings, sensitivity, and the feeling of home was found with Lester Horton and the Horton Dance Theater. Here he established the foundation from which his choreography, school, arts-in-education, and artistic philosophy stemmed. Horton's technique as well as his beliefs of equity and inclusion were carried forward and expanded upon by Mr. Ailey with specific focus to African-American dancers, artists and culture.

When Horton died suddenly in 1953, Ailey and the other dancers of the Horton Dance Theater tried to keep the company and school going. Invited to dance in New York in a Broadway show called *House of Flowers*, Ailey and de Lavallade moved to New York for what was to be a temporary period before returning to California and the Horton company. Neither one made the return. Ailey, living in the lush and vibrant NYC dance scene, became a proponent catalyst in creating a space where African-American dancers would be viewed and appreciated for their artistic and creative contributions. Using all that he had learned under Horton, Ailey choreographed a show performed at the 92nd Street Y in 1958. This historic evening was received with tremendous success. The dances, based on Ailey's memories of growing up black in rural Texas, showcased an all African American cast. This was a pivotal moment for Ailey as a choreographer as well as for African Americans in modern dance. The performance led to the forming of his own company, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and subsequently the forming of the entire Ailey organization which includes a second company-Ailey II, The Ailey School, Ailey Arts-in-Education and Community Programs, Ailey Extension and

AileyCamp. In his own words Ailey speaks to Horton's impact on his artistic and organizational aspirations:

What I've been trying to do through all the years with my school and my company is to create that feeling of love, of caring, that we had with Lester. Lester's approach was to give you the feeling that you and he were creating together. He never made you feel: *I'm doing this*. Instead it was: *We're doing this together*. Lester would say, *We're going to buy some costumes, family*.

When I finally became a choreographer, I took all of that with me, all of his ideas about sharing and about being a family. (Ailey and Bailey 62)

From dancer to celebrated cultural ambassador, Ailey's choreographic works, company, school and community look to promote the inclusive, equitable and culturally relevant training he experienced under the tutelage of Lester Horton.

The Horton School to The Ailey School

The Ailey School first opened in 1969 at the Brooklyn Academy in Brooklyn, NY. Throughout its 51 years of existence and several location changes, the school now resides in its permanent home. Located on the corner of West 55th street and Ninth avenue in NYC, the six story state-of-the-art facility dedicated entirely to the Ailey Organization opens its doors daily to students of all levels and backgrounds. As per Ailey's stance on the inclusion of African-Americans in the modern dance scene (and

really all dance scenes) the school has always focused on making dance available to those often marginalized, dismissed, and denied due to the color of their skin.

This inclusivity and equity extends nationally and internationally as well. In 2008, a U.S. Congressional resolution designated the Company as “a vital American cultural ambassador to the world” that celebrates the uniqueness of the African-American cultural experience and the preservation and enrichment of the American modern dance heritage.¹ The Ailey performances, lecture/demonstrations, arts-in-education residencies, and master classes have inspired movers from all over the world to come to the school to expand their training. In addition to the company and the school, the Ailey organization’s mission to give dance back to the people is delivered through programs designed for all ages and levels. There’s the national AileyCamp programs for at risk youths, Ailey Arts-in-Education and Community residencies, as well as the Ailey Extension program which offers “real classes for real people” seven days a week on location at the Ailey School. There is a richness and diversity in the genres, styles and dance techniques offered in all of the programming. The celebration and inclusion of cultural, social, traditional and contemporary movement modalities throughout the programming at The Ailey School speaks to Ailey’s vision of dance for everybody. As Thomas DeFrantz notes, “Ailey created a thriving cultural institution balanced on the double-edged sword of race” (“Dancing Revelations” 239). What makes the instruction of the Horton

¹ Alvinaley.org, <https://www.alvinaley.org/about/alvin-aley-american-dance-theater>

technique distinct are the direct ties to the Horton lineage and the articulation of the technique through the Ailey works.

In speaking of the impact of one of Ailey's more iconic works, *Revelations*, DeFrantz summarizes my thoughts on the artistic education at the school as he explains the effect of the work:

For contemporary audiences, the work enacted the crucible of race relations born of slavery, but through an emphatically systemized representation of order, dignity, and public possibilities for physical expression. In many ways, *Revelations* answered the call to create an American system of dance representation that might be inhabited by any dancing body, but would speak to an American history shared regardless of class background." ("Dancing Revelations" 239)

Methodology

Horton in the 20th Century: Inspiration

Of interest to me as an educator of a traditional codified technique and a practitioner of contemporary movement and dance making, are ways to incorporate modernized teaching practices of this systemized work while maintaining its principles. To this point, my present studio practice offers students an opportunity to engage with and implement traditional artistic and performative skills. Inherent in the technique are the methods for investigating the multitude of contemporary possibilities the dancing

body informs and conveys as an unspoken language. I seek challenges to dive into issues pertinent both to myself and the field by asking these questions: How do I investigate the multiple ways traditional and contemporary pedagogical methodologies complement and repel each other. And how does the teaching of traditional and contemporary pedagogical methodologies inform and support the growth of creative practice and technical artistry in today's dance artists in higher education and conservatory programs? How do we honor the traditional and historical framework of the Horton-Ailey lineage as it was passed down while also exploring the technique through contemporary modalities? How do I engage in discussions with my students and explore these concepts as a way of building a toolkit when approaching the Ailey work and beyond? Finally, how do I/we progress and encompass the growing field of culturally relevant pedagogy in our studio, rehearsal, and choreographic process? As a leading advocate for culturally relevant teaching in dance education, Nyama McCarthy-Brown proclaims, "As educators, we decide what is important for students to learn. If we do not shine a light on the people and communities outside the dominant culture we fail our students and perpetuate a lie. It is a lie to think that only the dominant culture is worth our study and contains artistic techniques of value" (23). In prioritizing this inclusionary approach to research and theory, I seek to expand the usage of culturally relevant pedagogy as a contributing factor in dance education.

Several years before beginning my MFA journey, I was drawn to deeply examine and enlarge my teaching practices and methodologies to reroot and discover alternate

angles of the Horton technique and the Horton-Ailey lineage. In the past decade, my teaching practices have broadened with the implementation of contemporary and somatic methodologies. This includes teaching a creative movement curriculum based on Anne Green Gilbert's *Braindance* pedagogy in arts-in-education residencies. Motivated to further synthesize my traditionalist Horton teaching philosophy and creative movement teaching practice for my elementary through high school students, I applied and enrolled in the Montclair State University MFA graduate program.

The initial inspiration for *Roots & Routes*, the choreographic and performance components of this MFA thesis project, began during the first semester's coursework as we explored dance films in the *Dance Technology* course. The idea of projecting video footage onto dancers as part of a living cyclorama immediately entered my mind. I imagined how this use of a digital medium could serve as the entry point for my work bridging traditional and contemporary perspectives of the Horton technique. Initially, I was unsure how to best utilize the digital medium and what exactly I would create with it, but I imagined this would be an ideal method for bringing the past and present together. I began to envision how I might use digital frames to communicate and contextualize the historical importance of Horton's work as a modern dance pioneer and to show how Horton and Ailey's philosophy of cultural relevance, equity and inclusion continue to be instrumental in the creative and artistic practice at The Ailey School.

During the oral history interviews for my *Research, Writing and Publication* coursework, I was astounded by my initial discussion with Milton Myers (audio

recording). Having never heard the full story of his artistic journey, I was inspired by his untapped historical knowledge. My next step was to seek out additional interviews, writings, and conversations to gain a more expansive understanding of Horton's legacy. In tandem with this investigation of Horton, I engaged in research to understand why Ailey advanced the continuation of Lester Horton's technique in The Ailey School curriculum.

Beyond my study of these amassed materials, I conducted a series of interviews with the dancers and educators who significantly contributed to the continuation of the Horton lineage at The Ailey School: Ana Marie Forsythe, Tracy Inman and Freddie Moore. Ana Marie Forsythe (Chair of the Horton Department at the Ailey School since 1979, co-author of *The Dance Technique of Lester Horton* and my instructor and mentor) provided remarkable information in relation to the pivotal role Joyce Trisler had in weaving the technique into the roots of the school. Trisler danced with Ailey at the Horton Dance Theater and along with Jimmy Truitte, was part of the first generation of Horton legacy authorities after Horton's passing. While I was quite familiar with the fact that Forsythe had completed considerable research with Marjorie Perces to co-author the book cataloguing the Horton technique, I was not aware she learned the framework and methods first from Trisler and then from Truitte. Most fascinating about this history was the completely different way Trisler and Truitte delivered their teaching practices. In both Forsythe's and Myers' accounts, Trisler's breath, length and expansive use of space are emphasized. She used the movement of the technique as a tool for artistic process and

discovery. Forsythe shared that Trisler was not tightly bound by specific counts or structures. She taught the technique as an evolving organic form where dancers could use the technique to problem solve and self-cue in the moment.

In contrast, Truitte's teaching methods emphasized correct structure, placement and specificity. He would not deviate from the Horton framework meant to build individual strength and power, believing a dance artist could reach their potential through the adherence to, rather than stray from, the structures. In an interview with Benjamin Harkarvy, Truitte observed, "The technique is a very objective approach to the anatomy. The technique, any changes in it were designed on the members of the company. It was not a personal statement of one body." Ailey's first teacher Marjorie Perces notes:

Lester had a special talent for investigating movement. He was very concerned with each dancer's body, so his technique focused on developing weaker parts of the body—feet, back, abdominal muscles. He created new motions with quite simple lines that are eminently achievable by dancers. His technique also focused on motion designed to extend joint mobility and on constant explorations of theirs for descending to and ascending from the floor into horizontal positions. Thus it has the potential to evoke a rich variety of expressive motions. (Ailey and Bailey 70)

To complete my series of interviews, I added to my cache by speaking with Tracy Inman, Co-Director of The Ailey School, former member of Alvin Ailey American

Dance Theater and Freddie Moore, certificate program graduate, Ailey II member and the current Rehearsal Director for the Ailey Fordham Student Dancers. Having amassed a rich body of resource materials to choose from, I set about editing the video footage for the first section of the piece. As this process continued, I started to reflect on my role as a dancer and felt the drive to revisit my role as a performer. These ruminations led me to the next section of the project.

Performers are often tasked with expressing a narrative. Having danced many of the works of Ailey, I began thinking about the possibility of including a work of Horton's in my thesis concert that I would perform. What better way to encapsulate a time period than through the embodiment of a work by a creator from that period? I contacted the Dance Notation Bureau and began the process of applying for approval to restage Lester Horton's 1948 duet, *The Beloved*. An extremely dramatic piece, it tells the story of a pious man who suspects his wife of infidelity and strangles her. I also reached out to Linda Kent, former dancer with both the Ailey and Paul Taylor companies and current master teacher and stager of Taylor's works. She recounted her experience performing Horton's duet with both Dudley Williams and Clive Thompson while in the Ailey Company.

Inspired to take to the stage after a decade, I moved forward into rehearsals as both dancer and maker. Integrating my research and collected oral histories, I set to work analyzing the information and combining it with my own knowledge and experiences, to begin the process of dancemaking.

The Choreographic Thesis Performance: Roots & Routes

Section I-Reflections

The work begins with four dancers (three recent Horton trained graduates of the Ailey/Fordham BFA Program and one scholarship student) standing in stillness while a video montage of collected interviews and archival footage provides historical context as the piece evolves. This video projects directly onto the dancers' full-length white tunics to serve as a symbol of the multiple legacies imprinted upon us. Each of the four students in my work embarked on a journey to immerse themselves in this legacy and to evolve their individual and creative practices through the Horton-Ailey lens. Coming from a myriad of training backgrounds, countries and cultures, these four dancers represent a contemporary voice that continues our dance ancestry path in the school today. Creating this juxtaposition of the past and present, the dancers move through the stage space demonstrating classic Horton forms showcasing the technique's lineage. The voices and images of the film (excerpts of my interviews) being projected onto their bodies share the direct connections to that lineage and why the work that we do as keepers of the Horton-Ailey lens is important, relevant and vital to the dance world today and in the future. The video embodies the philosophies of Horton, his all encompassing impact on Ailey, and the generational ties to the teaching practice of the technique at the school.

In the rehearsals during which I built the movement for this section, I tasked each dancer to choose basic, relatively stationary vocabulary from the Horton technique to

construct a slow phrase. This individual phrase, primarily performed facing the audience, served as the dancer's artistic contribution and revealed the components of the classroom work they felt particularly in tune with. As the interviewees talk about Lester Horton, Alvin Ailey and the Horton technique at The Ailey School, the dancers share a physical homage by embodying their chosen aspects of the technique. One by one, each dancer steps forward performing their phrase while the other three dancers in the background delineate the projected frame using a distinct repetition of the technique's architecture as they move through the space. Finishing their individual and group phrases, the dancers peel off to the sides of the stage, seen just enough to create disappearing shadows while the oral history continues to be heard and shared visually through the video montage. Dancing two by two in large loops from downstage to upstage, the dancers represent the passing of time, the ever present, the concept of moving forward. The section ends with Myers' advice to his students at the school: "You are about to go out there and audition. I need you to know that you are comfortable enough that if it's not looking like Horton, you still are strong enough and have enough movement and information to comfortably do it successfully" (Myers interview). This section addresses the history of the technique, its continued influence on today's dance field and lays the foundation for the next parts of the performance.

Section II-Lester Horton's *The Beloved*

In order to personally experience Horton's choreographic work as a means to better understand his artistic choices and viewpoints, I chose to restage and perform *The Beloved* in my thesis concert. As an preexisting work, this was not a required contribution to the thesis; however as an emissary of the Horton-Ailey legacy, performing the duet was an opportunity to artistically experience the historical, social and performative embodiment of a Horton work. Performing this duet with my longtime friend and dance colleague, Martin Lofsnes, fulfilled my desire to perform a work choreographed by Horton. After two decades of teaching the technique and performing using its structures, I wanted to experience and embody a creative offering from Horton himself. This intense work, a commentary on inequity and abuse between a domineering husband and a placating wife, required a deep dive into visceral dancing and kinesthetic empathy. The work demanded an acute and often exhaustive examination into this character which called for a constant manifestation of subservience and a reluctant acceptance of this unfamiliar behavior. Through rigorous rehearsals mapping the work and extensive coaching sessions with Linda Kent, I was physically and artistically transformed by these experiences of feeling insignificant, unequal and excluded in this submissive role. My connection to the Horton legacy deepened significantly, transcending far beyond my initial aspirations. Performing again at the age of forty-nine brought a resurgence and reflection on the profound gift each opportunity to take the stage truly is. The realization of performing one of Horton's artistic visions has sparked a further inspiration to stage

more of Horton's works in order to not only keep the technique legacy alive, but also the choreographic.

Section III-Soleness

I have come to understand how much I align with narrative dance. This is not to dismiss or undervalue abstract forms, or any forms of movement, it is to simply say that a story is how I live through a dance as a performer, educator and an audience member. It is why I choose to move; a vehicle for expression and communication. Much of my formative technical, artistic and performance practices evolved in my time as a student and dancer in the Ailey organization. Exploring the kinesthetic and thematic telling of a story was part of my training and performance career, and it is now part of my daily teaching practice.

For the third section of the project I wanted to challenge myself and the dancers to historically define how we physicalized movement as I had done through *The Beloved*. What I wanted to convey through this portion of the work was the bridging of the past and present through commonality and shared experiences. Driving this was the personification of the texture and emotional landscape of the Civil Rights movement inclusive of Ailey's initial 1958 concert event. Connecting this time with overarching themes of cultural relevance, equity and inclusion, I sought to place the dancers in the soft and taut spaces of those protestors who, by their everyday stance and actions, showed how dedicated solidarity and courageous belief could bring about change.

I shared with the dancers my research and thoughts on Horton's racially integrated company and the impact on Ailey and the sensibilities of the work at that time. We spoke at length about the reasons they chose the school to continue their artistic paths and we discussed Ailey's choreography. I explained how the articulation of the dancers performing in 1958 was different or the same as the movement they do today. Each one of the dancers, as part of their coursework, had learned and performed an excerpt of Ailey's *Revelations*. We used these experiences to inform our approach to movement in this section as the African-American artists performing in that first show were dancing with different facilities and mindsets. Ailey's use of his *blood memories* when creating *Revelations* defines the setting from a specific point of view. *Soleness* represents struggle, community and home. It personifies my connection to the Ailey organization. In honoring that connection, I choreographed my reflection on the dancers using the voice of the classical modalities of the Horton vocabulary. The dance begins as the dancers step forward into the future and back towards the past, reaching for each other's hands as a way to signify people coming together. Through the use of canons in this section, I designed the dance to be that of quiet strength and unrelenting principle. Like the thousands of silent protests that had taken place during the civil rights era, the tone and movement sequences transpired to convey a meditative oneness, a unified soleness.

Section IV-*Present Future*

For the last section of the work, I wanted to experiment with contemporary elements in relation to this codified technique. In the process of developing movement for *Present Future*, I utilized several choreographic approaches to create the content in collaboration with the dancers. Running parallel to my pedagogical process in exploring movement, I chose to deliberately engage with the dancers as author, pilot, facilitator and collaborator in terms of choreographic process. During the rehearsal period, the dancers acted as interpreters, contributors, and creators within the structure of movement sequences and conceptual improvisational tasks I presented to them. With all of us acting in the generation and development of the artistic content, we embodied a shared authorship.

Employing three pedagogical and choreographic theories developed during my Explanatory Model of the Dancemaking Process and Pedagogy of Artistic Practice as a dancemaker-at-work course work at Montclair State University (Creative Practices II Final Project), I exercised the following systems in the inquiry of the movement origination: 1) the practice of creating and emanating embodied knowledge as a means of communication; 2) embracing personal and collective power and abilities to deepen components of performance practice and construct a purposefully flexible environment, inclusive of form, shape, proficiency, concepts, creativity, self-reflection, peer observation; and 3) collective engagement as further means of expanding dancemaking and performance practice. Additionally, I proposed the broadening and expansion of the structures, concepts and methodology the dancers amassed as part of their Horton

training at the Ailey School. In this, we allowed ourselves to manipulate the movement vocabulary through a contemporary lens by interacting with the technique improvisationally. The absence of codified boundaries allowed for a more inclusive articulation of the movement phrases which incorporated ideas and styles currently being utilized in present day dance practices.

The culmination of our work synthesized linear gestures with a multitude of adaptable movement choices, demonstrating a successful bridge between an historic dance technique and contemporary movement modalities. As an educator and dance maker it is important that I engage my dancers in collaborative events marked by both internal and external explorations. I am not interested in them solely mimicking what I demonstrate; I endeavor to create opportunities for their introspection and investigation of movement to foster development of skills. This type of pedagogy encourages an authentic artistic and kinesthetic broadening which provides a depth that can be seen and felt by an audience.

Present Future exemplified the capacity to engage in the ethnographic traditions of the Horton technique yet simultaneously explore a contemporary versioning of the ethnography while maintaining its integral principles. *Roots and Routes* presented how we may use reflections on the past as a means of inquiry to possibilities of the future; how we view and value history, ourselves and the world around us.

Results and Implications for the Future

During the post-performance discussion there were so many wonderful contributing thoughts and reflections from the audience and the dancers. In response to my question to the audience to share their perspective on something they viewed in the work that resonated for them in how they carry their lineage and legacy in life, Vernard Gilmore, a 22 year veteran of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater commented, “Everybody was gorgeous. I always talk about the quality, and the quality (of Horton) was there. That’s one of the things that resonates with me with the technique. To really gain the quality when you have something to take on past and present.” Kevin Bosemen, also a former Ailey Company member, former Graham Company member and Broadway veteran observed:

I was very struck by what Milton said [in the *Reflections* projection] about training Horton dancers. How when they then go out into the world they are prepared to do anything, which is kind of what I did. The first quartet [*Soleness*] that was presented was very Horton-esque but then the second one [*Present Future*] was an expansion of the technique. That really resonated with me with what he (Myers) said and what you were able to do with the technique. I could still see Horton in there but it was more than Horton and that’s beautiful. That is the legacy and I am so honored to carry it within me.”

Tamar Drobransky answered, “You took us on a journey. You started with *Reflections* and you brought us till today and had the contemporary dancers of today showing it. As somebody who’s not trained in Horton, I could see the progression that I’m assuming you wanted to show us and how it stayed relevant and it was a very enjoyable journey that you took us on...thank you.”

From my perspective and as a result of our discussion, my answer to *where we go from here* is *onward*. The Ailey School’s commitment to the preservation of the Horton technique is vital to its survival and the relevant role it has and continues to play in the dance field. My work exhibited how we are able to use this traditional American artform as a foundational tool to discover movement through historical and contemporary modalities. There is much to continue to explore and make known about the pedagogical and choreographic legacy of Lester Horton and the Horton-Ailey connection. For educators and students, many of the components and ideas in this heritage project can be expounded upon in the research, development and delivery of culturally relevant perspectives in dance classrooms and studios. I intend to further advance my gathered research and physical knowledge by creating a studio and creative practice that uses a culturally relevant, equitable and inclusive platform utilizing the Horton-Ailey legacy. I have future interests in disseminating my research through written materials, lectures and workshops. I am committed to amplifying conversations around cultural relevance in the dance field. With this approach, I hope to contribute to the continued recognition and application of these aspects of pedagogy in higher education.

Through the improvisational work that contributed to this heritage project, it is clear there is much to be learned and taken from widening the exploration of codified technique through both a historical and contemporary lens. Consistently during the rehearsal process, the dancers demonstrated a deeper level of understanding of the technique, and I could see their individual identities bolstering with each moment spent creating this work. My continued engagement in this kind of experiential work is a priority for the evolution of my teaching and dance making practice. The ability to practice embodying traditional forms as they were structured as well as explore contemporary developments as to how the movement can be performed creates new inclusive movement language. There is much to be gained in the experience, discussion, and reflection of embodied movement from the mid 20th century. The molding of traditional Horton vocabulary with contemporary movement provided an avenue for these dancers to expand beyond previously experienced boundaries held inside of the technique. When we authentically engage with each other in the studio, rehearsal and in performance, we learn about each other, ourselves, and humanity. We can hold on to the knowledge of the past while living in the present and creating for the future. Each moment of the day is an opportunity to commune with what was, what is and what might be.

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Appendix: Thesis Concert Documentation

Program

LINEAGE & LEGACY:

HORTON THROUGH THE AILEY LENS MFA Thesis Concert by Lakey Evans-Peña

ROOTS & ROUTES

Reflections

Choreography: Lakey Evans-Peña

Danced by: Devika Chandnani, Dominique Dobransky, Paulin Maindron, Ellie Sato

Film by: Lakey Evans-Peña with interview contributions by Ana Marie Forsythe, Tracy Inman, Freddie Moore, Milton Myers

THE BELOVED (1948)

Lester Horton, "*The Beloved* attempts to state in pure dance terms the bigotry and sexual chauvinism that held women subservient in fin-de-siècle New England, a kinetic projection of the social savagery of the double standard."

Lester Horton's program notes for *The Beloved* read, "Out of an era of dogma and servility comes a phonetic theme leading to bigotry and violence."

Choreography: Lester Horton

Restaged by: Lakey Evans-Peña and Martin Lofsnes

Coached by: Linda Kent

Music: Judith Hamilton

Danced by: Lakey Evans-Peña and Martin Lofsnes

Costumes: Courtesy of Montclair State University Department of Dance & Theater, Lakey Evans-Peña

SOLENESS

Alvin Ailey, "I never thought of myself as a dancer. I thought of myself as Lester Horton. The man who did not dance but who gave to everybody else. I wanted to be Lester. Lester was such a wonderful man, such a beautiful spirit, such a wonderful human being. He just made you feel like you could do everything."

Choreography: Lakey Evans-Peña

Music: Michael Wall

Danced by: Devika Chandnani, Dominique Dobransky, Paulin Maindron, Ellie Sato

Costumes: Courtesy of The Ailey School

PRESENT FUTURE

Choreography: Lakey Evans-Peña in collaboration with the dancers

Music: Michael Wall

Danced by: Devika Chandnani, Dominique Dobransky, Paulin Maindron, Ellie Sato
Costumes: Courtesy of The Ailey School

*Performance Production Staff Stage Manager: Gina Solebello Lighting: Jonathan Doncker House Manager: Emily Riehle Crew:
Lauren Evans*

Special thanks to:

My husband Rick for his unwavering love and support Pat Boland for her beyond generous sponsorship
Ana Marie Forsythe, Tracy Inman, Freddie Moore and Milton Myers for their time and contributions to this work

Melanie Person

Martin Lofsnes

Linda Kent

Devika Chandnani, Dominique Dobransky, Paulin Maindron, Ellie Sato

Paiter and Isaac Van Yperen for the incredible chairs

Emily Riehle and Lauren Evans

Mark Eric Rodriguez, The Ailey School and Montclair State University Costume Department

The Ailey Performance Production and Studio Management Staff

And all of you, my family, friends, dancers, mentors, teachers and colleagues who enriched this concert with their love, time, knowledge, memories, listening, editing, artistry, and dedication to dance. I am blessed to share the beautiful history, vision and mission of Lester Horton, Alvin Ailey and The Ailey School.

The videos and speech included in this performance are for educational purposes only, not for commercial use. No copyright infringement is intended.

Photos:

Section One: Reflections



Dancers (left to right): Devika Chandnani, Ellie Sato, and Dominique Dobransky



Dancer: Ellie Sato

Section Two: Lester Horton's The Beloved



Dancers (left to right): Martin Lofsnes and Lakey Evans-Peña



Section Three: Soleness



Dancers (left to right): Ellie Sato, Dominique Dobransky, Paulin Maindron, and Devika Chandnani



Dancer: Devika Chandnani

Section Four: Present Future



Dancers (left to right): Devika Chandnani, Ellie Sato, and Paulin Maindron



Dancers (left to right): Devika Chandnani, Paulin Maindron, Dominique Dobransky, and Ellie Sato