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CRAIG, SAVANNAH RAE. Four Women. (1974)
Directed by: Miss Virginia Moomaw. Pp. 16

It was the purpose of this study to show four women from a historical view of slavery. This point of view was used to develop the moods, personalities, and movements of the four women. The four types of women concerned were those of a slave, a free mulatto, a prostitute, and a free black.

The first woman, a slave, executed movements which were somewhat spastic and displayed strong back contractions. The second woman, a free mulatto, was characterized by lyrical movements that often became tensed. The third woman, a prostitute, was concerned with seductive type movements of the torso, shoulders, and hips. And the fourth woman, a free bitter black, utilized strong, hard, explosive movements. All of the women except the last one were influenced by being a slave or existing during the time of slavery and all of them represented attitudes of black people as forces inherent in their lives.

The lighting for Four Women was very basic with no special lighting effects. The music used was by Nina Simone, entitled "Four Women", and, for purposes of this study, edited by Kevin Fitzpatrick. The costumes were similar in style but different in color. Each woman wore a long gathered skirt and long sleeve shirt.

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following
members of the Faculty of the Graduate School at the
University of North Carolina at Greensboro:

FOUR WOMEN
"

by

Savannah Rae Craig
"

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts

Greensboro
1974

Approved by

Virginia Moomaw
Thesis Adviser

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Thesis Adviser Virginia Moonaw

Committee Members Earl M. Dennis

L. Anderson

Herman M. Johnson

July 1, 1974
Date of Acceptance by Committee

FOUR WOMEN

By: Nina Simone

Edited by: Kevin Fitzpatrick

Arrangement for Dance

Dance I	Theme I
Dance II	Theme II
Dance III	Theme III
Dance IV	Overlapping of Themes
Dance V	Silence (3 minutes and 42 seconds)
Dance VI	Theme IV

Score: None Available

Recording: Phillips PHS 600-207

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to acknowledge and give thanks to the following persons for their unselfish time and assistance with the music, dance production and writing of this thesis:

Ms. Virginia Moomaw

Ms. Elsa Heimerer

Mr. Kevin Fitzpatrick

Ms. Laura Doyle

Ms. Bonnie Bérard

Ms. Maceo Robinson

Ms. Karen Langstron

Ms. Denise Massey

Mr. Andrew C. Jones

Choreography Class P.E. 686 - Summer, 1974

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INTRODUCTION

The thesis dance "Four Women" is based on historical reflections on slavery. As will be elaborated upon, the slavery system is one element which is the center of each woman's life. It is that system, too, along with each woman's attitude towards blackness, which dictates the mood, personality, and movements for each character.

The thesis dance is a character study of four women, each of whom represents an exponent of her life as she exists under the "roof" of being black. The first woman has skin of ebony color, wooly hair, and a back that has been strengthened by the exercise of hard work placed upon her by slave masters. "Aunt Sarah" is what she calls herself. The second woman is an illegitimate mulatto--too black to be white and having too much white to find comfortable refuge in blackness. And, so exists Safronia. Before black "became" so beautiful, the third woman might have been considered to be one of those "pretty negroes". Sweet Thing is fair skinned with long fine hair, has luscious lips and sexy hips and freely sells her virtue to anyone having the money to pay the price. And the fourth woman, Peaches, exists in bitterness and rebellion because, even at a time when she wears the strength of

freedom, she is burdened by the bondage of those before her.

When blacks were first brought to America they were part of an economic system called slavery. Under the term "slavery" belong many degrees of enslavement, such as serfdom, peonage, contract labor, patronism, white slavery, the acquisition of girls by purchase disguised as dowry, child labor, prison labor, and through history the status of many prisoners of war.¹ For purposes of this study, the author describes slavery as a set of conditions whereby one person subordinates another, usually by the exercise of coercion, and exerts some proprietorship, either legally or customarily. It has been stated earlier that "Four Women" is a character study; hence, the historical reflections thereto will be directed towards slavery.

My skin is black, my arms are long
 My hair is wooly, my back is strong
 Strong enough to take the pain, inflicted again
 and again
 What do they call me? My name is Aunt Sarah.

There is no doubt, from the description, that Aunt Sarah is a slave who has been "shipped on order" directly from Africa. She bears the typically long arms of an African, has the unique wooly hair of an African, and

¹Albert Woodruff Gray, "Slavery," Collier's Encyclopedia, (1971), XXI, 73.

proudly acclaims her black skin to being that of an African. Aunt Sarah's skin is so black--so purely black--because her blood has only been mixed with "black" blood, and, because so much slave work in the out of doors has given the sun ample time to scorch her with the heat of its rays. Her back is strong because it has been strengthened by the exercise of physical labor, which has become her tool of survival. And, yet, her strong back has had to bear much pain. All slaves were liable to the arbitrary cruelty of their masters. To some slaves, slavery might have been regarded as a misfortune. To Aunt Sarah it was a wrong. Some slaves might not have felt resentment against their masters unless they were ill-treated. Aunt Sarah felt that slavery was a downgrading to her pride--after all, she had come directly from the proud Mother Africa! Surely her instilled pride conflicted with the ideas of slavery--thus causing mental frustrations because she could not find just reasoning as to why she could not exist in as free a state as another human encased in a lighter skin. Her dissatisfactions might have presented themselves in physical attitudes of rebellion, hence bringing the master to beat out the stubbornness she obviously displayed. And so, her back took the pain inflicted again and again and again. Aunt Sarah knew that in spite of the fight there was no escape for her--that was to come for those who would follow. But

somewhere in history someone must let it be known that a change was destined to come. And, for Aunt Sarah, that time was "now".

Aunt Sarah is unquestionably a slave who has been aged by work and pain. She enters the stage establishing her identity with bent knees and a curved back and arms that appear to be moving almost in a spastic style. Aunt Sarah uses direct movements to emphasize certain conditions: for a strong back, her hands clasp quickly behind her back, arms straighten, her neck extends upward and her back arches; to show pain inflicted again and again, her hands are folded in the small of her back, she is in a pli  as she contracts her torso, and straightens her legs as she brings her back into a strong arch by lifting her shoulders alternately and with force. At the same time that she is moving into the arch, her face lifts up to the sky. The indication being here that slaves believed in an Almighty in heaven--regardless of how oppressed they were. And, even during periods of turmoil, it was a belief in Him which gave them the will to meet a new day.

My skin is yellow, my hair is long
 Between two worlds I do belong
 My father was rich and white--he forced
 my mother late one night
 What do they call me? My name is Safronia.

During Safronia's time miscegenation between white men and black women was a common occurrence. Generally,

the rule was that the child followed the mother's condition, and consequently was born a slave. On occasion, a master might have granted manumission to his child and possibly to the child's mother. Such was the case with Safronia. She was legally given her freedom but in reality she was still a slave. Her blackness had been diluted by the color of her father's skin. There would never be comfortable refuge for her because it would always be known that she was not all black--that she had some of "them" in her. In the time around Safronia's immediate existence there were only two distinguishable kinds of blacks: (1) those who were pure black in color--that is, those who were straight from the mother country and whose black color had only been mixed with other black colors, and (2) those who were mulatto. Those blacks in the first aforementioned group quite often rejected those in the second group. The reason here being that those in the second group might have considered themselves better than they--afterall, they so closely resembled the white man and the white man unquestionably "knew" he was better than anyone else.

Even though Safronia is loved by her mother, she is not proud of the fact that she is mulatto. She has been freed by words and yet she remains enslaved by her color. More than anything else, true blackness is an attitude --but it is something which a slave oriented society won't

allow her to develop. She is weighted by a lasting desire for identity but has chosen to be passive because she foresees no change.

Safronia enters the stage with her head bent towards one shoulder. Her walk is timid and her mood is apologetic. Safronia wants to be freed of all that bounds her and every now and then she shows frustration in her movements because she is not totally free. Almost always her focus is down and out.

Safronia's timid or "insecure" movements are executed with the head directed downward on a forty-five degree angle and with her chin almost touching her shoulder. Her theme in "Four Women" is danced more lyrically, basically than the others. The reason here being that her life should be better than the others because she does not have to worry about the bitterness of slave living. Frustration displays itself in such elements as a run--of almost moderate tempo--which shows signs of being frantic, of wanting to break away. Also frustration is evident when Safronia very quickly throws her arms over her head, crossed and with clinched fists. For Safronia real freedom is destined to come but the time is much later. And, when it does, even those who are all black will be able to accept her color tint as a true black.

My skin is tan, my hair is fine
My hips invite you, my lips like wine
Whose little girl am I? Anyone who has
 money to buy
What do they call me? My name is Sweet Thing.

Sweet Thing is similar to Safronia in that she is mulatto and she is free. Yet, it is that same similarity which makes their lives so different. Safronia's struggle is inherent in her attempt to be recognized as a true black and to accept herself as a free human being. Least of all Safronia's worries are those subjects which deal with physical survival--food, clothing, shelter. For Sweet Thing the "struggle" is the core of her existence. Sweet Thing is not concerned with such matters as whether or not she will be accepted in the realm of blackness, or the color of her father's skin, or the circumstances under which she was conceived.

At some point in her youth Sweet Thing undoubtedly became aware of her physical beauty, and undoubtedly the men who lived around her became aware of the same. Sweet Thing's body was her most prized possession and subsequently her tool of survival. Whose little girl was she? Anyone who had the money to pay the price. Maybe Sweet Thing was promiscuous because she had been oriented to believe that her body was the only item of value she'd ever own. To black men she was a discarded convenience--after all, she was not pure black, she was mulatto. To white men she was simply a

convenience--after all, she was a black girl because her mother was black. In spite of the "conveniences" of her situation, Sweet Thing was wise enough to attach a price to the work she performed. She was not in her occupation for fun--but rather, for survival.

Sweet Thing enters the stage area with a walk that is both seductive and a direct advertisement of her character. Her movements involve freely moving shoulders and hips, a beckoning for money gesture where she imitates rubbing her palms together and extending her hand and shoulder out to the audience, a gesture where her hands come across her face and lips to draw attention thereto, and an obvious lifting of the chest and slinging of the hair.

My skin is brown, my manner is tough
I'll kill the first mother I see. My life
has been rough
I'm awfully bitter these days 'cause my
parents were slaves
What do they call me? My name is Peaches.

Peaches is free because of the time in history and not because she is brown-skinned. She is bitter and resentful because she continues to witness the scorn that those before her have experienced. A law was changed to set slaves free but written laws cannot change the hearts of mankind. Peaches is not mulatto but her brown skin is

indicative of the circumstance that somewhere in her family tree black blood has been mixed with white blood. And, as heredity would have it, traces of that mixture might have and did show up in later generations.

Peaches was quite aware of the solitude of slavery in which her parents had been drenched. She was so terribly resentful because those who induced such hardships on her parents had indirectly diluted her physical blackness. Her life has been rough because she is a free, black, "slave". Because her parents were slaves, Peaches did not have the chance to get an education. Therefore, in order to survive she must work for the white man who continues to regard himself as a slave master. How do you tell someone who is accustomed to being superior that now he is an equal to someone who was once his subordinate.

Peaches realized that she would work for her survival but she was determined to be regarded as a free human being. Peaches is a believer in physical action. Since the slave owners before her time used physical abuse to get their slaves to perform, she would use physical activity in order to be understood. She will not allow herself to be brain-washed into believing that she is less than anyone and consequently stays "on guard", protecting herself against white propaganda. Peaches is determined to use the strength of being a real person--a strength her parents never gained.

And, with all her might she will exemplify a freedom her parents were never permitted to experience.

The mood in which Peaches enters the stage is that of anger. When Aunt Sarah, Safronia, and Sweet Thing entered the stage, each presented herself as existing in her own secluded world--unconcerned with any evidence of the existence of the others. Peaches' actions of anger and frustration are not reactions to the presence of the other three women, but rather they are reactions to a past existence of what Aunt Sarah, Safronia and Sweet Thing represented.

Peaches' movements are basically hard, strong, very tensed, very defiable. Defiable here is in reference to dance training--that is a turned-in flexed foot as opposed to a turned-out pointed one; clinched fists or rigid fingers as opposed to a soft, graceful hand; jerky shoulders as opposed to smoothly moving ones; and, strong contractions as opposed to gentle torso movements.

The lives of Aunt Sarah, Safronia, Sweet Thing, and Peaches had been touched, either directly or indirectly, by the system of slavery. It was that system which had oriented Aunt Sarah, Safronia, and Sweet Thing towards accepting a lifestyle which had been imposed upon them. Peaches was affected indirectly by slavery because her parents were slaves. Still, it was that system, too, which made her determined to be free in every sense of the word.

The moods, personalities, and movements of the four women were dictated by slavery. With Peaches being bitter and resentful of the bondage of her parents, her movements were naturally strong, hard, and explosive. With Aunt Sarah being a pure slave and a victim of that circumstance, her movements displayed characteristics of hard work and old age. Safronia, who was not an outspoken individual, was basically calm and serene and her movements were lyrical and done in a rather shy mood. And, since Sweet Thing was a prostitute, her movements followed a sexy style.

Because all four women were black and by no means fond of the situation of their lives, each could have been representatives of present-day type attitudes of rebellion against their subordinators. But in the same likeness, none of the women, except Peaches, had enough of her own authority to react so critically for fear of her own well-being. Peaches is a representative of a period directly following the freeing of slaves. But she is also an Angela Davis, or an H. Rapp Brown, or a Stokley Carmichael of today. She is the essence of the survival of a race. In the end of the dance when those who have lived through bondage reach out to her but will not--or cannot live her lifestyle, Peaches lifts her head and her clinched fist to say that she must survive, overcome a struggle, and carry on for the good of her people.

COSTUMES

The four women are costumed similarly because of the closeness of their relationship in the time era. The material for the skirts and their colors are fitted to each personality. All four skirts are gathered at the waist line and are floor length. Each woman wears a man's shirt.

Aunt Sarah

Aunt Sarah's shirt has no collar, the sleeves are rolled up and the color is that of a faded blue. Her skirt is of patchwork. She wears a "rag" tied on her head.

Safronia

Safronia wears a pale yellow cuffless shirt. Her skirt is of a deeper yellow print material. She wears a long black hip length wig.

Sweet Thing

Sweet Thing has her collar tucked in. The tail ends of her shirt are tied high above her waist. Her skirt is of red jersey and she wears a long dark brown wig.

Peaches

Peaches has an Afro hair style. Her shirt is of a pea-green color. Her skirt is a loud purple print.

COSTUME SKETCHES



Aunt Sarah



Safronia



Sweet Thing



Peaches

VIDEOTAPING

The thesis dance "Four Women" was placed on videotape for purposes of recording.

Distance of stage to camera - 25 feet

Camera make and number - Sony Videocamera and electronic viewfinder

Lens - Cosmimar Television Lens

12.5 mm

1:19

No. 11090

Aperture - 2.8 f
 ∞ '

Close Ups - Sony TV Lens Telephoto

f = 16 - 64 mm

1:2

No. 209.640

2.8f zoom and pan

Process and videotaping

semi stationary w/panning

Tape size

one inch (1")

Videocorder (desk) make and number AV-3650

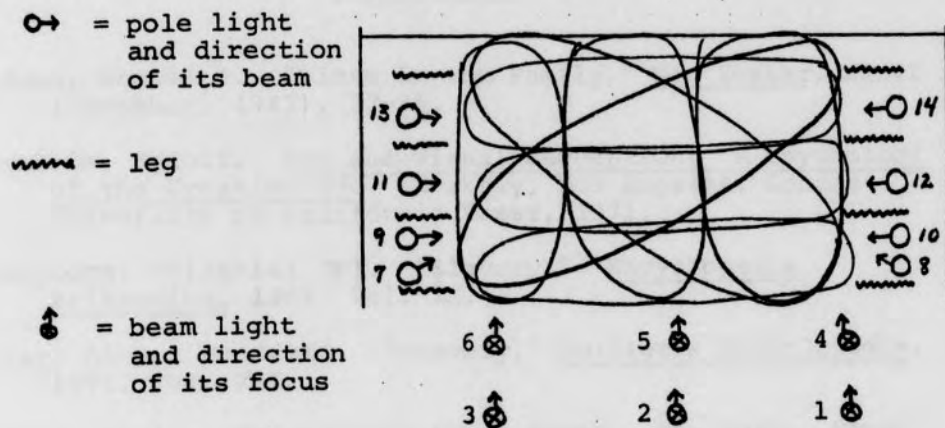
Sound Process

Sound was placed 30 feet from stage, 5 feet away from camera (to the rear of the camera).

Copy Process

none

LIGHTING PLOT



Even numbered lights - steele blue

Roscolene # 854

Odd numbered lights - flesh pink

Roscolene # 826

CURTAIN AND LIGHTING PLOT

Pre-set lights - all 0-7

Cue 1 Curtains open moderately fast

Cue 2 Dancers enter

Cue 3 When dancers are seated music begins

Cue 4 Curtains close moderately fast when

music and dance are ended.

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