

## ABSTRACT

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Directed By: Visiting Associate Professor and Director of  
Graduate Studies in Dance, Karen Bradley,  
Dance Department

The full-length contemporary ballet *Trapped* used Igor Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring" to examine contemporary issues surrounding the life and brutal death of transgender teen Gwen Araujo. The new work premiered at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center Feb. 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> at 8:00 p.m.

I was inspired by the airing of the Lifetime channel made-for-TV movie "A Girl Like Me: The Gwen Araujo Story." The movie was based on a true story. It told the story of a teen who was violently attacked and killed by three men. They killed her after learning that she was biologically male. After seeing the movie, I wanted to take the opportunity to hear and think about her story, and to share it with a new audience.

The dance is supported by Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. *Trapped* altered the well-known synopsis and merged it with Gwen's story.

Trapped

By

Wayland B. Anderson

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
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Advisory Committee:  
Visiting Associate Professor Karen Bradley, Chair  
Professor Anne, Warren  
Lecturer Paul Jackson  
Dr. Charlie Rutherford

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Inspiration comes in many forms, and it usually comes when you least expect it. It was a regular weekday evening. No fabulous plans for the thirty year old gay man. Earlier in the week, I read an interesting article in *The Advocate*. *The Advocate* is a national magazine that addresses issues surrounding queer culture and news. It mentioned a movie called *A Girl Like Me: The Gwen Araujo Story*. After reading the article, I felt it was my duty as a gay man to check it out. I didn't realize that this movie was depicting a true life story. By the end, I was well aware and found myself sitting in disbelief. Little did I know that I would be so moved that I would call myself to action.

The movie told the story of Gwen Araujo in a nonjudgmental way. Before seeing the movie, I really wasn't aware of this story. Before working on this project, I didn't include transgender people in my community. I'm sure that I watched this story unfold in the gay newspapers, but paid little attention to the impact it has had on the LBGT community. I have a tendency to read the things that bring me laughter and joy. I'm sure that I read the headlines and skimmed the first few paragraphs, but failed to dig deep into this disturbing part of my history. After seeing this movie I realized that I know what L.B.G.T means, but never really accepted everyone that creates this community. Collectively we have a history, and this work is an effort to embrace the entire community. The movie brought the written words of *The Advocate* to life, and this inspired me to create this image of word coming to life in my work *Trapped*.

Gwen Araujo was a transgender teen who died as the result of a brutal attack.

Araujo was biologically male, but lived as a female. It is believed that her three attackers beat her for five hours after discovering she had male genitalia. She was choked, hit with a frying pan, hit on the head with a can of tomatoes, and struck with a barbell. After this she was strangled by rope, hog-tied, and buried in a shallow grave.

My fighting ring is not in court or on Capitol Hill. My fighting ground is in the Theatre. The theatre is the space that allows me to usher in social change and justice. Hopefully this work will do just that. Every moment of life has the potential to inspire me. I use life's complexities as inspiration for new movement. I take that inspiration in to the dance studio and use it as a departure point for my work. My dream was to share Gwen's story with another audience. I needed to spread the word, and inform others that this happened. I was inspired to share and give others the opportunity to right this wrong with their daily actions. We can change the world with our everyday actions. Simple actions like asking your friends to show respect for people who are different or holding the door open for someone can alter the way we experience the world. For every action there is a reaction, and it is my goal to help people see this.

In an effort to match this amazing story with an amazing piece of music, I searched everywhere. I spent hours listening to music at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Library. I also spent time listening to all the classical music that I have in my own musical library. I needed a work that was powerful enough to tell Gwen's dramatic story. Looking back, I now realize that I wanted a piece of music that could stand alone. I also wanted to find a work that would challenge me as a

choreographer. In retrospect, I think I unconsciously created a sink or swim scenario when it comes to my musical choice. Originally, I entertained using Phillip Glass, but eventually settled on Igor Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*.

*Rite of Spring* premiered May 29, 1913 at the Theatre des Champs-Elysees in Paris. The unique music and the harsh dance steps caused the audience to interrupt the performance with comments and whistling. The uneasiness felt by the audience led to a small riot. The police were called, but could restore little order. I found the story about the music just as intriguing as the music itself. Creating a work to this music is almost like a rite of passage for most ballet choreographers. Ten years from now I would like to become an Artistic Director. I want to be able to go into a job interview knowing that I've successfully created a work to the well known and widely respected *Rite of Spring*.

The *Rite of Spring* is powerful and undeniably one of the most challenging pieces of music for musicians and choreographers. The original *Le Sacre du Printemps* (The Rite of Spring) shares one major similarity with the Gwen Araujo story. The girl dies in the end. For this very simple reason, I found it appropriate to merge the musical masterpiece with Gwen Araujo's breathtaking story.

The body of this written work is made from excerpts of my journal. This journal is the truest depiction of my journey, which came to be called *Trapped*. In the daily entries, I share my ups, downs, highpoints, and low points. During the creation process, the journal helped me remember what I'd done in previous rehearsals. In other moments of need, it acted as my friend, confidante, and partner. The condensed version herein holds the side of the choreographer that should not be seen by others

until the work is completed. In the journal, I discuss all things related to the show. I share my doubts and uneasiness about dancers, my abilities as a choreographer, and the way the work evolves. This journal is a backstage pass to the world premiere of *Trapped*, which opened February 22, 2007.



## Chapter 2: First Semester Journal Entries

**Monday August 21, 2006**

The semester is about to begin and I'm gearing up to work on my thesis concert. Most of my attention this year will go towards this two day event. I think the show will open February 22<sup>nd</sup> and end February 23<sup>rd</sup>. I've worked really hard last year to take advantage of every opportunity that has come my way. I set works for American Dance Institute and West Texas A&M University.

Today I was presented with a challenge. Karen Bradley, the Graduate Director and Adviser, ask me to blow the roof off my vocabulary. More specifically, she requested that I try and stay away from meaningless arabesque. At first this statement came as a shock. I didn't expect this to come from one of my true supporters. I wanted to just raise a white flag and say "I give up!" I sat there and realized that this is just another variable and another chance to grow. I approached the challenge with no fear. I am creative and can work around this speed bump. I think she is looking for movement that communicates story and purpose. Sitting in the chair, I realized she was challenging me to be the best and create work that requires me to dig deep into the subject matter. This obstacle will require that I take the time to examine and really understand what I'm trying to communicate.

In the meeting I made my unofficial proposal. My thesis concert will include a new *Rite of Spring*. The new version will combine the original synopsis with transgender issues. The second work will use the music of DMX to tell three

different stories. The final work will involve collaboration between composer, choreographer, and single musician and dancer.

**Tuesday August 22, 2006**

Last night I watched *WORD BECOMES FLESH* by Marc Bamuthi Joseph. The work is a solo work that deals with many different issues. The work is a series of letters to his unborn son. This was my first assignment from Karen Bradley. She wanted me to see how other artists are using movement to communicate their truths. The following is my response to his work:

Marc Bamuthi Joseph tells a compelling story about his life and personal journey. He combines tap, jazz, and modern, with poetry. After watching the work, I wondered if he could have created dances that communicated what he said verbally. There were a few moments of profound beauty, but overall it left me wanting more. I was also taken by the things his stories taught me as a black man. The most important question for me is who will inform my work. I'm not really interested in creating work that lives on the fence. I want to create a dance that communicates a story of real life experience. I think that it may be good to create a poem or story. A tool such as a poem or short story will allow me to line up movement with a simple plot. This would allow me to evaluate whether the movement is supporting my objective. I also noticed that the performer/creator really dug deep into his soul to find material that mattered to him. He presented material that was really important and real to him. You could feel his passion for the subject matter. So what did I learn from this performer? Dig deep to find your passion.

### **Thursday August 31, 2006**

I have not presented my proposal to the committee. I have to commit to my idea. I have a lot of concerns. I don't know how many people will show up for my audition next Tuesday evening. I have to make a decision about what works, what will be in the concert, and commit. Each day I see things or hear things that make me want to rethink or reconsider what I want to present in the show.

I've been watching Project Runway. I am so caught up with fashion and the idea of gender queer. As I think about it more and more, I think that the new *Rite of Spring* will explore gender issues.

Maybe a fashion show is a way to introduce the characters in the work. I imagine people parading down a runway created by tape markings on the floor. At some point in the fashion show the chosen person will step onto the cat walk. He/She will wear something that has both genders' qualities and leaves the audience questioning the main character's gender identity. I would also like to link in the use of ace bandages. Ace bandages are used by women who want to pass as men. I see all the models having some strip of bandage hanging from their pants or skirt or shoes. This would symbolize their link to the chosen person. I think I may even wish to create an entire scene around it.

### **Friday September 1, 2006**

Yesterday, I realized I'm holding auditions on Tuesday. I'm really nervous, but the dance must go on. I have to prepare for the audition. Today, I have to purchase fabric to create numbers and I also need to create an information sheet for each dancer to complete. In order to prepare some choreography, I've been listening

to the music over and over and over. I'm trying to hear what the music says to me. Last night I created mock titles and descriptive words for each movement based on the feelings created while listening to the music. The music is very challenging to count. I would like to find my own individual way into the complicated score. If this doesn't work, I will have to purchase the score and learn the music. I need to know the music like I know the palm of my hand. I need to have it memorized. This weekend I plan to reread the transgender story that will function as part of the foundation for the work.

### **Sunday September 3, 2006**

The first thing I did today was play the music. I want to know it like the back of my hand. I planned to listen to it at least four times. I wrote the second draft of my thesis proposal. I am getting creative and thinking outside the box. For example, I wanted to use paint in the final scene. I realized this may be too much to ask. There are other ways to get the same effect. I envisioned the lead character dancing around in the paint. I think the same concept can be accomplished with red fabric. I will need to get creative. I also need to have a plan for the moment when dancers start to drop out or are not committed to performing in the concert. I have to stick to my guns and be up front in the beginning. I have to state in the audition that they are auditioning for the ensemble that will make up the cast for my thesis project.

### **Thursday September 7, 2006**

I've misplaced the journal entry that talks about my audition experience, so I've included this little recap to bring you up to date. The audition went really well. The audition started with a 30 minute barre. Then I created two combinations in the

center. I had twelve dancers show up for the audition and I took all twelve. I had one man and the rest were women. I'm not exactly sure how I will use the man, but time will tell. All who auditioned were dancers with whom I have never worked. I believe that this is good. It gives me the opportunity to set the standards high and have a fresh start. I'm very excited to see what comes of this group. The ensemble will rehearse on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 3:30 – 5:30.

### **Monday September 11, 2006**

Today was the first day of rehearsal. The group got off to a great start. We went right to work. I informed the group that we would start each rehearsal with a 20 to 30 minute ballet barre. Having a barre at the beginning of rehearsal will give everyone a common point of departure. I want the dancers to see my movement through the warm up. It will also ensure that people are really warm and ready to start rehearsal. College students tend to suffer from injury as the result of not properly warming up. My goal is to prevent injuries. The dancers all work hard. I told the dancers that there are no understudies so everyone must learn every part.

Today we started the first section. The first movement is simply an introduction of two characters. In order to bring the dancers up to speed, I handed out responses to the movie *A Girl Like Me*. Each page contained many different opinions about the movie and it documents people's response to the movie. I asked everyone to take a few sheets and read over them. We gathered around in a circle. Each person read a sentence that stood out to them. I was surprised to find that they picked some of the same sentences that stood out to me. This was an easy and fast way to refresh my memory about the subject matter at hand. I also did this to help the dancers

understand what they are dancing about without giving a speech or some boring lecture.

### **Friday September 16, 2006**

The day started with Marie requesting an official list of my Thesis Committee. I sent her an e-mail with a list of names which include Karen Bradley, Anne Warren, Charley Rutherford, and Paul Jackson. She informed me that the budget for the show is a little over 2,000 dollars. I'm very excited about the opportunity to present my own work. I want to have all the works completed by the end of the first semester. I want to reserve the second semester for polishing and cleaning all works. Today was our third rehearsal. The dancers are working really hard and appear to be very committed to the work. Our time together is no joke. They are an inspiring group of dancers. I have given them some challenging steps and they've attacked them with a fierceness that is rarely seen in young dancers. On Monday we will start the fourth movement. We are right on schedule. My goal is to create a section each day. This is why it is so important for me to listen to the music religiously. I have to breathe this work once the rehearsal starts. Yesterday, I sent out an e-mail to anyone involved with dance at the University of Maryland. The e-mail informed everyone that I'm still searching for dancers. I got a response from one of the dancers who auditioned for the ensemble but could not make the times. She has committed to attending on Fridays. I also have a dancer coming to observe on Monday. I'm very excited about these two dancers possibly joining the cast. I need more men. I would like to do more partnering work but it is difficult to do with one man. I'm very happy

with the progress that we have made this week. I hope every week is as productive as this one.

**Thursday October 5, 2006**

Thesis Project Meeting w/Paul Jackson

We talked mostly about the production side of the project. We discussed the possibility of using white or off white cotton for the six movable wings. He showed me the wings and pointed out their dimensions. I shared with him my desire to project text on the moveable wings, the white cotton clothes that the dancers dance with, and on the dancers' bodies. We discussed the props for the work. They include 10 white cloths used by the dancers, 20 books, 1 red cloth (10 yards long), shredded cotton cloths, and fishing wire.

The work focuses on the main character's struggle with religion and others' beliefs about the life she has chosen to live. I make these beliefs tangible by making the dancers use books. I want the audience to pick up on the idea that the words in the books give the dancers the power to take action or judge. The pages of the books come to life via white cloths that grow from a book that has been gutted. Mr. Jackson introduced the idea of gutting a book. I want to create a scene that shows the words of the book coming to life.

He advised me to concentrate on the one work (*Rite of Spring*), and put the other works in the first or second shared graduate concert. This sounds like a wise idea, but I would like to talk with the dancers. I don't want to be accused of falsely advertising my project. From the beginning, I offered them the opportunity to

perform different dance styles, and I want to stay true to what I proposed to them. He suggested that I discuss the option with the dancers.

I invited Mr. Jackson to attend a rehearsal and he offered to come and view later in the semester.

**Thursday October 12, 2006**

Meeting w/ Dr. Rutherford:

Our meeting was short, sweet, and to the point. We started out by talking about the scope of the project. He encouraged me to focus my energy on the *Rite of Spring* and *Rite of Spring* only. I expressed that other faculty members have expressed the same concern and I would gladly dedicate my energy completely to this work. We also talked about the impact this ballet had on the world of music and dance at its premiere. We spoke about my aesthetic and how I plan to use the ballet aesthetic in this new work.

I showed Dr. Rutherford a clip of my work and explained that I want to use books to represent the beliefs held and used by a community. The lead character has to interpret the complex views of society and deal with how they relate to her life.

We discussed the audition process. Did the dancers know what they've committed to? Who are they? I expressed that originally I was very excited about creating a new work, but I've notice that my focus has grown to include growth. By growth, I mean the growth of each individual dancer. I want the dancers to learn more than just steps. I want them to learn to interpret movement and make it work for their bodies. The process and journey are the most important elements of this project. We also spoke about my written journal and video journal.



**Monday, November 27, 2006**

There are three weeks left in the semester. I took a break from the work to create other works for the ensemble. I'm not sure if this is a good or bad thing. The dancers really want to perform other styles. The dancers have grown a lot during this semester. I would attribute that to many things. I've challenged the dancers to move with grace, power, and passion. Their growth is, in part, due to the ballet barre that we do before each rehearsal. During the barre I offer helpful hints that, if absorbed, could really aid their technique. Today we spent time working on the eleventh and twelfth movement. I was convinced that we would work hard and fast today. With only three weeks of school left I want to have all the choreography completed by the end of the semester. My goal is to finish the work this week. This Friday's rehearsal has been canceled, so now I have even less rehearsal time this week

As a choreographer, I can see that I'm growing. I'm not obsessing over every step and every note of music. I'm now allowing the work to speak to me. I'm looking at the big picture. I've stop searching for answers and guidance. I'm learning to trust my instinct. I think this is a major part of being a choreographer. I don't have to have the research and documented information in my hand to lead me along the way. I've done the reading and the needed research. Now I can just trust myself.

Today I purchased what I think will become a part of the dancer costumes. I found white underwear from Target. I'm going to create skirts for the man and women. I'm not exactly sure how this will work, but I'm enjoying the costume

creation process. This process has caused me to give more thought to the way a costume works. It plays a major part in the way a work is received.

### **Friday, December 15, 2006**

Today is the last rehearsal of the semester, and it was very challenging. I had to fit the dancers who missed the main costume fitting. Three dancers needed to be fitted. This could have taken three hours, but I had the other dancers assist me. They had already gone through the process. They knew exactly what needed to be done. After the costume fittings we reviewed the latest material. At this point the dancers have never run the entire ballet. We've spent the last month learning the third movement. Some sections have not been run or rehearsed since the beginning of the school year. During the review the dancers had many questions about steps, direction, purpose, and motivation. I had to balance my desire to answer their questions with my desire to get through the rehearsal. I enjoy knowing that they want to perfect their work and dig deeper into the characters. We finished the review that could have continued for five more hours. I had to stop or we would have ended up running out of time. We ran the work. I was very excited to see that the dancers retained the material and are starting to grow in the work. I've committed to creating no new movement vocabulary next semester. If I have to create something new, I will manipulate the vocabulary that the dancers already know. I'm very excited to see what comes of the next three weeks. Our rehearsal for the next semester will be on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 4:30 to 7:00.

Meeting with Anne Warren... I had a meeting with one of my committee members. Anne Warren sat with me and watched the video of the final run from

Friday's rehearsal. I was very nervous. We sat and talked about what she saw. The meeting went much better than I expected. Her main points had to do with clarity. She wants me to clarify the relationships. (mother, daughter, lovers, friends, and other half.) She also recommended that I look at all transitions. How does one section lead into another? Is there an abrupt stop or is there a smooth transition? Why do dancers do what they do and what purpose does the ensemble serve? She recommended that I have outside rehearsals with the lead characters. This will be challenging, but I will try to make it happen. We talked about my use of ballet movement. I find that I'm always defending it in this department. I think the way to win the faculty over is to make sure the ballet steps are purpose driven

The concert has been posted on the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center. I need to arrange a photo session, create post cards, and create the program.

## Chapter 3: Second Semester Journal Entries

**Saturday, January 20, 2007**

Classes start next week. I thought I should give you a brief update on what has happened over the last few months. I've spent time drawing extra costumes which I don't think I'm going to use. I also designed the postcards which will advertise the show. Creating the postcards was very challenging. I did not have enough time to set up a proper photo shot. I hope to do one as soon as we return for the second semester. After a lot of thinking and some time studying the calendar, I realized that there is just not enough time for a photo shoot. My first thought was to capture the images from some video footage that I have from earlier rehearsal. I went through the process of capturing the pictures from video, but the images weren't very clear. While working on the program, I heard the voice of one of my professors: "Less is more." As a part of my documentation, I took pictures of each cast member. Luckily, the pictures were taken in high resolution jpeg format. I placed a picture from a previous show on the front of the postcard. The picture was neutral enough that it could draw people's attention without saying too much about the work that will be presented. On the back I arranged pictures of all the cast and myself. I had the card proofed by four different people and sent it to production. I placed the order online. It was very simple and within a week a thousand copies were delivered to my door step. There are a few imperfections, but overall, I'm happy with the product.

As far as the costumes are concerned, I've added a death costume for the lead. At the very end all the dancers are dressed in red. Originally I'd planned to dress the lead character in white with red accents. For some reason this just didn't look like

death to me. If all the dancers are dressed the same color the audience will have a challenging time deciding who to focus on. I found some black fabric that caught my eye. I created a costume that looked similar to the rest of the cast, but in black. I think this will work better visually.

After thinking about the work, I realized that the killers were not very developed and not very noticeable from the rest of the cast. I think I should give them different costumes. This show has taught me that there are many elements to creating a work. Yes, the dancing should be the most important part, but there are so many elements that support the dance. I've also learned that I like the creative aspect more than I like the cleaning and polishing aspect. I enjoy thinking and creating new things. I digress. The new costumes for the killers can be worn by anyone. The new costumes will be three capes. I'm considering putting hoods on them, but I'm not sure if this feature is really needed. I want the killers to have more presence in the work. I want every dancer in the work to act as the killers at some point. My goal is to show that we all have a part in her death. No action is still action. Everyone plays a role. I also placed the finishing touches on the costumes completed before the end of the fall semester. Finally, I created new wings for the Dance Theatre. Currently the space has very dark blue wings. I created tan panels that are the same color as accents on the dancer's costumes. I want to transform the space as much as possible. We will see how these panels work.

This past week I worked on the program. I want to keep it simple. I will do it myself to keep the budget available for costuming. I feel that there will need to be one more costume. I'm almost finished with the program, but I need a few more bios.

I'm having a hard time making it fit on one page. I want to include the dancers' bios. They worked really hard and I think they deserve their moment of glory. I've also decided to have a talkback. Wow!

**Tuesday, January 30, 2007**

If there was a low point to define all others it was today. Sure it was a little ambitious to take on this work. Yes, it was wild to think that I could do this in two years. Yes, it was crazy to think that this modern school would really get where I'm coming from. Things can only get better from here. I have to keep in mind that the dancers have been off for two months. The work will come back and grow stronger than ever.

I forgot to mention that the University of Maryland Dance Faculty came to see my work. I asked the faculty to come and give me feedback on my work thus far. I don't want to get to the performance and have the faculty say that they completely hated it. At the same time I'm not trying to create a modern work. It is a contemporary ballet and I have to hold my ground. The faculty voiced some serious issues in a short meeting after my rehearsal. The following are notes from the meeting with the Dance Faculty:

No more new material.  
Figure out why people are doing what they are doing.  
Why  
Are they watching what is unfolding between Laura and Nick?  
Develop the relationship between Laura and Sonya  
Look at the transitions  
What caused you to go to another step?  
Too much going on  
You need to direct the audiences focus.

Simplify  
Let the relationships drive the Work  
Listen to the music  
The story  
Relationship?  
The audience needs to understand.  
You are going too fast.  
Why do the dancers do certain steps  
more than once?  
The dancers are just doing the material.  
Counter tension with the props  
Simplify  
Do less  
Look at what you establish and when  
Show that the group has the power to  
drive this girl crazy  
Give the group the power longer  
Who are the duets?  
Establish Nick  
Establish relationship of the Cloth and  
other props  
How does the book make you behave?  
The book gives society the power to  
judge and kill Laura  
Stylize: Nick, Sonya, Laura  
Why is she attracted to that space?  
Simplify  
Clarify

The two major notes that I plan to take away from this meeting are Simplify and Clarify

**Tuesday, February 13, 2007**

It would be nice if I could make this show happen and get some sleep at the same time. I've been working since the beginning of the semester and I still have a million things to do. I've been so busy the last week that I have had no time to write. This morning I really need to work on the costumes, but I can hear Anne's voice telling me to journal about everything.

Let me start with the program. I had to retake the pictures on Thursday. One of the dancers came to me and requested that she have a new picture. She didn't like the fact that she was frowning in her picture. I thought she looked serious. I decided that if I was going to give her that opportunity then everyone should get the same opportunity. I want to promote fairness. Originally, I planned to make everyone pose in the pictures. After taking pictures of the first person, I noticed that she looked artificial. So instead I took pictures of everyone while we discussed our reading. This worked out well. The candid shots allowed me to catch the dancers' true personalities.

The rehearsals have been very challenging. With such a large cast it is difficult to keep everyone on the same page. This week has been especially difficult because key dancers have missed rehearsal. As of Thursday, I have not completed the ballet. It looks like I will work on the ballet until the curtains open. Sunday, Paul came to watch the work. He gave helpful suggestions. We spent much of our time together talking about musicality. He agreed that the dancers need to run the work as many times as possible so they can get the movement in their muscle memory. Today I plan to run the work three times. I will give corrections as the dancers move. I question whether this is a valid way to give notes. Will the dancers take in the feedback or will they miss the corrections? In class I receive corrections while moving all the time. I know that it can work.

The costumes are driving me up the wall. The big problem is the velcro. I've ditched the top portion of the first set of costumes. They just didn't turn out the way I envisioned. These unique unusable tops took forever to create. At first, I thought I



wasted my time. Now, I see that this was a part of my learning process, and allowed me to move forward to the end product. This costume making process has been about trial and error. I've been trying to make the costumes work together. Originally each set of costumes were different colors. I didn't like this element. The costumes didn't flow and that means the work will not flow. I purchased dye for the killer's costumes. The killers' capes were originally tan. The dye turned the tan to various shades of gray. I liked the color so much that I decide to dye all the costumes with the same dye. It was supposed to be black. It turned or added a hint of dirty grey to the costumes existing color. I dyed all the costumes with the same dye. It turned the tan dark dirty grey. It turned the bright red into a deep dirty red (which I'm really happy with). The brown costumes are just a deeper shade of brown, they also had tan accents. The accents turned dirty grey. I'm very happy with this change. Now all the costumes will relate to each other.

### **Wednesday, February 14, 2007**

Time, persistence, and patience are the lessons of the day. I have learned these lessons as a result of making the dancers' costumes. Sewing the costumes on my own may not have been the wisest idea. I chose to do it on my own anyways. Last night I started sewing and just could not get the brand new sewing machine to do anything I wanted it to do. I have a few costumes left to finish. Hopefully tonight will be the end of the sewing madness. I've been sewing since fall and I'm ready to close shop. I got so upset. I told myself that the dancers would have to finish their own costumes. I packed up the machine and put all the materials away. I closed shop for what I prayed was for good. This morning something told me to give it another shot and go

slow. I did exactly that. I tried again and I took my time. From this craziness, I learn that slow and steady can win the race.

Last night's rehearsal was right on the mark. We did our warm up. I taught the entire class sitting on the floor. I also tried to make the warm up continuous. I did very little talking, and kept them moving. My plan is to use this week to build their stamina. We ran the piece twice. The dancers are finally starting to see their place in the big picture. After the first run we revisited some places that didn't work musically. Then we ran the work again. The dancers were focused and worked very hard to apply every correction.

My big speech of the rehearsal went a little something like this: We are in a "make it work" situation. The time for breaking down material is now over. I would like for you to own the material. Don't apologize for movement. I set out to create a contemporary ballet, and I need your help to make it happen. Make every step and move with confidence and courage. Be bold and beautiful. I'm looking for these qualities when you are right and when you make mistakes. If you mess up, mess up with conviction. The dancers really seemed to respond to this in a positive way. I could see in their eyes that they knew that I was giving the work to them. They began to see that I trust and value their artistic judgment.

By the end of rehearsal the dancers were dripping wet and out of breath. This made me feel really good. I want the dancers to think back on this process and remember what it feels like to work hard. The lessons learned in dance can be applied to many different occupations. This simple fact is one of the reasons dancers are such valuable employees. I want the dancers to know that with a little hard work

they can accomplish any thing they desire. I have no problem pushing the dancers to do and expect more. It is nice to see dancers move, work hard, and enjoy each other while getting the job done. The dancers have really grown since September 2006. I can't wait to watch them shine.

**Monday, February 19, 2007**

I can't remember the last time I made an entry. It feels like it has been years. So much has happened. I don't know where to begin. At the moment, I'm stressing out because one of my dancers may be injured. The only male dancer has just sprained his ankle. I am very nervous. I may have to learn his part and perform it. This may make things very challenging. I would prefer to stay out of the work. I need to continue to clean and shape the work. At the same time, it may be destiny at work. I've never performed at the University. We shall see. I have rehearsal every night this week.

Yesterday, I spent the day inspecting each costume. I also ironed one set of costumes. The costumes were extremely wrinkled after dying them. I don't have any more time to write. I must do. Wish me luck.

Ok now wish me luck!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

**Tuesday, February 20, 2007**

Well, it is two in the morning and I'm just now getting ready for bed. Today's rehearsal went better than expected. Nick has not e-mailed me, but it seems he is out. I have some suspicions about this departure. My gut tells me that there is more going on. Does he have an issue with dancing the alter ego of a transgender person?

During some of the discussions, he had a hard time understanding how someone could want to live this way. Time will tell.

As I completed the day's tasks, I hoped that I would somehow run in to David. He is one of the few male dance majors at the University of Maryland. I didn't run into him at all. I prayed that maybe he could learn the ballet. I really don't want to perform my own work. The rehearsal was about to begin and David walked in. I asked him what he was doing there. He responded that he had come to help Paul. I practically cornered him and asked him if he would learn my ballet and perform it in less than a week. I think he thought I was kidding. I looked at him and said, "I barely know you, but I need you now more than ever." It was truly a turning point for me. He nervously said yes. I felt my heart begin to pulse again. The blood began to rush through my body filling me with joy and relief. I wanted him to be a part of the cast from the beginning. He has studied classical ballet. His long arm and legs really show the choreography. I loved working with Nick and he really grew during the process, but David's movement make the choreography fill the stage. His movement commands your attention. He also learns quickly, which is valuable asset. He learned two out of three sections and danced them beautifully. I'm happy that things are working out this way.

I have several goals for tomorrow. I would like to put postcards on cars in the Silver Spring area and call a camera person. I want to have the dancers in the space when people entered the auditorium. I think that I'm going to abort this idea. We've created legs that have various sayings written on them. I think they will work as the audience's introduction to the characters and the subject matter. This will save me

from stressing out about how to make this work. Less is more. I'm tired and must go to sleep.

**Wednesday, February 21, 2007**

Yesterday was the first complete run through. I'm all over the place today. So this entry may reflect that. David has learned all the major parts. I've taken him out of the ensemble work. I think it makes his character clearer. I don't spend so much time wondering who he is in relationship to everyone else. I finally created the beginning section. This section happens as people enter the Dance Theatre. I have Laura lying dead center stage. Her mother played by Sonya and her Alter Ego played by David sit at her head and feet. She lies dead while society walks by upstage of her body. The funeral lasts for about twenty minutes. It makes my skin chill just thinking about it. Each dancer pays their respect. It also shows that we all have a hand and place in the reality that is her life and our lives.

I'm completely exhausted. I'm taking the day off from dance. These are the last few hours that I have to pull this together. I also need to deal with some costume issues. I must also alter the program. I have a lot to do today.

Later today.....

What can I say? I have to let go now. I think I'm ready to give it to the dancers. They have worked so hard. They have given so much of themselves to make this story that is my life, come true. I'm forever grateful. Tonight, I recorded the first run and I'm glad I did. The second run turned out to be more of a mark. The dancers were just exhausted. It has been a long week. I'm really excited to see this work finally come to life for two days. I will enjoy every second of it.

Today was a little crazy. I'd hoped that I would just come into the studio and rehearse and go home. Well it didn't work out that way. I received a phone call from Laura Mertens of Communications. It was a little strange to hear from her on my cell. She informed me that The Washington Post called and showed some interest in my show. She assured me that this doesn't guarantee that the story will get in, but she wanted me to round up a picture that related to the piece. This news was wonderful, but I didn't have a picture with the proper resolution. I had some pictures that I created from rehearsal videos, but they would not work. So I jumped in my car and drove to the University. I got to the university and ran into Laura Henderson. I snatched her up and draped her in the red cloth. We spent 30 minutes taking pictures and then I sent her on her way. It was really fun and we captured some really cool shots. I returned to my office to upload the pictures and realized that I left my USB connector cable at home on my desk. I tried all kinds of things to make the pictures upload without the cable, but nothing seemed to work. I finally decided to go home. This occurred just as five o'clock traffic was about to begin. I went anyways. I didn't want to wake up the next day and say I wish I would have tried harder. I got home and up loaded the pictures and sent them to Laura. I hope it works out.

Karen stopped by my rehearsal tonight. I'm really glad that she stopped in to see how things are going. She said that I had addressed most of the things that we talked about in our last meeting. Hearing this made me really happy. I'm not sure if she really meant it or she just wanted to ease my nerves. I don't care. It helped. I know that the dancers have worked really hard to digest all the notes and corrections

that I offer. One of the things that has really helped in this part of the process is the video. I can take it home and take the time to write down what I see.

I'm a little sad to see it come to an end. I love these kids and I've seen growth and maturity in each them. This experience has taught me many things.

Don't be afraid to try.

Trust yourself.

Get the big picture first.

Respect each other.

It is OK to be yourself

Everyone has a part to play. No action is still action

The weather changed today. For weeks now it has been cold, cloudy, and just depressing. Today the sun came out the temperature reached the sixties. I'm in heaven.

I think the weather is ushering in my World Premier Trapped.

The End!

## Chapter 4: Conclusion

Now that this project has come and gone, I can now calmly monitor and appreciate my growth, struggles, challenges, successes, and new found understandings.

My struggle with the music came while teaching the dancers. I often created movement that worked with or against the music. In order for this to work everyone must have a working relationship with the music, and this takes time. Time is not something we had a lot of. I relied on the dancers to develop an individual understanding of the music. They really didn't commit to the work musically until weeks before the show. I didn't use counts. It became very important for the dancers to sense the music and one another. So, I asked the dancers to find their own way to hear the music. This didn't work at first. In order to get them to move together, I requested that the dancers really use their breath to help them feel the music and each other.

Creating movement is no problem for me. I'm creative and can create movement with ease. I have a harder time creating movement that is rich with meaning and purpose. Reviewing old video footage, I can clearly see my growth over the course of the project. Early on I was absorbed with inventing new shapes and angles. Toward the end of the work, I was less concerned with the step, and more concerned with what we were saying with the step. Clear intention also became the foundation of creating meaningful movement. I had to really try to communicate the right amount of information about the meaning behind movement. I knew what made the movement real for me, but how can I articulate that to the dancers? I had to experiment with different ways of translating my relationship to the movement into



something the dancers could understand, translate, and make meaningful for themselves. Translating my experience into something the dancers could relate to was a vital part of creating meaningful movement.

Another vital part of the process was the use of improvisation to generate new material. At first, the dancers were resistant to improvisation. The improv process even brought some to tears. Some cast members wanted to be told exactly how to execute every step. I'm not creating a ballet with twenty corps de ballet dancers who think the same thought at the same time. I wanted to create a group of different individuals in the same world. Early on I used very little of the material that we created together. It really functioned as a way to expand the material already created. Towards the end these experiments became vital to completing the work and making it successful. This process gave the dancers an opportunity to make the movement meaningful and real for themselves. This experience gave the dancers the power to be in the moment while performing and the power to trust their instincts.

The improv experiments happened periodically throughout the creation process. Looking back it fueled much more than I realized. Towards the end of the first section a red cloth is introduced. Sonya's solo, which portrays the mother in anguish, comes from many weeks of improvisation. I created this section by first focusing on the big picture. I created the world around her and then honed in on her once I saw where the work was going. I start with the big picture because I don't always know the direction I want to take the work. The improvisation experiments worked differently each time. Sometimes I asked the dancers to only use movement

vocabulary that has been used in the work and other times I gave them key phrases or emotions that I wanted them to express with their bodies.

Improvisation allowed me to give the dancers time and space to find a sense of freedom within the work and allowed me to generate new material. Much of what I asked of the dancers required that they know the vocabulary, but execute the steps in their own way. The improv exercises allowed the dancers to put their twist on the vocabulary that I had given them. It also presented an opportunity for me to put aside my preconceived ideas and experience what was happening in the moment.

The dancers' investment in the work is a key component of the success of *Trapped*. There comes a point as a choreographer when one must place the work into the hands of the dancers. It is one of the scariest moments along the creation process. I have to trust that the dancers value the process enough to deliver the goods when the lights go up. Throughout the rehearsal process, I did several things that should have shown the dancers that they are not just bodies, but strong contributors to a work in progress. I asked the dancers for feedback about movement, fairness of rehearsal process, and how their character in the ballet made them feel. We also spent time researching other transgender figures. Our group research gave us the opportunity to discuss what we found interesting or things we didn't understand. The discussion time allowed us to freely share opinions without judging others' views or lack of understanding.

The fact the dancers were invested in the work changed the way they related to the movement. The dancers were not just executing meaningless steps; they were communicating a story and sharing their place in that story.

The subject matter of *Trapped* was challenging for some of the cast members. Just a week before the concert, I lost a dancer to a sprained ankle. It is my belief that the dancer, who will remain unnamed, may have had problems portraying a transgender person and didn't have the courage to voice their discomfort. Keep in mind that some dancers had no problem with the subject matter, and were excited to help tell the story of Gwen Araujo. During the creation process we did group readings to better understand the issues that transgender people confront. Some dancers had friends that were either gay or transgender, and this was their connection or way into this work. Others had no way to relate to this work. This is why our group discussion became such a vital part of the process.

Not every dancer had to understand what it meant to be transgender. But because they were dancing the transgender role, Laura and David needed to dig deep into what it meant to be transgender. The other cast members functioned as society. It was ok that everyone didn't understand the transgender experience. I did try to give them opportunities to grow comfortable with the subject matter. I knew that some people were not able to go to a place where they could begin to create space for new ideas and beliefs. It may be ten or fifteen years before the young dancers will dig deep into this experience. It is my hope that the dancers will use this dance as a door into new understanding. I'm certain that they will at least be able to empathize with the transgender community. Everyone has to start somewhere.

The show was followed by a post-show discussion. I connected with a group called Beyond Beats and Rhymes. The organization is a University of Maryland organization that is working to further the discussion of sexism, gender, race,

homophobia, violence, and consumerism in hip-hop culture and in American society. The link between *Trapped* and *Beyond Beats and Rhymes* could be found in my presentation of sexism, gender, homophobia, and violence. The talk-back also functioned as an opportunity for the audience to ask questions and share their thoughts about what they experienced.

Thursday night's talk-back got off to a slow start. The audience was very timid and reserved. The host was prepared with questions that he wanted to ask me, the dancers, and the audience. Once the questions began to flow the audience opened up. One audience member wanted clarification on the difference between transgendered and trans-sexual. I choked. I was proud that the dancers tried to answer the question. To my surprise there was a gender specialist in the audience watching the show. This individual shed light on the difficult question that we as performers were not prepared to answer. Towards the end the host took on a very preachy tone. His tone completely turned the audience off, and it was clear to me that the discussion was over.

The second talk back had a larger crowd and seemed more positive than the first night. The host worked to be the link between the audience and the cast. Instead of sitting with the dancers like Thursday night's host, Friday night's host stood between the stage and the audience. He also spoke in a manner that paid respect to the audience members' points of view. The audience members for the second talk-back jumped right into the discussion. They were more interested in my process and view on the subject matter. They also applauded my courage in confronting such a serious issue. One member of the group pointed out that they enjoyed my creative

use of the timeless music. Another audience member wanted to know what the books represented. He had an idea, but wanted to see if his idea matched mine. I tried to make it clear that his interpretation is just as valid as mine. Friday's post show discussion was a nice balance between discussion of the work as art and the work as call for social justice and understanding. The dancers were also more comfortable with sharing their thoughts about the work and their role in its creation. The final talk back was a great success, and gave everyone a chance to reflect on what we experienced together.

Creating the costumes for the show taught me several valuable lessons. It was a very long and painfully humbling process. I started with no clue as to how to design or create a costume. At the moment, I thought that the best way to learn was by doing. Looking back on the situation, it is clear that a little investigation was needed. The Center has a great costume shop. I should have stopped in and at least had a conversation about my goals and desires. I'm sure they could have given me several suggestions. I decided I could create the costumes effortlessly. It looks so easy on television. The truth is I could create the costumes, but it would almost consume my life. What may have taken a professional three hours took me three days. Next time I will seek guidance from the professionals and delegate this responsibility to someone who is skilled in this field. I'm a choreographer not a costumer. This project made the distinction very clear. The costumes were completed, but none of them were perfect.

The process did teach me to think about how costumes helped tell the story and create different moods. One example of the costumes adding to the work can be

seen in the very beginning of the work. The ballet opens with the two lead dancers dressed in white and the rest of the ensemble dressed in grey costumes that were crafted for each dancer. Through the costumes and their position on stage it was clear that there were two groups in this work. The people in grey represent the society and the two dancers in white represented two parts of one identity. The color white could evoke feeling of purity, cleanliness, truth, and heavenliness. The color grey could cause one to feel that the group is somehow tainted or impure. Placing these colors in the same space shows that the two groups are completely opposite. I used costumes to complement the mood created by movement or lighting.

*Trapped* made use of several props. The dancers worked with books, large white cloths, paper torn from books, a twenty foot long red cloth, and shredded white cloths. The dancers were constantly manipulating something. Originally the props were introduced to help unify the dancers' carriage of the upper body. Unification, in ballet is a major characteristic that defines the art form. The sign of a good corps de ballet is when all the dancers look the same and move to the same beat. I wanted some sections of *Trapped* to resemble that of a great corps de ballet. The props took over the work and begin to have their own purpose and agenda. The book was the most used prop in the work. Each dancer moves with a book at some point in the work. The book allowed me to show a universal quest for knowledge and understanding. Without the books, I don't think this would have been as clear. I also had the dancers work with five foot long white cloths. These props allowed me to bring the pages of the book to life. Not only did the pages come to life, but they changed the quality of the atmosphere around the lead dancer. Sometimes the pages

read by the lead character embraced her and touched her with care. In other moments, the cloths struck her with anger and hatefulness. In this instance the props gave the atmosphere texture. In retrospect, the props allowed me to magnify the actions, responses, and relationships of the people and the space around them.

I learned that a choreographer is not always in control. While creating a work the choreographer channels many things to help create a work. Sometimes, I channeled the music for inspiration or direction. Other times, I examined the positive and negative spaces on the stage, and they helped me see where the work needs to go next. During most rehearsals I had a good idea of what I wanted to create. I had a clear story that functioned as my guide. On some occasions I found that the ballet would speak to me and let me know that the direction that I intended was not exactly right.

At the beginning I believed the work would concentrate on Gwen's relationship with society. As we begin to work on the dance, I realized the work really seemed to deal with the mother-daughter relationship and Gwen's inner struggle. I tried to stay on task and create a work that stayed true to my original goal. I continued to notice that the material kept returning to the mother-daughter struggle as well as Gwen's inner battle. When this became clear to me, I embraced the direction given to me by the work.

Another example of the work speaking to me happened during tech week. I needed to give some dancers time to change costumes. I didn't have the energy to create more choreography. I was put on the spot and needed to create something quickly. I didn't have time to look over the research that I had used to guide me. I

could not hear the music. I needed to create without having time to consult or think. I closed my eyes for one second to get grounded. I opened my eyes and began to move. The dancers followed and picked it up quickly. The section created days before opening night became a vital part of the work and told a compelling story. The section created portrayed the moment when Gwen decides to stop living as a male. She embraces her desire to live as a woman, pushes away her male alter ego, and tries on a dress for the first time. This made me realize that there are many factors at play and I need to be open to all of them.

Toward the end of the process, I invited the dance faculty to provide me with feedback on the work that I had done thus far. After the original meeting, Alvin was gracious enough to donate his time and energy even though he was not on my committee. He provided several nuggets of information that slightly shifted me into new directions and a deeper focus. Alvin asked a very simple question. He wanted to know who Sonya was portraying in the ballet. This question set me on high alarm. It made me realize that I had not developed this character enough. Time was clearly running out, I need not alter her steps, but clearly define her and her relationship to the other performers. This was vital to making the piece work. Sonya had the huge responsibility of portraying Gwen's mother. As a result of reexamining every step, gesture, and stance of Gwen's mother, the role became stronger and more powerful. The dissection of this role also helped me effectively present the mother and daughter relationship and power struggle. From Alvin and others I learned to develop my third eye. The third eye takes on the view of an outsider, and allows you to see the work



from another perspective. It is ok to step out of your own shoes and watch the work from another angle.

How do I give meaning to the ballet vocabulary? The ballet vocabulary is established and well developed. I'm not really creating any thing that is new. The ballet vocabulary is hundreds of years old and has stood the test of time. It has been used to create story ballets and cutting edge contemporary work. This style of dance can be used to communicate any message. Because the classics are so branded into our memory, we have a hard time opening ourselves up to the potential this art form holds. How do I create meaning with my use of the ballet vocabulary? Since the shapes and lines of the ballet vocabulary are already predetermined my focus turns to how the dancers relate to the shapes their bodies create. Are they moving through the shape? Are they held back by the movement? Does the movement propel them forward? How does the movement alter their relationship to the ensemble? How does the movement change how they may feel about themselves? How does the movement make them feel? These are all questions I ask myself while creating. These questions help guide the creation process, and help determine what these predetermined shapes really mean in the moment and what they mean to the work.

As a choreographer, coach, and director, what did I learn from the challenges presented to me by the faculty? As a choreographer, the faculty challenged me to see the work as if I've never seen it before. They also encouraged me to look deeper than the lines and shapes that I've created. I began to think about the meaning of simple actions. From giving another person your hand to giving them your body weight, there is meaning in every aspect of the movement. It is my job to craft and shape that

meaning. With their guidance, I learned to examine and value the relationships created between bodies.

As a movement coach, I had to quickly figure out how I would pull the work together. The faculty gave me very long laundry lists of things they wanted to see happen before the work hit the stage. Originally, I felt under-appreciated and overwhelmed by their lack of approval. After the shock subsided, I quickly went to work. Coaching the work required that I multi-task, trust the dancers, and articulate my needs clearly. In order to move quickly, I split the ensemble into groups. Often in rehearsal you would find groups in each corner of the room. I walked around the room and gave each group corrections on whatever I asked them to work on. I also asked them to evaluate and help each other. This is where the trust aspect came in. I had to trust that they had been listening and absorbing the corrections and notes from previous rehearsals. Finally, I had to start giving feedback with the goal in sight. This helped me articulate clearly. These simple actions allowed me to successfully propel the work to performance level.

As a director, the faculty really gave me push back about trying to do five hundred things in one show. In my original proposal, I had hoped to do too many things in one year. I have a tendency to bite off more than I can chew. During this entire process, they have made me focus on the smaller details. During the last few weeks of rehearsal I battled with a very challenging step that I created for the dancers. The faculty pointed out that this section was way too busy. I didn't really want to give up the ballet vocabulary in this section. Ballet steps or not, it is clear that the steps weren't working. I simplified the section and made the steps work for the

dancers bodies. While adapting the section, I realized that the complex steps were covering up an important confrontation between mother and daughter. They have also encouraged me to understand that less is often more.

Where do I go from here? This process has given me greater insight into what it means to put a full evening length work together. More importantly, it has given me the courage to trust and value my own artistic view. From here, I will stick with my life plan. I will join a ballet company to gain more experience. While dancing I want to continue to pursue a career in choreography. I would like to set works at colleges and universities around the United States. This will help me stay connected to academia. I picture myself retiring from dance in seven to ten years. Upon retirement, I would like to spend some time teaching at a college or university. From academia, I plan to transition to working as an Artistic Director of a contemporary ballet company. It is my belief that all of these experiences will prepare me to make a positive contribution to the dance community. I am forever grateful to the University of Maryland and staff for giving me the opportunity to grow and learn.