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Laban Movement Analysis
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2012 NYU Masters' Dance Concert: An Interesting Process, Personal Perspectives, and
Laban Movement Analysis.

The following analysis has been developed throughout the semester and was possible as for my participation in three pieces for the Masters' Dance Concert. It was held November 16 through November 18, 2012 with a total of 5 performances. The event was sponsored by the New York University Steinhardt Dance Education Program. The concert is intended as a choreographic and teaching project for the Master of Arts students enrolled at the common hour class titled concert preparation that is offered a semester or a year before the students engage in teaching their choreographies. The students are expected to develop specific ideas, propose their piece and work with dancers towards a final product. The dancers vary in age, dance experience, and expertise. They are chosen through an audition open to all NYU students and if chosen, they are requested to perform in a maximum of three pieces. The meeting times for planning, organization, and rehearsals are set in blocks of 2 hours per week. I was selected to participate in three pieces and developed the work every Saturday 10:00AM to 2:00PM for two pieces and Tuesdays 12:00PM to 2:00PM for the third one.

The process included presenting the works in progress to the faculty members involved in the production and direction of the show. The MA Concert committee consisted of about 10 faculty members that observed the pieces and provided feedback to each choreographer. The dancers were not present during the comments session because it related to the choreographic

choices and devices. It did not include performance-related feedback. However, I received information about the response and advice for the pieces at different timing. Some choreographers shared the comments immediately after the showing and some preferred to do so at the following scheduled meeting.

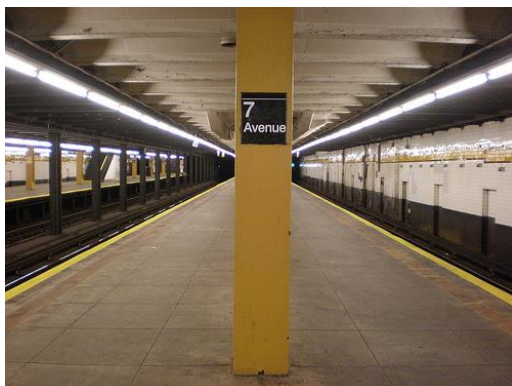
In order to complete a concise analysis, I collected information pertaining to each piece such as choreographic notes, ideas, production planning, and themes, etc. Also, I collected their written outlines of their pieces' background, music and costume ideas. Besides, my rehearsal time, I maintained electronic communication with the choreographers requesting updates, feedback, and video clips. During rehearsal, we captured short videos as a practice tool and records that I had originally planned to use towards an edited video of my project. Because of time constriction and efficiency, I decided to cut the video of my presentation, but I used the clips to analyze the process and review the phrases I chose to use as examples.

One of the pieces I learned and performed is *Space/Time Continuum* by Ruby Christine Frink. A piece inspired in NYC's ongoing energy and the pedestrian movements of its people. "In a busy city, subways are usually packed and everything continues to move around you even when you are still. Motifs were inspired and created by various subway actions such as: hanging on the pole and swiping a metro card," said Frink. The subway, people and crowded places are clearly accentuated in the piece with an abstract and interesting feeling. I believe her idea of NYC within the sense of space and time inspired her movement in a very artistic way. Ruby extracted pedestrian movements and used them to create motifs, and then she utilized choreographic devices such as repetition, manipulation of tempo, levels, and retrograde to form phrases.

There were five dancers involved: Kari L. Gonthier, Carly Kipen, Samantha Lopes Sousa, Julia Wallace, and Belinda Sáenz. The piece began with an untitled poem written and recorded by Ruby Frink and broke into recorded music “Jupiters” by Four Tet. The use of words to begin the piece added a very colloquial aspect, it represented a challenge to unify the rhythm but it came out interesting going from a poem to stillness and to an upbeat song. Her idea of costumes and lighting design served the purposes she envisioned. With various New York characters based on Manhattan locations, she created a perfect NYC look and allowed for individual creativity by assigning characters to each dancer.



The following photos were submitted to the production in order to express her ideas about lighting. As Ruby stated, “they were used as inspiration for the lighting design”:





The use of all body parts indistinctively resonated with the pedestrian notions of New Yorkers' constant mobility and contrasted with the use of stable body images of people standing. Ruby utilized posture and gestures to portray natural movement while stylizing it with interesting distal initiations in most of her motifs. Especially the beginning, a moment she used to set the main motifs which were based on arm extensions. As the piece developed, initiation of movement varied from each character's phrase but during the group work, a distal initiation returned. The body action was simultaneous, and sequential while demonstrating the asymmetry of the ensemble movement in a busy NYC subway/street.

The action focused on pedestrian activities such as stillness, traveling, walking, running, stretching, and twisting. It all reflected movement that was born within the most ordinary actions but was taken to another levels of impression. The manipulation of balance and transfers of weight, are also present in the attempt to bring the idea of traveling through space. I picture those phrases in a cube and icosahedron... I don't believe they were meant to be choreographed within those spatial forms but the concept is applicable. Besides, the variation of direction, pathways, and facing demonstrated a successful communication of her ideas of constricted vs. open space and spatial orientation. The pathways in the kinesphere remained peripheral and transverse

during the ensemble phrasing. She used all levels in space in order to represent the individual goals of each character as well as imprinting the ups and downs of life in NYC.

In terms of energy, *Space/Time Continuum* carried diversity as it developed on a group of people moving in relationship and keeping importance on individuality. For most of the ensemble work, the flow effort was ongoing, free with spontaneous and frantic moments that talked about the realities of dynamism in most areas of NYC. Also, the weight effort remained very active during the whole piece. My character was very strong and determined in her movement because she was a formal Wall Street business girl. The space effort was direct and linear for most of the piece as we were always busy traveling, changing directions sharply, and completing urgent tasks. However, the breaking towards our solo phrases and the rapid sections the effort became more indirect and wavy suggesting the constant changes of minds, decision making, out of control, and excitement. I think most of the piece worked with states that resemble mobile approaches but the overall look made me think of a vision (drive). The phrasing was impulsive during the ensemble and even during the sustained motion solos.

In terms of body-space, I noticed the shape was mainly directional spoke-like, especially when we were simulating movement in crowded places. Also, most of the ensemble phrases made me understand the shaping as having advancing, retreating, rising, and sinking notions. We were in constant relationship with one another on stage, the ideas of sinking and rising worked perfectly when it came to touching and supporting each other. The contrast of shaping and effort was successful as the group moved quickly and a soloist was widening, narrowing, rising and/or sinking slowly.

Based on this Laban Movement Analysis and my experience as performer and dance educator, I believe that Ruby Frink succeeded as choreographer because she took risks that

became interesting and fresh while portraying ordinary concepts. She was able to manipulate various choreographic devices and her combination resulted in a very unique piece. Besides her preparedness, positive attitude as teacher and choreographer, clarity on her ideas and goals, Ruby was always open to learn about our experience executing the movements.

This fruitful use of devices and combined ideas was not noted in the following piece a participated in. Because the piece was mainly divided in three contrasting sections, I compiled what I considered the overall look or highlights in terms of movement. Because of my previous experience with Bollywood pieces and my high interest in folk dance, I must admit I was disappointed with the outcomes. It is not my intention to present a negative critique about the work, but to examine the reasons of the failures as a reflective scheme. Furthermore, I was able to study the actions and omissions of the choreographer and performers and I have taken it as a learning experience.

The piece *Nmaste Nritya* (Greetings to Dance) by Lorraine Samuel was intended to be very spectacular. With five dancers: Giselle Snyder, Hillary Pond, Margaret Bouslog, Samantha Lopes Sousa, and Belinda Sáenz; this was a dance on traditional Hindu costumes: black leotard, patiala salwar (Afghani Pants), dupatta (scarf) anarkali kurti (ladies suit), and dandiya (stick). The music was a mix of “Devashree” by Ajay Gogavale. “Salaam ‘e’ Ishq” by Lata Mageshkar, and “Disco” by K.K and Sunidhi. The background of the piece is an outlook of the different genres of dance in India. The piece was divided in 3 sections: 1. Devashree: Festival of dance, music and joy. This section elaborated on the luck that Ganesha festival brings in to the family. 2. Salaam ‘e’ Ishq: A tribute to love. The sectioned focused on relationships and the beauty of feeling in love. 3. Disco: A Bollywood freestyle dance composition.

The body action was absolutely mobile focusing on the full body throughout the 3 sections. With high influence of gestures with arms, hands, and head, the facial expressions also became important features for each piece. The core and proximal initiation was major in the first two pieces but the last one became distal. I noticed the use of simultaneous and asymmetrical body actions as we bent extremities, traveled through space, jumped, turned, and constantly transferred weight.

The facing was usually towards the audience, giving the indication of a presentational piece throughout the dance. The use of dimensions within proximal and transversal actions was managed with the use of medium level as we grounded ourselves. There was bound stoppable tension, quickness and a sense of urgency in the 2nd section. Besides a strong active weight effort, there was a clear indirect space effort while presenting a mobile state with impactive and impulsive accents. The idea of constant energy was present throughout the dances. With directional spoke-like and arc-like shape flows, the dances also carried rising and advancing shaping. There was a clear but not intimate or long relationship with the scarf and stick because they were used briefly at the 2nd section. However, the relationship as a group was consistent. There was far and close interaction with one another as well as a brief audience interaction with a subtle traditional salutation gesture.

After the previous LMA and considering my experience as a dancer in this piece and my passion for folk dance, I believe that the choreographer lacked several components to make this piece more cohesive, interesting and artistic. She could have abstracted and stylized the piece instead of portraying such a traditional feeling with underdeveloped choreographic choices. I think she could have enriched and magnified her ideas by accepting our support and feedback as well as avoiding the literal framework. The piece became “plane” in terms of choreographic and

performing challenges. Lorraine seemed confused and unclear from beginning to end and demonstrated lack of preparation in various aspects: confidence, music understanding, rhythm clarity, choreographic clarity, pedagogical strategies, and use of LMA components.



The third and last piece I analyzed is *Loose Knot* choreographed by Chloe Ashley. She selected loose fitting, flowing sundresses for the female performers and jeans and solid color shirt for the one male dancer. The lighting design was bright and vibrant mixed between warm and cool colors. The dancers were: Carly Kipen, Alfdaniels Mabingo, Belinda Sáenz, La'Kim Thompson, and Julia Wallace. We danced to a song called “Tonight” by Lykke Li. I was able to interview Chloe about the process and her main ideas:

“My thoughts for the piece before I started choreographing were really abstract. I actually had been going back and forth with my fiancé about an issue we could not compromise on, so when I started dancing, the only thing that made me feel better was “throwing” movements, which helped me release stress and frustration. So that’s basically where the thought of movement came from. I guess in terms of LMA, effort and space are a big part of my piece.”

Chloe chose tridimensional patterns of movements and clear use of planes as an important aspect of the big movements reaching far. The use of all levels to accentuate the ongoing free flow was very clear. Chloe used sustained and quick movements with light weight transfers to represent the romanticism and constant battle of free and bound flows. This was useful to represent her ideas of the ongoing forces that lead us back and forth in relationships. She picked direct walking patterns with wavy gestures along with a very intense passionate drive with swing accents.



Her quality of movement was symbolic and very literal as well. Literal approaches were positive in this case because it was intended to portray real emotions within real relationships. The body action was mobile mainly through the upper body. The gestures with arms and head were pedestrian though poetic. She decided to use core and distal initiation to allow our limbs to

react freely and create a sense of repercussion. With head/tail organization, there was a nice sequential and symmetrical action in her twists, bending of knees and hip joints, traveling through space, swinging of the arms and body, and various walking patterns.

Whether her intentions were met to perfection or not is questionable, however, the result was quite interesting and honest. The relationships with their emotions and peculiarity were indeed imprinted in the use of couples, groups, ensembles, etc. A constant relationship of the dancers with one another through touching and eye contact interaction was present thru the piece. Her piece was very much about relationships because the main idea revolved around a love, friendship, agreements, disagreements, arguments, etc. It was clear from the very beginning that the couple was going through the numerous dynamics climaxes of any relationship. We began the piece walking towards each other, looking directly into our eyes, touching, and experiencing our different energies. The next section was a group of girls dancing together in a presentational manner facing the audience; the male character comes back at different moments to clarify the relationship with his partner. The girls dancing became a support and a friendly contact with the couple.

Interestingly, I danced three contrasting pieces; it was an experience of three different characters in very different given circumstances, and in very different environments. The quality of movement varies, the choices vary, and the manipulation of the LMA components is very unique according to their choreographic intentions. I have been lucky to have such an enriching opportunity that allowed me to wrap up all the information of the Laban course and use it in a comprehensive project. During my presentation in class I will talk about the three pieces separately and will explore some comparison and contrast. I will highlight the choreographic decisions and how the various choices came together to finalize the pieces. It is not my purpose

to evaluate their work as choreographers or teachers, but given the fact that they are students, I utilized the learning process to analyze whether their movement choices served their goals and I have used the opportunity to express my opinion.