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Echoes: A Dance Composition and Performance

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ECHOES: A DANCE COMPOSITION AND PERFORMANCE

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of Fine and Performing Arts Honors Program

By

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Fine and Performing Arts Program

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I. Introduction

Echoes: A Dance Composition and Performance analyzes the creative process of choreographing a dance with aerial elements to convey an emotional narrative. My experiences as a theatre and dance Fine and Performing Arts Honors student at East Tennessee State University from 2013-2017, culminated with my final senior capstone project as director, choreographer, and performer of *The Echoing Effect*, performed February 9, 2017 at the Bud Frank Theatre. The following research of the history and development of aerial dance as an art-form created a better appreciation of the artistic field and informed how I approached the daunting task of composing expressive dance that seamlessly connected movement from the ground to the air on an aerial apparatus. Through research and practical application, I explored the world of the aerial dance choreographer, and this thesis serves as a record of my journey.

II. What is Aerial Dance?

The most common responses I receive when I tell people I am an aerial dancer are a confused tilt of the head or a fake, “ahh...” which signals they don’t understand what I said, but they want to appear sympathetic. I even struggle with a concrete definition of “aerial dance” despite the fact that I have been training in aerial practices for almost six years. I like to think of aerial dance as a type of dance that incorporates rigorous, athletic physical demonstrations on a piece of equipment, an aerial apparatus, suspended in the air, to communicate an emotional narrative or abstract effect. It is a *dance* with aerial skills, not aerial skills with a little bit of dance. Neither is it a dance that features a single aerial moment as we sometimes see in ballet, theatre, or popular entertainment. The history of aerial dance is deeply rooted in modern dance. However, the foundation of our movement vocabulary is rooted in aerial circus. I think the greatest mental obstacle for most people to comprehend is that the aerial skills they commonly

associate with circus acts can be manipulated into a seamless dance. This leads to distinguishing aerial *dance* from aerial *circus*. The history and practices of aerial circus have far deeper roots than aerial dance and the general populace's familiarity with this new art form; our challenge as aerial dancers is to overcome audiences' stereotypes of circus and maintain the integrity of our work as a dance.

Dance is time, space, and energy, and the manipulation of those elements allow dancers to connect with an audience. Aerial dance can be defined similarly; we are simply inserting an aerial apparatus which provides the dancer with additional surface space and movement that coincides with the apparatus and intensifies the aerialist's awareness of time, space, and energy. As authors of the seminal book, *Aerial Dance*, Jayne Bernasconi and Nancy Smith state, "it's not just the liftoff that makes it aerial dance; it's the intention of the choreographer using aerial and its relationship to modern dance aesthetics" (Bernasconi, Smith, 6). This means that the approach to the apparatus, the transitions on the apparatus, and the resolution either on or apart from the apparatus are the keys to defining a piece as dance. Aerial dances typically contain a motif or movement "effort" that determines the quality of the movement for the entire piece. For example, the dancer might execute their movements softly and slowly or sharply and suddenly. There are endless possibilities for combinations of movement qualities that set the tone of an aerial dance. Aerial dance choreographers often utilize a technique called improvisation when creating dances (Bernasconi, Smith, 4). The choreographer and the dancer typically work in conjunction as the choreographer defines a movement quality or communicates a short story and then asks the dancer to play or explore on the apparatus while adhering to the choreographer's instructions. On the other hand, aerial circus acts or routines, a vernacular uncommon in aerial dance, are created in a set format which begins with an almost impossible "stunt" and then adds

layers of difficulty to emphasize the performer's jaw dropping, incredible physical strength and extreme flexibility (Bernasconi, Smith, 6). To add to the wow factor of the act, the performers often hold difficult positions as long as 10-15 seconds to showcase their endurance and give the audience a chance to applaud their magnificent "tricks." This applause is well-deserved, but the 'hold for applause' pattern leads to a highly presentational style of performance (Bernasconi, Smith, 6). Aerial dancers focus much less on audience applause; our objective is to elicit an emotional response from the audience, provoke an intellectual or social idea, or perhaps a combination of both. I believe all artists desire some signal of approval from their audience, however, aerial dances are not designed with pauses that create an intentional space for the audience to clap their hands.

III. History and Development of Aerial Dance

Aerial dance is a relatively new form of dance that has evolved over a short period beginning around the late 1960s and continuing to present day (Bernasconi, Smith, 4). However, we can trace the seeds that give rise to aerial dance all the way back to the Greeks with the invention of the "deus ex machina" in which actors are flown on stage with aerial mechanics that are hidden off stage. The use of aerial equipment to enhance actors' performances and extend the physical limitations of a show have been present for as long as the theatre has been in existence.

However, the true cultivation of aerial performance as a genre of dance with a specific purpose and intentionality began with modern dance choreographer Alwin Nikolais (1910-1993) .

Nikolais was not interested in exploring aerial dance as a new genre, but rather he wanted to create a distinct effect by giving the dancer the ability to suspend and hover above the floor (Bernasconi, Smith, 5). In 1960 he choreographed the dance *Sorcerer* with a dancer encompassed by a large circle of fabric to distort the performance space. In addition to the

levitating fabric, the dancer was rigged in a harness attached to a rope so they could float above the stage when they jumped laterally into the air. Nikolais also created *Ceremony for Bird People* in which performers danced from ropes attached to a tree (Bernasconi, Smith, 4). Again, his intent was not to create a new form of dance, but his experiments with various aerial apparatus led to other new works by postmodern choreographers who were inspired by Nikolais's revolutionary ideas. During the time that Nikolais was choreographing, another postmodern choreographer, Trisha Brown, began to explore pedestrian movements combined with aerial suspension. For Brown, with the assistance from a piece of aerial equipment, her experimental dances changed the audience's perspective by shifting the dancer's "floor" to a perpendicular surface such as a wall. Like Nikolais, Brown's experimentation with incorporating aerial elements was a relatively smaller part of her body of choreographic works, but the chances that she took primed the soil for the birth of a new form of dance (Bernasconi, Smith, 5).

Now we move on to the real pioneers of aerial dance: Stephanie Evanitsky and Terry Sendgraff. These ladies made tremendous strides toward the creation of aerial dance as its own art form, and yet they worked on opposite sides of the country, unaware of the other's advancements. On the West Coast, Terry Sendgraff's developments in aerial dance began with her background in modern dance, gymnastics and "recreational" high flying. In modern dance, she studied with Joan Woodbury and Al Wunder who both were influenced by Alwin Nikolais. In the 1960s, Terry was introduced to the high-flying trapeze in Denver, Colorado. Over a twenty-year period, Terry invested in other styles of connectivity such as improvisation, tai chi, and alternative bodywork methods. On the eve of her 44th birthday, Terry delivered a performance that debuted the trapeze with an announcement of her new technique which she

developed and would continue to refine; she coined the method *motivity*. This was Terry's label for the movement before it became popularly recognized as aerial dance. With multiple trapeze suspended, Terry and five or six dancers began to improvise on and around the trapeze, walls, floor, and one another. Terry's trapezes were originally rigged with two points of contact, one from each rope. In this configuration, dancers swing in the frontal plane, forward and backward, like a swing. Later, Terry condensed the two rigging points down to a single point attachment which then created two additional movement patterns for dancers. With the single point, the trapeze can be manipulated for spinning or rotating in a large circular pattern. Due to its popularity and versatility, the low-flying single-point trapeze initiated the movement for aerial dance (Bernasconi, Smith, 12). As for Sendgraff, she launched the next generation of aerial dancers.

On the East Coast, Stephanie Evanitsky followed her own aerial curiosities and founded the *Multigravitational Aerodance Group*. Evanitsky's approach to aerial suspension was less conventional than Sendgraff's low-flying trapeze. For Evanitsky, she experimented with hanging mixed props in the air to suspend dancers. Her aerial exploration was deeply imbedded in Nikolais's influence (Bernasconi, Smith, 14). After graduating from Pratt Institute in 1966, Evanitsky began taking dance classes at the Henry Street Settlement House where Alwin Nikolais was teaching. Under his instruction Evanitsky gained a heightened awareness and appreciation of space (Bernasconi, Smith, 32). "Nikolais taught you how to acknowledge the space around you. When you walked out on the street after class, you could feel the space around you" (Bernasconi, Smith, 14). This awareness and intrigue led Evanitsky to engineer new ways to find or create dance in the air with one of the other dancers, Diane Van Burg. Van Burg was studying dance at New York University at the time. With similar perspectives and

interest in space, Van Burg voiced her desire to Evanitsky to explore the air space for a dance. Together, Van Burg and Evanitsky began to develop approaches for aerial exploration and utilized Nikolais dancers for improvisation. Evanitsky writes that her search for movement in the air was not affected or led by previous achievements in the air by circus, gymnastics or even modern dance explorations. She was mostly guided by the “search for space and time that gave birth to a new way of moving” (Bernasconi, Smith, 32). This was a direct result of Nikolais’s influence. He inspired dancers to challenge conventions about space. In her search for space above the ground Evanitsky debuted her own company, the *Multigravitational Aerodance Group* in 1967 following her graduation (Bernasconi, Smith, 32). Unfortunately, the company was met with less-than favorable responses. According to Evanitsky, her dancers and their exploratory dances were “shunned” by the dance community who did not consider their work “dance” and made no efforts to understand what they were trying to achieve. However, Evanitsky reports that the visual arts community was highly receptive of their work. Her company continued to work and create dances for the next twenty years, despite constant oppositional forces, misunderstandings, and lack of recognition and respect for their defying, unconventional, revolutionary creations (Bernasconi, Smith, 33). Evanitsky was not involved for the twenty-year duration. After ten years of devotion to innovative performances and international travel spreading her new aerial works, she revealed she no longer had the energy to continue struggling to keep the company funded or to maintain a steady rehearsal space. After her creative partner, Diane, moved to California, Evanitsky’s creative ambitions suffered from the loss. Following this shift, Evanitsky was selected to participate in a Manhattan project known as *Supernova*, to present free dance classes to the public. At this event, Evanitsky met two talented dancers, Suellen Epstein and Arthur Hurray. She adopted them into the aerial company, and they proved

to be incredible assets in the company's performance and creative endeavors. Next the company took on a performance at the Guggenheim Museum after Evanitsky was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship in 1974 (Bernasconi, Smith, 36). After a company tour in Europe in 1976, *Aerodance* returned to their work in a space at the Sirovich Senior Center (Bernasconi, Smith, 15). It was there at the Sirovich that the company showcased its final performance with Evanitsky.

Following the performance, Evanitsky thanked the center for its generosity and allowance of the space and also confessed her exasperation with lack of funding and support from the arts community (Bernasconi, Smith, 36). As a result, she no longer felt capable of creating with such little support and the company divided over differences of goals. Despite her Evanitsky's frustration and the abandonment of her company, Evanitsky was no less important than pioneer, Terry Sendgraft. Both women are responsible for laying the foundation of this new genre of dance with their daring explorations and inspiring a next generation of aerial dancers.

IV. Personal Development as an Aerial Dancer and Choreographer

A. Discovering Aerial

My aerial journey commenced six years ago in January of 2011 in *Mountain Movers Dance Company*, ETSU's resident dance company. I was a sophomore in high school; I had been a member of the company for only two months when our director, Jennifer Kintner, invited me to join her in the dance studio one Saturday morning for a one-on-one session. She told me that she wanted to introduce me to something new that she was working on. The morning of our appointment, I woke bright and early to meet Jen at 8:30 a.m. in the dance studio of the Mountain State Health Alliance Athletic Center. As I walked in I immediately noticed a red piece of fabric hanging from the ceiling. Jen explained that she and her friend, Sunshine, had been learning and exploring aerial movement on this red swath of fabric as a new way of

dancing. I thought to myself, dance? I had preconceived ideas that this equipment was reserved for the circus since I had only seen pictures of trapezes associated with colossal tents and clowns. I had not seen a dance performance with this equipment, and I certainly never imagined that I would personally encounter an aerial contraption in my *dance* training. Nevertheless, I withheld these private thoughts and stepped forward as Jen set into the lesson.

The first thing she demonstrated was a climb. After observing her and listening to her instructions it was my turn to execute. I recounted her directions as I stepped up to the fabric and tried to mimic her movement. I began to climb and climb and climb all the way to the top and suddenly I realized how high I was off the floor, 20 feet up in the air. The view of the studio was much more interesting from the ceiling; however, I was a bit nervous at this new altitude. I cautiously peered down to Jen on the ground below me and caught sight of her motioning for me to come back down to the floor. With great care, hand over hand, I descended the fabric with a rush in my head, heart, and stomach. Next, I learned how to tie a basic footlock around my foot and ankle. I cannot recall the exact sequence of skills that I completed after learning this lock, but I do remember how unusual the footlock felt and how awkward my movement was on the fabric. I had never attempted any type of exercise or “dance” like this before, nor did I know what this was supposed to look like. I felt as awkward as a new born baby giraffe standing up as I tried to mimic Jen’s actions or follow her verbal instructions. Lastly, Jen tied a knot in the fabric and simply told me to “play”. Play? On what? The “knot” she just tied? I was so perplexed that Jen eventually stepped in and gave a short demonstration on how to mount the knot and offered a few suggestions of how I might move or explore the new sling that she created. With these helpful hints, I made an entrance onto the knot and began to move freely and impulsively, rolling, inverting, and spinning on the knot. I felt like a child discovering a

playground. The movement was physically challenging and downright fun. I didn't know that you could have that much fun in dance. The following morning, I was sore. Actually, sore is an understatement. Semi-paralyzed might be more accurate since I could hardly roll my body out of bed. My small hands were gnarled from holding onto the thick fabric, my arms were deflated, my back was tender, and the list goes on. Evidenced by endless aching muscles and the joy of the experience, it only took one aerial lesson to convince me that this was the ultimate way to work out. The fabric was beautiful, and I could dance with it, on it, and around it, while challenging and increasing the physical limits of my body.

Unfortunately, Jen and I were only able to continue with a handful more of lessons until we had to take a significant break for ETSU's 2011 Spring Dance Concert. Our company was contributing a marathon of a dance to the show, and many of our members were dancing throughout the entire concert as well. One member, Sunshine, Jen's aerial partner, was starring in an aerial fabric solo. This was my first taste of aerial *dance* in action. Yes, Jen had invited me to try aerial dance, but I was in the early stages of learning aerial vocabulary and developing the strength necessary for aerial work. My closest encounter with dancing on or with the fabric took place when we improvised with the apparatus at the end of our lessons, but we had not ventured into learning or creating choreography. I had never seen an entire aerial dance performed until I watched Sunshine during rehearsal. It was also the first time I had a cathartic experience watching a dance; I was completely captivated. I can remember how much I wanted to be her. I coveted her strength, her grace, her radiance, and the fluidity of her movement. I was intoxicated by the way she moved so naturally with the fabric. Not only was I moved by her dance, but I had an enormous amount of respect for her effortless projection. Unlike most of the other dancers in the show, I knew how difficult aerial was first hand which enhanced my admiration of

the dance even more. I take the time to describe my response to Sunshine's dance because her dance set a fire in my heart for aerial dance. It was the combination of strength and empowerment that I felt through my lessons with Jen, and Sunshine's aerial performance that inspired me to pursue aerial training and performance. For the first time in five years, I felt like I had discovered a genre of dance that suited me perfectly. As a child I played tee ball, basketball, and football with my brother and dad. My brother and I spent most of our elementary days playing at my grandparents' greenhouses in the dirt and climbing trees all over their property. We rode go-carts and dirt bikes, and often we picked apple fights with one another as they fell from the trees. You can imagine my disgust when my mom took me to my first dance class when I was ten years old. I was not suited for ballet, and ballet was not suited for me. I had the thighs of a gymnast, and my feet were not conducive for pointe shoes. I did, however, develop a love for movement and the ability to express myself in jazz and modern dance classes, but I never felt like I was completely in my element until I was able to combine my athletic roots with dance in aerial.

B. Growing as an Aerial Dancer and Choreographer

Aerial is an encapsulating discipline that demands physical, mental, and emotional exertion and strength. I would like to say that my aerial journey has been a constant high with forward progress at every stage, but that is not the reality of my experience. As I have pursued aerial dance training and performance in the last six years, I have had to overcome three significant injuries, three residential changes, my parents' divorce, and a sudden, unexpected death of a close friend, while balancing the daily grind of the class load of a Fine and Performing Arts Scholars student, community service, and part-time work as a nanny of three young children. My journey has been anything but predictable, and my aerial development has both suffered and

surged from these physical, mental, and emotional obstacles. There have been seasons where I have soared through physical progress and others when I was completely out of commission and unable to train. There have been times where I detested parting from my work and creative progress in the studio, and there have been days that I loathed to even set foot inside the studio. It was in the waning of my strength and motivation to train and practice that I discovered another facet of aerial dance: choreography. I first began to choreograph as a distraction when I felt that I was not progressing in my physical achievements on the fabric. As I became more interested in and addicted to the challenge of choreography and its unique emotional release, I began to learn techniques for choreography. Choreography transforms the dancer's connection with the apparatus; it is the beginning of a relationship. The apparatus is no longer a dead piece of equipment; it becomes a living partner that we interact with. Choreography invites us to find a purpose for interacting with our partner. Once we insert music, phrases of movement, and a purpose for our movement, the work transforms from a physical challenge to an emotional outlet and vessel of communication. We graduate from something that "looks cool" to something that has power, gives life, meaning, and purpose for our work.

One is not transformed into an aerial dancer because they took a class and then captured a picture of their favorite pose on a piece of aerial equipment. "Looking cool" and simply "wanting" to try this type of dance are not enough to qualify one as an aerial dancer. Aerial dance can be graceful and electrifying, but it demands a high level of discipline and willingness to endure and press through pain. Much like a ballet dancer who is skilled on pointe, this art form may appear "dainty" or "effortless" to an audience, but behind the scenes it literally takes blood, sweat, and tears to achieve success. The skills of an aerialist are earned through extreme discipline which molds and shapes the body for the physical demands of working on an

apparatus. I like to think of it as developing a certain level of pain tolerance. It takes so much more than going to class once or twice a week to survive and progress as an aerial dancer. It requires commitment, discipline, self-denial, consistency, endurance, tolerance, determination, resilience, focus, motivation, patience, and a balance of push and self-love.

The work of a choreographer takes diligence as well. It's an unexpectedly difficult art form. Imagine, no rules, no restrictions, no limitations. The responsibility falls solely on the choreographer to create something from nothing. So where do we begin? In aerial dance we first have an apparatus. With the apparatus we have a list of vocabulary and techniques that can be executed on the apparatus. But the secret of creating a successful dance is in the arrangement, transitions, and intentionality. The "in-between" steps that seem less significant are truly the most important elements of creating an aerial *dance*. Not just a dance that uses a piece of aerial equipment as we saw with Nikolais and Brown. When you choreograph, one must understand it requires a balance between creating boundaries and freedom to create a dance. It is a strange dichotomy of limitations and exploration. You need boundaries to create a framework for the dance. Without some sort of guidelines, the dance is too open to any type of random arrangement. Boundaries also give us a better chance of creating something that is cohesive and consistent in theme or movement efforts. However, we also need to accept a certain amount of flexibility and playful freedom in order to create beyond our physical limitations. It is essential that a choreographer is free in their mind to draft original ideas and imagine the impossible. Even if one cannot execute something that you imagine because of a physical limitation, the imagination leads to new possibilities that one would not have arrived at without thinking outside the box.

In the summer of 2011, I co-choreographed my very first aerial dance along with two other dancers. I was new to both aerial and choreographing. My main focus was safety. I was blessed to work with two dancers who had been studying aerial dance longer than I, and both were more accustomed to creating sequences of vocabulary. They were very helpful with suggestions for our dance sequences in the air. However, I can recall as I was performing in the piece, and in talks with my dancers prior to our presentation, we primarily discussed the safety protocols for our skills and drops. The next dance I choreographed was in the spring of 2012, *Sitting in the Sky*. By this time, I had been practicing aerial skills for nine months, and I was much more comfortable with executing choreography by muscle memory. I had also learned more skills on the fabric which provided me with a greater variety of movements to choose from to incorporate into my solo dance. As I recall, this next attempt at choreography, I focused on *dancing* the movement and incorporating additional gestures with my head, arms, and feet that add artistic flare to a dance. I also began to consider how to approach and leave the apparatus which I had previously overlooked. The way in which a dancer first approaches and interacts with an apparatus sets the tone for the entire dance. And the manner in which a dancer leaves their apparatus can give the audience a feeling of completion or spoil the entire dance. My third dance in the summer of 2012 was a fabric solo I called, *Girl's Night Out*. In this fun, upbeat piece set to K.T. Tunstall's *Suddenly I See*, I focused on creating a character in my dance. A character who was preparing for a night on the town while swinging, climbing, wrapping, and rotating around the fabric. I also worked diligently on audience engagement. While staying in character, I wanted to project out to my audience and draw them into the excitement and sass of a girl putting on her make-up, picking out her clothes, and dancing along to the "radio" while getting ready for an eventful night. So often in aerial, dancers can become very internal when we

perform because we are focused on safety and the physical strain of our choreography. The gaze is internal, and the body language is closed off to the audience as we try to focus on our choreography and manage our adrenaline. Aerial performances generate an adrenaline rush because of the nature of the beast and the chance that an aerial apparatus may behave unexpectedly or differently in the middle of a performance than when the performer rehearsed their dance. When working with an aerial apparatus the dancer is supposed to be in control of the apparatus, but sometimes we encounter unexpected situations with the aerial apparatus, and dancers can slip in a position or get tangled in a wrap. When this happens, especially on stage, our adrenaline is racing, and we must maintain a level head to safely exit from the mishap and continue the dance, or descend to the ground. My fourth dance, I choreographed in the fall of 2013. This particular fabric piece was a duet for myself and the director of the modern dance company that I dance with, Jennifer Kintner. In this dance my greatest challenge was executing movement in perfect synchrony with Jen. When creating a duet in which both dancers perform the exact same sequence a choreographer has two options for timing: synchrony or a canon. In a canon dancers commence their choreography after one another with a clear and distinct separation in between the initiating movements. Each of these dances presented new challenges and opportunities to focus on additional performance elements, from safety to dancing the movement to creating and staying in character to audience engagement to coordinating with a partner. The work of an aerial dancer and choreographer largely depends on how and if you connect with your movement in each performance. Therefore, the quality of our dances only improves with time and an extraordinary amount of practice.

V. The Echoing Effect

In February of 2016, my thesis advisor, Professor Cara Harker, and I met to draft ideas for my senior capstone project. Professor Harker and I have maintained a close working relationship since my freshman year when she noticed my interest in pursuing aerial dance for performance and choreography in my career. Throughout my enrollment she has helped to tailor my experience in the Department of Communication and Performance with creative opportunities that engage and challenge my skills as an aerial dancer and choreographer through dance classes, performances, and traveling to workshops together. Yet, I was still surprised when Professor Harker generously offered me the opportunity to present my existing and new choreography in the Bud Frank Theatre with the potential of setting up the aerial dance rig and technical support with lights and sound from Professor Melissa Shafer for my senior capstone. I gratefully accepted the opportunity and began to consider which pieces I previously choreographed were worthy of the big stage and what kind of dances I should create to fill in the gaps. In anticipation of post-graduation auditions, I felt this was my opportunity to create visually interesting and technically challenging aerial dances to highlight my performance skills which could be recorded for a demo reel. I also wanted to unify my showcase with some sort of theme which I had previously seen Professor Harker execute in the 2011, 2012, and 2014 dance concerts.

Over the summer, I evaluated my dances to see if there were any re-occurring themes or motifs within my body of work. Unfortunately, I could not draw a unifying topic from the dances. I decided to choose an outside theme and integrate the concept into my completed dances and works in progress. I incorrectly assumed that the process of choosing a topic would be easy. For weeks, I tried to decide on a subject to explore through dance, but it was not until I

chose a more relaxed approach for my search that the idea found me. As I was driving to work one morning in late July I heard a song that mentioned echoes. As I listened and sang along with the lyrics, I found myself captivated by the concept of an echo. I began to see how this subject could unify my dances and would provide rich, fertile material for new dances. The following week, while on vacation I began to research echoes. This included several definitions, synonyms, their behaviors, characteristics, and how and where echoes are created. Next, I began to journal my thoughts about the process. I started by recording my anxieties and expectations to clear my head and get them out in the open. Once I acknowledged my fears, I could breathe a little easier and surrender to the process.

I scribbled a list of the dances that I had choreographed and of the works in progress that I wanted to further expand. In total, I listed nine dances. I knew that I would not present nine dances in my showcase, but I needed to lay out the possible combinations of aerial apparatuses and available dancers to accompany my performance. After scanning my list, I categorized the dances in two divisions: aerial and floor dances. I had the potential of five aerial dances and four floor dances. Following Professor Harker's example in the 2016 Spring Showcase I decided that I would like to have two acts in my performance. The first act would consist of aerial dances. During a brief intermission, our technical crew would disassemble the free standing aerial dance rig for the second act. The second act would display floor dances.

The second week of August, I began the creative journey working with Claire Woodard, one of my aerial dance partners. In June, Claire and I created an aerial fabric duet for an outdoor summer performance. The dance was quickly assembled at the time, but we both knew that it was the seed of a greater dance that I wanted to incorporate in my final thesis production. Once the two of us were back in town for the semester we worked diligently for two weeks prior to the

start of classes, reviewing our dance, and exploring and improvising new material with the abstract idea of an echo inspiring our movement. The dance already contained a partnering section on the fabric in which I climb above Claire, and we move in patterns that reflect one another's movement. We also utilized our ability to spin on the fabric as a technique to disguise our transitions, and I knew that I wanted to further expand this element of rotation to mimic the rings of an echo. As we shared ideas, we developed three new phrases of movement to add to the current partnering section: a separate aerial sequence performed in unison, a spinning sequence, and a floor pattern. In two weeks, I was thrilled that Claire and I managed to create the structure of our fabric duet.

Once I felt confident in the progress of the fabric duet, I turned my attention to creating a solo dance on a lyra, or aerial hoop, for my mentor Jennifer Kintner. I chose to use a hoop because of the symbolism between a circular apparatus and an echo which radiates in a circular pattern. Besides my choice of apparatus and dancer, I knew that I wanted to create original movement patterns and transitions that started with the foundational skills of lyra technique, and then alter the aesthetic quality to avoid any trace of presentational or circus-style delivery as I have frequently witnessed in aerial performances. I did not want to create a sequence of "poses" with arm accents. Instead, I wanted to explore the entire surface area of the aerial hoop and defy typical entrances and transitions that a familiar aerial observer would anticipate. Our first meetings began with re-visiting stock vocabulary and then exploring unusual approaches to set up these traditional skills. As we improvised, I discovered an aesthetic that I wanted to incorporate throughout the dance: flexed feet walking around the entire hoop, or bracing on top of or against the hoop. With this pattern in mind we created a multitude of sequences on the

hoop; we developed excess material so that I could have plenty of choices when making the final cuts for the choreography.

I then shifted my focus to reviving an aerial straps duet and floor duet with my training partner, Michael Maughon. We began our rehearsals with straps warm-ups and playing with new partnering ideas while spinning. I was so excited to have the time to expand our original straps duet into a larger suite with solos for both Michael and me. However, in late September, Michael informed me that he had chosen to have surgery on his left hand. The operation was scheduled for the first of November with at least a month of prescribed rest for rehabilitation. I then had to prepare for a break in our training and even anticipate the possibility of losing my dance partner if his hand could not recover from the operation by Christmas break. With this news of Michael's surgery, we began to focus on singular skills during our straps training in anticipation that I may need to perform a straps solo.

Throughout the month of October my meetings with Claire, Jen, and Michael were less frequent due to scheduling conflicts, however, I was able to maintain progress in sessions by myself through training and documentation. By November 2, I began to consider the possibility of consolidating the show into one seamless act without the disassembly of the aerial dance rig. While I was debating the consolidation, I had another meeting with Jen where she casually mentioned incorporating a swing and letting one of the children that I nanny play on the apparatus. Her idea was not closely related to my topic, but I am so fond of the children that I take care of, I was very tempted to bring them into the show. Within the week, I decided to cut two floor pieces, and combine a ballroom duet with aerial straps. I also continued to entertain the idea of including a child, creating characters, and inserting a storyline. I did not intend to re-choreograph my dances, but the idea of echoes began to inform the emotional narrative more

than the choreography. I thought about how experiences in our lives shape who we are and who we will become. Often, the memories of painful events return to us again and again at various stages of our lives, like an echo. I decided to assign a character role to each dancer and re-structure the order of the show to tell a narrative of how memories inform our present choices and those choices affect our future.

After working with this new order and storyline for a month, on December 20 Michael informed me that he would not be able to perform in the show. Unfortunately, I had organized that show so that our floor duet was the opening dance and the breakdown of our relationship on stage affected every other piece that followed. Without Michael, I lost the conflict that set up the narrative. There was not enough time to return to my original idea of an abstract presentation, and my heart was already invested in this new idea of telling a story through each dance. I had to re-imagine the show with a new conflict, order, add a dance and re-assign roles for the remaining dances. The aerial dances were no longer abstract displays of grace and strength. They were transformed into necessary equipment to tell the story; each apparatus had a purpose and a motivation. I began to rearrange my priorities as a choreographer to highlight the story. This required that I simplify my choreography to help the audience follow the characters instead of getting lost in unrelated dance moves. After communicating the new plot with my dancers, we devoted ourselves to find motivation for each gesture in the choreography. We began to allow our physical actions to shape our emotional responses instead of imposing our feelings onto the dance. This approach changed almost every point of contact and interaction. As a dancer, I began to see the other dancers more clearly, and every time I touched another dancer I felt an almost electrifying connection because I had a purpose for connecting with each one. As a choreographer and director, the story was transforming into an authentic and believable

narrative once we assessed each dancers' approaches and created inner monologues for our characters.

VI. Conclusion

A. Discoveries

As a result of my senior capstone project, I made several discoveries about myself as an artist and my preferences in the style of work that I create. The most significant lesson I learned was how to be content with my own choreography. Throughout this process, I constantly struggled with accepting and being confident in my own choreography. I enjoyed the beginning of this undertaking when I selected dances to present. I began to feel like a real director when I refined my choices by eliminating and adding dances; I felt much more settled when I decided to consolidate the show from two acts with an intermission into a one act, twenty-five minute straight run. And when I had to re-imagine the storyline and dances in late December after losing a key dancer, I was up for the challenge. But in the end, no matter the story or the style of presentation, I struggled the most with settling in my choreographic choices. Thank goodness for deadlines otherwise I might never have committed to my choices. I constantly second-guessed myself, and comparisons to other choreographers' works became one of my biggest enemies. I was miserable because I was worried that my dances would not meet my audience's expectations. When the spring semester began, and Professor Harker checked in on each dance, I was incredibly nervous. What would she think? Would she be disappointed in my work? I was so honored that she presented me with this opportunity to perform on the main stage in the Bud Frank Theatre, but I was riddled with anxiety that I would let her and the division down. I was stunned when Professor Harker first looked at my dances and gave me her approval. She was so calm and re-assuring. After she gave me a little feedback concerning dancers'

motivations I confessed to her that I was fretting about my choreography and if it would meet the audience's expectations. It was in that conversation that she taught me the greatest lesson throughout the process. She first asked me, "Do you like it? Are you pleased with the choreography?" My response was a shy, uncommitted yes. She then told me that as long as I approved of the work, as long as I liked the dance, that was the only validation I needed. She encouraged me not to worry about the audience's expectations nor her own expectations. She told me that she was proud of me no matter what and that I had to be confident in my work. Her kind words repaired my damaged self-esteem and confidence in my dances. Thanks to Professor Harker, I will no longer compare my work to other's. I will let my own opinion, instead of fear or any other external pressure, be the guiding force that I assess my work by.

B. Final Thoughts

The Echoing Effect provided my first experience as a director and first time balancing all three roles of director, choreographer, and performer. To date, the only other person that I know that has also worn all three hats at the same time is my thesis advisor, Professor Harker. She executed her roles seamlessly in my first dance concert with East Tennessee State University in the spring of 2011. I was a sophomore in high school and completely ignorant of the demands that are involved when you occupy all three roles; I certainly never imagined that I would have the same opportunity six years later. My experience of balancing these demands was stressful, chaotic at times, and incredibly rewarding. It all paid off on February 9, 2017 when my show was met with a large and supportive audience. I was honored by their attendance and their patience to stay and engage with the talk back afterwards. The most re-assuring compliment that I received was from a deaf gentleman in the audience. He told me that even though he couldn't

hear the music, he was able to follow along with each moment of the story because of the variety of expressions on my face and the other dancers and our motivated responses to one another. In that moment, I felt that I had succeeded. The hard work paid off knowing that he enjoyed himself and the show and was able to connect with my story. I received a similar compliment from Professor Bobby Funk who noted that I “danced with my entire body.” I was struck by his observation because it made me feel like I had achieved the combination of actor and dancer, at least to the best of my ability in the moment. As challenging as this experience was, I would do it all again. As a result of this project, I am convinced that I must use dance to tell stories. I am passionate about proper technique and inspired by performances that focus on the spectacle of aerial dance, but my heart is moved by a story. I learned that I am most fulfilled when I combine my training in dance and theatre to reach an audience through a narrative. I know I have much more to learn in aerial dance and especially as an actor, but this project stirred new longings in my heart as an artist, and I am eager to fulfill these goals in a professional career.

VII. APPENDIX

Journal

Day 1

Writing on the beach...

Honors Thesis Presentation

Echoes. Thus far, I am interested in the idea of an echo and exploring echoes and their characteristics as the leading idea of my thesis showcase.

Echo- a sound or series of sounds caused by the reflection of sound waves from a surface back to the listener.

-a close parallel or repetition of an idea, feeling, style, or event.

Verb:

-(of a sound) be repeated or reverberate after the original sound has stopped.

-(of an object, movement, or event) be reminiscent of or have shared characteristics with.

Synonyms:

-reverberation, reflection, ringing, repetition, repeat

-duplicate, copy, replica, imitation, mirror image, double, match, parallel

Observations:

An echo arrives at the listener with a delay after the direct sound.

Typical examples are the echo produced by the bottom of a well, by a building, or by the walls of an enclosed or empty room.

A true echo is a single reflection of the sound source.

When sound is reflected multiple times from multiple surfaces, the echo is characterized as a reverberation.

In nature, sounds reflecting off canyon walls or rock cliffs facing water.

The strength of an echo is frequently measured in dB sound pressure relative to the directly transmitted wave.

Echoes may be desirable (as in sonar) or undesirable (as in telephone systems).

Day 2

Concerns by the water..

When I consider my thesis, and the amount of work that I want to accomplish, and the people/professors that I want to prove myself to, I begin to feel tired and overwhelmed. I want to approach this project in an organized manner, but I have so many thoughts and there are so many possibilities for planning, organizing, research, documentation, exploration, playing, and putting ideas into action in the studio that I feel like I need to loosen my grip a little and stop trying to manipulate this project and all aspects in a stressful, linear, “organized” manner. There are different stages with a project of this magnitude, and the transitions between those stages should be fluid, not strict. Just as an echo bounces back and forth off a surface so will I bounce back and forth between ideas and stages during the process. I need flexibility to work with an “echoing” approach, and enjoy the freedom of bouncing back and forth; this works well with my short attention span. Record what you want, when you want. Just try to title things so that you can remember your purpose. Surrender yourself to the process, because the **process** comprises the majority of the project. And if you make yourself miserable with lists and checking off boxes in order, then you miss the joy of the experience.

Most recently, I choreographed:

Letting Go, straps duet with Michael

Trust, floor duet with Michael

Co-choreographed:

Opposition, fabric duet with Kelsea

2014:

Someone to Watch Over Me, floor duet with Casey

Works in progress:

Straps solo

Fabric duet with Claire

Lyra duet with Jen

Tree duet with Kelsea

Group piece

Day 3

Back home at Panera with a mango smoothie...

Today in the studio with Claire we started the “second phrase” of our fabric duet.

New belay entry with inverted straddle and crochet to

Backwards pike drop to

Roll in belay swing, can create larger swing and play with partner swinging and manipulating the person on the fabric

Day 4

While watching my straps piece on film, I'm thinking...

-I want to tighten up our spins and add more dynamic/moving shapes.

-Clarify the message, if there is one.

-Smooth my transition in the span set from the entry to sitting. Might need to rearrange order and/or change shapes.

-In ankle hang, play with eye contact and/or reaching out to Michael to draw him into the moment so that he isn't separate/disconnected.

-Could the opening happen underneath the straps and allow us to somehow make a more natural connection to the straps?

-Begin first spin together

-In second spin add back to back with legs and knee hooks

Partnering inspiration from Diego & Elena film:

-Planking/planche off of partner

-At 2:10, her spin off of his straps

-I like "elbow hooks" to connect

-At 4:11, her transition from knee hook into him

-At 5:00, ankle hang partner work

Second video:

-Start walking around each other, lock elbows, then pull into ball tucks together

-X-back straddle partnering:

Rollups and tear drop

Day 5

Cara and I had our first thesis meeting yesterday, Tuesday August 23rd.

We discussed the requirements of my thesis, deadlines and expectations. I also spoke with Cara about the execution/performance.

A two part-performance: aerial and floor.

Clarifying the aerial pieces:

Opening with straps duet with Michael

2nd, lyra solo for Jen

3rd, fabric duet with Claire

4th, straps solo

Clarifying the floor pieces:

Opening with duet with Casey

2nd, trio with Devorah and Whitney

3rd, Mountain Movers group piece

4th, duet with Michael

Cara and I also discussed having an immediate talk back following the show to encourage provocative questions about the material and process.

The Boland Symposium:

Once I present my work and have a talkback in February, I will not have to present at the Boland Symposium, but I will present for the Honors College. I hope to show one floor piece and discuss my process and concept for the showcase.

Lastly, I need to approach Bobby and Scott about being 2nd and 3rd readers.

Day 6

MM group piece...

Starting with Jen's new phrase, elaborate and expand this movement.

Dance begins with dancers scattered, all dancing in different places, then eventually linking up in unity

Also, consider using three groups, improvising and responding to the spoken word and incorporating light weight sharing.

*Think about echoes, reciprocity, reflections.

Day 7

Grinding out the details...

I met with Scott this morning, and he agreed to serve as my third reader.

Scott encouraged me to remain open to consolidation/being selective with my dances, and be aware of which pieces are the strongest, which ones remain experimental and which of these do I want to present.

He will mostly monitor Cara and Bobby's feedback/criticism.

And he encouraged me to document, everything. Writing, photos, videos, everything.

Notes from working with Jen... the beginnings of lyra.

Jen's feet turned over to an ankle press instead of feet in the lyra.

Blocking/wedging, unconventional resting points, not prissy movement

Day 8

Questions for Cara from the thesis syllabus...

-“target a specific scholarly journal and write in that format”, What journal should I target?

-“using the primary research literature in your chosen field, use credible sources.” What kind of literature in my field?

-thesis examples?

In the studio...

I expanded the floor phrase that Jen began creating.

Problem solving on the lyra:

-How can I transition from a handstand to rolling down on my stomach without getting my shoulder caught?

Sequencing:

-man in the moon, shoulder stand open legs wide to straddle, drop legs down to back arch then walk feet along/back up the hoop “up and over” to continue rolling onto stomach, then roll around to knee hang.

-man in the moon, lift hips by wedging inside the hoop, brace feet and roll hips out of hoop into “birdcage” shape. Drop belly down to hoop and straighten legs, then retract back to ball.

Transition with reverse grip.

-reference film for sequence above the lyra, 2 videos

-think about starting above lyra, roll down to hoop, hoop sequence, then above lyra sequence.

Details and questions...

-Do we need tickets for admission?

-David Cantor, photographer?

-James, videographer?

-Costumes?

Day 9

Traveling back in time...

I received Bobby's approval to be my second reader today. He also suggested that I look into a French style of dance from the 20s, 30s, and 40s in which the dancers were "fighting" while dancing.

Day 10

Bobby's suggestion continued...

The dance does not involve real stage fighting techniques. It is more dance, with the idea of struggle and pain as opposed to a real stage combat fight.

There are not any knaps or sounds or strains involved. The "fight" or struggle is highly stylized with dance and tumbling.

Day 11

Lyra on labor day...

-hip balance drop

-swinging beats holding top of lyra

-I liked Jen's reverse grip transition out of birdcage

-relapse = drop

*Jen did not feel confident about man in the moon exploration.

*Play with resisting gravity, for instance ball on side of lyra does not slide down

Another sequence

-start in low dragonfly, beat legs up to ball on side of lyra, take/push feel back to make contact with lyra and turn into "standing M.I.M", then brace on the "solid ground", then let head lead forward and drive the hoop back with feet

-dragonfly beat up to MIM by putting knees up to chest instead of ball

-instead of shoulder stand, push up to reverse embryo on the outside of the hoop and retract back

-dragonfly to rib cage balance

-walking as pulling up on the lyra

Day 12

I need to make a trip to a place where I can research, explore, experience echoes live.

Day 13

Back to straps...

Michael and I trained straps in the studio today. Our first day back in at least three months. Tremendous fun and tons of sweat.

We trained most skills including:

- front levers
- back levers
- meathooks
- transition to reverse meathooks
- side flags
- transition in side flags
- roll-ups

I had tremendous progress on my back levers, reverse meathooks, side flags, and transitions, and roll-ups. None perfect by any means, but I found my back lever by bracing myself on my lats. I was able to sustain a reverse meathook on both sides with only a lights floor spot. I managed a successful side flag on my left side, and I even started working the transition out of my left side flag. My roll-ups are far from mastery, but I was able to sustain my pike and keep my arms straight and begin to understand the mechanics of my first roll-up. There are so many nuances, adjustments, and fine tuning that must happen simultaneously. My arms are exhausted and my biceps/elbows/wrists are bruised, but I will get here. I will learn roll-ups.

Bonus, Michael showed me a roll-up exercise using the mats for strength, stability, and further understanding of the skill.

I was also able to discuss his timeline, and I discovered that he has a limited amount of time to work with me before the showcase. Therefore, I think that we should not try to incorporate Bobby's suggestion of the Apache dance style into our straps duet. It would take too much time to re-work the dance; time that we do not have.

So, I would simply like to revive, tweak, and expand our current straps material. I believe this is more manageable/attainable within our timeline.

I'm thinking: duet, Michael solo, Jess solo, all in one suite like piece. The music will need to be extended.

Day 14

I need music... and a few random thoughts...

Break of Reality, Spectrum of the Sky

I think that I will let go of the duet with Casey and trio with the ladies, because I would really like to focus my attention on the aerial pieces and MM group piece.

I would like to go back to research echoes, and then check in with my pieces and how they are fitting into the concept.

Day 15

Sitting in Design Basics...

1. Look at pictures of echoes.
2. What are the lines associated with echoes?
3. Do these lines create shapes or mass?
4. Is there an emotion evoked by echoes?
-an emotion associated with the lines or created by echoes
5. How do/can Laban efforts communicate these emotions?
6. What kind of pace do we associate with echoes, their lines and emotions?
-fast, slow, long, drawn out, or quick/terse
7. Do I want to communicate with organic or geometric shapes?

What kind of echoes do we interact with/encounter in life?

*There is a difference between literal and suggestive interpretations.

Day 16

Music...

Break of Reality:

- Vintage, 3:39
- The Farewell, 5:45 or 7:09
- Che, 5:24
- Circles, 5:13
- Solid Ground, 4:47
- Lateralus, 9:03
- Near Light, Olafur Arnalds for lyra piece

Day 17

It's a good day...

After five sessions with Michael, I got my reverse meathooks today! Both sides!

It hurts to breathe now, but that is a small price to pay to have this skill, and I will happily do it again.

Next Michael says that I have to work on switching from meathook to reverse meathook.

Aside from meathooks, I am starting to feel concerned about the pace of my thesis progress. There are several things that I am wanting to do, but not able to find the time to do them.

Things like:

- Reflect on the lunch with Kate
- Watch Paul Taylor documentary about creative process

- Reflect/glean from Design Basics for the overall composition
- Research echoes and locations of echoes
- Think about the theme, mood, transitions and details and big picture with more information about echoes and their behavior.

New running:

1. Opening with straps (duet, solo, solo)
2. Lyra
3. Fabric duet
4. Floor trio
5. MM group piece
6. Closing with Trust

Working with Jen on lyra...

- incorporate twists
- chin up, pull knees up for a transition
- roll around, to "reverse meathook" grip
- Jen's "around the world"

Day 18

I have lots of thoughts, ideas, and concerns about the straps piece right now so this entry is about to get messy and will most likely be scattered.

Time constraints:

Michael gone October 8-31

Michael surgery November 4, out all of November

We potentially have December and January, but there will be snow days and other times when Michael is out of town.

I need to ask him about a live performance if we have a set date. Can he make plans to perform in the dances live?

With this news of little time to work, I am wondering how much I should change the pieces. I feel like I shouldn't make major changes, but, I was not thrilled with the previous piece. So really, I would like to alter the piece quite significantly.

How can I alter the piece more tastefully while keeping the bones of the choreography?

Things that I want to add:

- height, either with a raising and lowering rig or with a platform to step off from.
- more advanced, complex spinning phrases
- more advanced vocabulary
- more complex dance structure, utilizing dance improv and manipulation

I like when Michael manipulates the straps and increases my speed, spin/torch, and height. However, I think this can only happen from the ground.

I like using Michael as a base to push off from, connect with, use to hold a limb, but can this only happen from the floor?

If we are elevated on a platform, I shouldn't be able to touch the floor, so that limits our surface area as far as play and improvisation is concerned.

I want both floor play/improvisation and height for spinning phrases.

If I want both, should I plan to film this piece, off campus with the raising and lowering rig?

What if there were two versions of this piece? One on film and one live?

Or what if we have our spinning phrases filmed with height and play them behind the live performance?

Bigger question, can I count on Michael for a live performance?

Or should I plan on a film for our duet and a live solo for myself?

If I have to film, I want to film Trust in an aesthetically pleasing space.

My goal is a live performance, no matter the height limitations because there's nothing like the intensity of a live performance, not to mention the Bud Frank is not ideal for presenting a film.

Day 19

Lyra...

-sitting in the slack of the spanset about the lyra, play here, find the edges of your reach

-from sitting, turn into "diverish" position and slide all the way out to hold then beat back up

-start next time, playing with the lyra low on hips like setting up for down dog in the hammock

Day 20

Lyra continued...

-start low, beneath lyra

-set the theme in the opening seconds

-reach to "the edges" on the floor while connected to the lyra

-3 echoes, and every time it gets larger

-think about expansion, don't twist yet

*Each piece has a reflection of or translates to the next with parallel gestures.

Day 21

A visit to Biltmore... a day away for me to explore and work.

4 videos recorded, reference these for shapes and patterns that could connect all of my pieces.

Phrases that I like:

1st video

-forward lung

2nd

- “dig” behind the back

-low crouches

-final kneeling back to audience, chest open

3rd

-contraction and expansion

*think about the shapes that your back space creates

*think about the intention of the movement in the transitions, the in-between steps

-under leg twist

4th

-trying to find height

-suspension to contraction

-final opening out

On the lyra...

Start with spanset around waist, roll around to diver, double knee hang- play with fighting, driving, twisting lyra

Jen's shapes:

-straddle, side gazelle, legs crossed

Start with side gazelle, suspended with spanset around waist, keep tab low on hips, then open to straddle- remember lyra is at an angle, then down to double knee hang or one knee in, then legs crossed, then slide out.

Day 22

Halloween...

Lyra work- start with span set/third tier portion playing and driving the lyra before pulling lower body through.

Then put feet on lyra to push chest up and off lyra.

9/5 video, reference for “re-entry” onto lyra.

-I like the reaching with the feet and driving with hips and heels.

-I finish standing, which can lead into Jen's “standing” position with head dive

Cassette one: exploring with foot and hand, diver to legs crossed on back.

Day 23

Naomi's birthday, a beautiful fall morning, crisp and clear...

An update on Act II.

I am eliminating the trio with Devorah and Whitney.
 I am considering eliminating the MM group piece.
 I am hoping to add a ballroom floor or floor/aerial piece.

Option 1

Act I

-straps

-lyra

-fabric

Act II

-ballroom duet

-MM group piece

-Trust duet

Option 2

Act I

-ballroom

-straps

-lyra

-fabric

-Trust, on film at Jen's farm

My concern with the MM group piece is that we haven't even started this piece/setting this piece on bodies, and I don't think that it is going to come together as I want in time for the show. I want to set the choreography and have plenty of time to play with patterns and groupings.

I just don't think that there is enough time to go through this process to achieve the dance that I want, and I can't expend energy stressing about a floor piece that I am not in. I have three months left, and I have to make my time count, especially since my other pieces need so much attention. I need to let Jen know that I am dropping this piece from the show, but would be happy to continue working on this choreography through the spring.

Day 24

It's a tango...

I enter, tango with straps, Bren enters and comes to me as I arch toward the audience and takes my straps off. Full press, he lifts me away from the straps and we begin to tango together.

Day 25

Food for thought...

Opening with a child on the rig.

Day 26

Continuing to explore this idea...

- open with Trust
- ballroom (man and woman meet)
- strap solo (alluding to pregnancy)
- two girls playing on trapeze
- fabric duet
- lyra solo (reflecting on life)
- or Trust duet (How trust guides our lives? The ripples of creating and breaking trust)

Collaborating with Cara...

Option 1

- Start with Isla on trap
- straps solo
- Trust
- ballroom
- two girls
- fabric
- lyra
- Jen, Jess, Isla

Option 2

- Start with Trust
- ballroom
- straps solo
- two girls
- fabric
- lyra
- Jen, Jess, Isla

Option 3

- Start with cast on stage
- Trust
- straps solo
- ballroom
- two girls (or just Isla)
- fabric
- lyra
- Jen, Jess, Isla

I am going with option 3.

Transitions:

1. Bring the story down from while apparatuses are being changed out in shadow
2. Blackouts with change out and Cara speaking

Thoughts while I have them...

The challenge with my solo is going to be in telling the story *through* the skills, and not allowing it to become a “trick” piece.

How can I communicate my feelings with each skill?

What does each skill and shape convey?

Bearing through the pain? Learning to trust yourself?

What are the stages of broken trust, recovery, reflection, echoes carrying forward?

-numbness, denial

-shock, fear

-grief, loss, mourning

-rebuilding

Setting up/prepping for certain skills on straps is just mechanical and ugly, but necessary. So make it clear that the straps serve as an outlet/escape/source of rebuilding/the future that you are investing in/the safe place that you are returning to, the only thing that you have been able to count on and your movement.

What is Claire and I have a moment on the trapeze or we somehow overlap choreography and create a swinging phrase on the fabric?

Day 26

Training...

Finish well. No matter the start or the middle, finish well. I have hit a slump in the last two weeks without training and working on my dances because of the intensity of the semester and homework. But it's not worth looking back or getting discouraged, just keep going. Re-focus and finish well.

Day 27

Needs...

Trust

-confirm with Michael

-rework with text

-change ending

Straps

-music

-choreography

Ballroom

-music

-choreography

Trap

- music or perhaps spoken word
- choreography

Fabric

- music
- finalize choreography

Lyra

- extend music
- finalize choreography

Finale

- music
- choreography

Trust

- start with cast on stage, cast slowly disappears and Michael and I are left alone.
- begin facing each other with an invitation from him for me to trust him
- start with the background music then lead into the lyrics
- insert a light "trust test" before we go into the hand balance

At some point there needs to be a breakdown of communication and therefore trust.

Trust is something that you build. We start to build trust, but at some point it will disintegrate and ultimately lead to separation, in this piece.

We can start with a relationship that is already formed. We don't have to show the formation of the relationship; the audience will follow wherever we start. Once we show the trust/the settled, familiar state, then a miscommunication leads to a breakdown in trust and the relationship. This breakdown sets the trajectory for the rest of the show.

The challenge will be when and where to insert the beginning of the breakdown and how to communicate the full expression of the disintegration of the trust.

When trust is questioned:

- the initial tension creeps back in, you start to question your partner's actions and motives
- you begin to calculate the conversations, interactions, arrival time, and departures
- we begin to analyze/pick them apart and prepare ourselves for disappointment

Once we reach this point, we are closer to an end rather than a resolution.

A relationship without reciprocity will die. Reciprocation-echoes.

Mistrust is a silent, deadly poison in relationships. It slowly works its way in and eventually consumes the relationship if it is not addressed.

Once the ripples/echoes of the breakdown reach a certain point the relationship is almost beyond recovery or reconciliation.

Creating or breaking trust lead to consequences or rewards.

The dance begins joyful, pleasant. But as the mistrust becomes apparent, discourse follows. The pain is deep and profound, but I want the parting to be tender, not dramatic or hateful.

The frustration/struggle/misunderstanding is motivated by the need for love, our desperation to have someone to count on.

How can we *safely* represent a breakdown?

-perhaps a suspension that ends in a crumble, roll away and apart

-use of contractions, reverse tension

Day 28

Lyra with Jen... the beginnings of a beginning.

-Jen starts in lyra swinging, contemplating her life, and her choices.

-After remembering her child, perhaps Claire come out briefly to create the adult memory.

Day 29

The technical minds meet... with Cara, Melissa, and Zach.

Transitions, I want to try to create seamless transitions between dances. I would like for this concert to be structured like a play without blackouts. Draw the story down center, highlight the action and hide the technical transitions in the background.

Dates:

Tues 2/7, tech with cue to cue, 7-10

Wed 2/8, dress, 7-10

Thurs 2/9, show, 5:00 call, 6:00 go

Richard and Michael, stage hands

Need two more tech hands in booth.

Tuesday 2/7

3:00, bring straps and safety check with Delbert

Day 30

December 21, 2016

Today I learned that Michael is out of the show. During our session in the studio, he confirmed that his hand, which he had surgery on almost two months ago, is not recovering as he had hoped, and he cannot partner with me in our floor duet or our straps duet. Now I must re-

imagine the conflict/dance that will set the trajectory of the show. I'm afraid this will mean I have to change other dances and perhaps re-assign character roles.

My latest draft of the show began with a couple in a relationship navigating trust issues. The dance reveals miscommunication between the two which leads to mistrust and ultimately the relationship dissolves as a result of the broken trust. I wanted to portray this relationship and the broken trust in such a way that the audience is not attached to this couple but can understand the loss, damage, and lasting effects of a broken trust.

My project has evolved from an abstract exploration of echoes with an emphasis on aerial spectacle into an emotional narrative as I have eliminated dances and assigned character roles to my existing cast. Unfortunately, my original idea for a conflict that sets the show in motion is no longer available to me since I have lost my male dance partner, and no one can understudy his choreography since it involves extreme partner work and hand balances.

I have decided to take a little inspiration from the recent conflicts in my own life to integrate into the show and illustrate my concept that painful memories return to us again and again, like an echo, and our response to these memories will determine our future. Without the fact of the past we can't live in the present, but it doesn't mean we have to repeat it in the future.

I think I will open the show with an argument between a father and mother that their young daughter witnesses. She runs away to her swing for solace because she is too young to understand the conflict and is scared by their fighting. Times passes, the girl is now in her adolescence, and will appear at the swing, played by myself. This time, I am at a crossroads of my own, contemplating the relationship that I am in, and if I can commit to this person. The boyfriend will appear. We'll dance, and I will tell him that I have to leave him. He is stunned and hurt by the rejection, and the "older version of myself" will appear and prohibit me from interacting with him further. She will try to get me to move on from him and understand that he is not someone that I can trust. We will dance together, utilizing the same text from the previous Trust duet that I choreographed with Michael. She will then try to get me to move on from the break-up into a new season by dancing with aerial straps. Aerial straps solo will proceed, then another female dancer will appear; she symbolizes friendship and encouragement. We will dance in a fabric duet, and then she will leave. Once I am alone again, my older self will re-appear. The show will conclude with the older version of myself dancing on a lyra, contemplating her life, her choices, and the importance of her decision not to let her painful past ruin her future.

Day 31

I feel most behind on my solo choreography because I am still training the straps skills that I plan to incorporate into the dance. I need to list the skills that are available to me and then draft combinations of the skills based on hand holds and transitions.

Meathooks, Contortion flag, Reverse meathook, Side flag, Roll-ups, One arm-one leg roll-up, Front lever, Back lever, Superman Kip, Planche over one shoulder

Combination:

One: fan entry to meathook, play with legs in meathook, contortion flag in meathook.

Two: Side flag or crucifix behind back, one arm-one leg roll-up, back lever

Day 32

Working solo floor choreography:

I have two floor phrases. Working with quick steps, light jumps, turns and skimming with bound forearms/elbows or contraction in upper body. The question is, how to communicate the emptiness, longing, and loss multiplied? Try working with verbs such as: searching, stripping, pressing, fighting. I'm also considering the use of two props: a ring and a ball. A ring to reference the relationship I lost and the ball to represent my childhood and my parents' divorce.

I am also considering to have the cast appear during my solo, and highlighting each character, one at a time, with light and let their presence influence the quality of my movement. It's like they are present in my subconscious, and each person changes the way I move.

Straps choreography:

Adding a circular spin? While spinning, skin the cat, retract, superman kip, roll and play.

Gaining height, one arm-one leg roll-up, finish with basket and reverse meathook.

As always, how do I make these skills purposeful in telling the story and expressing my "thoughts"?

Day 33

Clarifying my characters, dances, and intentions.

I need to set up the show with a conflict. I have thought about illustrating this with an argument between a father and mother, but I don't want to create dialogue or risk any sort of melodramatic tone. I want to start with the dad and his little girl playing with a ball and swinging on a trapeze (swing). I want the mood to be light and tender. Then the mom will enter while they are playing, and the dad will tell his daughter goodbye, pick up his suitcase, and leave without a confrontation, but the message is clear that he is done with the relationship and his daughter feels abandoned. Using light play and mimes.

Time passes, she has grown up and is struggling with a relationship of her own, which she is contemplating on the swing where she used to play as a child. Her boyfriend enters and swings her like her father did. He then proposes to her, but she walks away from him. A tango ensues as they try to understand one another. He wants to convince her to stay with him, but becomes

too forceful as he becomes desperate which scares her and causes her to leave him. Incorporating ballroom, weight sharing, and partnering.

Next I want the aerial straps solo. This will be a chance for her to deal with her feelings. After she leaves her boyfriend, the ball re-appears that reminds her of her father, their time together, his leaving, and his absence now. This causes her to respond angrily since she can't talk to him, and she feels like she has committed the same crime as her father did by walking away from someone she loves. She becomes tangled in the aerial straps and wrestles with her thoughts and emotions of her father's choice, her choice, and her boyfriend's response. She finishes in exhaustion on the floor. In

Then the future version of herself appears to help console her, lift her up, and try to instruct her to rely on herself and trust herself before pursuing other relationships. Trust text will be used, but new weight sharing and choreography. This will end with a healthy resolve.

At the end of the floor duet, her mom will re-appear with a fabric. Now that her daughter is older and has decided to pick up the pieces with her new-found inner strength, she approaches her mom for reconciliation. The two re-connect and start fresh in their relationship over the course of a fabric duet.

Time passes, she is now in her middle age years looking back on her life up to this point, contemplating her choices and responses to the painful memories that followed her. An aerial hoop now represents her past instead of a ball. She is able to interact with the hoop on the ground, inside the hoop, and most importantly above the hoop which symbolizes she has perspective and has risen above the pain. The other two representations of herself, childhood and young adult, will return to embrace her on the hoop, symbolizing acceptance of herself and overcoming her past.

Works Cited

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