Post-Neoclassical Exploration: Innovation in Classical Ballet

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**BACKGROUND**

Post-neoclassical ballet—an extension of ballet’s both classically traditional and nontraditional practices, is the movement aesthetic ballet is developing into. Considered after neoclassical choreographer George Balanchine—“the father of neoclassicism”, and explored by the world’s top innovators of today, post-neoclassical ballet continues to defy classical dance, but uses ballet’s classical structure and traditional foundation. By attending live dance performances, engaging in informal dialogue with dance artists and choreographers regarding post-neoclassical ballet creations, and choreographing my own works using this particular aesthetics’ strategies and approaches, these opportunities will facilitate investigation in a nontraditional creative process.

**OBJECTIVES**

- Discover how choreographers create movement language and develop dance movement specifically in the post-neoclassical ballet aesthetic.
- Discoveries, approaches, and strategies will lead to continual development in personal choreographic style and voice.
- Observation, informal conversations/dialogue, and choreographic strategies used by world renowned post-neoclassical and neoclassical ballet choreographers David Dawson, William Forsythe, George Balanchine, and Richard Siegal are the references of this research study. Strategies learned will then be used to:
  - a. Choreograph a premiered creation for the Charlotte Ballet Summer Intensive in Summer 2019
  - b. Choreograph for a professional dance company launch in Detroit, Michigan in Summer 2019
  - c. Use information learned to create a pedagogy, and integrate a neoclassical ballet segment at the Florida State University School of Dance into the current Repertory class to improve student understanding of 20th century ballet.

**LIMITATIONS OF CURRENT PRACTICE**

Most university ballet departments do not offer non-traditional ballet styles, approaches, or instruction specifically in 20th century ballet, and also only offer traditional ballet and contemporary in the curriculum and studio courses. There is little education or work shopping in post-neoclassical ballet, and as a result, dance students lack in developing an understanding of the post-neoclassical ballet aesthetic. This can lead to students creating innovative classical compositions without completely understanding the details and nuances from the post-neoclassical ballet style, and as a consequence, the creations could lack high level innovation, sophistication, and risk.

**RISKS**

The risks in not pursuing explorations in new innovative choreography and movement strategies in classical ballet are that consequently 1) ballet will have difficulty remaining relevant and 2) university ballet programs will not be current with the rest of the world in innovation. Studying repertory and strategies from current innovative neoclassicists are essential for ballet students’ education. Practical studio application in classical ballet innovation

**METHODS AND ACTIVITIES**

- Visited the world-renowned New York Public Library’s Jerome Robbins Dance Division to engage in choreographic video archival footage of George Balanchine, William Forsythe, and David Dawson.
- Traveled to Saarbrücken, Germany to observe David Dawson’s choreography, The Grey Area, danced by the Saarlandisches Staatsstheater.
- Traveled to Berlin, Germany to attend performances featuring the Staatsoper Ballet Berlin in Berlin, Germany to observe Richard’s Siegal’s ballet Oval, George Balanchine’s Theme and Variations, and William Forsythe’s The Second Detail.
- Facilitated by Virginia Hendrickson, former dancer with Ballet Frankfurt (Germany) and Royal Ballet of Flanders demi-soloist (Belgium), research in Antwerp, Belgium allowed opportunities to discuss, view choreography, and dance workshoped innovative post-neoclassical movement language.
- In Frankfurt, discussion with Forsythe repertoire specialist Thierry Guerderdioni, as well as other dancers and choreographers also familiar with the Forsythen and Dawson Trajectory, modalities, and strategies. An origins of ballet exhibit in at the Palais Garnier in Paris as well as discussions on the Balanchine approach in Budapest were also research highlights.
- Traveled to Dresden, Germany to observe the Dawson work entitled Four Seasons performed by Dresden Semperoper Ballet.
- Returned to the United States for an invitation to create an abstract work on the students participating in the one-week Charlotte Ballet Summer Intensive.
- Research information and movement strategies will be used to create a duet entitled Forbearance, on two current dance professionals for an initiative company debut in Detroit, Michigan.

**FINDINGS**

- Organized chaos in the continual changing formations of bodies in space.
- Using the body’s main appendages at full range throughout the choreography, which designs infinite pathways through space.
- Ultra-twisting in the arms and great amount of use in port de bras (carriage of the arms).
- Cueing both musically and dancers in space.
- The choreographer’s specific music selections which helps create a specific and unique atmosphere.
- Costumes whichextrême the dancers, lines and bodies.
- Natural and extreme range in the casted dancers’ legs, feet, and arms in extension line.
- Dancers natural sense of musicality.
- Sophisticated music score.
- Atmospheric, simple, and unique set designs that contribute to the choreographer’s creation.
- Use of syncopation both in the dancers’ movements as well as music composition.
- Timing of the finish in the legs, feet, and arms.
- Seamless, fast and/or extreme partnering work challenging center of gravity and counterbalance.
- Lighting options that highlight and understand the choreographer’s intent and vision in the choreography.
- Requires the dancers to take risk and push the body beyond its limits.
- Staying true to the intention of each step without reserving or holding back objective, aim, or purpose.
- Hyper-musicality.
- At times, collaborative creative involvement.
- Improvisation as part of organized chaos.
- At times, use of metronome and timer to control movement timing/action.

**NEXT STEPS**

- Continue applying new strategies and use researched approaches in a January 2020 creation for Uptown Dance Company (Houston, Texas).
- Spring 2020, as previously listed, integrate a neoclassical ballet segment at the Florida State University School of Dance into the current Repertory class.
- Use network expansion of post-neoclassical dance makers, choreographers’ assistants, and educators in Europe to workshop and collaborate post-neoclassical innovative ballet movement approaches with the FSU School of Dance students.

**RESULTS**

Success in the new Charlotte Ballet Summer Intensive creation. The new choreography demonstrated an athletic, innovative, more present, and interesting creative work. These strategies will continue for the new creation in Detroit, Michigan.