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VARIATIONS FROM THE BIGSKY

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DANCE

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By

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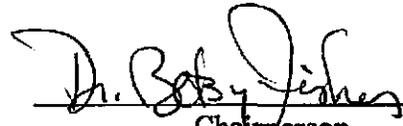
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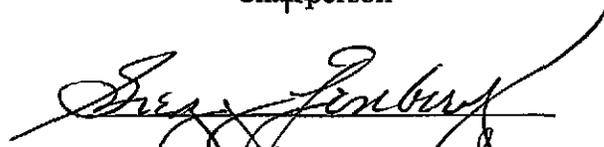




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Chapter 1 Thesis Proposal

Chapter 1.1 Introduction

Alone in a new city, living in a home where my native language was rarely spoken, I was overwhelmed by a homesickness I had never imagined possible. The new sights, smells, tastes, and people were both overwhelming and loveable, though. And after a period of adjustment, my love for Hawaii has grown exponentially. The homesickness has never really left me. There are good things about leaving home; leaving Montana led me to my true love. Hawaii has given me a new knowledge of the world and its people; it has created the opportunity for new friendships that will last the span of my life. But I will leave this place. I will take my true love and return to my home. Being away has allowed me to realize the importance of where I came from, and how that place and its people have shaped me. I love Hawaii, but I am Montana.

Chapter 1.2 Initial Proposal

Variations from the Bigsky is a suite of dances that will consist of two previously performed works and three new pieces. “Field Ready”, with music by Kimmie Rhodes and Willie Nelson; and “As I Lay”, with music by Trent Reznor; have both been performed in Footholds concerts and are what I consider integral pieces of this dance puzzle. “Field Ready” is the story of a matriarch’s life. Her family, the land she tends, and the children she bore. “As I Lay” specifically addresses the death of that matriarch, exploring the pain her passing imparts on a community as well as the joy her life has created.

The duty of a matriarch however, is not just to tend to a family during her life, but also to give them the tools to effectively carry on after she has gone. The three new dances in this suite will peer into the lives of the generations left behind. “Under Starry Skies” is a female solo set to an old cowboy anthem that will explore the exuberance of youth experienced in a land with few visible boundaries. My childhood in Montana was

somewhat picturesque. Summertime was a herd of young girls trekking through the woods in search of wild flowers - under the watchful eye of the family cow dog, who never let us stray too far from home. It was sunny afternoons on rubber tubes floating down a lazy creek. Or on allowance day, it was speeding through town on banana seated bikes with multicolored streamers fluttering from the handlebars, on our way to get a \$0.99 root beer float at the A&W, where beautiful teenaged carhops ruled the day. They were days before death, before uncertainty, when everyone we loved was still alive and life's biggest worry was whether the snow cone vendor would be at the city pool tomorrow afternoon. "Under Starry Skies" will explore the freedom of a youth lived to its fullest.

The second new section of this suite is an as yet untitled male/female duet that explores the support system created by two people in love. The creation of a family is a process that until two years ago, I didn't realize existed. Contrary to the old adage, a person can choose her family. Not the family she is born into, but the family that she will bear. I chose my husband and he chose me. What we have created so far in our short life together is not only a system of love and support for one another, but also a union of existing families. We are creating the cornerstone upon which future lives will be built, and this dance will explore that process. This duet will rely heavily on partnering, weight sharing, and ultimately the trust shared between two people. Intimacy between the two dancers will be imperative, which means that thoughtful casting is a must.

The grande finale of this suite will be set to "Hoe Down". This selection will portray a grand celebration: a wedding, birthday, or even the lively luncheon that follows most Catholic funerals I attend. Because in the end, in spite of the death and pain and uncertainty, there is joy.

Chapter 1.3 Proposed Choreographic Process

The basis of this work is emotion: the love I feel for my family, my husband, and the place from which I've come. It is also based in grief, loneliness, and the sometimes overwhelming uncertainty that accompanies adult life. All movement invention stems

from a place of feeling, as opposed to from a place of what looks good. Because of this, I feel it is imperative that the dancers play a large role in the creation of the movement. For example, the means by which I would choose to express a particular emotion may very well seem strange and unfamiliar to another dancer. This unfamiliarity is easily read by an audience and therefore negates the choreographic intent. If the dancer cannot feel the emotion in the movement, the emotion does not exist. I have found that my cast members have proven invaluable assets in creating movement that is expressive and personally meaningful.

I believe it is my place as the choreographer to provide the careful and extensive editing necessary to make a cohesive work from a set of choreographic exercises. I dictate only to a small degree what movement is performed. More so I choose how, when, where, and why that movement is done. I stand behind the genius of my dancers and call myself a choreographer, when in reality I am their copy editor.

Chapter 1.4 Casting

In accordance to UH Theatre and Dance Department policy, Amy Redmond and I will hold a joint audition in October to select dancers for the new works in this thesis concert. I will once again perform the role of soloist in “Field Ready”. In an effort to maintain the original choreographic intent of the previously performed dances, I hope to retain as many original cast members as possible. I feel that this is particularly important in “As I Lay”, given that the bulk of the movement was created by the dancers and is highly personal. I served, for this work, as choreographic editor rather than movement creator. To place this piece on new dancers, when the original cast is available, would be a disservice to both the dancers and the dance.

For these reasons I respectfully request that Chansri Green, UH graduate and Kapiolani Community College faculty, be allowed to rejoin the casts of “Field Ready” and “As I Lay”. Chansri has proven an invaluable asset in the conception, creation, and performance of both of these works. To replace her would be both unfortunate, and I feel, unnecessary.

Chapter 1.5 Rehearsal Schedule

Work on new pieces will commence on Wednesday, October 31st at 5:30 p.m. in the Temporary Dance Building. I have already secured this rehearsal space for the duration of the semester. Initial rehearsals will be held every Wednesday evening for the duration of the fall semester. At the start of spring term, work on restaging pieces will begin, and the creation of new pieces will continue. Restaging rehearsals will take place separately from the new work, at a time conducive to the dancers' schedules. These rehearsals will be conducted on a weekly basis for the duration of no less than ninety minutes.

Chapter 1.6 Music

Generally when I choreograph, I do not select music until the cast has been in rehearsal for several weeks. I feel this creates a situation where the movement dictates the music, freeing the work from becoming a music visualization. This is also important because of late I have been drawn to using popular music in my work. With a steady 4/4 beat and lyrics there is the grave danger of predictability and physical manifestation of those lyrics. Choosing music after the dance has been somewhat established staves off these dangers, allowing for an affective use of pop music.

In this situation however, because it has been in planning for an extended period of time, I have pre-selected music for two of the three new dances. The female solo will be performed to Roy Rogers' "Don't Fence Me In", and the celebratory finale will be set to Aaron Copland's "Hoe Down" a staple in the Montana Summer Symphony's repertory. I have not yet selected music for the male/female duet, but I imagine the piece set to something along the lines of a Susie Tyrell, Linda Ronstadt, or Willie Nelson song. Country music has been a part of my life for as long as I remember, and certain songs (some of which I have mentioned in this proposal) make me homesick. This music sets a particular ambience, it's reminiscent of quieter days, of the common folk. Because of this, I feel that to set certain selections of this suite to any other genre of music would be inappropriate.

Chapter 1.7 Costumes

Women will be dressed in the same costuming worn in “Field Ready” and “As I Lay”: plain, threadbare house dresses and simple, unadorned hairstyles for all dancers. Men will wear worn denim pants and printed button up shirts. Every effort will be made to pull costumes from storage, rather than making or purchasing new items.

Chapter 1.8 Proposed Suite Order and Duration

- 1.) “Field Ready”, 4 minutes
- 2.) “Under Starry Skies”, 3 minutes
- 3.) “As I Lay”, 5 minutes
- 4.) “Male/Female Duet”, 5 minutes
- 5.) “Finale”, 7 minutes

Duration of new choreography, 15 minutes

Duration of *Variations from the Bigsky*, approximately 25 minutes

Chapter 1.9 Existing Cast

“Field Ready”

Maya Iida
Tiana Khron-Ching
Shannon Yamamoto
Amy Redmond
Chansri Green
Becky Helfert Wedll

“As I Lay”

Maya Iida
Shannon Yamamoto
Chansri Green

Mikaela Brady

Lauren Santos

The availability of all cast members has not yet been confirmed.

Chapter 1.10 Conclusion

Variations from the Bigsky is a highly personal work, a private sentiment made to be seen by the world. It is an expression through movement of who I am, where I came from, and whom I love. I look forward to the opportunity to share these things with the world, and I thank you for your kind consideration of this proposal.

Chapter 2 The Creative Process

Chapter 2.1 General Overview

Rehearsals for *Variations from the Bigsky* began on November 18, 2007 with a large group rehearsal. These rehearsals, as well as smaller ones dedicated to the duet and solo sections of the work, continued through the end of Fall semester, broke for Christmas vacation, and began again on Sunday January 26, 2008. There were many roadblocks throughout the course of the semester that I had not planned for, many of which made it necessary to deviate from my initial proposal.

In my proposal I mentioned that I had secured Wednesday evenings for rehearsals throughout the semester. Professor Amy Schiffner took the time I had reserved for her “Drop Back” rehearsals though, leaving me to find a new time suitable for all nine of my dancers. After much discussion we settled on Sunday mornings, which we continued throughout the course of the rehearsal process. I had intended for spring rehearsals to begin as soon as the cast returned from winter break. However, a two-week residency to set Paul Taylor’s “Three Epitaphs” usurped a large percentage of my cast, and all of my rehearsal time in TDB. Professor Patricia Gaither Adams also specifically requested that no rehearsals for the Footholds production be held at this time, making weekend and early afternoon rehearsals taboo. As this residency was not planned at the time I had created my proposal and its time line, I had not planned for the disruption. As a result, my project time line was null throughout the course of the making the thesis, my progress stunted by a full two weeks.

As I mentioned earlier, in making this piece we had one large, three hour group rehearsal on Sunday where we worked on reconstructing and reinventing “As I Lay” and “Field Ready”, as well as creating the suite’s finale, “Happily Ever”. In addition to this, we held rehearsals throughout the week to work on “Angel on My Shoulder” and “Bright Eyed And...” Early rehearsals for these pieces were quite productive, as the dancers were energetic and eager to contribute to the creative process. Their

contributions to both movement invention and qualitative integrity proved the backbone of this thesis work. Without this particular group of dancers, who are not only stellar technicians and performers, but also intelligent dancers for whom creative problem solving is second nature, this thesis would not have become what it did.

I began each new section of this work by giving the dancers a phrase of movement I had created. I then asked them, either on their own or in groups of my choosing, to elaborate on or make something new from this phrase. I edited each of these short dances, and placed them in some type of order to create the framework for the rest of the piece. This is not to say that every phrase that was initially created made it into the final work. Over the course of six months, the vast amount of editing, restructuring, and reworking that took place in each of these five dances was incredible to me. Especially after my thesis committee became involved and began giving feedback.

As the creative process became more complex, and the expectations placed on both me and this work escalated, I felt it necessary to add more rehearsals in order to achieve success. As a result, Sunday mornings were fully dedicated to this project. I began working at 8 a.m., rehearsing the solo for “Field Ready”, at 9 a.m. Shannon Yamamoto and I worked on “Bright Eyed And...” and then at 10 a.m. Sarah Hartley and Lauren Santos came in for “Angel on my Shoulder” rehearsal. After this we spent the following three hours working on “As I Lay”, “Field Ready” and “Happily Ever”. It was a full day that was fairly exhausting, but given the large group and their busy schedules, we decided together that it was a better alternative to adding another rehearsal during the week. Ironically, when crunch time came right after spring break, we did add yet another rehearsal to our schedule (for 90 minutes on Tuesday evenings) in an effort to solidify the performance qualities necessary to bring this work to life.

There were also many casting decisions that deviated from the initial proposal. Maya Iida was not available given her intense course schedule in the College of Education, nor was Chansri Green. Lauren Santos was not available for Sunday

rehearsals, which took her out of both “As I Lay” and “Happily Ever” although she was still able to commit to “Angel on my Shoulder”. I replaced these dancers before the first rehearsal with people who I felt would embody the essence of the movement that had been created by the initial dancer, but not necessarily perform it verbatim. Much later in the process, about two weeks before tech weekend, Shannon Yamamoto was injured and had to be replaced. This was particularly challenging, as Ms. Yamamoto was an integral part of the creation of four of the five sections of this suite. Fortunately, her replacement was stellar, and what could have been a complete disaster was instead merely an unfortunate event. My final cast was Gwen Arbaugh, Mikaela Brady, Tiana Krohn-Ching, Sarah Ann Hartley, Travers F. King, Amy Redmond, Lauren Santos, Megan Southcott, and myself.

Chapter 2.2 “Field Ready”

“Field Ready” was the first piece I created for performance here at the University of Hawaii. Based on a composition class assignment: create a movement biography of someone you admire or find interesting. The initial solo was based on my grandfather. This solo, which is nearly identical to its original form, explores his life, his interactions with his friends and family, and his physical attributes and mannerisms. The chorus was added later in an effort to depict the people my grandfather experienced in his life, making the interactions with friends a more literal experience for the audience. I made a very conscientious effort to keep this piece as close to its initial performance as possible. I felt that as this was the basis for everything that would come after, it was important to maintain the integrity of its original form. We were very successful in doing so. The piece did grow and change, as the original cast members were not all available to perform in this work, and each new dancer brought their own unique vision and experience to the movement. These changes were a matter of performance quality, though, as the actual choreography received only minor tweaks in this reconstruction.

Chapter 2.3 “Bright Eyed And...”

Originally intended to be a solo for junior Shannon Yamamoto, this dance underwent drastic changes from its proposed form. The working title was “Under Starry Skies”, which I scrapped in an effort to move away from the lyrics of the song we were using as a title. Instead the new title looked to describe not only the dance, but also the character and her outlook on life. We began rehearsals for this piece in November of 2007, which seemed early at the time. However, given Ms. Yamamoto’s busy schedule and subsequent injuries throughout the course of the semester (she missed five of our twelve scheduled rehearsals for various reasons), the early start may have been the only thing that saved this work. Unlike the other sections in the suite, most of the choreography in this dance is my own. Often I would give Ms. Yamamoto a simple movement phrase that we would work on together to create detail and depth, but rarely did she create movement for this piece on her own.

I intended this piece to express the vast possibilities of youth, and to do so I chose to use the allegory of the vast possibilities of the Montana landscape. I intended the movement to be expansive, exploring not only the dancer’s kinesthetic space, but also the space in which she danced and the space beyond that. This concept was a struggle for the ballet-trained dancer I had cast (who also had never seen for herself the expansive landscapes of the American West), and greatly effected the initial choreography. While I was frustrated with this constant struggle, I was determined to make a work that was suitable to both my artistic intent and the dancer’s abilities.

Late in the choreographic process though, Ms. Yamamoto suffered a serious head injury that forced her to withdraw from the Footholds concert. I was forced to replace her at the last minute with Megan Southcott, a junior who is relatively new to the dance program here at UH. While the injury was terrible and not something to be wished upon anyone, I felt that in this instance, the replacement dancer performed the work in a manner more appropriate to the work and the choreography itself. Ms. Southcott has spent several summers studying dance in the expansive wilderness of Colorado. Given this experience with the landscape I had intended this work to

describe, as well as her extensive background in modern dance, Ms. Southcott brought an understanding of my intent to the work. In the two short weeks she had to learn and rehearse the dance, Ms. Southcott not only became proficient at the choreography that had already been created, she also lent to the creation of new movement that added significantly to the clarity of the work.

Also late in the choreographic process, it was decided that this dance was in need of a direct connection to the other dances in the suite; a thread to connect it to the community tapestry the five dances looked to create. As such, Travers King was added as Ms. Southcott's playmate, and later on-love interest. Integrating this new element into the already established dance was a challenge. Initially Mr. King's entrance, as well as the interaction between the two dancers seemed somewhat forced and a bit awkward. After several unsuccessful runs, we discovered that having one of the offstage dancers give Mr. King a good hard shove onto the stage created an amusing "back story" as well as a reason for him to be there. We also discovered that giving him more structured choreography for his interaction with Ms. Southcott overcame the awkwardness we had been experiencing earlier.

This section of the dance was a particular challenge from its inception. The cast change was incredibly stressful, as was the struggle to find rehearsal time with the dancer I had initially cast. And while the movement itself does not appear to be technically difficult, this work was both a cardiovascular challenge and an exercise in gestural expression. Without Ms. Southcott's ability to paint the visual picture I intended the audience to see, the work could have been a total flop. Fortunately, she and Mr. King provided a wonderful performance, taking the work far beyond my initial expectations.

Chapter 2.4 “As I Lay”

“As I Lay”, another piece I had made earlier in my tenure here at UH, did not remain as true to its original choreography the way “Field Ready” did. Detailing the turmoil experienced by a family when watching the death of their matriarch, this piece has deep sentimental value to both myself, and the dancers who helped me create it. The work, like “Field Ready”, also received three new cast members though, each of whom brought new and exciting elements to the choreography. One new character in particular, played a major role in reshaping this piece into a deeper and more intricate dance. I cast Gwen Arbaugh to play the part of one particular family member whose struggle seemed more violent and inescapable than the rest. Ms. Arbaugh, whose dance specialty is Japanese Butoh, danced this role with incredible depth and commitment. This new choreography created new interactions between the characters, lent to various structural changes in the dance, and initiated the need for an even greater qualitative commitment from the rest of the dancers. Coupled with some very selective editing as suggested by my committee, I felt these developments made the piece, in its new and improved form, incredibly successful.

Chapter 2.5 “Angel on my Shoulder”

“Angel on my Shoulder” was by far my favorite part of this thesis work, both making the piece and seeing it performed. This dance was originally intended to be a love story between a man and a woman. However, once I learned that Amy Redmond, a fellow M.F.A. candidate with whom I was sharing this thesis concert, was also making a love duet, I reconsidered the structure of the work. Given that at the time we started rehearsals for this piece, there was only one man in the department to play the male role, and also that I felt two love duets in one concert could become tedious for the audience, I instead chose to cast two women for this piece. The piece then became a duet about my interactions with my sister; a relationship that is both joyous and frustrating.

I began making this piece by teaching the dancers two movement phrases I had created. Into those phrases we integrated several moments of weight sharing and lifting. This movement, coupled with the supports we created, established the characters the dancers would portray: Sarah Hartley the older, wiser sister and Lauren Santos the younger, more volatile one. From this we created a story line, based loosely on both my experiences with my sister and also the dancers' interactions with their siblings and closest friends. As Sarah Hartley, Lauren Santos, and I had collaborated on several projects in the past eighteen months, communication came easily. The three of us had come to a point where sentences need not be finished and many of the things we did say to one another were in a sort of code; one that combines LMA terminology, modern dance technique, and a vernacular particular to the dancers here at the University of Hawaii.

Although I felt this piece to be the most successful of the five throughout the course of creating this suite, it was the work that seemed to receive the harshest critiques from my committee. Often the comment was made that the sister relationship was unapparent and that the dance did not fit with the other four pieces in the suite. The faculty at large also thought that the work was too long and repetitive. We worked hard to correct these problems by editing out one of the two portions of the dance that occurred twice, integrating movements from other sections of the work into the piece, and giving each gesture careful consideration and qualitative analysis. In the end though, I decided that the piece was what I wanted it to be, and if the audience didn't see exactly what I saw, that was alright. My main concern was that they came away with the sense of these two women having a relationship that was tumultuous and loving, playful and harsh. Given the feedback I received from audience members and peers though, I don't feel the concerns were warranted, that the relationship was indeed apparent and the piece was thereby a success.

Chapter 2.6 “Untitled Solo”

This portion of the thesis was a late addition to the work that came after my committee strongly suggested a music change for the final section of the suite. The piece of music I chose, “I’ll Fly Away”, a traditional southern gospel song performed by Kourtney Heying, was familiar to me from my youth, although, I had originally been a fan of the Statler Brothers’ version of the work. The desire to sing a selection of this Christian spiritual has no traceable lineage for me though. It was merely one of those moments where you look at the person sitting next to you and blurt something random. Usually these moments are good for a giggle, but in this case it actually turned out to be a good idea. I presented the short solo, derived from movements and gestures previously seen in the dance, to the dancers on the eve of tech rehearsals. They agreed that it was appropriate for the piece, and suggested that it be placed just before the finale as a segue from the turmoil of “Angel on my Shoulder” to the celebration of “Happily Ever”. I presented this idea to my dancers rather than to my committee for two reasons. Given the late addition of this section to the piece, the committee was not readily available. Also, the faculty each had their own feelings and opinions about how the work should be and where its focus should lie, and had already given an overwhelming amount of opinion and feedback. Thus, I felt that the dancers would have a more objective view of this new section’s viability with the work as a whole, as well as its personal importance to me as both a performer and a choreographer. The dancers were the safer option, as I knew that they, like my committee, would be honest. Unlike the committee though, whose job does not include the sparing of feelings, I knew that if the idea was terrible the dancers would let me down gently, which was important given my stress levels at the time. My greatest challenge in creating this short solo was to select gestures from the other five sections of the suite that were both interesting and meaningful. And beyond that, to organize them in a way that told the story I intended. While I do feel that in the end both the choreography and the narrative intent were clear, I must concede that it took until Saturday evening’s performance to get it just right.

Overall I think that this brief moment of song and dance greatly contributed to the success of the suite as a whole. I feel that this addition to the piece not only created a meaningful transition between “Angel on my Shoulder” and “Happily Ever”, it also lent to the creation of a community tapestry. Many communities are based on faith, and the addition of “I’ll Fly Away” gave this work a decidedly Christian emphasis that had not originally been intended. Given that my family is largely Catholic though- my aunt is a Catholic nun, my father can be found at mass every Saturday evening, my husband and I were married in the church - the idea of a spiritual gathering made sense throughout the work. In my family, all celebrations, whether they are ones of joy like a wedding or a baptism, or those of sorrow like a funeral, involve the church to some degree. I believe that in giving this work a more specific community, the churchgoers rather than just the townsfolk, the community itself became more apparent to the viewer, and thus the suite as a whole achieved greater emotional depth.

Chapter 2.7 “Happily Ever”

Even though when creating this piece of choreography I relied on creative strategies that have proven successful to me in the past, this final section of the suite was by far the most difficult to create. One reason was my own personal creative struggle; another was my committee’s very strong opinion on the music and the associations it created. Originally I had intended this work to be set to Aaron Copland’s *Hoe Down*. This piece of music is affectionately referred to by my friends and family as the “Beef, it’s what’s for dinner” song due to its association with a long running National Beef Council advertisement. The faculty had great concern though, that a learned dance audience would make associations with the dance for which the music had been created, Agnes DeMille’s *Rodeo*. While I understood the faculty’s concern, I personally felt that the greater percentage of the audience there to see the Footholds concert would not have such an association. That this bias they were experiencing was more specific to them as dance educators than it would be to a general audience. It was my perception, based on

certain feedback given, that my committee was concerned that the movement I was using was stock movement from *Rodeo*, and that I was not working on independent movement invention. That observation may have been accurate if I personally had been a fan of the DeMille work, or was even somewhat familiar with it. The reality though, is that I have never seen *Rodeo* in its entirety; what I have seen was a five-minute excerpt, performed by a student company nearly fifteen years ago, three years before I began studying dance. So even though the assessment of my movement invention was not necessarily untrue: the dance seemed too familiar to the viewers, something not acceptable for a thesis work. I feel the assumptions made about the methods I was using to create the movement were somewhat unfair.

I soon became overwhelmed by the criticism from my committee, the faculty as a whole, and my own. I continually changed movement, spacing, and timing from one rehearsal to the next in a desperate effort to improve the piece. In doing so, I realize now, I was not allowing my cast to have a chance to fully explore the movement I had given them the previous week. This was making the piece unfamiliar to them, and giving it a disjointed appearance to me. It was non-productive for all of us. Finally, I caved to the pressure to find new music, which as I mentioned earlier was “I’ll Fly Away”, performed by Kourtney Heying. This music changed the overall intent of the piece, which had been a wedding party, to a general community gathering - perhaps a revival or church picnic. It gave the cast a renewed energy and enthusiasm, something infinitely important when going into performance. It also, because of the revised story line, led to new choreography and choices in performance quality. And as I mentioned earlier, new music inspired the untitled solo that appeared directly before this finale, something I am very glad for.

What really saved this piece though, was me stepping away from it for a week. In mid April I had the opportunity to visit my husband, a Navy submariner, on the island of Guam where he was stationed. Taking leave of my dances for five days so close to performance time was an incredibly difficult decision, but one I feel was extremely beneficial. I was so overwhelmed by both criticism and helpful suggestion at the time,

that I could not see the forest for the trees. My dancers were becoming overloaded by my corrections and editing, and the piece was suffering as a whole; stepping away for a couple of days to clear my head seemed the best course of action. My trusted friend and colleague Chansri Green agreed to run my rehearsals for the time I was absent. She had a very clear understanding of both “As I Lay” and “Field Ready” as she had been an original cast member of both, coupled with the fact that she was my roommate at the time, who received an earful about my choreographic process nearly every day. She was given free range to make choices regarding all five of the pieces she was rehearsing. Her fresh eyes and energetic direction were particularly helpful to my weary cast. She made qualitative corrections, spacing clarifications, and overall suggestions (including one about using the dance to “paint an emotional landscape”, which was brilliant) that were nothing but helpful. When I returned from Guam the dances that I had left in good condition were even better than I had hoped, polished and nearly ready to perform. To Chansri I am eternally grateful. While this piece did not end up being what I had intended to create, overall I am satisfied with the results. Ms. Southcott added a breath of fresh air to the work, and the new music changed the dynamic in a way that was beneficial to my cast, who were exhausted and in need of fresh energy. The piece received great feedback from the audience as well as from my peers. To me, vigorous applause is the best feedback of all.

Chapter 3 Performance and Final Reflections

The five-day run of this show was not, in my opinion, nearly long enough. I am happy to say that this particular show was the most rewarding performance experience I had during my time here at the University of Hawaii. The final product of this six-month building process was wonderful. The dancing was precise, energetic, and expressive. The costuming – housedresses for the ladies and jeans and button up shirt for Mr. King - was appropriate yet subtle. The lighting design by David Griffith became part of the piece, it was not so ostentatious to be noticed, but the work would definitely have been lacking without it. And the cast of the entire show shared an infallible positive energy that stretched from the stage to the dressing room and beyond.

Standing backstage each night watching though, I did find some places where I felt the choreography was in need of revision or elaboration. In “As I Lay” there were several small moments where the initiation of movement was different from one dancer to the next. In “Angel on my Shoulder” there were two different places where I had known the choreography was murky. It was not until I had the opportunity to see it several times in full on performance mode though, that I understood how I could make those moments more clear. And given more time, I would have rehearsed the final moments of “Happily Ever” to a point of much greater precision. Unfortunately there was not enough time or rehearsal space to do these things. Fortunately, I doubt these issues were apparent to anyone but myself and perhaps my committee.

The creation of *Variations from the Bigsky* was by far the largest choreographic undertaking I have ever undertaken. Fortunately for me I had a strong support system that included not only my friends and family, but also my committee and my colleagues in the Honolulu dance community. I am both pleased with and proud of this twenty-five minute opus, as it serves its purpose well. *Variations from the Bigsky* tells the tale of a family and of a community. It explores the gamut of joy and pain, pride and sorrow with an authenticity as unique as the dancers who helped bring it to life. Because of this, I feel this piece was successful not because it tells the story of my family, but because it tells the story of every family.

Appendix A. Echoes Concert Review

HonoluluAdvertiser.com
May 3, 2008

Wacky start works in modern dance showcase 'Footholds'

*By Carol Egan
Special to The Advertiser*

This spring's "Footholds" program at University of Hawai'i-Manoa offers predominantly modern dance works, with one notable exception: Carolyn Wilt's wonderfully wacky ballet solo. She begins by nobly striking a series of classical poses. But soon things begin to fall apart. At first the hands start flapping wildly, soon followed by wobbling elbows and limp arms. Things progress from bad to worse, letting up just long enough for her to strike a semi-poised position before tripping off into the wings.

Comedy is rare in dance concerts, particularly in the world of ballet. Kudos to Wilt, who recently received an undergraduate research award; she's the first dancer to be so honored. The remaining seven pieces, though all in modern dance style, are nevertheless very distinct. Starting off the program on a light note is Mikaela Brady's "On the Road." Reminiscent of the '60s, the loose-limbed, playful dancing is well served by casual, colorful costumes, music by the Grateful Dead, and psychedelic lighting effects.

Amy Redmond's solo, "Awaiting Change," by contrast is intense and deliberate, depicting a woman searching the horizon, first directing her gaze and energy to the four corners, then taking in a full 360-degree circle. Perhaps threatened, she prowls the stage with high intensity.

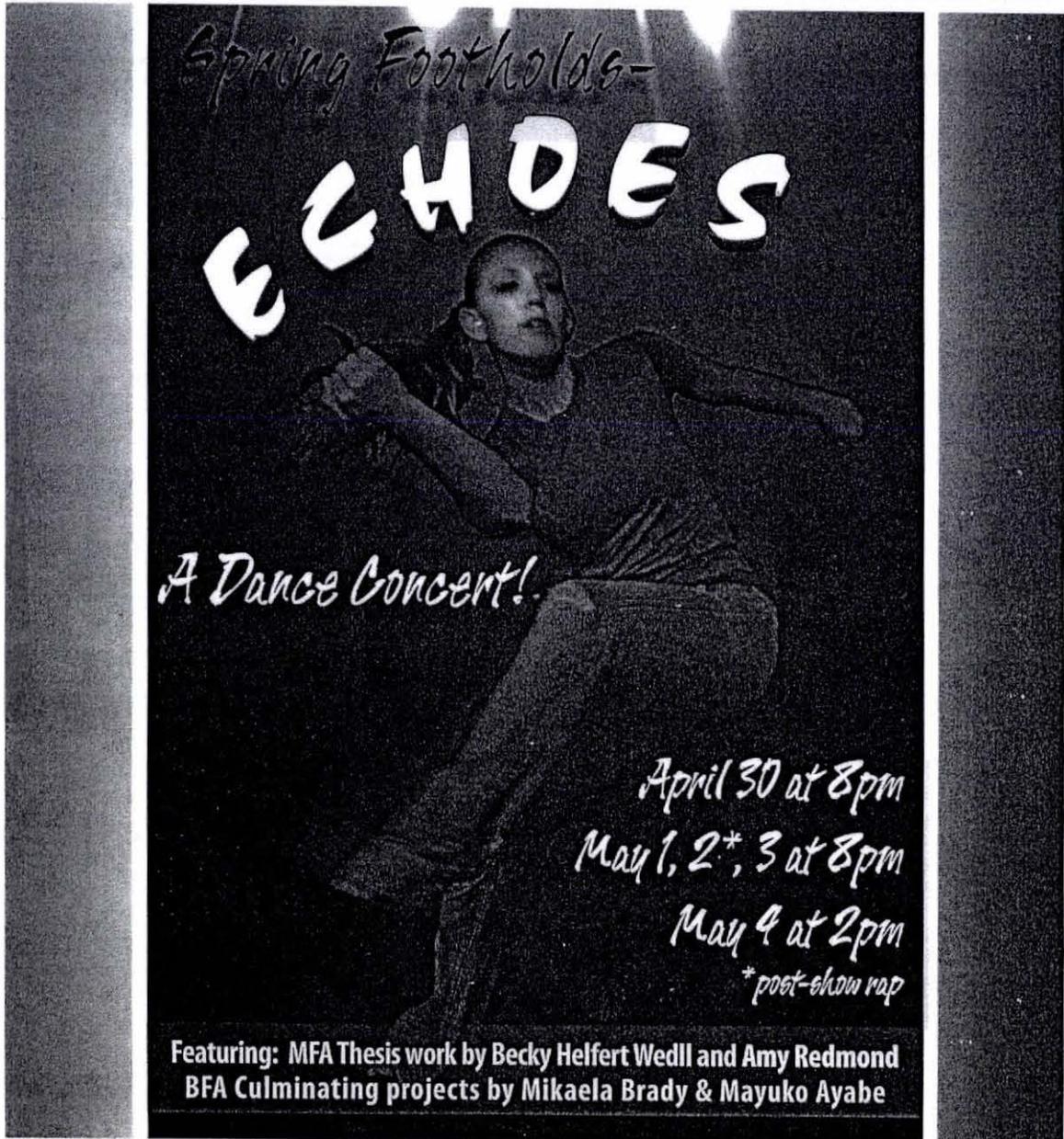
Malia Bowlby challenged herself by choreographing a large group work for 10 less-advanced dancers. She managed to give the dancers movements which, while not exceedingly difficult, are well executed and give the work a dramatic touch.

Jennifer L. McGowan's solo proves how far this young dancer has come in the past few years. Her strength and flexibility is apparent as she collapses prone on the floor then slowly raises one leg in an arc across her body, toes reaching for the ground. Rising, she alternately extends her limbs into space, only to fold in on herself.

The three-part dance "Prism," choreographed by Redmond, expresses the various ways light works. In "Absorption," seven dancers in black begin by extending outwardly then closing in upon themselves. In a white dress, Becky Helfert Wedll, soloing in "Reflection," slowly crosses the stage as the lights gradually rise and the black upstage curtain parts, replaced by a white one. In "Refraction," the seven dancers return, this time costumed in solid bright colors.

Another dancer who has shown consistent growth since entering UH is Mayuko Ayabe, whose affinity for modern dance has developed to the point where she can execute many different styles. Judging from her quartet, "Nemesis," she may be equally talented as a choreographer. The concert ends with Helfert Wedll's five-part work to assorted country-western songs. Each section differs in mood, from the wistful to the lyrical, from the depressed and deprived to the playful and joyful. Particularly fine are Megan Southcott and Travers F. King, exuding freedom and carefree youth, and Lauren Santos and Sarah Ann Hartley in a gentle tug-of-war relationship.

Carol Egan, a former professional dancer, choreographer and teacher, began writing about dance in 1975.



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Figure 1. Spring Footholds Poster

PRODUCTION STAFF

Stage Manager: Michele M. Painter
Associate Lighting Designer: Daphne Velasquez
Light Board Operator: Jackie Okimoto
Sound Board Operator: Carolyn Wilt, Shealin Johnson
Patch Panel Operator: Jamie Casino
Floor Crew: Nerissa Nicole Castilleja, Becky McGarvey, Lauren Santos, Sara Satellio, Megan Southcott
Faculty Production Manager/Lighting Design Consultant: David A. Griffith
Staff Costume Shop Manager: Hannah Schauer Galli
Earle Ernst Lab Theatre Costume Coordinator: Katherine Greenway
Costume Construction Crew: Johnna Batiste, Marie Charlson, Kat Pleviak, Priscilla Stafford, Students from THEA 240 and 221
Wardrobe Supervisor: Alexis Leon
Concert Advisor: Peggy Gaither Adams
 All costumes were coordinated by the individual choreographer.

FRONT OF HOUSE STAFF

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Box Office Staff: Sarah Jane Carlton, Kristen Kellar, Elise Sanders, Stefannye Slaughter
Publicity Director: Brett T. Botbyl
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Department Office Staff: Tana Marin, Lori Ann Chun
Department Chair and Director of Dance: Gregg Lizenbery

FRONT OF HOUSE INFORMATION

For large print programs, Assistive Listening Devices or any other accessibility requests please contact the House Manager or call the Kennedy Theatre Box Office at 956-7655.

To arrange a Campus Security Escort from any two points on campus, please see a House Manager. Please silence all pagers, phones and digital watches. Photography, texting or video recording is not permitted.

Please refrain from eating, drinking or smoking in the theatre.
 Visit us on the web at <http://www.hawaii.edu/kennedy>

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to Peggy Gaither Adams, Betsy Fisher, Gregg Lizenbery, Paul T. Mitri, Amy Lynn Schiffner, Judy Van Zile, and Marcia Sakamoto Wong for their guidance and support. Congratulations to Sarah Ann Hartley on the completion of her BFA senior project performed at the Ten Days On the Island Festival in Tasmania.

SPECIAL THANKS

The UHM ticket program is supported in part by a grant from the Associated Students of the University of Hawai'i and the Student Activities and Program Fee Board.

Figure 2. Spring Footholds Program Outside



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII AT MĀNOA

Kennedy TheatrePRIME TIME
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2007-2008 SEASON

Spring Footholds-

ECHOES

A Dance Concert!

April 30 at 8pm
 May 1, 2*, 3 at 8pm
 May 4 at 2pm
 *post-show rap

Featuring: MFA Thesis work by Amy Redmond and Becky Helfert Wedli
 BFA Culminating projects by Mikaela Brady and Mayuko Ayabe

Department of Theatre and Dance | College of Arts and Humanities

On the Road

Choreography: Mikaela Brady
 Music: The Grateful Dead
 Lighting Design: Daphne Velasquez
 Dancers: Mayuko Ayabe, Sarah Ann Hartley, Travers F. King, Jennifer L. McGowan, Jacqueline Nii

Awaiting Change

Choreography: Amy Redmond
 Music: Don Ross
 Lighting Design: Asuko Endo
 Dancer: Amy Redmond

Remember to Breathe

Choreography: Malia Bowiby
 Music: Rebekah
 Sound Editing: Malia Bowiby
 Lighting Design: Kazumi Hatsumura
 Dancers: Michael Caputo, Nerissa Nicole Castilleja, Sarah C.M. Cutts, Shealin Johnson, Ashley S. Matsuura, Lyndsey Matsuura, Becky McGarvey, Betsy Saccenti, Daniel Sakimura, Maki Tokami

Please visit <http://www.freewebs.com/mbdancinrtbhome/> for a "backstage" look at the creative process of this dance.

In the Realm

Choreography: Jennifer L. McGowan
 Music: Edgar Meyer
 Lighting Design: Tino Cares, Nathan Garrett
 Dancer: Jennifer L. McGowan

Prism

Choreography: Amy Redmond
 Lighting Design: Asuko Endo

"Absorption"
 Music: Tool
 Dancers: Malia Bowiby, Isabelle Brosnahan, Stephanie Gumpel, Sarah Ann Hartley, Tiana Krohn-Ching, Nicole Lam, Jennifer L. McGowan

"Reflection"
 Music: Tool, performed and arranged by The Section Quartet
 Dancer: Becky Helfert Wedll

"Refraction"
 Music: Tool, performed and arranged by The Section Quartet
 Dancers: Malia Bowiby, Isabelle Brosnahan, Stephanie Gumpel, Sarah Ann Hartley, Tiana Krohn-Ching, Nicole Lam, Jennifer L. McGowan

Intermission

Figure 3. Spring Footholds Program Inside

Namsais

Choreography: Mayuko Ayabe
 Music: Scanner
 Lighting Design: Justin DeLand
 Dancers: Mikaela Brady, Sarah Ann Hartley, Lindsay Jarvis, Jacqueline Nii

Pao da Mol

Choreography: Carolyn Wilt
 Music: Tchaikovsky
 Lighting Design: Marie Kuroda
 Dancer: Carolyn Wilt

Variations from the Big Sky

Choreography: Becky Helfert Wedll
 Lighting Design: David A. Griffith

"Field Ready"
 Music: Kimmie Rhodes and Willie Nelson
 Soloist: Becky Helfert Wedll
 Dancers: Sarah Ann Hartley, Tiana Krohn-Ching, Amy Redmond, Lauren Santos, Megan Southcott

"Bright Eyed And"
 Music: Roy Rogers
 Dancers: Megan Southcott with Travers F. King

"No 1 Day"
 Music: Johnny Cash
 Dancers: Gwen Arbaugh, Mikaela Brady, Sarah Ann Hartley, Amy Redmond, Megan Southcott

"Angel on My Shoulder"
 Music: Willie Nelson
 Dancers: Sarah Ann Hartley, Lauren Santos

"Happily Ever"
 Music: Kourtney Heying
 Dancers: Gwen Arbaugh, Mikaela Brady, Sarah Ann Hartley, Travers F. King, Tiana Krohn-Ching, Amy Redmond, Megan Southcott

The work of Amy Redmond and Becky Helfert Wedll is in partial fulfillment for the requirements of the Master of Fine Arts degree in Dance.

The work of Mayuko Ayabe and Mikaela Brady is in partial fulfillment for the requirements of the Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Dance.

We invite you to participate in a post show discussion with choreographers and dancers following the Friday, May 2nd performance.