TRAVELLING THROUGH HER AND FRIENDS OF P

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DANCE

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By
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Kara Miller
For Jason, Soren and Dahlia
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PART ONE: THESIS PROPOSAL
Statement of Intention

As a third year Master of Fine Arts student in the Department of Theatre and Dance at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, I anticipate presenting my thesis at the Spring Footholds concert March 2nd-6th, 2016. While studying and researching during my time as a graduate student there have been specific themes, topics and frameworks that continue to inform me as I create work, write about dance, and reflect on the works of others. Much of what I have grappled with and explored during my practice and research in dance has had a relationship to the topics of third wave and intersectional feminism, concepts of reality, and diverse notions of the self. These areas of interest will continue to inform my creative process as I develop my thesis. I will present two works—a four-part suite entitled “P makes friends,” and a piece entitled “Traveling Through Us.” My work will explore components of space as they relate to dance and the relationship between pedestrian and pantomime gestures and dance. During my rehearsal process I will explore range in space including the possibilities of moving in confined spaces and in large, vast areas. The dancers will perform on a proscenium stage with projection design to enhance appearance of spatial range on the stage. The projection will allow the performers as well as the audience to consider the relationship our physical bodies have with the projected image. The final component I will be working with relates to the body (in addition to space) and will address the relationship between shaping and functions of isolated parts of the body.
Four Part Suite: *Friends of P*
Performers: Makena Harootian, Faith Im, Mo Kearns, Misha Matsumoto, Camille Monson, Terry Slaughter, Corbett Stern
Music: Tom Waits
Length: 9:00

The first and second sections of this four-part suite begin with dancers entering the stage at various points accompanied by a sound score of ambient “elevator music” and spoken monologue. The dancers performing these sections include Faith Im, Misha Matsumoto, Makena Harootian and Mo Kearns. The piece begins with gestures and pantomime that are pedestrian and reminiscent of things done in the privacy of the home—talking on the phone, cleaning, changing clothes, bathing, reading, eating, grooming, organizing, cooking, etc.—with each person expressing a sense of interest and curiosity for the other performers in the space. These gestural movements expand in range, levels, sequential and successive initiations, and tempo as the piece develops. With the increase in dance elements, there will also be an increase in curiosity that becomes amplified and abstracted. Each dancer will also have a clearly developed movement motif that increases in body and spatial range and further transfers the movement from pedestrian/pantomime to dance.

During the third section, Corbett Stern and Terry Slaughter enter the stage with movement that is very stoic and, again, pedestrian. As their dance begins, the scene on stage will shift to a bus stop with black boxes to represent a bus stop bench. There will be a return to pedestrian simplistic movements that expand and become increasingly abstracted. Continuing with the theme of range in space the dancers begin the piece by utilizing a small portion of the stage where the bus stop scene is implied. At a certain point during the beginning of the dance the performers will begin to utilize the entire stage space and there will also be a strong emphasis
on levels and pathways. Low level floor work that brings the dancers extremely close together and far from each other will be a key component and this will be layered with various pathways that contract and expand the space between the dancers throughout the stage.

The fourth and final section integrates new choreography with a short work I choreographed in the spring of 2014 entitled “P is for Pelvis” (hence, the title “Friends of P”). The 2014 work focused on movements of the pelvis with both function and meaning creating a comical commentary about the white western taboo of its movements, particularly when considering a Calvinistic framework. I will perform my original solo in the same space with the dancers in the first three sections and make shifts in the original piece to incorporate additional movement motifs and literal gestures. The piece will also expand so that the other dancers on stage relate to my movement and explore other gestures and that allude to corresponding perceived meanings.

During the climax of the section the dancers will move with complete abandon and freedom defined by free flowing energy, lack of interest in the originally confined space, and a new desire to move together, though their dancing will not necessarily be synchronized. There will be a continued use of their original motifs and reference to the original spatial confines from the first three sections though it will be fleeting and transitional with a new found awareness towards the entire stage and an intersection of previous scenes and sections of the piece. The utilization of large, vast space on the stage will help to illustrate and communicate this new found freedom.
**Costumes:** For this piece the dancers will wear form fitting solid-colored suits, dresses, sleepwear, robes, etc. I envision these articles of clothing in various purple, turquoise and pink tones. There will also be a plastic theme with each dancer have something plastic—shower caps, raincoats, and various other articles.

**Lighting:** I foresee complimentary lighting and use of the cyclorama to bring a warmthness to the stage with hot pink, blue and purple tones. The last section will explore red tones that will be reflected in the costumes to give a deeper, darker, satirical feeling.

**Music:** I will be working with various instrumental versions of well-known eighties pop songs and “Tango Till They’re Sore” by Tom Waits.
Traveling Through us
Performers: Makena Harootian, Faith Im, Mo Kearns, Misha Matsumoto, Alisa Olko, Bridgette Sutton
Music: 7 Worlds Collide
Length: 4:35

The 6 dancers in this piece—Makena Harootian, Faith Im, Mo Kearns, Bridgette Sutton, Alisa Olko and Misha Matsumoto—will explore themes of confinement and liberation. During the development of this dance I want to consider the connection that these two opposing themes have on each other. I anticipate working with silver lycra fabric that has two key functions; first, it will be a large costume for each of the dancers and connect them to each other. The fabric will cover ¾ of the stage and give restriction and resistance to the dancers so that they aren’t able to travel freely through the space. One dancer always remains connected to the fabric while the other five will leave at various points during the dance. Secondly, the material will create a projection surface. Themes of connectivity and individuality will be projected onto the material and continue to surface the dancers bodies as they separate from each other and the material and return again. These elements will also help me explore the idea of self as both an individual and a community member. The dancers will also assist me as I investigate concepts within third wave and intersectional feminism— accepting and respecting the diverse choices individuals make and creating awareness for different types of oppression that affect people because of race, class, gender and sexual orientation. For example, one dancer, while moving with the fabric, might communicate a sense of wellbeing and power yet other dancers might experience feelings of being trapped and needing to be freed.
Other movement concepts I will explore in this dance include: advancing, retreating, spiraling, sinking, rising, core to distal axial actions, and physical relationships within positive and negative space.

**Costumes:** The dancers will wear silver camisoles that are connected to the silver lycra fabric.

**Music:** I will experiment with operatic vocalizations performed by my sister Charla Williams and various arias to accompany the performers.

**Lighting:** For this section lighting will have an important effect on the fabric. I will create blue and green tones on the material and the dancers’ bodies that will come from the projection design as well as traditional lighting techniques.
## Timetable

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<td>November 9</td>
<td>Send Revised Thesis Proposal</td>
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<td>November 9</td>
<td>Formation of Thesis Committee</td>
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<td>December 13</td>
<td>Get Video Footage for Promo</td>
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PART TWO: REHEARSAL AND PERFORMANCE
Four Part Suite: *Friends of P*
Performers: Makena Harootian, Faith Im, Mo Kearns, Misha Matsumoto, Camille Monson, Terry Slaughter, Corbett Stern
Music: Tom Waits
Length: 9:20

**Rehearsals**

I came into my first rehearsal in M118 feeling quite nervous. I had a strong group of diverse dancers and some of them were meeting each other for the first time. So many ideas were present in my mind and I hoped to get a greater sense during this first meeting about the direction I needed to go as my process unfolded. I knew that I would be exploring concepts of space and also working with pedestrian movements that could be transformed into dance. Picking dance elements such as range of motion (use of small space and large space), level changes, and rhythm changes to add to the set pedestrian choreography would be important during this time of exploration. I also intended to create a comical piece that could make people laugh and question why moving certain body parts can be funny or taboo (i.e. the pelvis or chest).

I envisioned the dancers working individually at the start of the four part suite and gradually beginning to interact with each other and the stage space that they shared. I had specific tasks to explore during this first rehearsal. First, I wanted to have the dancers improvise as they travelled across the studio with their pelvises leading and following. With this first exercise it became apparent that this idea would work. The dancers were theatrical, quirky and uninhibited and I was feeling the creative spark. Mo Kearns and Faith Im, two of the dancers in my cast, danced extremely well together as they incorporated percussive qualities to their pelvic improvisations juxtaposed with sequential and/or fluid elements. It was striking, rhythmic and
funny. I made video documentation so that we could remember the movement qualities explored and continue to investigate before setting the work.

Another dancer that I worked with, Misha Matsumoto, left me with many exciting impressions after our first few rehearsals. I had worked with her before and was eager to have her in my cast again as she has such a lovely sense of flow and connectivity. I was particularly impressed with her movement choices and commitment as we began to incorporate pantomime into the structure we were working with. Because we were considering gestural and pedestrian movement ideas that would then develop into dance, I asked the dancers to think of movements done in their homes—cooking, cleaning, reading, talking on the phone, showering and walking the dog. Misha’s movement began with references to walking a dog and being pulled in many directions. Her movement then began to model reading the paper. As the piece unfolded we discovered ways to bring a percussive quality to the movement of the torso.

During Mo’s pantomime section she began developing a scene around cooking and talking on the phone. With the percussive quality of the music her sequence lent itself beautifully to dance elements that was quirky and comical. For example, as she gestured to show that she
was cooking she added a deep and wide second position plie and while she mixed her food she would isolate her shoulders upward and downward giving rhythm and intensity to the task she was performing.

Figure 2: Mo Kearns rehearsing *Friends of P*

The music the dancers were working with, “Chick a Boom” by Tom Waits, has a driving percussive quality that influenced the movement as well. Misha’s scene that brought her from walking the dog to reading the paper and Mo’s cooking and talking on the phone were the perfect match for a duet. I asked them to begin in opposing corners of the stage—Mish upstage right and Mo downstage left. I hoped this would signify their separation in private spaces and that as the piece progressed they would eventually come into contact with each other. As the dancers bridged the gap between pantomime and dance, I asked them to give rhythms to their simple tasks and emphasized movements of isolated body parts. Misha’s dance became a statement about the ribcage while Mo’s section emphasized the shoulders. As they branched off away from their original spaces and tasks established in the beginning, the dancers moved down
stage center. Concepts they explored as they moved from personal space to shared space on the stage were: leading with different body parts—pelvis, tailbone, ribcage, sternum, etc.—as well as large roundhouse kicks, en dedans fan kicks—which I thought could add a new circular feel to the angular and geometric theme.

![Figure 3: Mo Kearns rehearsing *Friends of P*](image)

I hoped that as the two soloists came together that the dance would become a very visible duet (instead of two dancers on stage doing their own movements without noticing one another). Three of the next tasks we explored were 1. Working in close proximity and 2. Reacting to each other and 3. Maintaining the percussive qualities they had established while borrowing movement from each other. This seemed to be working and I was pleased with their crisp, tension as they moved together while being strongly supported by the music. During my first showing with two members of my committee, it became clear that the movement was working, yet there was something missing. We decided to bring Faith Im and Makena Harootian into this piece midway through. We had experimented with both of them coming in earlier in the process
but hadn’t solidified their roles and decided to keep it as a duet. Now it was apparent that their presence was needed and this addition brought new elements to explore. Their movements brought new dynamics to the piece as they responded to Mo and Misha while also moving within their negative space. In addition, they utilized beginning motifs that had been established including—cooking, reading, talking on the phone—and helped create a movement conversation with patterns of moving and stillness. I now had a loosely finished section and needed to turn my attention to another part for a while.

As I left this section to develop another piece within the four part suite, I was drawn towards scenes from a bathtub with shaving, washing, rinsing and relaxing to begin my exploration from pantomime to dance. Because I had worked with Faith and Makena during another choreographic project that was also quite theatrical and satirical I had both of them in mind. Again, we began this portion of the piece with literal gesturing to signify getting into the bath and shower. They both took large steps into their bathing spaces and began grooming. As the piece began to expand and bridge the space between pedestrian movement and dance there became a distinct theme of reaching with an obvious struggle. I asked my dancers to imagine reaching for shampoo with a struggle that could add a bit of humor to the task. This theme of reaching as a solid part of the choreography was now accompanied with a very linear spatial design. During this section I explored what it would be like to begin with two dancers—Makena and Faith—and then have two more dancers come into the scene a third of the way through. Towards the end of the process as we were finalizing the piece I noticed that Mo, who had filled in for one of the dancers who had to miss a number of rehearsals, was very captivating and had a comedic timing that continued to work. I then asked both Misha and Mo to begin on stage as well and groom within their personal “bathroom spaces.” Misha began on a black box at the
start and the way she interpreted the dreamy, intimate bathtub scene was really hilarious and I was again so glad that I had the opportunity to work with her. Eventually, Mo and Misha also joined Faith and Makena with reaching.

Figure 4: Faith Im, Mo Kearns and Makena Harootian rehearsing *Friends of P*

Figure 5: Misha Matsumoto, Faith Im, Mo Kearns and Makena Harootian rehearsing *Friends of P*
The arc of the dance began to take form when Makena gestured that she was shaving and cut her leg in the process. The other dancers in the space then noticed her gesture and reacted with a percussive and surprised quality. This moment brought the dancers out of their personal spaces and they began to cross paths and incorporate more linear and curved pathways in space. The last addition to this scene came when I asked Corbett Stern and Terry Slaughter to enter at two distinct moments from stage right and left, come towards each other, circle around each other and then leave the stage. The conclusion to this section reaches fruition with all of the six dancers gesturing as though they are blowing bubbles from the bathtub weaving in circular pathways with a light and suspended feel as they pique and exit the stage.

With two rough drafts semi complete I began to move forward with the third vignette. This next section needed to begin at a bus stop and would follow a similar structure of pedestrian movements that began to mingle with dance. Terry and Corbett become focal points as the music started and, similar to their entrance in the bathtub section, they began at opposite sides of the stage and entered from the downstage wings walking very erect, bound, and in time with the slow pulse of the music. Their movements continued to be synchronized, deliberate and controlled as they met at the bus stop bench, sat down and began to notice a sudden change in weather. I hoped that this section would have all of the dancers on stage moving together and so my next problem to solve involved figuring out why they are connecting with this new scene downstage right. As Terry and Corbett noticed that it has begun to rain the other four dancers who were still on stage from the previous section began to express through gesture and interaction with one another that they are aware of this change in weather as well. One by one they plead and flirt with the dancers at the bench and are invited to share the space under one umbrella.
The entrance of Terry and Corbett was definitely working and the umbrella became a focal point as it was passed from dancer to dancer. During my first showing of this section my committee gave me some helpful feedback regarding the pulse of the dance. I had set the piece to “Rains on Me” by Tom Waits which is a very soulful, song conjuring up images of beer drinking and being down and out. With these images there is a slow and steady beat. Kara Miller suggested countering this at times during the piece to break up the monotony. Gregg Lizenbery liked the use of the umbrella and discussed how to make transitions from one dancer to the next in a seamless manner. He and Kara also agreed that the motion of the umbrella needed to flow and have a pathway and life of its own. Both of these critiques and suggestions were very useful in the development of the piece.

Figure 6: Makena Harootian, Mo Kearns, Misha Matsumoto and Faith Im rehearsing Friends of P
In the fourth section of this work I brought back a short solo I choreographed during 2014 called “P is for Pelvis.” I was curious to see what could happen if this solo met and meshed with the characters of the first three sections. This was the last section of the dance and we had only a few weeks to finish before auditioning the entire piece. I began this section by teaching all of the dancers roughly the first third of the dance. This allowed me to see them taking on new movement that was very stylized and centered around the pelvic area. Because the piece poked fun of the taboo nature of moving the pelvis in western culture, by bringing new characters into this section I was able to amplify the satire and comedy I was hoping to communicate. I agreed with the feedback I received for this section around the time of the auditions. First, there was too much synchronized movement and secondly, the dancers needed to be more expressive (almost like caricatures with larger than life movements). During the next few rehearsals I pulled back much of the unison movements and found key moments where could be featured while reiterating gestures and motifs from the first three sections.
Music

Because I was developing scenes inspired by daily life and utilizing pantomime, I wanted to use music that would bring these diverse pictures of life together as well. Some questions I considered with regard to musical choices were: How would each musical section relate to the other? Did the sections need to relate? And if they did, what were the connecting musical elements? My process for finding music involved quite a few Tom Waits songs and instrumental pieces from various albums. In the back of my mind I had thought about using all of his music for my thesis but I also didn’t want to limit my possibilities. Yet, as I progressed in my choreography it became clear that the movement of the dancers and the personalities and performance qualities they began to embody had a wonderful relationship with some of the Tom Waits songs with which we were experimenting.

“Just another Sucker on the Vine” became the clear choice for the first section with its French Café feel. I chose the music before beginning the choreography (although this wasn’t the first section we worked on). Dancers Misha Matsumoto, Faith Im, Makena Harootian and Mo Kearns, were fully invested in the scene we developed and the music was quirky and stylized which worked well with the movement. Similarly, in section two, “Chick a Boom,” also by Tom Waits, worked from the beginning of our rehearsals. The musical choice for the third section wasn’t as clear for me at the start of our rehearsals but when we began trying out different pieces (also by Tom Waits), the piece “Rains on Me” seemed to bring about the right kind of inspiration for the dancers. It also assisted Terry and Corbett with comedic timing. Tom Waits’ “Tango Till They’re Sore” was the music used for the fourth section of the suite.
Choosing music from one artist seemed to make sense in this project and helped me answer some of my questions from the beginning of my process. I connected with Tom Waits’ eclectic music compositions and his diversity in sound somehow gave me the freedom to achieve uniqueness in each scene while also giving a sense of togetherness. His music has been an important part of my life since the time that I met my husband. I hoped that by using his music it could be a way for my husband to connect with my work and be a symbol of thanks to him for all he has done for me and our children during my time as a graduate student.

Costumes

The costumes were basically black and white with hints of color—purple, pink, red, turquoise—from props and accessories. The women wore vintage style swimwear of varying designs—striped, polka dot and checkered—and black biker shorts while the men wore white tank tops and black skinny jeans. They all had additional articles of clothing depending on the section they were performing. This seemed to work well for most of the piece but during our dress rehearsal I received feedback from Gregg and Kara that my costume for the fourth section needed to be brighter and give more emphasis on my pelvis. Gregg suggested wearing big underwear over my pants while Peggy suggested wearing white or red pants. The next morning I went out and found red stretch jeans that worked well within the short time frame.
Figure 8: Mo Kearns, Makena Harootian, Camille Monson, Misha Matsumoto and Faith Im before performing *Friends of P*

Figure 9: Camille Monson, Mo Kearns and Faith Im performing *Friends of P*
Figure 10: Cast performing *Friends of P*

Figure 11: Terry Slaughter and Corbett Stern performing *Friends of P*
Lighting

Lighting for this piece was straight forward. In the first section light lavenders gave a very intimate feel to the bathtub scene. For the second section the stage was lit with brownish amber to accompany the driving rhythms of Tom Waits “Chick a Boom” and percussive movement qualities of the dancers. For the third scene with the song “Rains on Me” the stage returned to blue tones and for the final section accompanied with “Tango Till They’re Sore” the stage was lit with saturated pink. I was pleased with the lighting though I also experienced the difficulty that comes with dancing in a piece that I had also choreographed. I would have liked to have had more time to step outside of the piece to view the effects of lighting from the audience’s perspective. Because of this challenge I was very grateful for the help and artistry of Chikako Omoso our lighting designer and my committee.

Reflection

This piece was extremely enjoyable to work on with the other dancers in the cast. Because we were dealing with satire there was an added element of play and I often saw that the dancers were having fun exploring the possibilities of their characters. Feedback from my dancers helped me keep my spirits high and not doubt what I was doing. When I’m making a piece that I hope will be funny, I often wonder “am I the only person that will think this is funny”? With this piece I got nice feedback and discovered that the dance went in the direction that I’d hoped and that people were, indeed, laughing. One of the most rewarding moments during the performance was at the end when I heard my dad laughing. My parents and three
sisters travelled to see my work and in the back of my mind I wondered if they would enjoy my “mysterious modern dance.” This piece was appreciated by a wide audience.

After reflecting on my work I found that I would have liked to work more on the transitions between each musical and dance section. The moments of silence as the dancers prepared for the next section could have been highlighted with sudden bursts of movement. One example of where this could have been done was between sections two and three (between “Chick a Boom” and “Rains On Me”). I’ve started to imagine Mo, as the dancers are gathering before the rain, to have one more burst of energy with her deep plié showing that she is mixing and preparing food. I think it could have added another little element of comedy before Terry and Corbett enter with their stoic walking. I would also like to see what this piece would look like with the cyclorama to enhance the blue, violet, amber and saturated pink lighting. Finally, I wonder if the pantomime could have been more effective with added bits of silliness if I had less costuming and patterns. For example, would it have been more effective to have Terry and Corbett come in during the first section with bathing suits on and shower caps? They would have matched the women more. Their robes and nightgowns were a last minute purchase and I would have liked more time to see if there was a better costume choice for them.
Traveling Through her
Performers: Faith Im, Mo Kearns, Misha Matsumoto, Alisa Olko, Bridgette Sutton,
Music: Ludovico Einaudi
Length: 5:34

Rehearsals Process

My concept for this piece developed during my production course last semester with Peggy Adams. As we discussed the importance of costuming for choreography and its relationship to the intent of the piece, I started imagining a group of dancers connected by a large piece of fabric that covered the length of the stage. I was also interested in creating a projection design that would be projected onto the fabric and the dancers. These elements—choreography, projection design, and fabric installation—would be my mediums for communicating ideas of interconnectivity, diversity and ultimately the ability to choose ones path in life. I drew from my understanding of third wave feminism where notions of what it means to be a women in society aren’t defined by a dominating theory but by the acceptance of a multiplicity of ideas and themes contributing to a broader understanding of what it means to be a woman and ultimately human. I shared this idea with Cheri Vasek, the costume designer for the university, who came to guest lecturer in our production class and Betsy Fisher one of my committee members. They were both very supportive of my idea. One of the most exciting aspects of sharing my idea came as I was talking with Betsy; she offered to let me use large amounts of white lycra fabric that had been donated to the department earlier in the year. It had never been used and was absolutely perfect for what I had in mind.
Figure 12: Production sketches

Figure 13: Production sketches
Initially, I had three yards of grey lycra that we experimented with in a very makeshift way. During that time I notice how each dancer approach this small prop that would eventually become an installation for the dancers to travel over and under, manipulate, and struggle with. In addition to this, I was able to borrow pieces of fabric from the costume shop that we used as well. I also began choreographing and arranging sections of movement that I didn’t necessarily intend to use in relation to the fabric. I knew that my experimentation with the smaller piece of fabric was not very useful in getting an understanding of what the larger fabric would be like so I continued to work and craft the pieces of the movement that were possibly not connected to the material.

During our first rehearsal for this piece I spoke with the dancers about my concept of exploring third wave feminism. I hoped that the piece could communicate diverse journeys of women and highlight the beauty that each brings to the world because of their uniqueness. The idea of there being a specific role for all women to fit into was something I wanted to challenge by presenting my dancers as individuals that relate to each other, know each other, show love and respect to one another yet don’t move through the space like one another during the choreography. I hoped that each dancer could find their own relationship with the installation and how they identified as a woman with other diverse women. To get to know my dancers in this new context I started with a simple exploration and choreographic exercise about different ways of traveling and moving. I gave them words to look over—rising, sinking, under, over, around and through—and then asked them to make a simple sequence that communicated these words with their movement choices. I imagined using these same words as we explored the fabric. My dancers were at varying technical levels and I was excited to see how they would use these words to make a phrase. Misha Matsumoto was, again, one of my dancers and her
movements were quite axial. For example, she used very little space on the ground yet her torso travelled through various planes of motion with reaching, carving, arching and contracting of the torso and arms. I pictured her role as the dancer who is connected to the fabric as though it is her gown. I imagined her becoming a mother figure.

I hadn’t worked with Alisa Olko and Bridgette Sutton before but had seen them perform on different occasions. They had such beautiful performance qualities and strength in their dancing that I welcomed in this piece. Neither had been dancing very long and their sense of newness to dance was refreshing. Both seemed a bit nervous with the first choreographic task I gave to the dancers so I decided to be less improvisational with them and give more set movement. They both became more confident with their movements through the installation, their desire to bring improvisation into their exploration with the fabric and their connection to the other dancers. It was really rewarding to see how beautifully they danced. Alisa’s movement became bolder as she came into contact with the fabric while Bridgette’s dancing was highlighted behind, between and in front of the lycra.

Mo and Faith, were in this piece as well. Right away I could see them develop through their movement into key characters. Faith has an innate ability to work with fabric and the ways she wrapped her body in the lycra while moving with such intensity and, at times, percussiveness was breathtaking. Mo was fearless and determined in her dancing. Her journey in this piece was natural and she seemed to take on an older sister role as she guided, supported, and connected the dancers with each other. When she worked with the fabric it was quite different from the way Faith moved. Her relationship to the fabric was lighter, softer and fleeting.

As the audition neared, I began to feel worried about not having access to the fabric yet. I had received permission to use it but the costume shop was hesitant to let me have it. With the
stresses of choreographing and not having rehearsed with one of the most important components of the piece, I decided that if I wasn’t able to use the material for the next rehearsals that I would not continue with the choreography. It was hard to come to that conclusion, but I needed to be realistic and also clear about my need to practice with the material. I met with Cheri, who understood my choreographic need to use the fabric and I continued on with the piece.

For my next rehearsal Betsy was present and we were using the fabric for the first time in the theatre. We had used the material that morning as well in the dance building studio yet because the spaces are so different it was hard to create movement that could be used in a new space. This piece had become site specific and the theatre space became a mandatory place for our rehearsals. When Betsy saw the piece for the first time it was quite messy. The fabric wasn’t utilized with enough understanding and familiarity. The dancers hadn’t had the opportunity to work with it until that day. Looking back I can’t believe I had Betsy come to see where we were with the piece, but at the same time, I’m glad she had a reference point to see the drastic changes that happened after that in such a short time. While at the rehearsal she gave me key critiques to consider. First, the dancers needed to treat the fabric as though it was a part of them instead of a foreign object. I agreed and knew this would come with time. Second, she thought the projection design was too busy and took away from what was seen on stage. She suggested only few simple images. This was different from the feedback about projection that I received from Kara and it allowed me to consider what I was trying to communicate and whether or not it was effective. Finally, she noted that the music had a very industrial feel and questioned whether the sound was the best choice.

After Betsy left, we got to work. I edited quickly, making bold changes, cutting out movement sequences that didn’t fit with the installation. The dancers were fierce in their
commitment and I was grateful. We had one more rehearsal session before the audition and Kara would be coming. Since the previous evening I had made changes to the projection design, mainly taking out a few faster sections that didn’t seem to fit, though still keeping the same concepts and rhythm of the projection. I didn’t want to take all of it away. It was an important layer and I needed to see it through to the end. Kara suggested that I take the fabric that travelled upstage from right to left and instead have it hung above the stage. I was able to implement this technical aspect at a later date with the help of Brian Shevelenko and the added level for the projection design and was an important addition for the development of Misha’s character. She had begun to take on more of a goddess feel and signify the point where earth, water and sky meet.

Figure 14: Misha Matsumoto performing Traveling Through Her
Projection Design and Lighting

Creating the projection design was long and, at times, quite challenging. I learned after rehearsing in the lab theatre that what my projection looks like at home on my computer will most likely be very different when projected in the theatre. My rehearsal time in the theatre was limited due to a theatre conference that was sponsored by the department and each time I made changes to my projection design I knew that it probably would not be the last after viewing it on stage. It was often the case that bright colors became muted and/or the movement did not quite work with the projected images.

We worked with concepts from third wave feminism and as we began to think of images for the many ways of being woman and ultimately human in this world, images from nature became helpful. Water, rocks, sand, trees and the sky began to symbolize different journeys and ways of being in the world. My projection work was a layering of these images throughout the piece. The footage I shot of the ocean, the sand and the sunset took place at Ala Moana and the trees and flowers were from my little lanai and the University of Hawai‘i. One of the distinct images that began to symbolize Misha’s role as goddess was a little baby Koa tree we had potted on our lanai. During this time I decided to make a subtle change in the title from Traveling Through Us to Traveling Through Her to reference Misha as the place where earth, water and sky meet.

I used a Nikon P600 camera as I filmed these elements and to edit the footage I utilized Adobe Premier. I started with ideas I hoped to capture in the projection design and began the choreography first. After putting the first draft of the projection with the choreography, I began the arduous, yet rewarding editing process. Each time we rehearsed I considered how the design
looked in the space, and how it worked with the movement of the dancers as they interacted with the installation. Then, I would make the needed changes and bring the new projection design to our next rehearsal.

Figure 15: Misha Matsumoto performing *Traveling Through Her*

Figure 16: Projection design and installation
There was also a brief moment where the silhouettes of my children at the beach were projected. I wanted to include them in this process. As I explored third wave feminism and reflected on my personal journey as a mother in graduate school, working two jobs and struggling to make ends meet, I thought daily of the balancing I had to do and the sacrifice we made as a family in coming to Hawai‘i. My children were always present in my thoughts and the many hours away from them were difficult. I hoped that they would feel a part of my thesis as they watched the performance.

As we entered tech week and worked with Chikako our lighting designer I found that side lighting, and any additional lighting beyond the projection, would fade the intensity of the projection. It became a balancing act of trying to work out how much side lighting to use. Gregg and Brian felt that the side lighting was necessary while Kara and I thought it needed to be reduced. A compromise was made in the end that worked well to light the dancers and still see the images and footage in the projection design.

Figure 17: Faith Im rehearsing Traveling Through Her with no side lighting
Costumes and Installation

With my concept developed from the previous semester of production class I knew I had a lot of work ahead of me to make this piece reach fruition. The costumes and installation had a symbiotic relationship with the choreography. With the donated white lycra fabric, I envisioned two panels that ran the length of the stage with one panel being connected to a dress worn by Misha so that she and the costume were a part of the installation. As she rehearsed in the dress her intention and character started to transform into a goddess figure that transcended the dancers around her. With the images of earth, water and sky projected on her, she became a metaphor for the place where the elements meet. This became clearer as the fabric upstage was hung above stage left while she remained grounded and the remaining fabric was free to move and stretch.

Some of the difficulties with the fabric had to be worked out during tech week and we had to enlist people to hold the fabric in the wings on stage right and left. After roughly two weeks of using the fabric, we also noticed that it had stretched from being pulled and manipulated. This wasn’t detrimental but it did remain in the back of my mind that the fabric was growing as the dance took form. I had originally wanted two pieces traveling across the stage, but as we worked with the lycra before cutting it, I noticed that it was much more interesting if kept in one piece. Though we did cut a small portion to make Misha’s dress, the rest of the fabric was uncut and travelled from downstage left to middle wing stage right and then back to upstage left where it was flown.

Cheri put me in contact with Marc Marcos, the costume director for footholds, so that he could assist me in making Misha’s dress. Learning to make her dress with the help of Marc was extremely rewarding and difficult. Initially I thought that I’d be assisting him while he did most
of the work but instead he talked me through what I had proposed and then gave me instructions to follow so that I could sew the dress that I envisioned. There were times he needed to step in and correct mistakes and help me rework things, but he was so helpful in allowing me to do much of the work and acquire a new skill that I hope to develop further. He was also extremely helpful during rehearsal time as we mapped out where the dress would be connected permanently to the larger lycra. Taking the last step and sewing her dress was quite paramount as well. We had to take 60 feet of white fabric down to the costume shop with great care in keeping it untwisted. If the dress was not sewn in the right place there were a myriad of problematic possibilities in relating to the lighting, where Misha needed to stand in relation to the projection, and how the dancers worked with the fabric, just to name a few.

![Figure 18: Cast performing *Traveling Through Her*](image)

The other dancers in the piece wore white biketards so that the projection could also be seen on their costumes and bodies. Yet, because the lighting washed out the projection a bit, the costumes still seemed to read from the audience as white. In the end I was fine with the white
costumes not transforming to absorb the projection very much. The dancers looked strong and their movements with simple costuming communicated what I had wanted.

Figure 19: Bridgette Sutton, Faith Im and Alisa Olko performing Traveling Through Her

Figure 20: Bridgette Sutton, Mo Kearns and Alisa Olko performing Traveling Through Her
Music

As stated earlier, I began this piece using music that had an industrial and urban feel but after talking with Betsy I began to consider other pieces of music to support what I was trying to communicate. After letting my dancers know that we would be trying different music for the next rehearsal and asking for suggestions, Mo sent me links to music by Ludovico Einaudi, an Italian composer. His music is classical in tone with an orchestral feel and the piece that worked perfectly with the choreography was “Experience” which has long piano sections followed by driving violin layered with piano. Each section of the choreography seemed to work well with the sections of the musical composition from Misha’s beginning solo to Faith’s struggle within the fabric to the softening resolution at the end of the piece. Feedback I received after making the musical change was positive all around.

Safety and Technical Concerns

Because the costume that Misha performed in was a part of the installation and sewn to the fabric a few concerns arose. While the dancers were manipulating and pulling the fabric their movement could affect Misha’s stability. In addition, she was standing on two black boxes which compounded her need to stay stable to avoid a fall. There needed to be clear communication with dancers regarding the intensity of their pulling. Her dress was fitted like a tube to just below mid-calf length. She realized that not only was there the possibility of being pulled off the boxes but that if the fabric was pulled too strongly it pulled on her knee and aggravated a pre-existing injury. Faith’s pulling was the most intense and so, again, communication between the dancers
was paramount. Each night as I watched from the wing I checked to make sure she felt safe and secure and I tried to stay calm and enjoy the work.

**Reflection**

Seeing this piece finished and ready to perform was extremely rewarding and the struggles that I encountered along the way made the completion of the work all the more gratifying. It was also a relief to finish the last show and know that all of my dancers were safe and that no piece of the installation fell down or tore apart. So many people were instrumental in this piece reaching fruition. I know that if I were to return to it and reconstruct it there would be changes. Yet, for the amount of time I had to work with the fabric and the space where the fabric was hung, I was content and that is a great feeling.

Another exciting point during performance week happened when I read the review of our show in the *Honolulu Examiner*. The dance critic was so kind as she applauded the choreographers for their diversity, experimentation and performance quality. Her mention of my piece “Traveling Through Her” was wonderful to read and she pointed out the connection the dancers had with the technical aspects of the piece. Regardless of outside opinion, I grew a lot during this piece as I challenged myself to sew, create an installation, a projection design, and work with dancers from diverse technical backgrounds. Seeing the performers work together and embody their different roles in the piece was really lovely and gratifying.
PART THREE: PUBLICITY
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Kennedy Theatre Presents Spring Footholds Dance Concert  Student Choreographers Début Powerful Contemporary Dance

The University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa’s Department of Theatre and Dance is proud to present the second in its Footholds dance concert series, Spring Footholds: STREAMS. This multidimensional concert brings together dance students, choreographers, technicians, and designers to create an intriguing performance of contemporary dance. Performances will take place March 2, 3, 4, and 5 at 7:30 p.m., and March 6 at 2:00 p.m.; free post-show rap with choreographers and dancers on March 4.

The biannual Footholds concerts showcase the zenith of student choreography and movement-centered work, achieved through titanic amounts of sweat, blood, and determination. The student choreographers at UHM constantly seek to better themselves and their work, pushing boundaries and defying limitations. This particular Footholds will be an amalgamation of visions utilizing both dance and projections. When Kara Miller, Assistant Professor of Dance and Faculty Advisor of Spring Footholds was asked why she chose to direct this show, she said “Dance is so versatile and powerful. When combined with technology, it has the ability to change the lives of everyone involved, dancers and audience alike.” She also has high hopes for what the show will accomplish. “We have some very talented MFA students. I want them and their choreography to be successful. We all
feel that dance is very much an important part of who we are as a community. Dance and technology creates a magical connection across time and space.”

The production will feature the thesis work of Master of Fine Arts candidates Camille Monson and Faith Im. Monson’s “Travelling Through Us” and “Friends of P” explores concepts of space, both through the physical body onstage and the digital body onscreen. The dances have a visible interplay with projection design, installation and lighting as the dancers reimagine ways of restricting the body, connecting with others and escaping confinement. “Friends of P” brings a bit of wry humor to the stage with the dancers breaking free of pedestrian movements, allowing rhythm and emotion to takeover. Im’s “Perishable” is an observation of commodification. It explores concepts of commercialism and culture running into each other with a quirky satirical twist. To accomplish this, Im incorporates video choreography presenting exaggerated images of moving bodies amidst a mountain of clutter.

Tickets to Spring Footholds: STREAMS may be purchased online at www.etickethawaii.com, by phone at (808) 944-2697, at official outlets, and at the Kennedy Theatre Box Office during sale periods only. For more information, visit http://manoa.hawaii.edu/liveonstage/spring-footholds/

EVENT:

Spring Footholds: STREAMS

PRESENTED BY:

UHM Department of Theatre + Dance

WHEN:

March 2, 3, 4*, 5 at 7:30 p.m.       March 6 at 2:00 p.m.

* Free post-show rap

WHERE:

Earle Ernst Lab Theatre        1770 East-West Rd.

Honolulu, HI, 96822

TICKET PRICES:

$18 general admission
$16 seniors / military / UH faculty and staff
$13 students/youth
$8 UHM students with validated Spring 2016
UHM photo ID
Ticket prices include all service fees.

PURCHASE INFO:
Tickets are available online at etickethawaii.com, by phone at (808) 944-2697, at participating outlets, and at the Kennedy Theatre box office; the box office is open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday through Friday during show weeks, with extended hours on performance dates.

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Program

PRIMETIME
2015/2016 SEASON

SPRING footholds:
STREAMS
dance concert

Earle Ernst Lab Theatre
March 2, 3, 4*, and 5 at 7:30pm
March 6 at 2:00pm
*Post-show rap

UNIVERSITY of HAWAI'I
MANOA

Department of Theatre + Dance
College of Arts and Humanities

pre-show: live stream from backstage

traveling through her

CHOREOGRAPHER: CAMILLE MONSON*
PROJECTION DESIGN: CAMILLE MONSON
COMPOSER: LUDOVICO EINAUDI
DANCERS: FAITH S. IM, MO KEARN, MISHA MATSUMOTO, ALISA OLKO,
BRIDGET SUTTON

play date

CHOREOGRAPHER: CHARLAINE KATSUYOSHI
COMPOSER: ROBERT SCHUMANN
DANCERS: DAYNA CHUN, KAYLYN KUMASHIRO, ANYA LIZARES,
JESSICA PEREIRA

perishable

CHOREOGRAPHER: FAITH S. IM*
PROJECTION DESIGN: FAITH S. IM
COMPOSER: KILIMANJARO DARKJAZZ ENSEMBLE, SAMMY FAIN
DANCERS: LORENZO ACOSTA, FAITH S. IM, MAUREEN KEARN,
CHRISTINE MAXWELL, CAMILLE MONSON, TERRY SLAUGHTER

we move

CHOREOGRAPHER: AMY BUKARAU
COMPOSER: NATURE SOUNDS, DUSTIN O’HALLORAN
DANCERS: ALECA BORSUK, MAKENA HAROOTIAN, ALISA OLKO

intermission

OUTDOOR PROJECTION INSTALLATION OF DANCE FILMS

someone to watch Over me

CHOREOGRAPHERS: TONI PASION, KEONI BRACHE
COMPOSER: GEORGE GERSHWIN
DANCERS: KEONI BRACHE, TONI PASION

*IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE MFA IN DANCE
legong bapang saba
CHOREOGRAPHER: CLASSICAL BALINESE DANCE
COMPOSER: SANGGAR SABA SARI, SABA, BALI
DANCERS: NEZIA AZMI, ANNE REYNOLDS

kiss
CHOREOGRAPHER: SAMI L.A. AKUNA
COMPOSER: POINTER SISTERS, BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
DANCERS: SAMI L.A. AKUNA, CHRISTINE MAXWELL, PATRICK PASCUA,
TONI PASSION, DONALIO SALDANA, KISORE SHREYITT

friends of p
CHOREOGRAPHER: CAMILLE MONSON
COMPOSER: TOM WAITS
DANCERS: FAITH S. IM, MAKENA HAROOTIAN, MO KEARNS,
MISHA MATSUMOTO, CAMILLE MONSON, TERRY SLAUGHTER, CORBETT STERN

Concert Directors: Kara Miller, Gregg Lizenbery
Lighting Designer: Chikako Omoso

production staff
Stage Manager: Brandann R. Hill-Mann
Technical Crew: Keita Beni, Minsun Boo, Kirsten Wisenhant
Lab Theatre Technical Director: Emma Robinson
Lab Costume Shop Manager: Iris Kim
Lab Costume Coordinator: Marc Marcos
Costume Construction Crew: Elize Monique Chaves, Katie Patrick, Mykaela Sterris
Wardrobe Supervisor: Andrea Gordon
Dresser: Jocelyn Ishihara
Faculty Consultants: Peggy Adams, Betsy Fisher, Amy Lynn Schiffner,
Brian Shevelenko, Yuki Shiroma, Cheri Vasek
SPRING footholds: STREAMS
dance concert
March 2-5 at 7:30pm
March 6 at 2pm
Post Show Fly on March 6
Tickets $8-$18

EARLE ERNST LAB THEATRE
UHM STUDENTS $8
Concert Review

Review: Diversity, collaboration pack UH’s ‘Footholds’

By Liza Simon Special to the Star-Advertiser

March 5, 2016

Dancers perform in Kennedy Theatre’s “Spring Footholds: Streams,” which ends March 6 with a performance at 2 p.m.

Give “Spring Footholds: Streams” an A++ for diversity, which is the most obvious charm of this University of Hawaii dance concert. The program features original works by eight student choreographers ranging from Sami L.A. Akuna, who brings gender-bending, drag queen-inspired fare to the stage with his hilarious “Kiss”; to Nezia Azmi and Annie Reynolds, who team up to present the elegant filigreed footwork of “Legong Bapang Saba,” a classical Balinese dance.

Somewhere between those extremes of choreographic sensibility, there is Faith S. Im with “Perishable,” an edgy dreamscape evocation of modern materialism; Charlaine Katsuyoshi’s “Play Date,” with the sweet lightness and lofty leg extensions of ballet; Amy Bukarau with “We Move,” an apt title for a piece with gutsy athleticism; and Toni Pasion and Keoni Brache, who do a take-your-breath away hula to the George Gershwin ballad “Someone to Watch Over Me.”

Spring Footholds: STREAMS

Dance concert featuring student choreography

UH Department of Theatre and Dance: University of Hawaii at Manoa

Earle Ernst Lab Theatre, March 5 at 7:30 p.m. and March 6 at 2 p.m.

Presented by the UH Manoa Department of Theatre and Dance

1770 East-West Road Honolulu, HI 96822

Tickets can be purchased online at manoa.hawaii.edu/liveonstage/spring-footholds

Admittedly, the diversity of “Footholds” should come as no surprise. Being at the Asia-Pacific crossroads makes choc-a-bloc fare a local standard, whether we are talking about the isles’ fondness for bentos or butoh. The UH Department of Dance and Theatre has remained true to upholding diversity with curriculum combining Japanese Kabuki, Indonesian shadow puppet theater, hula, Limon modern technique, Chinese opera and more. In the “Footholds” concert series (a twice-yearly presentation), students are always demo-ing just how much they absorb the aesthetic of diversity by busting out unexpected juxtapositions of styles that would raise purist eyebrows elsewhere.

But here’s something that is new and surprising in the 2016 “Spring Footholds”: collaboration. It’s stunning to note the collaborative interplay between the dancers and the student technicians
who pack the choreography with the added power of props and projection design, kaleidoscopic lighting, and complex soundscapes of layered musical choices.

What we have here is not just dance but sensory storytelling made possible by student mastery of 21st-century stagecraft enhanced by digital media. A stunning example of this comes in the open number, “Travelling Through Us,” choreographed by Camille Monson. A long white sheath is transformed from a flowing train of a goddess’s gown to a trap for a series of characters, who wriggle to be free from the towering figure of careless grace. You got to see it to feel it, and as hard as the dancers work, the feeling of the piece owes so much power to how much the dancers and technicians are utterly in sync with one another.

Definitely, this is not your mother’s college dance department recital, unless your mother earned an MFA at a college program specializing in MTV-influenced dance studies, which is not entirely out of the range of possibility. Thanks to the advent of MTV some 30 years ago, dance has gone vitally viral around the world and in our everyday lives and has legs into so many other disciplines of art and technology. Check out “Footholds” and enjoy the latest leaps of muscle and imagination that UH’s most talented stage performers have taken into this fun and stimulating frontier of creative expression.

Liza Simon is a Honolulu-based freelance writer and lifelong dance enthusiast. A graduate of Barnard College, she is currently a graduate student with a focus in arts education at the UH College of Education.