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## Senior Thesis Project

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# SENIOR THESIS PROJECT

Oscar Arce  
May 8, 1992

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inc.

# Intention

The intention of my dance is to pay homage to Dante Alighieri for his gift of magic and eternal themes. I hope to give true movement and motion to his inspiring poetic words. I was deeply moved by the "Paolo & Francesca" theme, it became my true desire to bring this great work to the stage. The intention of my art is to educate. If by chance people find it entertaining then so be it. But my primary concern is to present my beliefs of human concerns and bring forth awareness in my audiences. It is similar to reading, if a person never reads about a certain topic or issue he/she remains ignorant of its existence. My choreography represents the expression of a book or topic through movement and motion.

Through dance I can make people aware of human issues ranging from literature to contemporary political issues. This is quite a gift. To be able to affect and influence others through dance is quite a responsibility. I must not misinform or lead my audiences astray from the truth. I must be careful with my opinions and know how to separate them from the message that needs to be revealed. I am concerned with the truth. Michelangelo said "the truth shall set you free". Art helps to liberate the soul. The soul needs its nurturing to obtain this freedom. My choreography will nurture souls.

October 22

I've sketch about 75 % of the dance. How much of it I will keep I do not know. Margherita is dancing the part of Francesca. She fits the part best. I also like the fact that she has studied Dante's text. She did so while she went to high-school in Rome. She is a very valuable source to me on this project because this is a famous text in her country. Dante is an Italian hero in Italy. The music I have chosen is a slow adagio by Claude Debussy . The piece is entitled "Le Plus que Lente". It is beautiful and moving. I love Debussy's style because his music is simple and extremely romantic. This piece needs to be Romantic.

The music was extremely inspiring to me. I find it hard to create movement without music. The music has an enormous influence on what the movement will be. I follow what I feel. I create from my intuition. Music is no illusion, but rather a revelation. Where words leave off, music begins. My only wish is that the audience of the future will feel toward the music as the composer of the dance does himself. Music is indeed the most beautiful of all heavens gift to humanity wandering the darkness. Alone it calms, enlightens, and stills our souls. It is not a straw to which the drowning man clings but a true friend, refuge, and comforter for whose sake life is worth living. Perhaps there will be no music in heaven. Well let us give our mortal life to it as long as it lasts!

November 15

I have not had my creative juices running. For some reason I find myself sitting around waiting to be inspired. Maybe I have too many things going on in my life. To create, a person needs to be able to relax and concentrate. The sketch of my dance has not changed much. I want to keep it simple. I know that if I try to create a masterpiece that it will not happen. An artist needs to be content with what it is he is working on because that is all he has before him. When God created the animals and plants He was content with what He had accomplished. The next day He created more. He did not go back and change what He had done, He just kept on creating. I read the poem of Paolo and Francesca everyday in hopes that in doing so I will discover new elements with in it. I am starting to get an image in my mind but it is inhibited by my expectation of it when it materializes itself.

I am becoming frustrated with myself. I can not sleep at night because I desire to do so much. But my ideas get stuck in my dreams and do not find a way out. Judy 's been getting on my case about the dance and I know she means well. I just wish I could have some time to myself and the poem. I need to explore with more movement. I think I 'm going to watch some dance on video tapes. I will view some ballets with romantic Pas de deux. I hope I find what I do not know I am looking for here. How short life is! How much I still have to do, to think, and to say! I keep putting things off and meanwhile death lurks around the corner. Someday it will be here. I must do it in my art. the powers of art are the wings of the soul. As a man thinks in his heart, so is he. My dance needs to be.

My art is taking the form of a high spiritual exaltation, an infatuation for beauty, in hopes of Deifying my creative impulse. If the world could only partake of an atom of the joy that is mine, the world would suffocate in bliss.

November 28

I don't feel like talking about my dance. I never have time for it. I always have to be here or there. The little time I have I either have to give to other rehearsals such as Lori's and Joy's , or I find myself trying to keep up with my studies. Things are out of control. this is no way to be spending my senior year. Yet before I go to bed I dream of a synthesis of all arts, philosophy and religion- a new gospel to take the place of the old. Not all is wrong with a world where a life complete, noble, intellectually keen, beautiful in form and contents, and above all rich in ever lasting joy to humanity, and it must be lived before our very eyes. Religion and art have always been closely connected in my mind and a strange magic power has been ascribed to them. I hope this mystical ideas can find there embodiment in this dance I must create. I hope I do not insult Dante through my interpretation of dance - Paolo and Francesca. At this point in my life I have picked out from a number of philosophical systems traits that seem to echo my own ideas . My philosophy seems to emanate from the nature of my dance in hopes of stimulating me to fresh designs.

I require new life from every passage of the poem. Yet, I am failing completely in the systematic building up , effort of this dance. Someday I hope they say of me ; " an exquisite nature equally great as a choreographer and dancer, an enlightened philosopher, all nerve and a holy flame." Moses once wrote to Ramses ; " To each manifestation of the body, there corresponds an internal manifestation of the mind, which has its seat in the soul." I desire this manifestation. Help Dante! I cry to my Muses.

February 3

I have asked Julee Howell to be in the piece instead of Margherita. Gita cannot do the lifts because I am too short plus she is just starting to dance again after her back surgery so I do not want to take any risks.

Julee looks very enthusiastic about my idea and intentions. She can fit the part perfectly because she has that medieval-victorian quality that can definitely work. She is also such the ballerina and romantic type that it can only do this piece good. She has read the poem and she has done some research on her own. She is also going to design the costumes which is great because she knows what needs to be done and what will work.

It is different working with Julee because she is very different from Margherita in everything. She has a different body type: she is not as muscular and she is not as strong but she is lighter and this is what I need for the lifts. She knows how to hold herself and she is not afraid which gives me the possibility to try anything that comes to mind. She has helped a lot already by giving me some ideas of her own. I really like that.

I am glad I have found someone to work with that understands my needs, that is very cooperative and that is as busy as I am and can relate to me if I tell her we need to rehearse at eleven at night!



February25

### Artistic Concern

Can a person be creative when he/she is suffering? A very difficult question to address but it has importance. Many people believe that if a person is suffering, their creativity is one of the best mediums for easing the tension, and that the work produced is often extraordinary. Humans channel their energy into a craft or hobby whenever they are confronted with a sever obstacle. But why is it that some of our best work comes forth when we are in our worst state of being? Personally, it is difficult for me to be original and creative when I am suffering through a crisis. I become defunct. But I only need to spend time alone , centering myself , accepting the situations that are raping my inner contents. Only then can I find it possibly to create. I must digest the pain, anguish and savor its taste. Art is not always blue skies, joy, and happiness. Art is also dark, complex, and unpredictable. Art has a bewitched metaphysics about it. Yet, it does not fail in letting us know that we are alive, and in each moment , once it has past, is gone never to be repeated again. The artist must love everything he finds, experiences, and believes in. A true artist never surrenders. He toils, sweats, never gets enough sleep, and is always scraping to get by. His art has no price, and its value is immeasurable. The earth is his womb were he must nurture his embryonic canvas . He must remember that he is only a beginner and that he will always be one. He must love

his joy as well as his pain, there is no difference between the two, they both move him forward.

For the artist there is no rest. No beginning , no end, just a vicious cycle that he must succumb to. He must surrender his soul. Let him believe all that he needs to, whether it be true or false, or even if he believes in one thing one day and not the next so be it. The important thing is to believe . He must hate what he does and at the same understand that he would die with out his art.

This is just a glimpse of their artists' world. There is no theory that can offer a explanation for what an artist is. He is his only master, and he will not be free until he become this. To create is to suffer, to labor and give birth to one's bliss. The artist must be unique and above all true to himself, and no one else. With love he can overcome every obstacle , challenge and succeed.....

Love is the painful feeling of knowing that you  
are *alive !!!* -

Joseph Campbell

March 22

I had to show my choreography yesterday at the Student showing. The dance was finished but it still needed a lot of work such as strengthening our performance, polishing the ruff segments and maybe try new movement. Julee has been very cooperative like always and I believe that this past showing gave us a real sense of what we are doing. We had to perform it and not just rehearse it.

We still have a lot of work to do with the music. It is such a powerful piece that every moment brings an emotion, a movement and we have to fill those moments not only with the steps but the essence of the story in order to make the piece work at its fullest. In order to help Julee understand this I told her that Francesca moves according to the sound of the violins; she needs to listen to the instrument so she will surely know what the movement is in all its aspects: if it is slow or fast, light or sustained.

One thing I am concerned about is the fact that both of us really need to incorporate breath and to be able to approach the steps with strong intentions: we have to be there when the music hits that note with no hesitation. We still have too much fidgeting that should not be there because it takes away the clearness of the piece.

## Interview at 55

**Q:** Now that you have received the International Arts Award reflecting back on your career, when in your life would you say was turning artistic point for you?

**OAA:** Well, you know I don't like to give interviews so I'll make this quick. Funny you should ask that question because I would have to say that I recognized that dance was truly what I loved and what I wanted to do for the rest of my life my senior year at Loyola Marymount. I had choreographed a dance from Dante's Divine Comedy based on Paolo And Francesca. It was just a skeleton of what I aspired to do in the world of dance.

**Q:** Wow! Now at the age of five you are being praised for your full Epic Dance Opera of Dante's Divine Comedy. Did you ever dream this would happen? That you would gain such recognition globally. Your Dance Opera will live forever. But I guess my question is ; what do you know now that you didn't then?

**OAA:** I am a true believer of the spirit. By this I mean the creative principle (what I call spirit) is conscious of a polarity of the masculine and feminine elements, the one active, the other passive, or the will and the resistance. The latter element , inactive and inert, becomes crystallized in the immobility of the material forms, in the world with its manifold phenomena. The separated poles reach in their separation a culminating point: the complete materialization and

differentiation, the loss of any connection with the Deity. At this extreme point there arises a reaction in favour of a reunion: the World's love for the Spirit and vice versa- a mystical Eros. the purpose of the separation is achieved: the creative substance has left its mark on the matter and there begins a process of dematerialization, reunion. Ahh , that's all.

**Q:** That is some heavy Philosophy. Any last comments? I know your pressed for time as always.

**OAA:** Yeah, nothing in this world is quite worth the winning: it is the work of the moment that is savoring. This is what matters most. Thank you.

April 1

I have been working with Scott and Judy lately. They have been coaching me and helping me try to sculpt the piece. We are trying different things but Judy is very concerned, she is afraid we will not be able to have a finished and set choreography. I understand her concerns and I try to work with them as much as I can but Julee and I have very tight schedules. I have the Faculty concert and she has projects she needs to work on. I have been asking her to rehearse every day after Faculty run throughs: she is extremely patient!

Julee showed me the sketches of the costumes. They look great and they will make the piece so much stronger. I am not spending any money on my costume because Gwyne managed to make mine out of an old costume she had. We did spend money on Julee's costume but it was worth it. They are both beautiful, you do not see things like these any more.

I have been researching a lot for this piece especially because I am really interested in the lifts. I have been looking at pictures and I have been trying them with Julee. It is funny to see how things are starting to happen on accident. I believe it is really going to work even if we do need to work on it some more. Scott has helped us find a new opening pose which makes everything a lot easier. I like it not just for practical reasons but also for its aesthetics.

One concern I do have is the lighting. I would really like to be able to work on stage and the lights as soon as possible because I believe that the lighting has a very important role for my project and now that I have seen the costumes I have an idea of what I want. A spot light in the beginning and the end would be perfect. This is only a start. I will have Tim Krupka help me for the rest.

April 23

The most terrible thing happened last night before the dress rehearsal: Julee fell down the stairs going to the green room and sprained her ankle. It did not look too bad until she took off her sock. I thought she was not going to be able to do it. I did not know what to do. The only thing I thought about was that I wanted to do this piece and I was going to some how. I thought of Margherita, she was the only one who really knew what the piece was about and I believed she could do it. I asked Judy if that was a good idea and she gave me permission to take Gita to the studios and teach her Julee's part. We did not have much time and I was able to teach her maybe half the dance in an hour and a half. We rushed back to the theater and we did what we needed to. It was a challenge for me but mostly for Margherita. After we did it on stage we ran back to the studios and rehearsed some more. I believe she knows the dance now but she is still very insecure. She wants to be sure of everything like always and if she doubts something she just says she does not know it.

The most difficult thing for her to do was move to the music. She did not know the piece and she did understand that the music and its moments had a very important role in this piece. We rehearsed all day today and I really believe she can do it. But I do understand that it is very frustrating for her to work with some one as stubborn as I am and try to learn a piece that took so long to do in only one day! I think she can do it I just need her to believe that as well and I am sure everything tonight will go just fine.

## FINAL OBSERVATION

May 1

The concert is over, Graduation is on its way. I viewed my dance today and was happy with both of them. It is possible to express its contents in words. I can do so only in regards to its general features. The introduction is the germ, the leading idea of the whole work. This is Fate, that inevitable force which checks our aspirations toward's happiness before they reach the goal, which watches jealously yet our peace and bliss should be complete and cloudless- a force which hags perpetually over our heads and is always embittering their soul. This force force is inescapable and invincible. There is no other course but to submit and inwardly lament.

The sense of hopeless despair grows stronger and more poignant. Is it not better to turn from reality and lose ourselves in in dreams? A sweet and tender dream enfolds Paolo & Francesca. A bright and serene presence leads them on. How wonderful! Deeper and deeper their souls sink into this dream. All that was dark and joyless is forgotten. Here is happiness! It is but a dream, Fate awakens them roughly.

So all life is but continual alteration between grim truth and fleeting dreams of happiness. There is no haven. The waves drive us hither and thither, until the sea engulfs them.



Next the phase of suffering. Now it is melancholy which steals over them when at evening they sit indoors alone, weary of the other, while the book they have picked up slips unheeded from their fingers. A long procession of old memories goes by. How sad to think how much has already past and gone. And yet these recollections of youth are sweet. They regret the past, although they have not the courage nor desire to start a new life. They are rather weary of existence.

We would fain rest a while and look back, recalling many things. There were moments of sorrow, irreparable loss. All this has receded so far into the past. How sad, yet sweet to lose ourselves therein!