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Erin Funk

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Erin Funk

Senior Thesis Paper

5/2/2018

I have always been interested in video editing and creating concept videos since I was young. In high-school I went to a summer dance intensive in NYC called SOCAPA (School of Creative and Performing Arts). SOCAPA offers programs for music, screen-writing, videography, photography, and dance. The students collaborated regularly to work on projects. Part of the dance program was learning a dance to be made into a concept video, which the film students would help create. I used to spend hours watching all the different videos they had made in the first few years of the program. Over the summer of 2015, I got to intern for SOCAPA as the hip-hop assistant. I helped choreograph and edit many concept videos that summer. Each video had a completely different theme and location. I loved coming up with different ideas and seeing them to fruition. What I liked about creating and editing a video was that the possibilities were endless. You can create new ways of seeing dance in different environments.

Here is a video I helped with:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dSN7oLJpd8I&list=PL2F8FA5F1ACCC3AB6&index=5&t=0s>

When I thought about what to do for my senior thesis, a concept video was immediately my first choice. Initially, I had the idea to choreograph three different styles and create three different concept videos. When I thought more about it, I realized I wanted to make one video to send a single message. In high school, I saw a Ted Talk called *Do Schools Kill Creativity?* Speaker Sir Ken Robinson makes an

entertaining and moving case for creating an education system that nurtures (rather than undermines) creativity. Robinson is advisor on education in the arts to government, non-profits, education and arts bodies. In his speech he questions, "Why don't we get the best out of people?" from his perspective it is because we've been educated to become good workers, rather than creative thinkers. Students with restless minds and bodies -- far from being cultivated for their energy and curiosity -- are ignored or even stigmatized, with terrible consequences. In his speech, he tells a story about a little girl who is taken to a doctor because she was having trouble concentrating in class. The doctor talks to her and then leaves the room and turns on the radio. After he left, the girl started dancing and he tells her mother to bring her to a dance school. The young girl in the story happens to be Gillian Lynne, and she grows up to be an acclaimed dancer, choreographer, ballerina, and theatre/television director. Hearing that speech inspired me to continue my training and trust in my passion for dance. I decided to incorporate pieces of the speech by Ken Robinson into my senior thesis video. When I made the decision to use the speech I wanted the concept and design of the video to be really simple.

Another major inspiration to me was the music video to the Oh Wonder song, "Lose It." The band Oh Wonder brought five dancers in to audition for their music video, but didn't tell them that they were actually filming the real video. They asked the dancers to audition by improvising to their song and midway through pull out a few surprises. The video is unique, uplifting, and moving and every time I watch it I get chills.

Here is a link to the video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VgwcPiCjQ-0&start_radio=1&list=RDVgwcPiCjQ-0

Something I have cherished seeing over the past few years, is watching a dancer improv. I get to see dancers doing choreography a lot but I don't always see their own personal style of moving. What I

love about improv is that it is authentically you, no one is telling you to do anything so it can be really spontaneous and freeing. I thought of the idea to invite dance majors I have gotten to know to come to get filmed doing their improv at a nice off-campus location. I would use the footage from the shoot to create my video.

Having been in three Senior Theses and seeing how much of a time commitment it was for the dancers, I wanted to do a project that wouldn't require a lot of outside time for the participants. I also wanted as many dancers as possible to be in it so I invited as many as I could. As dance majors, we are always crammed with school and rehearsals so I wanted to do something that was mutually beneficial and did not require a lot of work for anyone but myself. The dancers would leave with well-shot footage of themselves dancing for their dance reels or social media, and also photographs I took during and between the filming.

I wanted to use as many dancers as I could so that I could send a message of how unique each individual person really is in our department. I wanted to use the footage combined with the speech to send a message about the importance of an art education and highlight individuals who are currently studying dance at LMU. I know how lucky I am to have been given this opportunity to dance in college but there are many skeptical people who believe it is not important or don't even know that it is even out there. I wanted this video to be a gesture of appreciation for the dance department at LMU and also a way to show people the indisputable importance of having arts in education.

As a dancer, I am not always center stage or "the lead". But I am always watching, listening and thinking. I am a very visual person and I understand what looks good and what doesn't. I see myself as more of the choreographer or director than I see myself as the star of the show. I think this project fit my personality as an artist because the idea was simple and open.

Once I was able to verbalize my ideas about the video, I made a Facebook group and invited dancers to join. I posted about my idea and made a poll of potential dates that would work for filming. I invited twenty-four LMU dancers to participate. At this point it was still just an idea, I didn't have a videographer, a location, or a date. I got good response from the Facebook page and the next step was to find a rent out a space on a date that looked best. I was able to find a website online called Peerspace. Peerspace is like Airbnb, but instead of homes you can rent locations at an hourly rate. I looked through a lot of options for spaces, including outdoor rooftops, a large field, and a Downtown loft. I ended up choosing the loft in Fashion district of Downtown Los Angeles because it had white walls, huge industrial windows, and lots of space to dance. Below is a photo of the space from the website Peerspace.



I booked the space for Saturday, February 24th, from 12:30-5:30pm. After I had figured out location the next thing was to find someone with video equipment to film the dancers. The first place I went was Damon, who contacted the Dean of Film and Television with the details of the shoot to see if any students would be interested. I never heard back from him, so I decided to contact a mutual friend via Instagram who I knew was a screen-writing major in the film school. He wrote back immediately that he would be happy to do the shoot. The problem with finalizing the date was that a few dancers who wanted to participate could not do the date I picked. So out of twenty-four dancers, seventeen confirmed they were coming. I organized a meeting through Facebook for Sunday, February 18th, to

touch base with the dancers and talk about what to expect for the video. Most of the dancers were able to attend the meeting but those who weren't I contacted separately. At the meeting, I explained how I was organizing the schedule for the day. I divided the day into two parts, so half the dancers would show up from twelve-thirty to three and the second half would show up from three to five. I asked the dancers and wrote down their preference for times. I wanted to divide the day so that no one needed to be there all five hours besides me and the videographer, Gatsby Keys. At the meeting, we figured out carpool groups so people could arrive and leave together. I also explained how it was up to each individual dancer to decide what styles they want to do, what outfits they want to wear (no logos), and what music they want to improv with; I wanted them to feel completely at home with what they were doing. A few days before the shoot I thought of the idea incorporate a moment when the dancers throw confetti up in the air and react to it.

The morning of the video shoot I went to Party City to pick up the gold star confetti, and then went to Ralphs to get snacks and water. I packed up my bag with my camera and a few tops and bottoms in case someone wanted a change of clothes. I drove to Downtown, parked, and walked a few blocks to the location of the loft. It proved to be difficult to find the loft so I needed to contact the guy I rented the space from to get better directions. Once I found it, I posted in the Facebook page with better details of how to find the loft so that the others would not get lost. When I first saw the space, it was even more beautiful than I had imagined from the pictures on Peerspace. It was on the seventh floor of the building, so the windows looked out over downtown LA. The space was one large room with a small side room with a kitchen and vanity. When the first few dancers arrived, we made the smaller room the dressing room. Right when we were setting everything up and getting ready to start with the first dancer, the speaker I had brought was not working. This was a big issue because I wanted the dancers to be able to improv to their favorite songs, so I ran downstairs and across the street and bought a new speaker from a vendor and ran back to the loft. Once that was handled, I made an order

of who would be filmed based on the order of when people arrived. If dancers wanted to do multiple styles they would do their second after everyone had done their first. Since I had divided the group up into two sections, there wasn't an overwhelming amount of people in the space and the whole process flowed very organically. After finishing their improv, each dancer would end throwing a fistful of confetti in the air. The day started off with such a good, fun energy and every solo was so unique and different. The styles ranged from hip-hop to tap to pointe shoes. I had been so distracted watching the first group of dancers that I had forgotten to bring out my camera. When we wrapped up the improv solos, we did one shot of a group dance party/circle. After this, we still had a gap of time before the second round of dancer arrived, so I took out my camera and took some headshots/body shots of the dancers, while Gatsby took a lunch break. Here are some examples of the photos I took after the first round of dancers...



After the first group of dancers left, the second group started to trickle in. This time I decided to photograph the dancers during their improv so I could get some movement shots. The light in the space was also changing and becoming more dramatic. Here are some examples of pictures taken during the second round of improv solos...



For the most part, the first group had more of a commercial vibe and the second group was a little more contemporary. The energy shifted and was a little more serious and contemplative, however it also had an organic flow to it and we never worried about running out of time. At the end of the solos, we did a last “dance party” shot like the previous group. After everyone had left, besides the people I was driving home, I did my improv solo at the very end of the day. Overall, the video shoot went very smoothly, everyone had a great time and thanked me for setting it up, and it turned out to be one of my favorite days of college. This experience was encouraging and inspiring for what I look forward to in the future.

The night I got home from the shoot, I downloaded all of the photos on to my laptop and uploaded them to a private album on Facebook so that the dancers could see the photos right away. The next week I saw the photos all over social media, including the LMU Dance Instagram, and it made me really happy to see that this additional unplanned benefit from taking my camera to the shoot.

A few days after the shoot, I met up with Gatsby and he gave me the disk with the footage. I downloaded it to my laptop and organized each video by the person’s name and style. Each person had a video of their own improv and also a video throwing the confetti. I then put those videos on my hard drive so I could more easily distribute the footage to the dancers. At this stage I was ready to start editing my video.

The first thing I did was drag every video into iMovie and stabilize them, basically removing the shakiness from the videos. I watched each video multiple times and started pulling clips from them that stood out to me. I muted each video and started to mess around with different songs to edit in the background. I wanted something that would work with every style and tempo of movement. After trying many options, I ended up choosing the song *Makeba* by French singer-songwriter, Jain. The song is about South African musician Miriam Makeba, famous for her activist music against the apartheid in the country at the time. The song is influenced in equal parts by French techno and African rhythms. It is upbeat, and although it has lyrics, a lot of them you can't understand besides "Makes my body dance for you," so it doesn't distract the viewer too much. The song has a fast tempo and a slow tempo so it worked well with every solo. After lots of switching around and finding new clips of dancers to include, I now had a four-minute video of seventeen different dancer's improvisation to the song *Makeba*. I needed to figure how to incorporate the speech by Ken Robinson to add more dimension to the video and complete the concept. I decided to add more footage to put before of the footage I already had so that it would be the speech alone before the Jain song starts in. The speech alone was too long and too boring from my perspective so I decided to take out a few bits and add an instrumental to go behind it. Also going from no music to a high energy song was too stark so added another song would help blend the two sections. The song I ended up choosing to play softly in the background of the speech was *Midwayer*, by Joep Beving. I used to read and listen to him album and I loved how poetic each song was and it never distracted me from the words of my book. At this time, I also decided to add in the footage of the dancers throwing confetti into the air and edited over it with a clip of a different speech from Ken Robinson for the conclusion of the video. Below is a quote from Ken Robinson that I used in the conclusion of the video...

“The arts especially address the idea of aesthetic experience. An 'aesthetic experience' is one in which your senses are operating at their peak. When you're present in the current moment. When you're resonating with excitement of this thing that you are experiencing. When you're fully alive. An 'anesthetic' is when you shut your senses off and deaden yourself to what's happening.”

“We're getting children through education by anaesthetizing them. And I think we should be doing the exact opposite. We shouldn't be putting them to sleep, we should be waking them up to what they have inside themselves.”

This clip resonated with me and tied the whole concept for the video together. I struggled throughout school with subjects I was not passionate about. I would try my best to do exactly what the teacher said to do but I didn't feel like I connected to what I was learning. Once I was able to take classes in art and dance I had a new appreciation for going to school and a new eagerness to devote my time to improving as a student.

I wanted to use the confetti clips with the quote because I felt like it was a moment of an aesthetic experience and everyone looked genuinely happy and authentic in their shot. It was a silly idea to throw the confetti in the air but everyone went along with it and it turned out to be an important conclusion to the video because you got to see the dancers be more real and human.

After making many adjustments, I finally felt like the video was finished. I showed it to several people to get some feedback, including Damon and some of my housemates. Damon instructed me to take out the moments when a dancer is looking too intensely at the camera or being too sexy because it confused the message of the video. I agreed that the sexy clips felt a little out of place but I left some of the moments of eye contact with the camera because it didn't bother me and some people kept eye contact their entire solo and I didn't want to leave them out of the video. One of my housemates felt like it was missing something to connect the speech with the dancers in the video, so I thought of the idea to interview some of the dancers and record how they felt about studying dance in college. Once I

got six recordings, I edited them down and clipped them all together to add over the second half of the *Makeba* section of the video. Adding the voices of the dancers in the video tied each section together and made the project complete. After minor adjustments, I was ready to present my final video.

I loved organizing and creating this video. I am grateful for the experiences I had throughout the process and being able to give something meaningful to the LMU dance community. The day that we filmed the dancers I left feeling so inspired by dance and passionate about creating art. Editing this video was actually therapeutic for me and I would watch it over and over to make sure everything worked well together. I liked the end result of my video, I thought the footage was beautiful and the location was amazing. The one area I would redo would be the audio section with the dancers speaking. I wish I could have had a better recording device so that their voices were clearer, but all I had was my iPhone. I also wish I had spent more time talking to and recording the dancers instead of asking them one question on the spot. I wish I had developed that piece of the video more, but I think having the dancers speak was an important, so I'm glad I still presented it with their recordings. I also think I could rework parts of the video and play around with changing the speed for different solos. I initially tried using sections with slow motion or reverse effects, but it seemed unnatural to change it. I think if I spent more time with it I would be able to incorporate changing some elements of the footage successfully to add a little dimension to the footage. I think I could create hundreds of different concept videos using the same footage in a different way. The last thing I wish I could have done if I had more money would have been to do another Saturday shoot at another location to make it more interesting. I would have loved to bring dancers out to Joshua Tree and do a shoot there but it would have been a bigger commitment

from the dancers and the videographer. I am proud of what I have done so far but I want to learn more about directing and editing videos.

Here is my video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZOfZIZAV2q0>

Erin

My personal goal is to be a music video director and choreographer. I have learned a lot about what visually looks good and what doesn't from studying dance and art for the past four years. I see myself creating art whether it is graphic design, choreography, or directing videos. I have a passion for participating in the dance and art scene in Los Angeles. In a year, I see myself getting my yoga certification, teaching hip-hop to kids, going on auditions for commercial work, and doing freelance graphic design work. In five years, hopefully I am still dancing and creating artwork but I am open to wherever life takes me, however I don't see myself still living in Los Angeles. In ten years, I would like to go to graduate school to get an MFA in Design or Dance. Creating this project got me excited for the next chapter in my life. I loved brainstorming an idea and turning it into something I can be proud of. It feels so natural to me to do something creative and visually stimulating. This experience brought me closer to some of the LMU dancers and I received a lot of good feedback from the dancers and people who saw the video. Even three months after I did the video shoot dancers are still posting their solos and photos I took that day on their social media.



I loved how efficient and effective this project was; I feel like this is what I'm good at and what I enjoy doing. I feel very strongly that art and dance has changed my perspective on life and I think it is important to share it with as many people possible. I am grateful for being allowed this opportunity to study art and dance at a University level. Each experience has made me a better person and I am fortunate for the relationships I've made with other students and teachers. The process of creating my Senior Thesis was organic and although it was a ton of work, it was work I enjoyed doing. This project has solidified my goals in pursuing a career in art and dance. I will use this experience as the starting point of all my projects to come.