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## Senior Thesis Reflection

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Paige Westover

Damon Rago

Senior Thesis

2 May 2018

## Senior Thesis Reflection

### **Section 1:**

Throughout my college career at LMU, I have always been eager to explore a collaboration between the various art forms that interest me. Music has always been a major inspiration for me in the way I choreograph, and throughout my life in general, so naturally I knew I wanted my senior thesis to combine my passions for music and movement. Choosing to choreograph a music video was something that had been brewing in the back of my mind, but I was also extremely nervous because I knew it would be a challenge considering it would be my first time choreographing something for film. I was also considering creating a business plan for a dance/fitness studio, but I wanted to be challenged and knew that a music video would push me out of my comfort zone. I also have always wanted to collaborate with my brother, Brock, an L.A. based musician. Brock has been pursuing music since high school and his work ethic, creativity, and ambition have always really inspired me. I see him as a role model and we have only grown closer throughout my college years. Before coming to LMU, I was pretty much only trained in classical ballet, only taking jazz and hip hop in my early elementary years. One reason I was so interested in LMU's dance program was because I knew I would be exposed to so many other styles of dance that would really

develop myself as an artist and versatile dancer. Freshman and Sophomore year, my confidence in jazz funk, hip hop, heels, and pretty much all commercial styles was very low. I was so used to ballet and modern technique and felt uncomfortable and inadequate in commercial dance. It wasn't until Senior Jazz with Jason that my confidence and perception of commercial dance changed. Throughout the semester major guest artists in the industry came, and while at first I was extremely intimidated and scared. I finally realized that I do have what it takes to work as a commercial artist. One guest in particular, Helene Phillips, had a very large impact on me. The first semester of Jason's jazz class I found her class overwhelming and somewhat scary. She is very direct and aggressive in her teaching style, while at the same time extremely motivating and caring. Second semester I got to experience Helene's class again, but this time my confidence and attitude towards commercial had completely changed. She recognized that I had improved over the course of the last semester and Jason mentioned it to me as well. This new found sense of confidence and respect for commercial dance continued to grow and really pushed me to want to choreograph a music video for my thesis. If you had asked me to choreograph something in the commercial style freshman year I would have been mortified and very doubtful of my abilities to do so. My experience in jazz 6 however really transformed both my commercial technique, and my views on the industry in general. After I listened to my brother's new song "Parking Lot", I knew I wanted to be a part of his music video release, and from there our collaboration began. This would be my first time choreographing for a project outside a class setting, so my nervousness and feelings of

anxiety were obviously present. However, I knew my jazz and hip hop techniques had improved over the years, and was eager to finally create something that demonstrated that.

## **Section 2:**

When creating a music video, there are so many factors and dimensions that must be planned. Luckily I had both my brother and my boyfriend, a film major, to help me with process. I found that I really love collaborating with other artists, more so than I do just working on my own. I like feed off of others' energy and this project reinforced that even further. I probably listened to the song about 50 times before I ever started choreographing. Because the song has a specific narrative, and features another artist, I needed the dancing to not disrupt the story line, or confuse viewers. I met with Buchanan on the beginning of the project to try and come up with a rough outline and storyboard of the project. He also really wanted to set a specific mood and vibe for the project so we researched lots of other music videos that had a style he wanted to mimic or maybe incorporate. A few of the photos below are some of the examples of the aesthetic he sort of wanted to riff off of.





We created a rough sketch of the scenes we wanted with the other artist, Maxx, where the dance scenes would make the most sense, set locations, costumes, and so forth. Little did we know how much all of these plans would change throughout the course of the process. I also met separately with Grant Gadbois, who would be filming and co-directing the project alongside Brock and I. Grant's film expertise was exceptionally helpful, considering Brock and I are very much amateurs in this area. Below is the "Parking Lot" Treatment that we created and edited multiple times until it both demonstrated the narrative of the song and incorporated the choreography in a fitting way. The shots are broken up into specific time frames within the song.

### **"PARKING LOT" TREATMENT**

TREATMENT OUTLINE:

Artist name: BROCK

Song title: "Parking Lot"

Record Label: N/A

Genre: Pop

Target Audience: young adults/millennials

Style of video: Narrative/ performance

Copyright approval: yes

#### OVERVIEW CONCEPT:

0:00 Wide shot of the parking lot with BROCK standing in the middle of frame.

0:01-0:03 Lights start to turn off in parking lot

0:04 Music starts; cue spot light creating a silhouette of BROCK singing

0:05-0:34 Camera dollies towards BROCK - stops on "somewhere"

0:38 On "Lately," switch between B-ROLL and BROCK singing from a different angle

0:51 Start to dolly away from BROCK for a wider shot, lights begin to come up. Dancers are beside him

0:55 Begin Dance Sequence for Chorus; BROCK singing

#### [HOUSE]

1:11 {LGirl} next to window; Starts singing.

1:12 - :44 Cut between shots of {LGirl} singing in hallway, B-ROLL, and dancers

[BRIDGE]

Begins with both BROCK and {LGirl} in separate beds - arial view

Both start to look at phones, open Facetime

"I can't stop thinking 'bout you" both begin singing to each other through Facetime on the phone {most of this will come together during post}

CHARACTERS:

Brock (lead vocalist, producer): struggling between wanting to pursue a girl a further, but also being caught up in the daily routines of life, not having time, or not knowing if it is the right move. Caught in the middle.

Lead Girl {LGirl for short} (lead actress/singer): similar to Brock. Feeling like she is wanting more in the middle but also is struggling to know if it is something worth pursuing, maybe a fear of love or falling to hard.

Dancers: Act as conceptual dancers in other scenes with Brock. They perform choreography behind LGirl and Brock during choruses and in finale of the song.

## LOCATIONS:

1. Bedroom/yard/living room (Paige's house): Will be used to shoot scenes of LGirl in her room with her girlfriends and/or solo singing. Bedrooms will be used for LGirl Bridge scene

2. Parking lot (LMU U-hall): will be used both in opening scene as well as dance numbers

where both artists are singing to the camera while dancers and dancing behind them.

3. Dance Studio: used for silhouette shots

## VISUAL ELEMENTS/SCENE STYLE:

### Costumes:

LGirl/Brock: Casual/hip L.A. style, whatever they want

Dancers: Outfit 1 is all black with hair in low bun or pony more of a modern look, outfit 2 is a hip L.A. urban look for dancing shots, outfit 3 is casual friend outfit for scenes of LGirl with girlfriends.

### Lighting:

1: night scene in parking lot - key and fill lights - need access to parking lot

lighting control

2: bedroom/ apartment scenes also daytime lighting

EQUIPMENT:

Camera - a7R3 - battery

C-Stands

PA for audio playback

Key and fill light kit

Prime lens kit - 50/90/35

Dolley/Or similar

GlideCam + TriPod

2 cellphones

2 beds/bedrooms

Ladder

Bedsheets/covers

Lighting Kit

CALL TIMES:

Saturday - 11:00 am (Marlo/Brock)

Sunday - 4:00 pm (Dancers/Brock)

Breakdown:

0:00 Wide shot of the parking lot with BROCK standing in the middle of frame.

0:01-0:08 Wide shot tightens to BROCK at chest-up. Vignette grows to total black out.

0:09 Music starts; cue spot light creating a silhouette of BROCK's head/chest

0:34 Then, we find him in an lonely parking lot. He gets out of his car. Three girls get out of their cars and start walking single file towards him. But once they pass by, the dance begins.

0:50 The girls dance behind Brock

1:06 Parallel to beginning with LGirl

1:22 LGirl in parking lot with dancers chilling on cars

1:40 Back to dancers and Brock

1:55 Back to LGirl w/ dancers grooving

2:11 Brock back in house, in hallway

2:21 LGirl in hallway

2:23 Brock in mirror

2:26 LGirl in mirror

2:30 split screen singing in mirror

2:34 LGirl singing in mirror

2:38 Brock singing in mirror

2:42 LGirl singing in mirror

2:45 Brock alone in parking lot (track around him, or CU pull back fast to wide)

3:01 Dancers and Brock

3:29 Dancers leave and Brock is alone (maybe end on CU of Brock)

We combined both of the different shot list breakdowns to complete our final product. For the most part, the shoot ran very smoothly, but we had to make some adjustments considering the other female artists could only shoot one day. With such a small cast, it was easy for everything to fall in to place especially for the dancing portions. We filmed all of the scenes of Brock and Marlo on one day and then all of the dancing scenes another day, and I think it was really smart to separate these out. In my opinion, shooting the acting and artist scenes were way more complicated and strenuous than the dancing scenes. For the dancing scenes the dancers really just had to do the same exact thing multiple times while Grant who was filming had to take various angles and depths each time. However for the artist's scenes, we had to change the direction each time in order to see what gestures worked where, how quickly the camera was dollying, where and when the artist should look at the camera, how his face was reacting, etc. I had sent videos of the choreography to Brock a few weeks prior to the shoot, so he could approve of the movement and make sure it worked with the music. I started choreography about a month or two prior to the shoot but I came up with about 4 different versions of choreography before I finally decided what to do. I knew I wanted it to be repetitive in each chorus as to not distract too much from the artist, and provide a sense of comfort to audience members when viewing. I had two rehearsals with my other two dancers and they both picked the movement very quickly. The hardest part of this entire process was fighting my self-doubt. I constantly would go over the choreography and question if it was too simple, too complicated, too jazzy, too anything.

But one I taught it to my dancers, I finally accepted that it was complete and ready to be filmed. Throughout this entire process I remember listening to the song on repeat until my ears wanted to bleed. I wanted the music to be constantly playing in my head just in case I randomly thought of another choreographic choice that would make the video even better. On the first day of shooting Brock, Grant, Marlo and I arrived at my house and shot all of Marlo's scenes for the first few hours. We wanted her portions of the video to have a warmer colored tone to it, so daytime lighting worked the best here. After her scenes we took a break and grabbed lunch together which was really nice. Spending time with all these artists really instilled an appreciation for all art forms, not just dance. It was so interesting to hear about all their experiences with new projects and plans for the future. Once the sun set, we went back to my house where we shot all of Brock's scenes, because for him we wanted cooler, blue tones with a darker vibe. We wrapped on day one and all we had to do the next day was shoot the dance scenes and the silhouette scenes of Brock in the dance studio. Day 2 started fairly late around 4pm and ran until about 9pm. The dance scenes were actually the easiest to shoot because we just ran the choruses over and over again, getting different angles each time. We ended the night with shooting solo silhouette scenes of myself and then Brock in the dance studio. Post all the shooting, we took about two weeks to edit all the material together and went through about three revisions before we felt it was finally ready to show.

### **Section 3:**

I feel the final product surpassed my expectations immensely. I personally felt that the final product looked professional and well executed, and if given the opportunity, would love to choreograph for another music video or film project. One thing that I think I could've improved on would've maybe been the focus of the dancers during the video. Not used to dancing on film, I feel like sometimes we accidentally looked right into the camera. Going forward I would be more specific in directing both myself, and the other dancers with our focus, specifying when we should look at the artist, straight forward, etc. This was an extremely rewarding experience for myself, and I am excited to have more opportunities to choreograph in the future. This project also really gave me a huge interest in film. I have always been a movie buff, but now behind the scenes production seems like a career path I would really consider pursuing. I am very satisfied with the final product, but of course nothing will ever be perfect and I will always find minute issues with everything I create. I think that is part of being an artist. However, at some point you have to be confident in your skills and your work and just put it out there. A lot of people came up to my after my thesis and were very impressed which was nice to hear. However, what was showed for thesis will continue to be revised and edited until it is approved by Brock for the official final release. Just last week Grant and I received notes on the final version, and there are a few scenes, not the dancing scenes, but ones of only Brock that he would like to reshoot. Throughout the summer Grant, Brock, Marlo, and I will most likely reshoot a few more of their solo scenes and b-roll portions of the video until Brock has a final product that captures exactly what he wants. Below are a few snapshots of some scenes from the video.





#### **Section 4:**

Thinking about the future used to really scare me, but the more and more I envision where I will be in 5, 10, 50 years, the more excited I become. Immediately after graduation I will be taking a short break from pursuing dance as a career, as I am equally as passionate about a career in the entertainment industry on the business side of things. I just recently accepted a full-time job offer at William Morris Endeavor to work as a floating assistant. I am really excited about this opportunity and know it will be a great learning experience. Though I won't be pursuing dance right out of college, it will always be a huge part of life. I will always take class when I can, as my body feels incomplete without regular dance practice. In 5 years I hope that I will be dancing professionally and working in business as well. It is sort of hard to set out a clear path for myself career wise, because I do think I could be happy in so many fields. I am certain though that dance will always remain a part of life, even if it is something that does not support me financially because it will always support me emotionally and physically. If I choose to pursue more of a business focused career, I will still dance and take class whenever I can for both my own sanity and because of the way it makes my body feel. I also have realized throughout my time at LMU, and throughout the course of this thesis how much I enjoy teaching dance to others. Even just the choreography in

this project was extremely exciting to teach and see performed on other bodies. My principles of teaching class also reemphasized my love of teaching and hopefully one day I will own my own dance studio or studios. Dancing is something I will never stop doing. Even when I am 100 years old, I will dance, or teach dance, or be a curator of dance, or just in some way have the art form integrated into my daily life. It is a part of me and my time at LMU has only reinforced that. In the words of Luigi, "Never stop moving". I will never stop moving, and I will never stop dancing.

