

**CHOREOGRAPHING FOR CHILDREN'S TELEVISION:
THE LEGWARMERS IN
VARIATIONS ON A DREAM**

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Abstract

In *Choreographing for Children's Television: The Legwarmers in Variations on a Dream*, choreographer Lisa Brkich explores the choreographic process for a demographic of children between the ages of four and seven years through embodied practice with the dancers, and through the collaboration process with her production team, media company Images Made Real, visual artist Emma Smith and composer Erik Geddes. In this work, Brkich explores the medium of television and its relationship to choreography for viewers in the primary years, kindergarten to grade two.

Choreography for this project is cultivated as a tool to increase the imagination of the viewer, introducing dance to this age group as a form of communication through storytelling. Discussions of the choreographic process of this work depict the choreography, created in the studio during rehearsals, as well as the choreographic changes that arise when influenced by the filming process.

Dedication

This paper is dedicated to my father and mother, John and Ljerka Brkić. To my mother, though you passed from our lives too early you gave me the love and confidence to find my voice. You taught me to tell my story and this is an everlasting gift you left me. For this I love and cherish you and am eternally grateful. To my father, well this has been your dream too. I thank you for your passion of music and dance, and for a lifetime of support and encouragement. I thank you for all of the opportunities you gave me to continue my training and for watching every recital and concert that Christine and I were involved in, along with the support you have given your grand-children in the pursuit of their art.

Prior to your passing you encouraged me to keep writing and working on *The Legwarmers*, telling our family stories through dance. Here, with both your guiding hands, I bring you this; our family mosaic of so many stories shared around our kitchen table. I love you both. Enjoy.

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INTRODUCTION

*The Legwarmers will dance their way
 All night long and into the day
 They won't stop not 'til their done,
 So come on... Join in...
 Let's have some fun!!
 Hahahahahaha*

—The Legwarmer Theme Song, lyrics by Lisa Brkich and Christine Brkich (2003).

Storytelling has always been at the forefront of my choreographic exploration. As a choreographer and collaborator my work has focused on children's theatre. Over the past twenty years I have collaborated with my sister, Christine Brkich, in the creation of a children's show titled *The Legwarmers*. This show has attracted an audience demographic of young viewers ranging from four to seven years in age, and currently consists of four full scripts and twelve episode summaries which together comprise one television season. Dance is the focal point of the project as the storyline depicts different genres which are personified as recurring characters. In the world we have created, the Legwarmers are a family of five characters: sisters Ballermina and Jazzermina, and their cousins Tappermina, Modernmina and Folklormino all of whom use dance and choreography to learn and share life's lessons.

For this thesis I selected episode six, *Variations on a Dream*, to write, direct, choreograph and produce as a twenty-minute television episode, in collaboration with media production company Images Made Real. Through research, I explore how the use of new media such as film and television informs and transforms my choreographic vision for the four to seven age-group.

This particular episode of *The Legwarmers* follows a larger template for the viewing audience to engage—one that will be utilized in every episode as a means of establishing continuity and connection. Following the template, the episode opens with an energetic

choreographic work that introduces the audience to the characters and setting. An adventure quickly unfolds either via a secondary, outside character, or by the local newspaper that appears in the show—a periodical called *The Daily Spool*. Then, The Step of the Day, an interactive game, is introduced and serves as the teaching component in the episode; this segment of *The Legwarmers* is a choreographic lesson educating the viewing audience of a simple dance step. Once learned, the audience is encouraged to dance with the Legwarmers and perform the step.

Eventually, over the span of the episode, the adventure is completed with the help of family members, and the Legwarmers perform a final choreographic work celebrating their success and team work. In my episode of focus, *Variations on a Dream*, a character named Tappermina (whom I will describe in more detail later) introduces The Step of the Day, which is performed three times during the episode.

Ultimately, the intention of *The Legwarmers* television series is to introduce and explore dance as a catalyst for discovering the limitless exploration of the imagination. It is through this series that we hope to foster educational content to the viewers about the power of dance, while inspiring the use of imagination and challenging the experiences of observers of dance, as a theatre art form.

CHAPTER ONE | “VARIATIONS ON A DREAM”

In this iteration of the episode *Variations on a Dream* I am experimenting with camera angles and the idea that the camera is a second choreographic eye. The process of creating this episode focused on the choreographic choices informed by the camera and also on the interpretation and suggestions of the dancers/actors portraying the characters in the episode.

This chapter outlines the world of *The Legwarmers*, giving a brief portrayal of the episode setting. Detailed character descriptions and an episode summary are provided, preparing a forum of exploration for my research on how the use of new media, such as television and film, transform and inform my choreographic vision for children’s audiences between four to seven years of age, while inspiring the use of the viewer’s imagination and challenging the observers’ experience of dance as an art form.

The Legwarmers’ World: The Town of Spool

The Legwarmers takes place in the Town of Spool where sisters Ballermina and Jazzermina Legwarmer live on 99 Knitting Needle Lane, right beside their cousins Tappermina, Modernmina and Folklormino Legwarmer. Gazing over roof tops made of yarn and cobblestone streets the town’s historical landmarks are visible, such as The Kanoopie Costume Museum for Traditional Dance: an ethnographic museum that plays host to all of the textiles and fabrics used in the traditional costumes worn in and around the different areas of Klapstik, the region where Spool is located. Klapstik reaches to the most northern peaks of Mount Paddleflap and to the most southerly reaches of The Lake of Spinning Swans.

Another important landmark is The King's Palace, located at the top of Ballone Bluffs. This is the residence of King Echappé and his royal family. King Echappé hosts yearly auditions for dancers to attend, in his search for the best performances in the Town of Spool. All successful candidates have the opportunity to perform in his court at the end of the summer. This is a huge goal for *The Legwarmers*.

But when they are not auditioning the Legwarmers enjoy spending time at the Tea Cozy, a fun, lively café just three stops away on the Time Step Trolley from their home on Knitting Needle Lane. Carly Doozling, the barrista, enjoys listening to the Legwarmers as they sip their warm cider and chitter-chatter about their day after dance class.

All the people of the Town of Spool are Kanoopies—which is a term describing a person who loves to dance and uses dance as their main source of locomotion. Therefore the Kanoopies of Spool move throughout the streets by dancing: on their way to school, or to work, or to rehearsal at the Town of Spool Theatre, for instance.

Character Descriptions

As noted previously, the main characters of *The Legwarmers* are two sisters and their three cousins who make up the Legwarmer family. Ballermina is the elder sister of a character named Jazzermina—and, giving depth to her personality, is Ballermina's pet swan named Goose, to whom she sometimes refers. Her favourite dance genre to perform is Ballet and her favourite teacher is Master Allegro (detailed below). Ballermina's dream is to one day dance with Ballet Fantastique, the dance company founded by the Great-Uncle of Master Allegro, who is Ballermina's favourite ballet teacher and choreographer. In this episode, Ballermina Legwarmer acts as the messenger to the plot and enjoys instigating the new adventure.

Ballermina's younger sister is Jazzermana Legwarmer, and her favourite genre of dance is Jazz because it is dynamic and exciting—much like her personality. Jazzermana has a difficult time figuring out right and left, but nevertheless dances on with a wide smile. Aside from Jazz, she likes going on adventures with her family and dreams to dance live on stage with Lizamina in *Lizamina Live Jumpin' Jivin' and Jazzin'*. For those who are unfamiliar with Lizamina she is the quintessential jazz performer with jet black spiky hair and energetic jazz hands. Lizamina performs live at the Town of Spool Theatre when on tour and Jazzermana dreams of dancing with her one day. Finally, Jazzermana loves to eat Lemon Drop cookies and has a vivacious energy.

Folklormino Legwarmer, the eldest cousin, loves folk dances the most and enjoys performing *The Braid Pearl: The Traditional Dance of the Kanoopies*. This dance is performed in the town square during The Birthday of the Town of Spool and at the Town of Spool Picnic where all the Kanoopies gather to celebrate the beginning of summer. He has a magic scarf that can take him out of the Town of Spool and into any world where he may learn dances from different countries. Folklormino's dream is to take his magic scarf around the world and learn all the dances he can by performing them locally, in the streets and in villages with all the people he meets. Folklormino is the brother of Tappermina and Modernmina Legwarmer and the first cousin to Ballermina and Jazzermana Legwarmer.

Tappermina Legwarmer loves to dance tap; it is her favorite dance genre. Her dream is to dance beside Freddermino Astermino, the best tap dancer that ever graced the stages of the Town of Spool, in his show *Tap in Time* which is held at the Town of Spool Theatre where all her family can cheer for her. Tappermina is very particular about time, punctuality for performances, dancing on time, and for reminding her family that it is time for Step of the Day. Furthermore, Tappermina enjoys taking the Time Step Trolley, which is the bus that travels down Spool's Main

Street connecting the top of the town to the bottom. The great thing about the Time Step Trolley is that a new tap time step is taught every day at five minutes past the hour, just to learn a new time step or practice an old one. Tappermina is the youngest in her Kanoopie family and is the sister of Modernmina and Folklormino Legwarmer.

Modernmina Legwarmer loves to dance modern dance; she feels it helps her express her inside story. Modernmina also likes to help solve conflicts in the family when they arise (in rehearsals) and she tries to keep everyone focused; however, she has difficulty as she, too, finds focusing to be a challenge. Her dream is to wear a beautiful, long red dress on stage while bounding and leaping with strength into the air as the material floats around her. Modernnmina is the sister of Folklormino and Tappermina, the middle sibling in fact, and is happy to have an older brother to go to for help—even though Folklormino can sometimes make her frustrated. In turn, Modernmina is happy to be able to help out her younger sister Tappermina, except with math because Modernmina does not do that subject any more.

Finally, Master Allegro is the Ballet teacher for the Legwarmer family and to almost all of the Kanoopies in the Town of Spool. He learned to dance under the tutelage of his Great Uncle Fernando, the founder of Ballet Fantastique. Master Allegro joined Ballet Fantastique as a teenage Kanoopie, and worked hard every day. He toured all over, performing in every beautiful theatre imaginable—his favourite venue being The Town of Spool Theatre, which is where only the best come to perform. Master Allegro became the Ballet Master for Ballet Fantastique after performing in the company for twenty five years. As Ballet Master, he teaches Ballet class daily at The Legwarmer Dance Studio and sits on the Board of Directors for the teaching syllabus of The Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing Kanoopies otherwise known as the I.S.T.D.K.

Episode Summary

This episode opens with the Legwarmers waiting to take ballet class with Master Allegro—Ballermina’s favourite teacher. As they begin, Master Allegro realizes that something in their dancing is missing, regardless of whether or not the Legwarmers remembered the exercises properly. He soon realizes (to his dismay) that they have forgotten to use their imaginations while dancing; the Legwarmers have forgotten to dream. From this realization, Master Allegro proceeds to share his dreams, explaining how he uses “beautiful memories” and images in his own dancing. While attempting to follow Master Allegro’s example and activate their imaginations, the Legwarmers lose focus. This leads Master Allegro to feel defeated by such “feeble attempts to dream,” and thus he resolves to invite the Legwarmers to try again the next day.

Later that afternoon Ballermina feels that she has disappointed Master Allegro. To feel better she bakes Jazzermana’s favourite Lemon Drop cookies and invites all her family to the King’s Court for a picnic where they can share their truest dreams. In the King’s Court, the Legwarmers engage in conversation about their dreams while gobbling up a plate of Lemon Drop cookies, which lull the Legwarmers into a deep sleep. During this nap the Legwarmers fall into a wonderful dream: Ballermina is seen dancing in a beautiful tutu for Ballet Fantastique, Modernmina is dancing in a long stunning red skirt, leaping and bounding with energy and strength, Tappermina is centre stage performing a trio where she is the star, while Folklormino is performing a folk dance with his magical scarf (alongside other villagers), and Jazzermana finds herself in a chorus line as the lead dancer spinning, jumping and flying as she is lifted through the air. When the Legwarmers awaken from their shared dream they are inspired to show Master Allegro what they have learned.

The episode closes with the Legwarmers in Ballet class the following day. Master Allegro asks to see their dance combinations, again, and is splendidly surprised by their performance in his class—the Legwarmers, remembering their sugar induced nap, manage to dance their dreams and use their imaginations. As we come to an end, Master Allegro encourages them to keep dreaming, and the Legwarmers express happiness and confidence that were inspired by their hard work—which makes Master Allegro very proud.

Defining *The Legwarmers*' world and describing the background of each character inhabiting it brings a sense of the fantastical world being conveyed on the screen. An understanding of the episode helps to place the process in context with the understanding that the entire project, through the evolution of the plotlines, makes continual reference to my thesis questions and inquiries around media—specifically television and its influence on choreography for children's programming. A history of *The Legwarmers* and the influences behind it will be identified in chapter two.

CHAPTER TWO | NARRATIVE TEXTURES

To further understand the concept and progressions of *The Legwarmers*, this chapter provides a brief history, followed by a discussion of the choreographic influences that inspired the movement sequences for the dancers individually and as a chorus.

A Brief History of the Legwarmers

In the mid-1990s Christine and I founded InMotion Dance Company, an ensemble of both performers and choreographers. As a company, we choreographed, produced and performed full-length shows with pieces that premiered at Danceworx, The Fringe Festival and Harbourfront Centre in Toronto. During the rehearsal for our Croatia tour in June 1999, we needed choreography to fill a costume change. In developing this additional work I decided to explore comedy, as our company had an affinity for producing dramatic narrative work and comedic choreography suited for all audiences. This choreographic discovery led to the creation of what we titled *The Maestro's First in ll:A:ll*; a comedy in three movements about a frazzled musical conductor known as the Maestro who could not get his musicians to follow his direction. The choreography explored facets of clowning and problem 'unsolving' where the Maestro was constantly interrupted, victorious only on the very last note—much due to his initial oblivion and eventual elation. It was through the performing of this work in the early 2000s that audiences, adult and children, took an interest in the narrative, often requesting it as a performance option.

In remounting *The Maestro's First in ll:A:ll* I formed the idea to further the characters and connect each to a specific dance genre. Christine and I wanted to give these characters a

family and a name with significance to us as creators and sisters. Looking back into our history, we recognized that legwarmers were a fashion fad both in and out of the dance studio in the 1980s, worn as part of our daily practice and everyday couture.

My first pair of legwarmers was given to me as a Christmas gift from my aunt and uncle who searched everywhere for “dance socks”, as they called them. Our family was, and is, closely knit; bound by movement and storytelling which often unfolded as our father taught and practiced dance in our kitchen. In these moments, music created our backdrop with instruments sounding and our Grandfather’s voice filling the air. My Grandmother’s knitted patterns of blankets, winter scarves and slippers lined our cupboards and chesterfields, covering us in her warmth as she narrated her stories of our lineage from “the old country”, Croatia. With all of this central in our history, legwarmers became symbolic of our stories as young dancers. Our creation of *The Legwarmers* pays homage to our history and our early training.

The Legwarmers evolved from my first experiment with collaboration, involving many artists and art forms—including music, visual arts and media. Through this continued collaborative experiment, *The Legwarmers* has become a live show and a book, and is currently being adapted for television. This latter production has included joint artistic efforts with students and professionals in the field of media arts.

Over its history, *The Legwarmers* has been rewritten, redefined, re-choreographed, recasted and repurposed into approximately fifteen evolutions. The creative process remains explorative and improvisational for both movement vocabulary and text. In collaborating with a dramaturge the script often comes to fruition through these improvisations, alongside the choreography, which aids in character development and timing. It is during this process, too, that the music develops through the composer’s involvement; watching the improvisations inspires

the development of motifs and themes which become embedded into the music and used as the choreographic score.

Creative Influences

My influences are found in those artists whom I feel are great storytellers. When researching their processes and techniques for composition I could see how applying tools from their practices could enrich *The Legwarmer* world we are trying to create. Through these influences I garnered a greater understanding of how to find movement for each character and what the aesthetic quality should look like.

To create the look and the world of *The Legwarmers* Christine and I turned to children's literature for inspiration. During this time (in the early 2000s) my eldest daughter, an avid reader, became hooked on J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series and together we would read through the adventures of the wizarding world. In reading Rowling's books I became fascinated with her attention to detail regarding every artifact introduced to the reader as well as her textured development of the context and settings. There was the sense that everything had a reason and that each object had a purpose, whether in the background or foreground, explicitly identified or not. It was the detail of the character's back stories and settings in Rowling's writings that prompted me to research her work. This research inspired me to elaborate our story and to make sure that as the writer I knew the history of the setting and *The Legwarmers* as a family. One such detail that captivated Christine and I appears in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, chapter six (titled *The Noble and Most Ancient House of Black*) where Rowling introduces the reader to a tapestry of a family tree in Sirius Black's house, linking the lineages of all the pure blood wizards in the Wizarding World (Rowling in "The Black Family Tree" 1).

In the BBC Documentary *Harry Potter and Me* Rowling describes her process and her reasoning for such details. Rowling explains:

It was five years from the train journey where I had the original idea to finishing the book. During those five years this mass of material was generated some of which will never find its way into the book and will never need to be in the books. It's just stuff I need to know, partly for my own pleasure and partly because I like reading a book where the author knows everything. They may not be telling me everything but you have that confidence that the author really knows all. It is a book for the kind of people who enjoy every little tiny detail about the world because I have created every little, tiny, detail (Rowling transcribed from "*Harry Potter and Me*").

From my reading of this chapter and details from the documentary, I recognize Rowling takes an in-depth intimate approach to character development, creating in-depth backstories and family histories, and this inspired Christine and I to similarly create The Legwarmer Family Tree.

The Legwarmer Family Tree gives us an initial point of departure from which to begin a new script. Each character that is written and introduced into the story has a reason for being in the plot and is connected to the Legwarmer family in some way. Following Rowling, we endeavor to draw out these connections through pictures that emerge in various backdrops of *The Legwarmers* productions. These pictures have a three dimensional effect. For example, one of the images used in the background of the Legwarmer Studio, drawn by Emma Smith, depicts a portrait on the wall of Ballermina and Jazzermina's mom, Lerkamina Legwarmer, kicking her leg well out of the frame (See Figure 1 in Appendix A). This is both a reference to Rowling's

attention to detail and a means of drawing out and layering intimate details for our characters—furthermore, all the pictures in the *Harry Potter* novels are depicted as moving and alert which is of further inspiration. In short, The Legwarmer Family Tree allows for our family stories to be woven into the plot lines and helps enrich the personalities of the characters. Filling in these gaps allows me to grasp the sophisticated thought process used in writing for children, with the constant thought of challenging children’s imagination through art.

When creating the movement for Folklormino Legwarmer I worked in tandem with fellow dancer and scholar Sebastian Oreamuno, who performed as the dancer/actor for this character, or part. I was interested in what Sebastian would bring to this character, as Chilean dance is one of his main fields of study. During our collaboration process, however, Sebastian asked if we could look at the folk dances of Croatia rather than Chile, because this dance form is part of *my* cultural background and *The Legwarmers* was written, in part, to preserve my family stories; our living history. Suitably, through personal experience as a dancer of Croatian dance, I recognized that the traditional dances from my heritage country are considered and studied as Folklore. Thus together Sebastian and I conducted research into movement material for Sebastian to embody in his portrayal of Folklormino.

To influence my choreography for Folklormino’s character and Croatian affiliation I researched the dance company called LADO: The National Folkdance Ensemble of Croatia, which is often referred to as a dancing museum due to its role in collection and preservation of dance, music, and textiles. LADO’s website states that their collection includes: “priceless and beautiful authentic national costumes some of which are centuries old (“LADO National Folk Dance Ensemble of Croatia – About Us”). What is more, the company elaborates that “[t]he ensemble also presents new, contemporary musical and choreographic works based on traditional

motifs and elements” (“LADO National Folk Dance Ensemble of Croatia – About Us”). LADO’s archive of traditional and contemporary costumes and music provided me with a vocabulary of potential steps and sequences to use as research for Folklorino’s movement patterns—during scene work and choreography in dance sections. Growing up, LADO played a great role in our training as dancers. Yearly, we would attend their workshops either in Canada or in Croatia to further our skills as performers in the area of dance, singing and instrumentation. As a dancer studying their work the choreographers would often talk about the authenticity of steps depicting the geography of specific regions of the country. The region of The Town of Spool, Klapstick, has a coastal area and for this reason I selected the Croatian folk dance *Lindō*. *Bunjevac* was the second dance used as a reference, selected because it was one of my father’s favorite pieces of choreography from LADO’s repertoire. These two dances became the basis of Folklorino’s vocabulary.

Lindō is a dance from the Dalmatian Coast that is usually seen throughout the more southerly coastal cities of Split and Dubrovnik. Lindō is a partner dance that consists of extreme braiding in the footwork against difficult and uneven rhythms. It also requires a loose feel in the upper body as the arms swing overhead. I was interested in the improvised style of footwork, the soft and stomping sound blended into the dance. Moreover, late in the 18th century along the Adriatic Coast Dalmatian dancers in Dubrovnik adapted Lindō, evolving the dance into a couples’ duet, that became favoured for wedding receptions. A blend of steps and rhythms from Greece and the eastern Mediterranean influenced Lindō’s development, accentuating the use of stamping feet and arms held over head to the accompaniment of the caller or leader bellowing out the next sequence of steps to be danced. Performers followed the calls of the dance master

and competed by improvising new steps with lifted knees and hands clasped over the chest (Snodgrass 20).

The second Croatian dance of focus, Bunjevac, is a competitive dance performed primarily in trios with a man standing in between two women. The men in this dance compete against each other, attempting to exhibit the most challenging steps in order to impress the single women. Their abilities are showcased when small metal plates on the soles of their boots create musical and rhythmical effects while dancing (Randwijk 5). Bunjevac dancers perform simple variations of gallops on the spot and skips. The steps are stately and understated with the women using this footwork to turn and cross around their shared partner.

Incorporating these steps into the background dancers' movements, during Folklormino's dream sequence in *Variations on a Dream*, provided a fuller look on camera—adding dimension to the scene with the family dancing behind Folklormino, performing variations on the movement themes to accompany his solo. Along with the steps in Lindo we looked at the men's variation in Bunjevac, to see which dancer had the best rhythmic footwork and employed the most sophisticated steps. In Bunjevac the men wear boots that echo the sounds of the syncopated footwork, giving a harsh and heavy feel with the dancer stomping into the floor. Lindo, however, requires a soft-soled, leather, slipper which keeps the sound muted and at times quiet.

For Folklormino's choreography I was interested in the interplay between the harsh and light sounds of the footwork found between the two folk dances. These two dances gave Sebastian and me a starting point from which to frame Folklormino's movement. I would share a series of steps with Sebastian and have him adapt it to his body generating a rhythm and dynamic for the choreography as best suited the character.

Keeping in mind the history of *The Legwarmers* as an evolution of *The Maestro's First in Ill:A:ll*—a piece based around five clowns (explained in the Introduction)—I wanted to look at the characters in *commedia dell'arte* to further the study and understanding of the Legwarmers' personalities and movement qualities.

In its first iteration, *The Legwarmers'* dancers personified characteristics from *commedia dell'arte's* series of clowns, specifically those of Harlequin or Arlecchino. The Legwarmer characters initially had painted white faces with bright eyes, and lips adorned in bright clown-like make-up. Much like *commedia dell'arte's* Arlecchino, the personalities of the Legwarmers were “silly and simple minded moving like an acrobat providing comic relief”; indeed, “[a]s soon as this character enters the stage there is laughter at their absurd actions alternating between flashes of brilliance and plain lunacy” (“*Commedia dell'Arte Characters*”).

As the evolution of the work progressed, *The Legwarmer* characters were also influenced by *commedia dell'arte's* persona of Zanni. Like Arlecchino, Zanni is a simple-minded clown. Although *The Legwarmers* do not take on the contracted deportment of Zanni, they do follow Zanni's animated fashion of speaking. For instance they might have been seen similarly “waving their arms and gesticulating with hands when speaking quickly, with erratic body movements thrown in” (“*Commedia dell'Arte Characters*”). The physical action and acrobatic nature of Arlecchino combined with the energetic voice in connection to gesturing hands of Zanni added to the development of the movement structure and vocal delivery of *The Legwarmers'* personas.

In the first scene of *Variations on a Dream*, the Legwarmers are asked to perform a dance exercise for the upper body and arm carriage—known in ballet terminology as a *port de bras*. I looked at the opening of George Balanchine's choreography of *Serenade* to create this sequence. Choreographed on students in the New York City Ballet in 1934, Balanchine adds anecdotes of

the rehearsal process to the choreography (“Serenade”). According to Ellin Sorrin, of The George Balanchine Trust, *Serenade* is a milestone in the history of dance (Sorrin 1). It is the first original ballet that Balanchine created in America, and one of the signature works of New York City Ballet’s repertoire (Sorrin 1). The ballet is performed by twenty eight dancers in blue costumes in front of a blue background. Originating it as a lesson in stage technique, Balanchine worked unexpected rehearsal events into the choreography (Sorrin 1). For example, when one student fell, he incorporated it; another day when a student arrived late, this too became part of the ballet (Sorrin 1).

I looked to *Serenade* as inspiration because it was initially taught in the dance studio on the students of the New York City Ballet as an etude for stage technique. Knowing this history, I found it fitting that *The Legwarmers* learn their Port de Bras using this material, as it was intended as a teaching tool for young dance students. Embracing this technique, the first minute of the choreography that opens *Variations on a Dream* was learned during rehearsal and then restaged backwards, or in retrograde. Each dancer was then given the task of dancing it, according to their character’s favorite dance genre and marking the new choreography with their own individual signatures.

During the execution of the Port de Bras, the Legwarmers lose focus and begin to fall apart completely. To maximize this colossal confusion I, like Balanchine, used anecdotes from the rehearsal process and embedded them into the choreography. Dancers would stumble into one another while improvising and nearly fall over, or they would begin on an incorrect foot, accidentally performing the entire Port de Bras on the wrong side. These features remained in the choreography, aligning my work somewhat with the creative process of Balanchine’s *Serenade*.

In trying to define a movement vocabulary for the character Jazzermana Legwarmer, I began structuring poses and choreographic phrases based on the inspiration of the late dancer and choreographer, Bob Fosse (1927-1967). I wanted to emulate his style, introducing it to the viewing audience while simultaneously creating intriguing choreographic phrases for Jazzermana. It was very important to me that Jazzermana move in a stylized fashion, even when acting in a scene using dialogue. The movement study of *commedia dell'arte* combined with Fosse's language of jazz refined Jazzermana's dance quality.

According to Cathy Young, who writes about dancing with Fosse, his work is intended to be acted, as well as danced, with strict attention given to every detail of movement and expression (Young 174). Furthermore, Young elaborates that Fosse's choreography draws the viewer's eye to the smallest and subtlest nuances of the body through precise gesture, such as a movement of the ribs, the shrug of the shoulders, a tilt of the pelvis, or a facial expression (174). Young states: "[W]hat truly defines Fosse's aesthetic is his ability to pair awkwardness with ease, and to put together elements that seem dissonant, creating a cohesive whole (Young 175).

In collaboration with Lindsey Thompson, the dancer/actress playing Jazzermana Legwarmer, I researched Fosse's style and decided to integrate some (rudimentary) Fosse terminology (Unsworth). As part of Jazzermana's choreography we incorporated *The Drip*, which is a loose wrist with relaxed fingers, embodying the feeling that water is dripping down the arm and onto the floor; *The Rake*, which directs the dancer to angle their body in a complete diagonal line from head to toe with one foot extended out in front, and the arms are either dropped in behind the back, or fully extended well above the head; and *The Broken Doll*, a position that requires the legs are bent and turned inward towards the center of the body, creating dynamic, jagged lines and shapes (Baggs).

As a former studio owner, I came to notice that Ballet and Jazz are usually the first classes young children take as introduction to a formal dance style: we had students that, by age four, were enrolling in a ballet-based creative movement class, and by age six demonstrated that Ballet had become a part of their learning repertoire—with Jazz following closely behind. The movement vocabulary used to portray Jazztermina displays isolations and hand gestures taught at the beginner Jazz level in combination with Jazz styles and techniques influenced by Fosse—as well as Broadway-style Jazz. I find that Fosse’s choreography allows for bold, expansive embodiment of energetic dance, and according to Connie Bergstein Dow—creative movement teacher and author of *Young Children and Movement: The Power of Creative Dance*— this type of choreography connects quickly with young children. Dow states:

Children especially love using large, expansive movements, they enjoy practicing considerable motor skills such as walking, marching, galloping, tiptoeing, hopping, jumping, turning, and moving across the floor in many other ways. Children who are five and six can add skipping and leaping to their repertoire of gross motor skills (Dow 32).

Jazztermina’s compelling choreography can bring a sense of intrigue to audience members who are unaware of the dance studio environment, and a sense of familiarity to those who started dance lessons at a young age.

In sum, it was through all of these influences that the choreography began to take shape, giving us a springboard from which to improvise, creating more vocabulary for the characters in the episode. The plotline of *Variation on a Dream* was furthered by drawing influence from the writing process of children’s author J. K. Rowling of the *Harry Potter* series.

My pursuit in discovering movement for Folklormino led me to look at the Croatian Folk Dance Company LADO, currently under the direction of Andrija Ivančan. I selected this company specifically because of their ethnographic education relating to choreography. Folklormino's steps embody a combination of the different styles and steps, and the selected vocabulary is considered folkloric—in contrast to character ballet, where ballet is the primary focus of vocabulary performed in order to portray a character such as a doll. Commedia dell'arte also became a great resource for understanding how to embody the clown aspect of *The Legwarmers*—as a part of the history into the movement of the characters. George Balanchine's ballet *Serenade* became the inspiration for the opening and closing dance sequence in the ballet classes. I was looking for a simple Port de Bras, arm and upper body sequence, to use as a point of departure. I selected the opening of this work for its fluidity and poetic quality. And finally, Bob Fosse became my inspiration for Jazzermina's movement and for the movement quality for *The Legwarmers* in the spoken scenes—I was searching for dynamic movement to link both dialogue and choreography.

With this, the choreography became a blend of intricate work and simple pedestrian movement; movement that is both challenging and familiar to the viewing audience. Bringing this to the screen for the target age group will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE | CHOICES

In considering the task of creating this episode I was curious about the collaboration between myself, as a choreographer and creator, and my film counterparts: Zlatko Cetenic, Director of Photography and Jonah Blazer, camera and sound operator of Images Made Real. In looking at the choreographic work, I also had to consider the space I was working in, both live and through the lens of a camera. This required negotiation and adaptation.

First, I needed to remember that we were shooting in front of a green screen, visualizing the world of colour and animation drawn by our artist Emma Smith. Second, I had to juggle the two-dimensional camera perspective and the three-dimensional performance perspective. As I began to watch the choreography through the camera lens, I experienced discord with the wide angle shots. There was a loss of texture due to my misjudgment of space, specifically where the ballet barres of the dance studio setting should be in relation to the projections that would be applied to the floor and the walls. Furthermore the choreography and direction of the scene looked disjointed as though I was filming on a two-dimensional plane, disregarding the projected backdrops, the projected floor and the physical ballet barres that were to be in the scene.

To connect the choreography spatially, I moved the dancers closer to one another and had them practice away from the physical barre. This brought the scene to the center of the rehearsal studio (as it would appear on screen) in order to provide space for the ballet teacher, Master Allegro, to roam around the dancers. This adaptation allowed for the creation of depth between him and the animated projection on the back wall. The dancers were to be immersed into this world, thus choices about filming, camera angles and restructuring the choreography were essential.

Continuity

One of the approaches to filming is the method of “continuity” (McPherson 36). Katrina McPherson provides a step by step guide for creating dance for the camera in *Making Video Dance: a step-by-step guide to creating dance for the screen*. According to McPherson, filming for continuity means that the choreography perpetuates the same structure on film as when viewed live. Specifically, McPherson states: “The term ‘continuity’ refers to the fact that, in the final video dance, the choreography will appear to run in sequence, with one movement following the other, as it would if you were watching it on a stage in front of you (McPherson 36). In her step by step guide McPherson identifies three basic steps for filming the choreography with continuity: First, the choreography is created; second the choreography is filmed in its entirety using various shots from different angles; and third, during the editing process the shots are organized in the same sequence as the structure of the live choreography (McPherson, 36).

Following McPherson, I attempted this technique when filming the opening piece of choreography, titled The Scarf Dance. Continuity was integral to comprehension for the viewing audience; I wanted the audience to see the work as a whole, with minor edits to the dance. The vocabulary in this choreography consisted of simple movements, such as walks, runs, skips and hops; all elements of primary dance criteria taught to children between the ages of four to seven. Fast-paced games, often played in the schoolyard such as tag and freeze, make up the opening of the choreography—Jazztermina mischievously steals Folklorminos’s scarf in a game of tag before Master Allegro arrives. My choice to film the scene this way was driven by the aim to capture the excited energy and relationship of the Legwarmers and to draw the audience into

both the Scarf Dance and to the episode itself. Actually, McPherson discusses the importance of capturing the choreography in one continuous shot at least once to maintain the structure of the movement sequence as a live piece, to better translate it to the screen (36).

McPherson suggests “[c]utting between the different types of shots generates interest and energy on the screen, by allowing the viewer to see certain moments in close-up detail, with wider shots showing the relationship between the dancers or the spatial context of the dance” (36). Adding inspiration to this suggestion was my research into early films with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, who together revolutionized the genre of the movie musical. In a clip of *The Carioca* from *Flying Down to Rio*, their first movie musical, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers perform a tap duet in ballroom style facing one another (“Flying Down To Rio 1933 Carioca Clip.”). Maintaining their relationship as the choreographer and lead singer/dancer of a night club, their performance was observed by both a live audience present in the scene, and the audiences at home. To film this scene, Astaire insisted that the dances be shot more or less in one take with the camera following the dancers, rather than a method that was at the time the norm—which, according to Atichity, involved cutting the dances up into lots of little pieces. Using a method akin to McPherson’s “continuity” (36), audiences could then see that there were no camera tricks, and thus recognize that the dancing was indeed the talented work of the performers (Atichity, YouTube).

Astaire and Rogers’s performance in this scene is intimate and energetic; we are able to watch the relationship between their characters and their love of dancing together. Their performance is contained and refined, maintaining their intimacy. The camera becomes a vehicle of capture, locking in their intricate footwork for audiences to view. The dance is a continuation of the scene filmed mostly from the front, with Fred and Ginger centered in the frame using long

and mid shots in order to show all the footwork, body alignment and their connection as dance partners. The choreography moves across the screen fluidly with smooth transitions.

Likewise in the choreography titled *I Won't Dance*, from the film *Roberta*, we see Fred Astaire dance a virtuosic tap solo in front of a live orchestra (“*I Won't Dance*, from *Roberta*”). He is centered in the frame, in a full shot, with the camera focusing on his every move. In this scene, the camera pans at a slow pace as though accompanying Astaire as he taps across the floor. The moving picture of the dance is consistent, with little interruption to the choreography which allows it to stand on its own. Matt Atichity, Editor-in-Chief for Rotten Tomatoes’ biography of Fred Astaire, acknowledges that “[u]p until then, you had many dance scenes that were more spectacle, [and] Fred insisted that his dance sequences moved the plot along and that made a big difference for how they were used in films. Astaire was known for saying either the camera will dance or I will” (Atichity, YouTube).

Looking to these films for inspiration, paired with McPherson’s guide to filming dance, *The Scarf Dance* that opens my episode of *The Legwarmers* communicates a great sense of frivolity and friendship as the Legwarmer family move from one game to the next with fluid transitions that were achieved best by filming the scene in its entirety. I discovered that filming and editing *The Scarf Dance* continually allowed for the choreography to become framed within the setting of *The Legwarmer* studio. The look of the whole scene offered a complete picture, rather than creating close-ups that might detach the viewer from the overall setting and story.

In continuing my research on continuity and choreography I also looked at the cinematic work of Gene Kelly. In *Dancin’ in the Rain: Gene Kelly’s Musical Films* Beth Genné discusses how Kelly’s choreography interacts with the movement of the camera, shaping the space through which he moves. According to Genné, much of Astaire’s choreography was shot from the front,

where the dance “itself was often performed either on a stage or in a stage-like setting (a pavilion, or nightclub floor)” (Genné 223). Furthermore, Genné continues, Kelly’s cinematography—though inspired by Astaire—maintained the continuous flow of the choreography coupled with a variety of different angles through which the entire choreography was filmed (233). Moreover, Genné emphasizes:

[t]he moving camera served a dual purpose: it both recorded the dance gesture and enhanced it, along with the drama the dance played out. Camera angles too were integrated with the choreography, as was the way the dancer’s body was positioned within the frame. The camera viewed Kelly from either side, from the back, and at oblique angles, turning and cutting to aim from all four points of the compass. In each case the view got what Kelly felt was the optimal view of the dancer’s gestures (Genné 234).

This approach seemed to work best in *Modernmina*’s section of the Dream Sequence because of the many lifts and levels in the movement. The choreography was filmed in its entirety from the front as well as oblique angles and a bird’s eye perspective to capture the most advantageous shots. Looking at the choreography through the camera, I recognized the way simple hand gestures were captured when the dancers were still. The camera framing around their entire bodies, in fixed poses with moving fingers, seemed to amplify the dream we were aiming to portray. This effect was not as evident when performed and viewed live in rehearsal—there was depth added to the space around the dancers while framed within the camera.

Recognizing this, I edited out other parts of the choreography that were more movement based and added in more stillness to repeat this effect.

Having filmed the choreography continuously from different angles allowed for fluid transitions in the lift sequences, which enables the audience to identify with the depth of space required to support such movement. Filming the choreography continuously aided in the progression of the storyline, as the connection between the dancers becomes heightened due to the camera's framework. According to Kelly it is framing that impacts the choreography, giving the audience perspective with which to view the dance (224).

Indeed, the audience must be able to perceive the full line of the dancer and their relation to the surrounding space. As Genné asserts:

[m]ost of Kelly's shots—whether from front or side—include the dancer's full figure, surrounded by enough space to include the complete dance gesture and allow the dance to shape the space within which he is working, in height, to each side and in depth. Like Astaire, Kelly insisted on never cutting away from the performer during the dance, which ruins the continuity and unity of the choreography (Genné 224).

It was essential to show the viewing audience the full line of the body in this particular section because I wanted to capture the fluid movement of Samara Brown, the dancer playing the role of Modernmina. The choreography lent itself to moments of counterpoint, where Samara is dancing one section and the rest of the company is performing a different sequence. Along with the focus and stillness created in the choreography, the addition of a counterpoint pose challenges for young viewers by introducing them to more difficult choreographic concepts. Maintaining the

continuity of the shot established a relationship of trust among the Legwarmers, as the characters lifted and connected to one another.

Montage

Another approach to editing in film is the utilization of montage. Through this methodology choreography is filmed in a given sequence and then reordered during editing so that “any sense of what happened ‘for real’ is abandoned, as the material that has been filmed is restructured and changed creating video dance choreography that is unique to the screen” (McPherson 37). Through montage editing, choreography can be broken up and thought about alternatively in contrast to the original linear choreography set live during rehearsal. Further, McPherson discusses how this approach takes viewers and editors into a new realm of creativity; she states:

Montage approach can also be used with shots that come from the same source: for example, a section of choreography, filmed in one location, yet offering a completely different experience of space and time. Not bound by what is possible in a live context, the repetition of images and sound can take montage in video dance into a new dimension and completely alter the viewer’s perspective on dance (38).

To understand this approach further I looked at Bob Fosse’s movie musical *All That Jazz*. In the opening sequence of George Benson’s *On Broadway*, the choreography during the audition scene is interrupted with dancers being pulled aside and asked either to leave or to stay for the next round. The choreography is edited with a series of repetitions interjected with the

back-story of the choreographer, played by Fosse, and his addiction to medication. According to Anouk Bottero's essay on Fosse's aesthetic in *Sweet Charity*, *Cabaret* and *All That Jazz*, this montage of events "removes the glitter usually associated to the world of the stars, creating a discontinuity, we as the spectators usually take in. Therefore, the expectation of cinemagoers watching the film musical are met with a highly cynical criticism of the world of performance and theatre" (Bottero 5).

This method seemed to work well when editing Ballermina's section of the dream sequence. Filming this section required a few takes capturing many angles. First, the duet was filmed from the front in its entirety at a wide angle capturing the movement vocabulary of the dance while maintaining choreographic continuity. Then mid, wide shots framed Ballermina's partnership with Folklormino, bringing the audience in a little closer to the dance. Zlatko directed the dancers to perform this duet in its entirety from the front view, the back view and both side views, and the final frame filmed the duet from atop a ladder, offering a bird's eye perspective. The montage of angles created a dream like scenario with Ballermina in the foreground accompanied by Folklormino. The top shots of the fish dive, simple turn sequence and the swan dive provided a full view of costuming and iconic ballet partnering sequences.

Using the montage approach in the editing of Ballermina's dream sequence set a fantastical mood, where sequences were repeated in different directions against a backdrop of pink and blue clouds. Lift sequences were layered over each other, then, repeating a sequence from earlier, created a form that was not in the initial choreography. Zlatko slowed down the fish dive in the editing, repeating it from the front and from a bird's eye perspective, leading the viewing audiences into Ballermina's world and evoking images of her dream.

Considering the target audience of four to seven years of age I questioned whether young viewers might understand the storyline with such cinematic manipulations. In continuing my research I came across a study conducted on children aged four to seven at the University of Minnesota in the mid 1980s that discusses their comprehension of television and film. Robin Smith, Daniel R. Anderson, and Catherine Fischer explain that prior to this study there was a belief that children within this age range had considerable difficulty understanding television programs and films due to camera and editing techniques and manipulations (2). They state:

A common research finding is that young children's comprehension of film and television is poor. Often this is attributed to children's inability to comprehend events portrayed through the use of camera techniques and editing manipulations, known generally as montage. Yet no previous studies have directly examined this assertion (Smith et al. 2).

The study examined the children's understanding of said cinematic manipulations through setting up short stop-animation sections of film composed of elements found in montage, such as fades, zooms, pans, and cuts (5). The children's task was to successfully recreate the storyline using character dolls and set pieces replicated from the characters and setting viewed in the stop-animation sequences (5). From their investigation Smith et al. declare

In Study 1, there was no effect of cinematic techniques on reconstruction performance of 3- and 5-year-olds as compared to control segments filmed without these techniques. The results challenged the assumption that the use of such techniques per se

contributes to young children's poor comprehension of television shows. In Study 2, 12 new segments were produced in which comprehending the montage required inferences of character perspective, implied action sequences, spatial relationships, and simultaneity of different actions. Averaging across all segments, 62% of the 4-year-olds and 88% of the 7-year-olds demonstrated clear comprehension of the montage. (Smith et al., 1)

The results of this study helped to support my decision of editing Ballermina's dream sequence using this technique. According to this information the viewing audience will still comprehend the relationships and storyline of the plot. Using montage helped to create an ethereal atmosphere appealing and stimulating the children's imaginations adding to the allure of an alternate world.

Stimulus

Another consideration to account for is maintaining a stimulating experience for young viewers. As the child's cognitive awareness develops along with a familiarity of *The Legwarmers*, their familiarity and intelligibility will likely start to increase and change. Thus, a greater sense of stimulus will be sought after to sustain their attention. The below figure illustrates the arousal of interest and attention according to research conducted for the Children's Television Workshop in 1983 by Huston and Wright, who state:

that it was logically impossible for comprehensibility to affect later attention to the content already comprehended. Instead the content and form, at one point in time lead

children to have expectations about what is likely to come next and those expectations influence subsequent attention... What was very difficult before becomes moderately difficult and therefore interesting; what was moderate before become easy and less interesting (Quoted in Pecora et. al. 181-182).

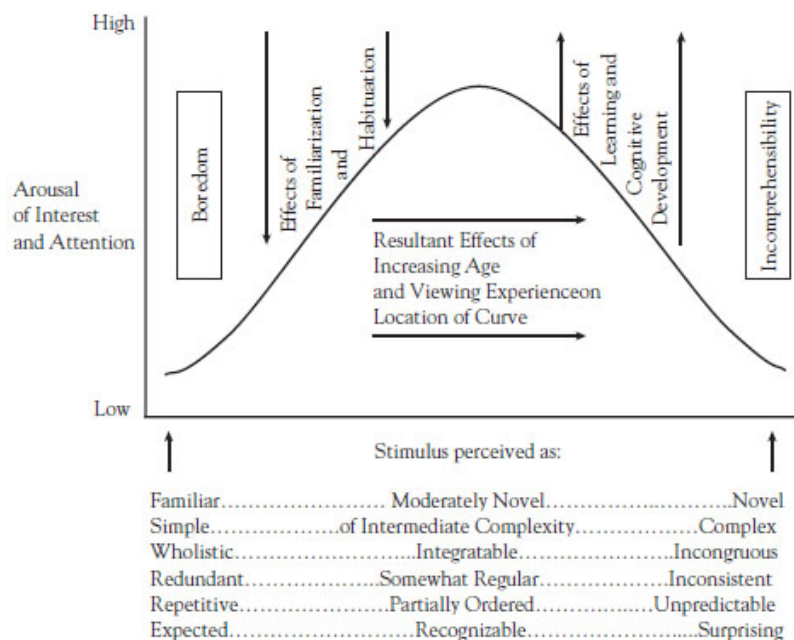


Figure 1: *The travelling lens model* from “The Forms of Television: Effects on Children’s Attention, Comprehension and Social Behaviour” by M.L Rice, A. C Huston, and J.C Wright, p.32, 1982, Washington, DC:US. Government Printing Office. Reprinted with permission. (Pecora et. al. 183).

With the help of this research I looked at Tappermina’s role. Her rhythmic sequencing and tap progressions create a sense of curiosity for the viewer, providing them with an auditory experience based on tempo as well as an emotional experience based on humor. Tappermina offers a new sense of excitement for the viewers as she can be heard, even minimally, when in a scene; she punctuated spoken lines or actions with musical phrases from her audible feet.

Her character adds to the overall dynamic of the episode, fostering incentive for the viewer to stay attentive and continue watching. According to research conducted through the Children's Television Workshop, a child responds to television actively, making their own decisions about when to engage and disengage with a program (Pecora et al, 175)

A seemingly passive response towards a program from a child is not necessarily their disengagement, but rather could be a space holder for the moment when they as the viewer decide to give their attention. Indeed, Norma Odom Pecora, J.P. Murray, and E. Wartella argue that,

children make decisions about when and how they watch television. At a more microscopic level they make moment-to-moment decisions about when to attend, when to look away and when to monitor sound for an interesting moment. They integrate and interpret content according to the intellectual skills and schemata that they possess (175-176).

Adding to the environment audibility creates a sense of curiosity for the viewers encouraging new exploration of the scenario. Creating scenes with prominent focal features such as Tappermina tapping allows the audience to notice her and perhaps hold their attention even longer. According to Pecora et al., children maintain their interest when the subject matter is neither too difficult nor too easy to comprehend (182). Thus, content that is too simple or familiar often leads to boredom; if it is too difficult children will often lose interest.

Tappermina's portion of the Dream Sequence supersedes the Ballet and the Modern sections. Placing the tap piece third of fifth in the episode creates a change in the musical style

and tempo. The tap section provides a fluid segue into the stomping, lively footwork found in the folk segment, leading well into the excitement and dynamic movement of the Broadway style jazz as the finale. When creating programming for children many of the features used to maintain their attention contain high action with visual and auditory affects. Interjecting Tappermina's distinct tapping footwork between scenes provides a new stimulus for the child to connect to, keeping the audience immersed in the story.

When creating the sequences I collaborated with Danielle Horton, playing the role of Tappermina, who developed an ear for the sounds and phrases of tap sequencing as a young student. In our collaboration and discovery of Tappermina's movement, Danielle explained how learning set choreography from a copy and response method was challenging for her simply because she started learning this art form a bit later in her own training history.

Tap is often taught with the teacher setting a rhythm pattern of recognized steps, dancing the phrase and then inviting the students to repeat the sequence matching the rhythmic cadence and dynamics. In working with Danielle our approach was a bit different; we would improvise a rhythm that accompanied the music, allowing for her to set the steps she felt best suited a four bar phrase. Choreographically, we looked at a soft shoe style of tap for Tappermina's dream sequence, aiming to pair the dance with the music—both as an accompaniment to the other—with simple musical silences that allowed for the music to be filled in by the dance through the tap sequences. In looking at the relationship between tap and music, Brian Seibert discusses tap as a form of music with movement. Seibert claims:

Most dances arise as a form of music and movement. But because tap can be a form of dancing *to* music and dancing *as* music it's especially concerned with the

combination...In practice, dancers tend to lean towards one pole or the other, emphasizing either sound or movement or the reverse. The two are in tension, one often working at the bidding or the expense of the other (5).

Building the choreography of Tappermina's character through her footwork creates a buzz of sounds in the scene delivering excitement and interest to the viewers. The introduction of tap as a dance genre illustrates the connection to music either when danced alongside a score or when performed a cappella. Using tap as part of Tappermina's vocabulary in the scene work and dialogue cultivates a richer sense of her character for the audience enriching the formal features required in creating a successful television show for children. Such formal features will be further discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4 | CREATING APPEAL

Creating appeal for our target market is in the foreground of my consciousness when choreographing for children. What may be deemed entertaining for me or the dancers in rehearsal may not be appealing to a five or six year old child. Through the use of choreography, direction and play, *The Legwarmers* uses the performance quality of each episode to garner appeal for the viewers as both a form of entertainment as well as a source of education. The manifestation of appeal in this episode, and in *The Legwarmers* generally, as a connection to education will be discussed further in this chapter.

My research into what children consider interesting, in terms of television, has led me to the writing of Shalom Fisch. Previously, Fisch was vice president of program research for *Sesame Street*, overseeing curriculum development as well as formative and summative research for a wide range of television series, children's magazines and interactive learning through CD-ROMs and online learning. Currently, Fisch is founder and President of MediaKidz Research and Consulting, a firm that provides educational content development, hands-on testing and writing for children's media companies (Dressman 1).

In the article titled *What's so "new" about the "new media?": Comparing effective features of children's educational software, television, and magazines*, Fisch discusses the formal features required for successful children's engagement of television programs, interactive media and magazine articles. Fisch notes the following elements as formal features: humor, action over dialogue, character creation, and the integration of music and sound effects (108). Creating appeal for children's programming is pivotal, as engagement in a program is a voluntary choice made by the child themselves. According to Fisch,

[t]he appeal of a successful media product is often the result of an idiosyncratic blend of elements that unite to become greater than the sum of their parts. Nevertheless, research on children's interaction with television has pointed to several broad factors that can play a role in appeal (Fisch 108).

Humor is one of the contributing factors, or formal features as Fisch calls them, for generating appeal in both educational and non-educational programming for children's media and television programs (108). I recognize that in order for humor to be successful the target audience must find the humor amusing and funny without it being difficult to understand or childlike.

In the opening sequence of scene two, The Picnic Dance, Ballermina is seen with a plate of cookies with which she entices her family members into the scene with the smell of the cookies, having them each grab for a cookie, one by one. Just as they are about to grab a cookie, Ballermina moves the plate resulting in all the Legwarmers falling off balance, either tumbling under Ballermina's legs or stomping away in a fury. I explored the ideas of slapstick in this scene, to keep the comedy physical and fast paced for the audience. For example, the character Jazzermina Legwarmer often gets confused with directions, confusing right and left. In the opening scene Master Allegro tells a story from his childhood while the Legwarmers eagerly gather around and listen. To infuse more humor into Master Allegro's monologue the entire cast dances his story swinging their heads to the left and then to the right with the line: "this way and that." Yet Jazzermina moves her head the wrong way, right and then left facing, while almost bumping into Master Allegro.

Formative research into creating successful television content for children finds that certain types of humor will attract specific age groups. As Fisch asserts, “[p]reschoolers consistently enjoy certain types of humor such as incongruity, slapstick, silly word play and adult error, but not sophisticated humor such as puns with double meanings” (108). Following Fisch, I employed these elements of humor into both the scene work and the choreography.

Building scene work that is more action based then dialogue heavy is the second element that Fisch presents as a formal feature when evoking appeal for children (108). Creating an episode where scenes and dance sequences are prominent in movement activity on the screen over dialogue is crucial “for both the preschool and school-aged children[,]” Fisch suggests, as “[t]his target audience prefers television programming that feature visual action over lengthy scenes with ‘talking heads’” (Fisch 108). Thus in line with what Fisch outlines, the entire episode of *Variations on a Dream* is based in movement. Specifically I selected to tell the entire dream sequence through dance, beginning with the prologue. In the prologue to the actual dream sequence Jazztermina leads the Legwarmers in telling her dream while eating cookies. The viewing audience watches her begin her narrative in fast forward, with her family dancing behind her while listening intently as her story unfolds. She then passes the story on to the next family member. The sequence is edited in fast motion with quick movements, quirky gestures and animated facial expressions. Although there is dialogue, it is high pitched and incomprehensible due to the quick editing. The action is what tells the story, and the voices become a sound effect against the music.

The creation of dynamic characters is Fisch’s third contributing factor when creating appeal. Often a child will engage in a television program because a character appeals to them (108). The characters in *The Legwarmers* are bright and spirited, accented with pastel colours in

the costuming and glitter adorning their make-up. Each Legwarmer is easily distracted and enjoys a sense of play at all times. The characters are created to give the viewing audience the feeling of welcome and friendship. The cast reflects a diverse background of people varying in gender, culture, and dance-style among other characteristics, allowing children to connect to the character they feel is either most like themselves and/or to the dance style that character represents.

Jazztermina's difficulty with right and left is a challenge that Lindsey Thompson, the dancer/actress playing the character, has struggled with since she was a child. We decided to keep this variable as a part of Jazztermina's character profile to build humor and as a connection for members of the viewing audience who also struggle with spatial differentiation. Studies in different forms of media have discovered that children gravitate to characters who are: "smart and/or helpful, a bit older than themselves and in many cases similar to themselves in gender, ethnicity or other characteristics, such as children who may have asthma liking a character who also has asthma" (Fisch 108).

Lastly, Fisch notes the formal feature of music and sound effects aiding in the creation of appeal when considering viewership of children's programming. Music will capture the attention of the viewer and sustain their interest when there is an action-based storyline behind it; attention to the music is difficult to maintain if the action that accompanies it is static (Fisch 108). The music for the Dream Sequence, composed by Erik Geddes, is 4:53 seconds in length and comprises five different variations and genres of dance. The dancers perform the choreography in front of bright backdrops and are constantly moving in different ranges of motion, with multiple changes of level and energy. When collaborating with Erik I asked if he could add part

of *The Legwarmers*' theme song as a motif in each of the sections for familiarity. The score of the entire episode has that same motif in each song—which Erik created.

Fisch elaborates that music and sound effects aid in the creation of appeal for children's programming when using motifs to generate familiarity. Through his research, Fisch found that “music and sound effects have been especially effective when signaling the arrival of a familiar character or program element” (Fisch 108). I aimed to apply this element in *The Legwarmers* accordingly. For example, the sound of Spanish guitar is played each time Master Allegro mentions his Great Uncle Fernando. Further, although the audience does not ever see the actual character, all of the Legwarmers display a physical gesture, representing Uncle Fernando, to accompany the cue of the Spanish guitar. This motif is repeated several times throughout the program. In another scene Modernmina teaches the viewers a “swing” for the Step of the Day, which is similarly complemented with a sound motif. In this moment a “ding” sounds which acts as a cue to the characters on screen and signals to the viewing audience that it is time to jump up and dance the Step of the Day. The cue is repeated three times during every episode, giving the viewing audience a sense of familiarity in the repetition, and a sense of community and fun in the participation.

CHAPTER FIVE | LEARNING AND OUTCOMES

Learning

The Legwarmers has always had a mandate of educating audiences about dance. As a dance teacher and educator with the school board, I have utilized *The Legwarmers* as a teaching tool for both choreographic exploration and technique classes (via workshops) for other educators and students. This process has proven successful over the last decade filled a gap in a system that seemed to be missing this information and pedagogy. Many of the teachers we have worked with did not have the knowledge or tools required for teaching dance. Bringing such workshops to their schools or to teacher workshops has helped meet that very specific educational need.

In its earlier iterations *The Legwarmers* was performed live for elementary school children at schools, festivals and dance studios. Each of the performances has been accompanied by a dance workshop for children where they could explore their own movement and practice the Step of the Day, introduced to them during the performance.

The Step of the Day quickly became a favorite feature among the children and a main ingredient of our television formula. Each episode of the Legwarmers hosts the Step of the Day, led by Tappermina due to her fascination with time. Tappermina gains the attention of the others, leading them into a frenzy of movement with slapstick physicality and humor. Once the Legwarmers settle into their spots, Tappermina leads them into the singing portion of the Step of the Day, preparing the audience for their mini-lesson in dance.

However, in this episode, Modernmina is selected to teach the viewers a simple dance step. Modernmina invites the audience to learn the “Swing” step, and the Swing is first

demonstrated by Modernmina, who invites the viewers to dance it with her and the other Legwarmers. Modernmina introduces a sound effect, in this case a “DING” which acts to inform the audience of when to participate in the Step of the Day.

As a dance teacher in a Regional Arts Program high school, I recognize the need for arts programming in the primary and elementary school levels as we look to our grade seven and eight classes from the elementary schools for students to audition for our programming. It has been my experience that many schools at this level lack the proper tools for teachers to teach The Arts proficiently—specifically dance.

According to a research document through the Elementary Federation of Teachers of Ontario titled *Arts Education for the Development of the Whole Child*, it is recommended that the students engage in the curriculum through three different methodologies (Uptis). The first method involves the elementary school teacher, usually a generalist teacher, working in collaboration with arts specialized educators because they have the knowledge and experience in teaching the techniques and styles required for arts education and application. The second method suggests students utilize technology and the creative process, where they may explore the arts through web-based learning and information technology. With the final method, elementary school teachers are encouraged to provide students with extra-curricular activities such as a musical theatre showcase, or choir.

The difficulty with these recommendations is such that every school community has limited access to financing and specialized teachers to support such programming. According to the educational research institute People for Education's recent report, found that in Arts Education, statistics proved the decline of outside support from specialized teachers. The report states:

Many principals commented that their schools struggle with a ‘lack of specialists’ to teach the arts. The survey data support this concern. In 2018, only 46% of elementary schools reported having a music teacher, either full or part-time. While this is an improvement of over 41% of schools reporting music teachers last year, it is still well below the 58% of schools reporting music teachers 20 years ago. Only 16% of elementary schools with grades 7 or 8 report having a specialist visual arts teacher, and just 8% of elementary schools with grades 7 or 8 have access to a specialist drama teacher (Gill 5).

These above statistics show that the access for specialized teachers is declining with representation shown for music, visual arts and drama. Dance, in this case, had no representation.

As part of my process in preparing the elementary students for viewing my episode I volunteered at Joyce Public School once a week teaching the grade one and two classes. There were three classes with approximately thirty students in each. The lessons were structured to explore movement, basing the exercises on the fundamental concepts of the Elements of Dance—Body, Energy, Relationship, Space and Time—which are the standard requirements for both the grade one and two elementary school curricula in Ontario (The Ontario Curriculum 66)

To achieve this we created small combinations of movement together that I would teach to them as well as having the students explore their own shapes and movement vocabulary either on their own or collaboratively with their friends. According to the curriculum, children in the primary grades should be moving creatively, daily, using their own “personal experience,

imagination and familiar movements to create a movement vocabulary, to respond to prompts and express an idea” (The Ontario Curriculum 62).

Working in this manner helped to engage the children in using their imaginations, by challenging their explorations of dance as an art form which emphasizes the importance of the latter part of my thesis investigation—pushing the boundaries of their imaginations through choreography at such a young age. Through working with them I learned they were able to create and understand complex choreographic concepts such as counterpoint—where two different choreographies, regardless of how small, can exist at the same time cohesively—and canon or follow up—when one move, or sequence of moves, is performed by one dancer or a group of dancers, after another. This compositional technique became their favorite.

In choreographing on the students I selected to teach them simple steps and partner combinations that they would see in the episode, such as crawling under their partner’s legs, cartwheels, and hops across the floor. To increase their imagination and dance vocabulary The Step of the Day became a staple part of the lesson. The children enjoyed either learning a new dance word and movement, such as a Star Jump or a Swing, or creating their own new vocabulary, such as The Snowball—inspired by a “snow day” that fell on the same day—and the Teeter Totter—inspired by their favorite apparatus in the park. Like in the episode, the children sang the Step of the Day song, repeating it three times on my cuing of the “DING” during each dance workshop.

Working with the elementary students at Joyce Public School educated me of the depth of their imaginations when given the opportunity to explore through both guided improvisations and simple games like Freeze Dance—which has the dancers freeze in different poses to explore low, medium and high space, when the music stops. Their interest in the movement and joy of

dance seemed to be the catalyst for their ability to learn a sequence of choreography from the episode that was rather challenging. I became the student in this moment, learning from the grade one's and two's, that children enjoy to be challenged and succeed when taught in an energetic and positive environment—even when the choreography and choreographic concepts are difficult. It is this extra-curricular outreach that benefits my learning as the choreographer and co-creator of *The Legwarmers*, teaching me that kids want to adapt to even more complex choreographic content.

Outcomes

On February 19, 2019 the episode of *Variations on a Dream* was shown at Joyce Public School to the entire school with the grade one's and two's sitting at the front, ready in anticipation to watch. Prior to watching the video both Christine and I danced the Step of the Day with the entire audience, preparing them for the viewing.

As the episode started with The Scarf Dance opening the first scene, the children began laughing each time Folklormino or Jazzermina dove underneath another character's legs. There were many audible responses from the children as they seemingly cheered for the characters that they connected with, responding to their actions from the film. During the Step of the Day some children were bouncing up and down and a few told me later that they were singing the song.

During the Question and Answer section one of the children made a connection with Master Allegro, enjoying his corrections of the Legwarmers during the ballet class. The children also enjoyed the dream sequence, and one student asked if he could learn the dance to Jazzermina's jazz section. I found when speaking to the teachers many were impressed with the

diversity seen on screen, saying that the children at Joyce could easily see themselves represented in the show because of the diverse casting.

When I discussed the project with the grade one teacher, Andrea Bow, she stated that in her professional opinion

The Legwarmers was definitely appealing to the kindergarten, grade one and grade two students. It was colourful, silly and imaginative—just like them. They were engaged throughout the show and I liked how it showed various styles of dance. Ballet, Jazz, Tap etc. (Bow).

In terms of utilizing *The Legwarmers* as a resource, Andrea informed us that she could use the episode to teach about mood, simple steps through the Step of the Day and drama.

On Thursday March 7, 2019 I had the opportunity to show the episode one more time at The Holy Trinity Elementary School in Etobicoke. This time there were only thirty grade one children, who, unlike the students at Joyce Public School, seemed very quiet yet focused on the episode. When speaking to the children afterwards the responses were very well articulated as though they had been taking it all in. One student said that her “favourite part was the cookie dance because it was a whole story without words, they danced instead” (Grade 1 Student, The Holy Trinity School). Furthermore, this student elaborated that she enjoyed how Ballermina always slid the plate away so that no one could get a cookie. Another student found Modernmina’s movement to be extremely special and thought he could not define why he just found her dance to be beautiful. Like at Joyce Public School, the Dream Sequence was understood, with many children gravitating to different characters. Some liked Ballermina

because of her colourful tutu, others found Tappermina interesting because of the sounds she created, and all of the children seemed to enjoy the humour of Master Allegro. At this school also Christine and I led the children through the Step of the Day and to our great surprise one of the students shared his rendition of his own inventive step he called “The Twirly-Whirl.”

This project was and will continue to be a collaboration with Zlatko Cetenic and Images Made Real. Working with Zlatko’s creativity and knowledge of film is what brought the world of *The Legwarmers* to life. Through our discussions I asked him what his challenges were when editing for the blue screen. And in response, Zlatko noted that Tappermina’s costume, though purple, is a composite of blue and red and because of this the costume would fade out, sometimes completely, causing Tappermina to begin to disappear. In terms of manipulating Emma Smith’s art work into the blue screen space, Zlatko states that

The issues with blending live characters into background art and CG (computer graphic) environments is that there needs to be discussions around visual perspective geometry and composite art direction. If the perspective is not conformed to the live action characters or live elements, the appearance looks off and disconnected and makes the viewer feel that the live element and background art is incompatible. The artwork for *Legwarmers* was made before the video production and needed to be conformed so that the dancers would seem grounded in the artwork environment. The floors needed to be recreated to have proper 3D perspective so that the two elements could blend properly (Cetenic).

I was also curious as to how he created the backdrops and the floors in the Dream Sequence, as they were not drawn by our visual artist. According to Zlatko,

It needed to be clear to the viewer that the Dream Sequence was actually a dream sequence, so the use of clouds as a background was ideal for that transition. The ballet and cloud animation complemented each other because the soft music and subtle movements of the dancers was as flowing as the wisps of clouds moving in time-lapse speed. The animation was made with time-lapse video footage that was coloured within Adobe AfterFX. The horizon was made by mirroring the clouds below the top cloud formations and rotating them 180 degrees and transforming the vertical size and then flipping them horizontally so that it looked like the dancers were moving on a glassy, smokey surface (Cetenic).

In looking towards the future, Zlatko's suggestion is to create a miniature diorama of a set, with the backdrops printed on all four walls, thereby giving him access to film this miniature set at any angle without always having to rely solely on the use of green screen—or in this case, blue screen.

The Legwarmers will continue to collaborate with schools across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), bringing choreographic workshops to the students and teachers across the board. The completion of this project marks the beginning of our work, as Christine and I begin to brand *The Legwarmers* through social media outlets, a new webpage and the start-up of our YouTube channel where our projects will debut. The goal for our work is to connect with a

streaming service, such as Netflix, Crave or Amazon Prime, or with television networks such as TVO or CBC Kids.

Storytelling narratives have always been at the forefront of my choreographic work. This process and research have given me a greater understanding of how children view choreography and what they, as an audience, consider entertaining when watching television. Their responses to the choreographic choices made and to the movement used in the scene direction confirms, for me, that children enjoy challenging their imaginations through dance as an art form. So too, the collaboration of film and choreography is a symbiotic relationship where both partners need to know elements of each other's craft so as to heighten both art forms. As such, *The Legwarmers* is a story about a family who loves to dance, and who loves being together. Sharing this tale to children everywhere through the medium of film in collaboration with choreography, direction, music and visual arts is one of the many variations of *The Legwarmer's* dreams.

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Appendix

Backdrop



Figure 1: *The Legwarmer Dance Studio* Emma Smith Visual Artist



Figure 2: Rehearsal *See it's Missing* (Left to Right) Sebastian Oreamuno, Samara Brown, Danielle Horton, Lindsey Thompson and Angela Xu Photo by: Lisa Brkich



Figure 3: Rehearsal *Just Like You* (Left to Right) Lindsey Thompson, Danielle Horton, Samara Brown, Sebastian Oreamuno, Angela Xu and Christine Brkich (Center) Photo by: Lisa Brkich



Figure 4: Rehearsal *So Many Cookies* (Left to Right) Lindsey Thompson, Samara Brown, Sebastian Oreamuno, Angela Xu and Danielle Horton Photo by: Lisa Brkich



Figure 5: Filming *Ballet Dream Sequence* Sebastian Oreamuno and Angela Xu
Photo by: Lisa Brkich



Figure 6: Filming *Master Allegro* Christine Brkich Photo by: Lisa Brkich



Figure: 7 Filming *Modernmina Dream Sequence* Zlatko Cetenic, Samara Brown, Jonah Blaser Photo by Lisa Brkich



Figure 8: *Sound Dubbing at Studio Ferro* Lindsey Thompson Photo by: Lisa Brkich



Figure 9: *Jazzermana's Dream Sequence* (Left to Right) Samara Brown, Lindsey Thompson, Sebastian Oreamuno and Danielle Horton, Photo by Zlatko Cetenic



Figure 10: *Entire Cast Finale* (From Left to Right) Danielle Horton, Sebastian Oreamuno, Samara Brown, Christine Brkich, Angela Xu and Lindsey Thompson Photo by: Zlatko Cetenic