

THE WORK OF WOMEN IN CANADIAN MUSICAL THEATRE:
DANCING IN THE CHORUS

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ABSTRACT

My interest is in the study of the female chorus member working in Canadian Musical Theatre. Through the body of my choreographic research, I propose to answer the following question: Who is the modern day chorus girl?

My research required an investigation into the historical background of the ‘chorus girl’, with special attention given to her ongoing development and to the fascination with which the ‘chorus girl’ is still viewed. I looked into well-known British, French and American groups for the time-frames indicated: The Ballet Girls (1870-1890), The CanCan Dancer (1840-1900), The Ziegfeld Follies Girls (1930-1950) and The Tiller Girls (1920-1930). This not only helped with the understanding of the development of the ‘chorus girl’ but also served as an inspiration for my own choreographic research. My interest is not only in the work that these women did as professionals, but also in who they were as individuals. What was behind their pretty faces, elaborate costumes and perfectly synchronized movements? How did these women of the past influence who the chorus girl is today? Are there particular personality traits that such women possessed that ring true in today’s chorus member? Through a detailed description of the three choreographic works I created (including a solo piece, group choreography, and a self-produced show), I framed my MFA research as an auto-ethnographic investigation on “The Work of Women in Canadian Musical Theatre: Dancing in the Chorus”.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my thesis to the women who have inspired this work: The Chorus Women of Canadian Musical Theatre. Thank you for being a part of my journey! Some of you came before me; some I met in audition rooms, or worked together with in a show; and some have been longtime friends. But without you this study would not have been possible. We have shared this crazy world of show business, so removed from the rest of society but forever embedded in who we are as individuals, and I thank you all for being a part of my journey.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The research focus for this thesis work is a choreographic investigation into the modern day chorus girl working in Canadian Musical Theatre, specifically looking into the personal characteristics and working practices of those currently employed in the field. My interest in uncovering these traits was to determine the type of person that this profession attracts, to distinguish between former ideas of who the chorus girl may have been, and to define how the role has changed through time. Because of the stigma surrounding the ‘chorus girl’ and the different values society has placed on a career that most people know little about, I deemed it important to break down the professional expectations of those employed in the field to be included in my choreographic presentations. Also, understanding the historical lineage allowed me to uncover the causes of these societal stigmas, the challenges that women often still face in the profession, and to compare them with new principles and current difficulties that working women of the Canadian chorus encounter.

Through this process I made three distinct choreographic studies relating to the material being researched. The first choreography, a solo work titled *Third from the Left*, allowed for a personal investigation into my own work as a chorus performer, focusing on the past eleven years of my professional career. For this research I delved into journals, photographs and other related memories to comprise a specific syntax - uncovering how the work has psychologically affected me and the reasons behind pursuing this particular career in the performing arts. The second choreographic research project was a self-produced and site-specific creation *The Chorus Girl-Moving Through History*. This project was a display of the chorus experience in various time periods. The material focused on four specific chorus groups, The CanCan Dancers (1840-1900), The Ballet Girls (1870-1890) The Tiller Girls (1920-1930), and The Ziegfeld Follies Girls (1930-1950), all of whom have directly influenced the current position of the chorus performer. Re-creating aspects of the environment that may have historically existed allowed for an experimental understanding of these groups and how they operated in times past. The third choreography, presented on a formal proscenium stage, was titled *Beyond the Line* and was my reflection on the modern day chorus girl. This choreography allowed me to delve into the idea of

the individual working in a group context; an integral part of chorus work that is seldom considered.

The writing of these specific studies has been divided into the three sections listed above. These offer insights into how the process began, how the knowledge of each was obtained, and reflections on how the work served my overall research goals, as well as on how it might have been more effectively realized.

CHAPTER TWO

Unravelling One's Self: The *I Am* Process

In order to accurately reflect upon and understand the part of my life that is in direct correlation to my study: *The Work of Women in Canadian Musical Theatre: Dancing in the Chorus*, I revisited eleven years of journals, audio recordings, photographs, cards, house-programs and letters. All of these collected pieces of personal history functioned as archives that triggered memories and helped provide insight into my career as a chorus performer.

The Past is Not Always Easy

The information that lay before me was used as a tool to deconstruct my past, yet it contained parts of my history that I was not keen on re-investigating and I often found myself cringing with embarrassment over the trivial dramas or overzealous self-talk that flooded my journal entries. Honest thoughts and ideas about my own person were very difficult to read and some of these descriptions filled me with a tremendous amount of sadness. The biggest challenge I encountered while working on the *I Am* process (ie., reviewing these personal journals and memories to help facilitate the conception of a physical piece of theatre) was being able to view my past objectively.

This process revealed many personality traits and patterns that I exhibited throughout the time being analyzed. Sifting through these memorabilia did not generate many fond memories of the time I spent performing in musicals, but rather memories of the times in-between formal contracts that seemed to be filled with personal struggle. The battle of keeping a balanced view was the greatest difficulty I faced throughout my years as a performer. Often this imbalance was described by finding faults with who I was as a person and an artist. Behavioral self-blame is described in Psychology Today's online magazine as follows: "Self-blame is one of the most toxic forms of emotional abuse. Self-blame amplifies our perceived inadequacies, whether real or imagined, and paralyzes us before we can begin to move forward". When I didn't manage to book a job, I would find fault with myself for not exhibiting enough confidence, not being interesting or talented enough or sensing that my skill set was lacking. Such critical thoughts led me to believe that I did not deserve success in my career and was unworthy of happiness. I also thought of the absurdity of constantly putting myself under so much pressure. All of these

thoughts and ideas resulted in a complicated battle within my own mind. Understanding when it was appropriate to be hard on myself and when my so called “failure” was just the normalcy of maintaining a career in an extremely difficult and competitive field, was a battle I had to constantly wage.

A journal entry from 2008, reveals one example of my struggle with an issue that played a significant role in my life; body-image. “My ego says: Allison you shouldn’t be eating that...I have no will power, I’ll never be as good as so and so because I’m fat and no one likes me...I have to figure out a plan, either cut this out, cleanse, never eat this again and we start all over again.” *Dancing Times Magazine* writer, Debbie Malina observed in an article titled “The Stress Factor” that professional dancers and training professionals often, from an early age are seeking to achieve a level of perfection not generally expected from children and young teenagers. Weight and body image issues may be thrown into the mix while relationship difficulties - either at home or school - can add up to a heavy load at a relatively young age. The perpetual thoughts of perfectionism that took over my psyche led to many bouts of hidden depression and a loss of self-confidence. During these times I would completely remove myself from my chosen profession as a performer, abandoning any affiliation to performance. This, in turn, led to additional patterns of negative thinking and also created more obstacles for me when I decided to return to performing. Having to start over in the professional world of musical theatre introduced a new set of fears that infested my mind. I was now out of shape physically and mentally and had lost connections in the field. The momentum of auditioning for casting directors had to be re-built, and facing these growing pains was a challenge that often had me questioning whether the pain was worth the pursuit. Reflecting on this time, I now see it filled with a considerable amount of unnecessary pain. “Actors, whose careers are in large part built on the dysfunctional notion that criticism, rejection, and disapproval are simply everyday parts of the game, are often in greater need of mental-health support than the general population, says one expert who has woven a strong safety net designed to catch artists when they fall.” (Jacobs: “In Focus: Performing Artists Maintain Mental Health as Part of the Job”)

Putting Thought into Form

From these observations, I began to piece together how I would form material to put on stage as an *I Am* solo. The difficulty in this was deciding how much information I was comfortable revealing, as it was so personal. I wrestled with the idea of creating a big Broadway dance number; opening the sequence in a dressing room and having exits and entrances to the stage area which would set up the atmosphere for the type of performance career I have had. I realized that this was much too ambitious and needed more technical support than was available. However, the next task of finding the music that became the core of the piece was what opened the doors to reveal the entire trajectory for the performance. “On Broadway” sung by Kurt Elling, a jazz version of the classic song, had subtle ticks woven throughout to indicate the reminder of time passing. This was overlaid by the sound of a busy city street along with voice-overs from people saying “no thank you”, reflective of the many “nos” I have heard throughout my career as a performer. The creative process was difficult at the beginning as nothing I was choreographing revealed the intentions behind my discoveries. My body wanted to move gently with broad strokes and this felt very satisfying physically. But these movements were not reflective of the music or the memories I had gathered. When I began to add smaller, disjointed gestures that were more staccato in nature (echoing the ticking sounds in the song), my mania started to reveal itself. Playing in this space, I eventually found a rhythm in my body that represented the thoughts penetrating my mind. I was searching for someone to say “yes”, longing for someone to want me for the job; and being rejected over and over again produced a flood of negative patterns which took over my body and affected my psyche. Capturing the feeling of walking a tightrope in order to fit the mold of casting directors’ and agents’ expectations was developed by a constant pursuit of equanimity. This was negotiated by exploring different rhythms, times, patterns and body angles with quick shifts in direction practiced on the balls of my feet. My balance was always compromised, forcing me to find a strong centre in order to maintain an upright position and a “right mind”. Through this unnatural expression of tight, held, unbalanced and anxious movement I was able to reveal the opposite side of things; times when I have been able to separate myself from the pressure-cooker of expectation and rejection and enjoy my life as a dancer. Here the broader movements, attacked with vigor and grace, allowed me to discover the freedom of my own personal movement; a healing and empowering place of reverence. Looking back at pictures and cards from times past reminded me of how

much fun I have had when I have been able to dance as a part of an ensemble. This pure love for performing reminded me to also look for the joy in my movement during the creation process. Combining the extreme thoughts expressed in my journals and the extreme highs and lows of a career in the performing arts offered a very personal insight into my life as a chorus dancer.

Speaking with a colleague about the extremes often presented by this chosen career revealed memories of her own path. Deciding to take one year to pursue another career in order to make a steady income and help pay for her and her husband's first property left her with feelings of emptiness. Through that period, she had to find other interests to distract her from the sadness of not being involved in performance. She stated that she felt as if she did not have the same rapport with people she worked with at her new job, as they did not share the same connections and intimacy that performers do. She said that those experiences reminded her of how wonderful it is to be a performer and stated that there is nothing better than being up there on stage with all of your friends. I have also encountered similar reactions with colleagues who have been forced out of work because of injury. They have said that the possibility of never performing again causes extreme sadness - to the point where one begins to look into alternative occupations that might feed their interests, while knowing that this is an impossibility. All of the chorus women I talked with who have gone through such trying times also stated that returning to the stage made them feel like they were home. Even when worried about money or the possibility of re-injury, they lived in the joy of being able to perform again.

Other Elements Included in the Work

Following my physical research, I moved on to gather more practical information about my career by listening to years of voice recordings I had kept from times I had spent learning show music and engaging in vocal and monologue tutorials. Having to learn material within very tight time constraints reminded me not only how often one is asked to do this, but also how presumptuous and ridiculous it is of casting directors and agents to make these kind of requests. These people often think that the job they are casting is your only job and that you should be available to learn a song or a monologue with a night's notice. Some rarely take into consideration that the performer may have a night job as a server in a restaurant, or have a family to take care of. No latitude is given when you are unable to complete the requested task. They need to cast the show and there is always someone else who will be willing to prepare what they

expect. This tension between the dancer's real life and the agent's agenda allowed me to create a moment of comedy in my piece. After searching through many recordings, I found an interesting group of tapes from a time when I had to learn a Hungarian monologue from a Hungarian actor who had agreed to coach me. I was taking myself very seriously on the tape, trying to grasp what I was saying while breaking down the vocabulary in order to be able to affect a proper Hungarian accent. This, along with the content coming from the musical; *Chicago* (which is all about women who murder their husbands), was in itself hysterical. I chose to use one of the recordings where I was repeating line-after-line what the coach was saying, and also asking at one point in a formal manner: "so, she's saying I chopped his head off!?" I inserted this part of the tape as background score during a section of the choreography in which I was preparing for a big audition. Once I gathered all of these tracks, and also recorded some separate parts and mixed them with the music, everything started to flow creatively and the structure of the choreography was underway.

Structuring the Piece

I began the piece in an audition setting marked by the disappointment of not booking the job. From there I moved into the "On Broadway" choreography section containing all of the conflicting ideas of being a performer, plus the moments of joy in the pursuit of dancing. I then received a phone call from my agent indicating that I had an audition for which I was to prepare the Hungarian monologue from *Chicago*. I concluded with a very typical piece of choreography that was developed to re-enact a musical theatre dance audition. This was a fun and exciting number that depicted what is expected of a chorus performer during a musical theatre audition - revealing your physique through the clothes you wear, the ability to dance well in high heels, complete high kick and multiple pirouettes - all while performing the dance and showing the audition panel your individual personality. The piece ended with a voice recording of the choreographer saying "we would like to see the following dancers..." and then, in a blackout, leaving it up to the audience to decide whether or not I had booked the job.

The process creating this choreography reminded me of the many sides of being a performer and the anxieties and joys that come with the profession. The high pressure of the actual audition and the preparation amidst everything else that is going on in one's life (work, school, family, and relationships) is part of the job that one must be prepared to undertake.

Getting called for an audition and getting a call-back can be uplifting and very rewarding, but it is a process that one quickly learns to put into perspective, as there is never any guarantee of being hired for a position. In all, the physical discoveries that I made revealed all the ups and downs of my life as a performer. This process was difficult and I often felt terrible physical discomfort while interpreting my negative emotions. Overall the process was a cathartic experience and a good reminder of the struggles I have endured over the past eleven years and of the choices that I now make in order to continue a healthier career as a Woman of the Chorus in Canadian Musical Theatre at the age of thirty-three.

Successes and Possible Changes

The construction of the piece was a clear and honest reflection of my own experience. This, combined with my skills as an actor and my strengths as a performer, was an effective tool in adding entertainment value to my work. If I were to make changes, I would do my best to get a clearer recording for the voice-over sections, and possibly add a singing audition to the end of the piece. The additional tension of adding yet one more challenge may have provided more of an impact to the surprise ending, which was meant to leave the audience in suspense over whether I was hired for the job or not. The dance sections were tightly woven together with the “mind games” and the “joy of dance” parts contrasting with one another. It would have been nice to add a little more depth to the “joy of dance” section. Had I the option of further exploring the material, I would have given the section more structure and also pushed myself to test my physical limits. Dancing to my fullest potential and finding the balance of quietly enjoying my body in motion would have helped to further support the idea of doing what I love to do - dance! The fact that I didn’t formally choreograph the entire unit was, in part, an exercise in exploring what it is like to live and perform in an unfiltered expressive moment. Coming from a structured musical theatre background, I challenged myself with this choreography to explore the freedom of improvisation, but I had difficulty detaching from certain movements or emotional states throughout the run. I sometimes found myself using these movements and emotions as a safety net. Had I delved a little deeper into the emotional states by pushing my physical range as a dancer, I think I would have found more liberty to comfortably express through structured improvisation. There were specific moments of joy, passion, determination and ownership over my body that occurred during this section. Had I broken them down a little further, used a little

more versatility in my movement by pushing the boundaries between quiet joy and explosive energy, this may have been more satisfying for the audience and for my own journey through the expression.

From my perspective, the understanding I had of my work was in that it involved struggles, joyful sections and points of comic relief. I believe that the comedy came out of transitions between dances - from the voice-overs, the Hungarian monologue and from watching a performer (me) rushing around changing costumes on stage. Until I performed in front of an audience, I did not realize that the subtle movements of Broadway and Fosse traditions (such as using “jazz hands” and other distorted Broadway customs) were comical. The sections where I was feeling torn apart and completely imbalanced were at times very funny for the audience. This was startling at first but a pleasant surprise. At another time I might have taken this response personally, as it was a point of vulnerability for me; but instead it made me realize how beautiful this resolution to my reflection was. The dichotomy of being a performer in musical comedy, attempting to create a slice of serious contemporary dance regarding my struggles as a chorus performer, ended up being its own short excerpt of a musical comedy. Everything I was trying to escape, by depicting an honest and raw reflection of myself, ended up being expressed in what my body so deeply understood - Musical Theatre Comedy! Indeed, I had understood that through comedy we can find joy, light and the meaning of our pain which can lead to a process of healing.

CHAPTER THREE

The Chorus Girl- Moving through History

This process, very different to my previous work - *Third from the Left* - allowed me to look at chorus women throughout history and to creatively explore different ways of presenting this material. The historical lineage of the chorus girl is long and complex, therefore my task was to touch on contributing factors and not to become too absorbed in a particular group or era unless it was significant to my presentation. The choruses of women analyzed were those that existed from the late seventeen-hundreds to present and were, for the most part, located in England, France and the United States. Many groups were surprisingly unfamiliar to me. When first delving into this subject area, I thought that I had a pretty clear idea of which groups were most influential. I thought the development began with the Greek chorus, moved through the roots of ballet, through French CanCan girls and onto the adored American chorus girls -The Rockettes. These groups certainly did have influence on the present day chorus member but there were many more factors which contributed to the historical relevance of the chorus dancer. An era's trends and fashions, as well as its politics, affected how these groups were created. These discoveries allowed for an understanding of specific choruses, and of how each genre helped shape the modern day chorus girl in Canada.

Calling all Chorus Girls!

Investigating the many different aspects of female choruses took time and consideration. It was often confusing to accurately grasp the order of their incarnation as choruses, their relevance to my work, how they were invented, how they influenced or were influenced by other groups and how long each existed. Many groups I had never heard of. Some, I discovered were revolutionary in shaping who the chorus woman is today. Deciding on which decades and groups I would focus on was my toughest task. In relation to my study and from my understanding thus far, the chorus woman in Canada is a female performer who works within a unit to support the entirety of a show. This is a very basic idea of her overall task. Most people understand the chorus girl as a show piece or a glamorous and beautiful woman used to decorate space. "In fact, whenever a group of young ladies place themselves in view, emphasizing their beauty by dance or pose, in or out of costume, the idea of the chorus girl is not too far away." (Parker 11)

This notion I wanted to dispel! I wanted to uncover the real duties of these women as well as the more personal aspects of their lives. My task was to investigate common characteristics and individual stories so that I could gain a better perspective as to why, in this day and age, people still see the women who work in the chorus as objects and not as individuals who each have something significant to offer to the overall outcome of a production. I also needed to consider how I would use this information to create an interesting visual display of dance that accurately informed my audience. To these ends, I decided to focus on four iconic chorus genres - CanCan Girls (1840-1895), The Ballet Girls (1870-1900), The Tiller Girls (1920-1935) and the Ziegfeld Follies (1930-1950).

The Tiller Girls, Ballet Girls and CanCan Dancers

The Tillers were interesting and innovative precursors to the famous Rockettes. In fact, they were the first of their kind to perform precision dance routines as a unit. Russell Markert, founder of the Rockettes stated; “I had seen John Tiller’s girls in the Ziegfeld Follies of 1922...If I ever got a chance to get a group of American girls who would be taller and have longer legs and could do really complicated tap routines and eye-high kicks, they’d knock your socks off!” (De Lafayette 411). Conceived by John Tiller in the eighteen nineties in Liverpool, England, the Tiller Girls were highly trained dancers and unique for the time. They were well known for tap dancing, ballet and high kick routines. Mr. Tiller, an industrial worker who operated a well-known cotton company with his uncle, also pursued music and work with amateur theatre groups. After a falling out with his uncle and tiring of his work in the industrial sector, he created the Tiller Girls and later founded the Tiller Schools with his wife Mary Carr. His meticulous attention to detail and work in the industrial sector dictated an accuracy and precision for his dancing chorus. This is a significant portion of what the chorus performer does in Canada today. Part of the work consists of performing in unison with a microscopic attention to detail; therefore, I deemed this group as a very significant contributing factor. The Ballet Girls of the mid-to-late eighteen-hundreds in England, depicted in the famous Degas paintings, were the next group I chose to look at. Initially I had wanted to create work based on the ballet girls of the Paris Opera (Early seventeen-hundreds) as they had been documented as paid working women in a chorus. “The comparison of wages paid to women and men dancers is possible thanks to the 1704 and 1713 bylaws, which listed salaries. As a rule, women were paid less than men.”

(Brooks 115) Unfortunately, the women that I wanted to look at in my own work were well known for their solo contributions to the art form and therefore did not fit within my research focus. I needed to keep my focus on the unit of women in the chorus and because of the general familiarity with the work of Edgar Degas (1834-1917), understanding the world inside his ballet paintings was of interest to me. The CanCan Girls of the Moulin Rouge (1840-1895) had a distinct impact on how chorus girls are often viewed by the general public. They were a combination of cabaret stars, burlesque dancers and theatre performers. The atmosphere created in my venue would lend itself well to a cabaret style environment. Therefore, I thought that this should be included in my work. The Follies Girls (1930-1950) were included as a reminder that these women were used solely as decorations of fantastical beauty.

The Individual Versus the Object

My view of the stage, was that whatever it might be... was not a platform for the display of grandmothers and maiden aunts. If physical beauty could be got in combination with brains and dramatic talent, so much the better, but my first duty seemed to me to be to get physical beauty, and I got it. -John Hollingshead¹ (Parker 52)

Throughout my research, I found the individual stories of the chorus girls/women the most intriguing. They often experienced problems similar to those that we face in Canada today. The common theme throughout history is that chorus women have not been taken seriously as artists. They have been looked at as objects instead of as artists and, as a result, many women of the chorus face compromising and misleading job proposals that often have little to do with dance or performance. The choice of whether to accept the job or be out of work is often a reality that many women still face. For instance, many dancers in choruses across Canada take jobs in the commercially focused world of “industrials”². There, many women have been misled as to what the job actually entails. Dancers are hired to perform staged routines, but there is also often an expectation, following the performance, to “entertain” the male guests. Although giving oneself over to a patron is not expected, women face harassment, to which other witnesses (including female patrons) turn a blind eye. This behavior and its social acceptance enforce the idea that women in the entertainment industry, specifically dancers, are objects of male desire.

¹ John Hollingshead was the builder and first manager of the Gaiety Theatre in London England.

² An “industrial” refers to a job where a group of performers is hired as the entertainment for a specific event. Usually, it is a one-time event put on by a corporation.

The Follies era in America was fascinating because it marked the boom of commercialization of the female form. During this period of the nineteen twenties, the female form was most certainly a commodity and the beautiful woman was a perfect vehicle for advertisers to make money. Images of women could be seen on everything from cigarette packaging to laundry soap. Unfortunately, this is still too often the lot of the chorus woman. You may train for hours on end or be the best in your arena (often being more versed in an array of different disciplines than the leading players), but, if you are fortunate enough to have the looks to go along with the talent, the looks often take precedence. An example of this can be found in the musical *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* (2004). There was a point in the musical where a female chorine simply walks across the stage as an object of beauty for the lead characters to ogle. The musical section entitled “Great Big Stuff” has dancing French maids depicted solely as objects of male fantasy. This is also the case in *The Producers* (2001) and *Spamalot* (2005), in which entire sections of the female chorus’s choreography are presented simply as a means of providing for men’s pleasure. Understandably, these shows are comedic in nature and are at some level meant to mock this perception of women. But it is quite demeaning when one’s entire purpose is to be the object of male attention.

It became apparent to me that the women performing in these shows would obsess over their appearances. Because they were for the most part to be scantily clad, much of the dressing room talk would be based around how many calories one consumed, how many times one worked out and the best ways to lose pounds and gain muscle. There were even times in the dressing room when women would say they couldn’t wait to eat carbs again. Women performing in shows such as *Cabaret* (1966) and *Chicago* (1975) were, in my experience, less likely to talk about their weight. They seemed to have a better outlook in regard to their bodies, and were more concerned with the show’s content. These particular musicals allowed for the ensemble to have specific characters significant to the overall plot. Even though the dancers in these shows are to be costumed in no more than underwear, there is a distinct feeling that the women participating were empowered by their own sexuality. Referring to choreographer Bob Fosse’s work, Beddow states that:

Graciela Daniele, who was one of the original dancers in *Chicago*, told me about rehearsing for the show...The thing she couldn’t get over was his ability not only as a choreographer, but also as a director. He taught the dancers how to be so clear in their intention and organic to the character that they got an

almost magical feeling of being able to communicate clearly any state of mind or emotion...he really knew how to bring out the best work in each performer. (Beddow 53-54)

Forming the Work

For my project, I initially wanted to have only one dancer portray a particular person from each of these eras. I wanted to tell individual stories but quickly realized that having a group of women shown working within a chorus would have much more impact. I needed to remain with the theme of the ‘chorus girl’, not the chorus individual. Once this was decided, I began work on the choreography sections of the piece. Each section had to display the kind of dancing that these women would do during the time period. In order to prepare and best represent the styles and era with authenticity, I watched different videos and looked at photography from each particular genre. From there, I was able to create similar representations of these different styles using my own interpretation and flair. Music was collected from each time period to be used as an underscore for the dance sections. I then researched each era, as my goal was to provide as much information about the time period as well as to tell individual documented stories. Character sketches were developed from this material and given to each performer. From that, mock improvisations of possible scenarios were discussed and rehearsed. Specific language and other relevant information was added to each performer’s script. The space needed to be as visceral as possible. I wanted the performers and audience members to be able to touch, see and have a real taste of what it would actually be like in each time period. An environment was created and the evening’s events took place in my parents’ house. Costumes were period appropriate. Each group was given a number of different scenarios to work with and they were instructed to perform the dance section anytime a crowd gathered to watch them. The Tiller Girls were training a potential new member at the Tiller School. There were measurement charts for audience members to fill out (waist, hip, bust, height and weight) and information about the Tillers as one walked through the space. There was also a Rockettes display showing the similarities of the two groups. I felt it important to emphasize the training aspect of the chorus career. In earlier days, girls were often criticized as being untrained beauties prancing about the stage. “They had not, one was forced to conclude, a very great deal to do.... but the chorus was generally encouraged only to sway gently in time to the music...” (Parker 23) The intensive training the Tiller Girls underwent indicates the differences between the “swaying” chorus and dancing chorus girls. In fact, the “parading” chorus girl now became the Show Girl.

“The difference between show girl and chorus girl was at first well defined: the chorus girl danced, and sometimes (rather shakily) sang; the show girl -well, showed.” (Parker 43)

The main floor display was the Ballet Girls. They were also set up to be in a rehearsal hall. During that period, men and suitors were often invited to watch the rehearsals and the dancers were on display for their pleasure. Their mothers would often be the guards at the stage door, deciding whom they deemed appropriate to enter. This was to ward off any potential backstage misconduct and also to encourage wealthy men (potential suitors or investors) to enter. “Mothers were not allowed in the Foyer, but guarded exits with great verve; and sometimes turned manager in a sense that would outrage our sensibilities.” (Parker 33) For my show, I wanted to have the mother figure auction-off her daughter. In this vignette, the women were instructed to rehearse the ballet piece but they also had individual stories that could be overheard by guests. One of the girls was pregnant and was hiding it from her mother who was trying to find her potential suitors. Interestingly, some of the evening’s patrons were drawn to talk to the dancers. The girls remained in character and talked with the guests about the problems they were facing.

The CanCan girls were the life of the party. They were meant to remind us of a time when there was a fine line between prostitution and performance; when alcohol and drugs also played a large part in the lifestyle. Although the ballet girls were often treated just as much as objects (even referred to as *petit rats*³ in an article reflecting Degas’ encounters with them), the CanCan girls were the true party girls of the time.

The evening began with guests gathering in the main living room of the house. A number of female hostesses were present to welcome the guests. Wine and snacks were also offered. Once all were in attendance, the maestro, dressed in a tux and tails, proceeded to sing “Beautiful Girls” and to introduce each performer as she paraded in a Follies-style exposition through the house. This was all very tongue-in-cheek as he referred to the girls by the way they were dressed - titles such as the “silver fox” and the “shining star”. Once the parade was complete, the maestro encouraged guests to roam freely for an evening of exciting surprises. A bell was used as a signal for guests to return to the living room for the show’s finale. As they wandered through the house,

³ Young student dancers of the Paris Opéra Ballet were affectionately called “*petit rats*”

guests were encouraged to pick their favorite performer as there would be an auction at the end of the evening. Once I had decided that most audience members had partaken in all activities throughout the house, I rang the bell to collect everyone for the final auction. To save time, Andrew the emcee/maestro picked the girl that would go up for auction. The bidding began and, once the winner was determined, the stage was set to appear as if the bidder would win a date (or something to that effect) with the girl. Instead, a surprise piece of raw meat was delivered to the winning guest: a metaphor for the performer being depicted as a “piece of meat”.

Observations

Overall, the show was a successful exposition of chorus women through the ages. The house was modified for each particular environment: A Moulin Rouge type night club, a rehearsal hall, a dressing room, the Tiller School, all set amongst archival areas displaying pictures of the past and quotes from different performers, producers and creators. This added to the atmosphere and allowed the audience to get a feeling for each particular era. The dance numbers and vignettes set the stage and the costumes created the finishing touches. The audience could appreciate the show on many different levels. The evening’s entertainment portion contained the dance numbers, song and scenes. The visual appeal was centered on the photographs, advertisements, quotes and televisions that were placed on the main floor and basement, playing reels of different chorus footage. There was always something for guests to do whether they wanted to sit and watch a performance, glance through a book or watch a video. This added layers to the show that were invaluable and educational. The most difficult aspect of the evening was the fact that a large portion of the performance relied on the audience. This made the evening an exercise in improvisation for the performers. The dances were rehearsed and possible scenarios for the scenes were also played out prior to the guests’ arrival. Due to the changing nature of the show, the most difficult part as a creator was to make sure the performers were prepared well enough for any scenario. They were prepped with thirty minutes of material with the possibility of guests staying in one area for the duration of the show. The performers also became more comfortable as the evening progressed and seemed to understand the ebb and flow of events. The tricky area was the main floor where the ballet girls’ action took place. Because it was the central meeting place, I found that either guests didn’t know when to move to the next area or would skim through and not really notice all of the action that was taking place.

We shifted things to get the audience moving after each performance. Adding the mother character, immediately after the emcee directed everyone to roam free, was an important part of getting the audience to consider bidding and of moving the action forward. This cleared the path for the women to get their rehearsal dance started and allowed escape for those polite guests who did not want to miss a moment. If I were to put this particular installment on again, I would use a house that had more rooms; areas that could break up groups and allow people to feel as if they could take their time to roam freely. I had contemplated being specific about directing guests with an order of events by using a program but decided against it as I wanted to see how people respond when they are also part of the performance. Many wanted direction (they needed to be told what to do) while others enjoyed conversation with the performers and wanted to be completely immersed in the world of the chorus girl.

CHAPTER FOUR

Working -Beyond the Line-

Beginning work on this project was a very difficult task for a number of reasons. The creative design of the overall piece was complex, and, allowing for changes to the work during developmental stages in order to best represent the overall vision, required patience and an open mind. As well, the collaborative aspect of working with students new to musical theatre dance proved a trying task which I will describe in detail below.

The dancers involved were eight women from the York University undergraduate class entitled: The York Dance Ensemble (YDE). Although it was beneficial to have time carved out each week within their classroom structure to work on my piece, the constraints of working with students training to be contemporary dancers, as opposed to professional musical theatre dancers, was a challenge.

The initial section of my piece began with an excerpt of typical musical theatre chorus ensemble choreography, and the second section used a contemporary approach to story-telling; portraying individual characters through monologues, scenes and dance sections. I began work on the chorus choreography of the musical theatre section to start. With the roots of the material based in jazz dance, a form often associated with up-beat enthusiasm, I believed that it would unite the group and help them to synchronize with one another. When I recognized how difficult a task this was for the dancers, who are primarily trained in ballet and modern styles, I spent a few sessions working on jazz technique and then implemented these principles into the structured choreography. Taking ideas from my *I Am* solo *Third from the Left*, I expanded on some of the choreography I had created to the song “Blow Gabriel Blow” from the musical *Anything Goes* (1934). At this point it became apparent that I was working with students who, aside from learning choreography, also needed instruction on how to conduct themselves in a professional setting. In her autobiography *Push Comes to Shove*, Twyla Tharp recalls one of the dancers saying: “We didn’t wait for Twyla to make things right. She would describe what she wanted and it would be up to us to make it right. We must have been dedicated, because now I find it extremely hard to get people to work with you that way.” (109) Having worked in situations such as regional musical theatre productions, I know that rehearsal periods are very short (between two and four weeks) and performers conduct themselves differently than these

students did and are required to bring all of their skills to every rehearsal. Successful musical theatre dancers are prepared, create their own ideas, and take it upon themselves to know the material given and to fill in the blanks where needed. I was required to adjust my expectations in order to work with the students of this year's York Dance Ensemble. This situation reminded me of the choreographer Agnes de Mille's comments on George Balanchine's work on Broadway: "George Balanchine was in the Broadway theatre, and he despised it. And it looked like that. I frankly don't think his Broadway work is good at all." (Lyle 52) My suspicion was that these dancers somehow thought my material did not require as much of an investment as other dance forms and did not need to be held in high regard. The attitudes of the dancers could greatly affect the overall outcome of my piece - a concern for me.

The Binds of Total Freedom/ Finding Character

Each girl was asked to write and deliver a character sketch which could be either a made-up personality or a description based on herself. This exercise was intended to get the group comfortable speaking aloud, to gain insight about how the girls wanted to be represented, and to see if their ideas matched my own thoughts for characters they could play. After each sketch was read aloud, I set up different scenes and the girls were asked to connect with one another through improvisation. The following week, each dancer was asked to share a vulnerable and personal moment - whether it was a difficult or exciting time in her life. This work session was to help the dancers access deeper and more vulnerable emotions relevant to the women in the chorus they would be representing. Three words that resonated with what the students had shared were chosen. These included: Heaviness, Growth and Freedom. Through breath, each dancer began to move and with each new word that was presented, she was asked to find the impetus of the movement and to follow that particular desire. I asked the group to add some vocalization with the word *freedom*, encouraging them to do anything they wanted. Total freedom meant that they could scream, run, chant etcetera, but they seemed nervous about the idea of having this much freedom. Reading from the book *Free Play*, I came across a quote by Igor Stravinsky that perfectly explains this thought. "The more constraints one imposes, the more one frees one's self of the chains that shackle the spirit" (84). It was now my responsibility to be more direct in my instruction with the dancers in order to gain their trust and make them feel comfortable expressing themselves. We began the next session moving in space and followed word clues to

ignite different movement qualities. This time, working within a grid structure, the dancers were now asked to move within extremely confined areas and had to find creative ways to move on the lines of this imaginary grid. Sharp angular movements, militant in their style, played in contrast with broad strokes which were used to push the momentum forward, backward and sideways. Expanding on this exercise by allowing the students to leave the grid, I requested that the dancers use wringing movements, small twitch-like impulses, quick directional changes and light and airy actions, all of which helped to decipher how each individual responded to the describing words. This gave me a clear picture of how these students' bodies interpreted movements and where both their preferred and less desirable points of comfort were. From these cues, and under the guidance of my own intuition, I would ask the girls to maintain specific body characteristics and then either move as a unit in a militant regime, as soloists, or in small groups. One dancer intrigued me when she was directed to lead her movement with her head. Immediately a character appeared who was airy and flighty in nature and an entire story began to unfold within this flow. I asked her to play with the character she developed through improvisation. She was moving in a way which connected words and a storyline; a beautiful discovery. Most of the girls then began to reveal themselves as different characters, enabling me to push them more in a specific direction. Another dancer moved with a bubbly confidence and shined as the "show off". There was also a leader who carried the group through direct and precise exercises. A soft-spirited woman became a character in need of support. Here, the group was directed to console her by lifting her and supporting her weight. One dancer in particular would always ask questions and needed things to be explained thoroughly. I used uncertainty to her advantage and asked her to tap into the idea of always needing others' approval. How was the lack of approval from others affecting her? A lack of confidence, a tendency towards perfectionism and obsessive compulsion were ideas offered to her, and she was asked to express her needs vocally or through physical interaction.

The next choice was to somehow use their strengths and, I thought, take a more general approach to accessing characters the students naturally were leaning toward. As Patricia Beatty wrote: "You are not there to represent life, but to express it. You must have an attitude of your own toward the situation, your own hero and villain, your own overall sympathy for the characters who are doing their best to live life." (Beatty 32)

For the first showing, the dancers introduced themselves as if they were at an audition when the dance captain began the “rehearsal” of chorus choreography. From there, the group danced in slow motion as individual stories were presented through physicalized monologues which were woven together with improvised small groups. The women came together to protect the wounded dancer, and from there moved into a circle formation, dancing in this space to represent the unity of chorus of women both personally and professionally. However, all of the ideas in this initial showing needed to be rethought for the final product.

The Process of Getting the Final Product

Following the first showing, we were off from school for the winter holiday break which meant I would not work with the YDE for approximately another month. This was stressful given all of the changes that need to be made to the first incarnation of the work. I was in agreement with my advising professors that the YDE performers were not strong enough vocal performers to execute the monologue ideas with confidence. I decided to cut this monologue section of the piece, leaving me with quite a large section of choreography to fill. It was also suggested to me that, with the time constraints and the abilities of the dancers, I might have to consider giving them very structured material. It was integral to my work that I depict the personal struggles and obstacles that performers in the chorus often face. I was aware that the dancers performing the piece had neither the life nor stage experience required but I did believe that some of them were capable of tapping into the vulnerability I was looking for. First, I wanted to consider more choreography and interaction with the “Blow Gabriel Blow” section of the dance. I envisioned the dancers performing in a nineteen twenties night club where they would still be able to play different characters, allowing some of the previous work to be carried over. We re-created this nineteen twenties environment, beginning with a solo burlesque performance which moved into a trio dance with the “club dancers”. The other girls filled the scene as patrons of the club. The party progressed after the club dancers took the stage and, from there, the group in its entirety broke into the unison choreography section which mirrored scenes that often take place in musical theatre shows. This section, although appearing to the audience as if it were the actual show, was in fact just a dress rehearsal embedded with my choreographic narrative. After this segment was complete, the girls broke character and reverted to a casual dressing room atmosphere. It took a lot of rehearsal and specific training for the dancers to

remain casual but engaged while taking part in the background action. I believe that this quality is the essence of excellence in a chorus performer. Having spoken with many professional actors, dancers, directors and choreographers in casual discussion, the consensus seems to be that an excellent chorus performer can remain engaged in the background without pulling focus, but that when it is time for her to shine, she owns her space on the stage. This means that in order to be a highly successful chorus member, the entire picture must be taken into account. Having a brilliant dancer with no acting ability can be as detrimental to the musical as an actor or singer who has limited dancing ability. All pieces of the puzzle, that is, being a true triple threat,⁴ are essential to the entirety of the show and to the overall functioning of the chorus member.

The second section of choreography focused on two duets. Here, the dancers had received some bad news - a situation I had wanted to explore. Speaking with performers currently working in the field revealed a situation that arose when a colleague passed away from cancer. As with any chorus, some people knew her well, some were acquaintances and others had only heard about her. Again, instead of being too specific, I worked with the two duets to understand how bodies cope with tragedy. With one duet, I used the idea of falling apart, where one dancer needed to literally be held up by the other to prevent her from falling. This idea piggybacked on the fragile character initially developed by one of the dancers. With the second duet, we explored the stages of grief when emotions can be erratic - ranging from anger, shaking uncontrollably to being apologetic and having feelings of sorrow and regret - also an expansion from one of the initial characters developed. With both duets, the idea of how reliant we are on one another was explored. Discussions with different generations of chorus women revealed that they often describe one another as “family”. Some say that they are the only people who can truly understand what you are going through, as most people do not understand the complexity and challenges of being a performer and becoming a family when working in musical theatre.

Subsequently, the duets quickly snapped back into work mode and were joined by the other dancers as they moved into the last section of choreography, a big group number structured with specific choreography. This was a “mad” rehearsal section that was meant to show that, no

⁴ A triple threat is a performer who excels in acting, singing and dancing

matter what the performers' personal circumstances might be - "the show must go on"⁵. The movement was based in traditional structured ballet which morphed into frantic movement, representing the complete unravelling of the chorus dancer. This was my exploration of how chorus performers are often expected to be on stage: engaged at all times, and allowing nothing to affect their performance or how they appear to an audience. This is often experienced by dancers performing in summer stock and some regional theatres, as company members cannot take sick or personal days because there are generally no understudies or swings⁶ to cover parts. A jarring halt to the music brought an end to *Beyond the Line*, and recorded laughter brought a return to reality and a time to laugh at what had transpired. Regardless of how one may have interpreted the ending, it was meant to shift the focus away from what the audience had just witnessed on stage and to reveal the strength it takes to work as a chorus member. Maybe we laugh because we are crazy, maybe we laugh to cheer each other up, maybe we laugh because we love to find the joy in what we do, or maybe we laugh to cope, hiding our true emotions.

Final Thoughts

The three sections of choreography were executed quite well once it came time to open the show, and increasingly the YDE dancers seemed more engaged with each performance. The demands were high for the dancers as it was a lot of new information for them to absorb, embody and present. Although the piece may not have been exactly what I initially had in mind, it developed into something to revisit in the future. There were three distinct sections of choreography that could be further sewn together with scenes and monologues to begin work on a full length piece of theatre. The creative expression found in the contemporary dance duet section was developed through improvisation and then structured to tell the story of the individual dancers. Had I not been working with dancers accustomed to these practices, I would have had to structure the material or ask the musical theatre artists to take some risks and delve into an area outside of their comfort zone. I don't believe that this would have yielded the same results. There was a rawness which captured the story of these women by the manner in which we worked to develop this particular section of choreography.

⁵ "the show must go on" is a term originally used in show business indicating that regardless of what happens, whatever show has been planned still has to be staged for the waiting patrons.

⁶ In musical theater, the term "swing" is often used for a member of the company who understudies several chorus and/or dancing roles. If an understudy fills in for a lead role, a swing will act the parts normally performed by the understudy

The challenges I faced throughout the process, in the end reminded me that not everyone you are relaying information to (dancers/performers) responds the way you want them to. This lesson taught me to allow for change, to make quick decisions when things are not working, and to lead with the strengths of the people with whom you are working. It also reminded me to be open and adaptable because art is not stagnant; it is always changing and developing. The steps of a dance don't matter as much as the intention or the story. If something is not working, attaching oneself to something like a particular step is not useful or helpful to the work or the artists performing it. Finding a way to tell a story with integrity is what serves the entirety of the material. These contemporary dancers, although a challenge to work with at times, used their gifts as improvisers, and their understanding of weight and texture in movement, to create a dimension to the work that I may not have experienced had I been working with musical theatre performers.

CHAPTER FIVE

Stories, Personal Accounts and Additional Thoughts

Having been involved in many different facets of musical theatre (as a performer, dance captain, choreographer, producer and audition monitor), I have had the privilege of working with many directors and choreographers, and have met some of Canada's finest female talents, spanning many different generations. As a result, my personal interactions have given me first-hand knowledge into this particular area of study. As an addition to my other research, I will include some recollections that I deem important to my study of this topic.

While acting as an audition monitor at a recent audition, I encountered two women who had made their mark as popular chorus performers in the heyday of the mega musical in Toronto. The mega musical existed in Toronto from 1985 until well into the nineteen nineties with such shows as: *Cats*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *Miss Saigon*, *Les Miserables*, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, *Showboat* and *Sunset Boulevard*. These shows were produced by two major commercial enterprises – Mirvish Productions and Livent Incorporated. During this time, employment was steady and artists in these fields made quite a good living performing in these shows. The two women I met were both auditioning for a regional theatre after not having performed in a musical for a few years. One woman had been given the wrong information and was told to prepare for a dance audition. Upon finding out that singing was required, she immediately prepared herself; even though dressed in dance attire. She took on the challenge with grace and an open mind. The second woman arrived late, forgot her resume in the car and seemed to be a bit nervous. Once settled, her outlook was positive. She told me that having made the effort to get to the audition was enough to remind her that she had done her job as a performer that day. After finishing, both reminisced about their careers and talked about their more recent work. Both still have ties to the arts, and were also pursuing complementary careers; one running an entertainment company and the other teaching fitness and performing arts for children. I understood that these women, like many of my personal colleagues, were able to dive into situations that were intimidating and still be proud of what they had accomplished in the audition room. They seemed genuinely happy and really enjoyed re-connecting with each other. Upon learning that I was also of a different generation of chorus performer, they formed an

instant connection to me that was shared through stories, congratulations on upcoming work and hugs as we departed the audition waiting room.

While monitoring these particular auditions, I was also struck by the way in which the team treated the female candidates who were auditioning to be members of the ensemble. After the dance portion of the audition, selected candidates were asked to stay for the singing call. One performer sang her material after which a musical director said, “You don’t have dancer voice at all!” - insinuating that he expected her to be a bad singer. (As a note, the artistic director did state that there was enough female talent auditioning to cast the show three times over.) On the other end of the spectrum, one male singer, who was requested to dance, was coddled by the audition panel, and offered the job as an ensemble member. A colleague who has performed as an assistant choreographer, dance captain and understudy in places such as The Stratford Festival, Mirvish Productions, and Broadway, told me that no one expects dancers to be very good at anything other than dance, and that when they go on as an understudy or have a really great singing audition people are surprised. When singers or actors go into dance calls, the material is dumbed down and they are given special treatment because they are not primarily dancers. This tells me that there is still a stigma to the designation ‘chorus girl’ and that chorus performers are often not used to their fullest potential.

The chorus woman demonstrates versatility by the number of tasks she is asked to fulfil on a regular basis - understudying lead roles, playing multiple small background roles and having the ability to work as an actor, singer and dancer. She works in a career that is highly competitive and in which the likelihood of actually booking a job is a challenge. As well, she is constantly under the pressure of keeping up a certain physical appearance. The chorus girl/woman needs to be innovative and, in order to maintain a career in the arts, also needs to be willing to work other jobs to support herself financially. With all that in mind, I would say the modern day chorus girl is an ensemble member who performs in musical theatre productions and must be adaptable, resilient, multi-talented and enjoy the camaraderie of working within a unit.

CHAPTER SIX

The Future of the Female Ensemble

There will always be leading roles and supporting roles within the structure of the musical. My hope is that creative musical theatre writers will continue to explore the abilities of women working in ensembles, and offer work that supports their talent and challenges them artistically. We are seeing the traditional female roles changing. An example of this is to be found in the newest Broadway hit *Hamilton*; a show which blurs gender roles. “In *Hamilton* the female ensemble plays both men and women... The choice of boots for the men and the women when they are playing men became the equivalent of sneakers with jeans.” (Kucharski) The story will always be the most important part of a musical, and if we continue to explore this work with different voices, I believe that the art form will grow and develop in its support of the idea that the female ensemble member is a valuable player, capable of much more than her previous title of ‘chorus girl’.

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APPENDIX A

DVD of Choreography

Please find attached.

APPENDIX B

Show Programs

The Department of Dance presents

AVAILABLE LIGHT

September 24-26, 2015
September 24 & 25: 7:30pm | September 26: 2pm
McLean Performance Studio


I AM solo Series


original choreography by
MFA candidates
Nikolaos Markakis, Allison McCaughey,
Suma Nair and Michelle Silagy

Artistic Director: Carol Anderson

dance.ampd.yorku.ca

Photo: David Hou | Dancer: Laura Armstrong, York Dance Ensemble | Choreographer: John Ottmann

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- *Third from the Left* -

Choreography and Performance: Allison McCaughey

Music: "On Broadway" performed by Kurt Elling

Costume: Allison McCaughey

Choreographer's Note

The process for creating - *Third from the Left* - began with reading and analyzing a stack of old journals that I had collected over the past eleven years. The stories and thoughts written were filled with raw emotion, feelings of defeat and triumph, confusion, loneliness and the epic battle of keeping a "right" mind in the business that is show business. Mantras and pick me ups, to my amusement, were a common theme in my writing, whether reflecting on a "rough patch" in time or a successful period of my career. These mantras, feelings and reflections were then used to begin the creative process. My intention was to create a practical example of the world in which I live in as a musical theatre performer. This world for the most part, in my journal entries, consisted of the times in-between formal contracts. I also listened to audio recordings of old auditions and show coaching for more inspiration. I was then able to gather the information I needed to expose a truthful excerpt of the harsh and sometimes very black and white world of auditioning. My physical research of past memories and current feelings began while working with the jazz song "On Broadway". The song perfectly captures busy city life and the lyrics reflect the feelings common to performers trying to pursue a professional career in the arts. Rejection, a mind filled with doubt, the hustle of trying to make money, auditioning, working on the craft of three different disciplines, having a personal life, relationships and the ambition to move ahead in the world were all relevant factors very present in my choreography. In the end, finding the love and the enjoyment of my craft, the real reasons for maintaining a professional career as a "chorus girl," are the feelings that are present at the core of my piece.

Welcome to:

~The Chorus Girl - Moving Through History~

*Please enjoy a beverage on the main floor,
Once the crowd is dispersed, feel free to wander freely.*

Very special thanks to the many people who have helped to make this crazy idea of mine come to fruition. Mom and Dad (John and Inta McCaughey), you've allowed me to take over your house and have helped create the atmosphere; a beautiful performance space. Meghan McCaughey has fed the talent and prepared the evening's refreshments. Uncle Rich has supplied all of the wine, and even stepped up to lend a creative hand. Alex and Carmen Armini helped see my vision come to life, loaning me their wonderful costumes. Dana Kerr helped wherever possible and allowed me to dig through the props department at the Capitol Theatre. Wes Berger has been a wonderful listener throughout much of my journey as a creative artist. He has allowed me to work out my ideas and is a great encourager. Professor Darcey Callison and Carol Anderson have both been great supporters and sounding boards, encouraging me along my journey as an MFA student of Choreography. The York undergrads have happily volunteered their time, Nikolaos Markakis has captured the event on video. The amazing performers seen tonight are highly trained professionals, working as chorus members in Canadian Musical Theatre. Thank you Kalie Hunter-Nero, Jessica Horn, Jennifer Thiessen, Sarah Badham, Breanna Willis, Kristen Dobby, Wendy Lyon and Andrew Taylor for giving me your time and being open and willing to jumping in and be experimental. Your skills and talent have created the world envisioned in my mind and have helped pay homage to the chorus women who have come before us.

Without you this would not be possible!

The Department of Dance & the MFA in Dance present

NEW LIGHT/ ANCIENT LIGHT


Artistic Director: Holly Small
Director of Design: William Mackwood
featuring THE YORK DANCE ENSEMBLE
Artistic Director: Susan Lee

February 10 - 12, 2016 | 7:30pm

MFA Choreographers:
Nikolaos Markakis, Allison McCaughey,
Suma Nair, Michelle Silagy
and new works also by:
Susan Lee, Kiera Shaw, Holly Small

Photo ©Craig Chambers | Dancers: York Dance Ensemble, 2015

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school of the arts, media
performance & design | YORK UNIVERSITY 

- BEYOND THE LINE -

Choreographer	Allison McCaughey
Music	<i>Blow, Gabriel, Blow</i> by Cole Porter, performed by New Broadway Cast recording <i>Sur le fil and La noyée</i> by Yann Tiersen
Lighting Designer	Cole Vincent
Sound Designer	Kevin Feliciano
Costume Designer	Alex Amini, Carmen Amini
Set & Props Construction	Dana Kerr
Voice Over Performers	Heather McGuigan, Jennifer Clare Thiessen, Melanie Mcinenly, Laura Caswell, Jessica Horn
MFA Committee	Darcey Callison, Carol Anderson, Marc Richard
Dancers	Robyn Bedford, Madison Burgess, Natalie Giankoulas, Christina Logan, Kezia Mullings, Emily Rapley, Dakota Stevenson, Teodora Vukaosavljevic

-Beyond the Line- embraces the challenges, traditions and pleasures of the chorus 'girl' in Canada's Musical Comedy industry. Working intimately as an ensemble each chorus member finds her own way to develop character, to stand out, to dance together and to make sense of training that includes jazz, tap, ballet and contemporary dance as well as voice, acting and clowning. The obsession to be perfect, the desire to be 'seen' and the ever-present chant - "the show must go on" - fuels the inspiration and the questions at the heart of this choreography.

Thanks to Carol Anderson, Wes Berger, Darcey Callison, Susan Cash, Kevin Feliciano, Dana Kerr, Susan Lee, William Mackwood, David Outevski, Holly Small, Cole Vincent, Claire Wootten, the YDE dancers and my MFA classmates for your insight in helping to bring this project to life; to my fellow chorus performers — you are my inspiration; and to my family for their unending support and love for me and for my craft.



APPENDIX C

Written Resources

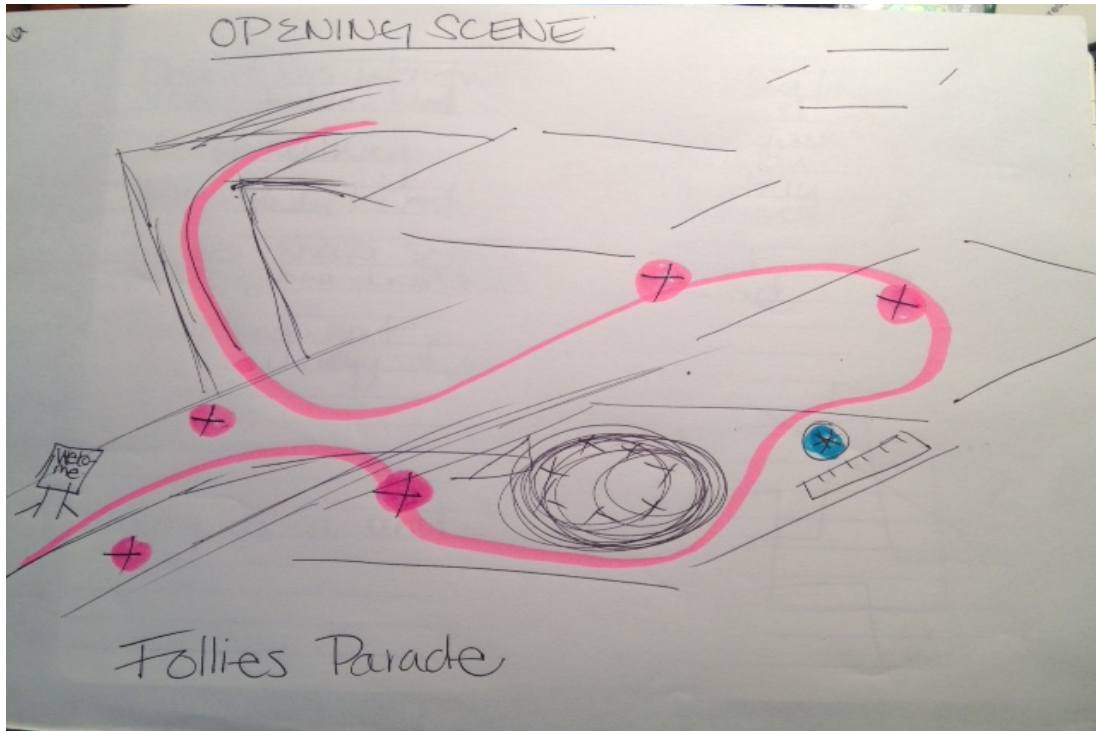
What sticks out to me.

- Constant battle with weight.
- Wondering why I can't book work.
- Relationship failures.
- ~~Constant struggle to find balance~~
- Constant struggle to find balance to do everything (train, make \$, create my own work, actually work)
- Balanced Friends/Relationship/Hamilyg.
- Chorus work has always been a break from "real life" - I get to laugh with friends, live in the country & do what I love.

Role of chorus girl.

Struggle
+
Book work
}}
Body Image.
}}
Not Good
Enough
Not used
to my
Potential
}}
Total Bliss
on stage.

* my work has been a slow grow always doing vastly different & challenging work. Generally with amazing people.



Girl Descriptions:

The Silver Fox-This mermaid style dress hugs the body in all the right places leaving no room for error...don't we all wish we could hug tight to this this ravishing beauty for the night?

The Black Beauty-Flowing with ease and elegance, this beauty would be the perfect accompaniment for anyone wanting a lady to gracefully twirl the night away with.

Pretty with a Pop-Enjoy this fun loving gal. How could you not say no to that smile...and those legs...now that is a good time wrapped up all in one package!

The Sultry Seductress- Seduction is the name of the game, and this gal will have you begging for mercy. Don't mess with her unless you want to spend the evening getting untangled.

The Shining Star- An image to behold...fit for a museum. The sparkles shine as bright as a shooting star....and lucky is the man who can catch this shining stunner.

The Show Goddess- Here we are with this wondrous image of everything that is feminine. Displaying the perfect female form and dressed with lavish theatricality. You'll never want to take your eyes off of this one!

Clear Focuses interesting lines - Robin, Mod

Graph walking

Amy - Emily / Christine

Picture snap shots. helping one another.

Travelling unit

array of women.

working as a unit

Connecting / forgiveness.

Grotesque Angular militarily embrace. hips shirt head.

lined the pictures slow motion

Beauty
 Grace
 Fun
 Love
 Ambition
 Stamina
 Persistence
 Joy
 Privilege

APPENDIX D

Photographs

-Third from the Left-



Photo Credit: David Hou

The Chorus Girl- Moving Through History



Photo Credit: Nikolaos Markakis

-Beyond the Line-





Photo Credit: David Hou