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## Direction of Reflection: The Means by which One Establishes Directorial and Choreographic Proficiency

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DIRECTION OF REFLECTION:  
THE MEANS BY WHICH ONE ESTABLISHES DIRECTORIAL AND  
CHOREOGRAPHIC PROFICIENCY

by

NICHOLAS J. WOOD, JR.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in Theatre Studies  
in the College of Arts and Humanities  
and in The Burnett Honors College  
at the University of Central Florida  
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Thesis Chair: Earl D. Weaver

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# ABSTRACT

## Introduction

I examined how one may establish directorial and choreographic proficiency in the contemporary society of American musical theatre. I did so by completing an examination of five personal observations in my craft. These observations included: (1) Directorship and choreography of *Welcome to Vegas*, an original jukebox musical; (2) Mentorship on Theatre UCF's *Nine* as Assistant Director and Co-Choreographer; (3) Research on the methodologies of various directors and choreographers; (4) Directorship and choreography of *Welcome to Broadway*, an original jukebox musical; and (5) Assistant to the Program Director of Broadway Theatre Project.

I evaluated parallels of my directing and choreography methodologies with those of noted directors and choreographers in the entertainment industry. These industry professionals include famed choreographer Ernest O. Flatt, Ron Field, Hermes Pan, Joe Layton, and Lee Theodore, acclaimed directors Harold Clurman, Dr. Louis E. Catron, and Jon Jory, and prolific director-choreographers Patricia Birch, Donald Saddler, Bob Avian, Bob Fosse, Tommy Tune, and Michael Bennett, as well as Professor Weaver.

I have worked for people who believe that experience alone is enough to make one a successful director, choreographer, or director-choreographer. My experience working with and observations of professional directors, choreographers, and director-choreographers, however, has proven that it takes more than experience alone in order to succeed. I predicted the process of

establishing my own directorial and choreographic proficiency will stem from a combination of inspiration, mentorship, trial and error, and experience.

### Background

A director coordinates and mounts theatrical productions while unifying the script, design elements, and cast to serve the world of the play. By dictionary definition, a director is, "...a person who supervises the production of a show for stage or screen with responsibility for action and rehearsals" (Webster 414). Underneath the producer, the director serves as the apex of the production.

As compared to directors, choreographers fill a more visually aesthetic capacity in musical theatre. A choreographer is "...a person who designs or arranges the movement of a dance" (Webster 259). The choreographer acts in lieu of the director wherever there is music and step sequence. This is the case with exception being given to the director-choreographer. In an interview with Svetlana McLee Grody, Donald Saddler, original member of the American Ballet Theatre, expressed, "...director/choreographers really give a musical a whole concept, a patina of style. Their contribution is a good 40 – 50 percent of the success of the show" (Grody and Lister 16).

### Experiences

I will explicitly reflect on four profound career proceedings. Each will be as an effort to learn to become a better director-choreographer. These observations will chronicle an insightful phase of my learning process.

### *Welcome to Vegas*

*Welcome to Vegas* is an original jukebox musical I authored, produced, directed, and choreographed. It was intended that the production would be a cathartic experience for the audience, allowing them to escape from the confines of everyday life by entering the humorous, loquacious, and musical world of the play. The story chronicles the triumphs and misadventures of a struggling young man in New York. When this waiter-by-day, singer-by-night becomes the opening act of a famous Vegas lounge singer, he embarks on an outrageous and witty journey across America in his Pontiac GTO. The musical's book was written while I attended my first semester at the University of Central Florida. The absurd vignette-style scenes were inspired by the sketch comedy of *The Carol Burnett Show* and the staging of Ernest O. Flatt. The production rehearsed four days per week for nine weeks and utilized a cast of 17 performers who ranged in age from 6 to 67. During production numbers, I drew strongly on the choreographic and visual inspiration of Bob Fosse, utilizing knocked-knees, sickled feet, 1960s movement influence, and a significant use of props, white gloves, fishnet tights, and bowler hats. I used this choreographic and visual concept to create a fervent contrast to the set and costumes, which emulated the visual aesthetics of Stan Lee's comic books.

### *Nine*

With music and lyrics by Maury Yeston and a script by Arthur Kopit, *Nine* is a dark musical based on Federico Fellini's *8½* and catalogues "...the last days of a director's once brilliant career" (Kopit 66). As the Assistant Director and Co-Choreographer, I was mentored by and worked directly under Professor Earl Weaver, Artistic Director of Theatre UCF. Upon entering my apprenticeship, I anticipated an authoritarian relationship where I would serve as a supervisory

assistant, without exploiting my creative skills. To my pleasant revelation, I served as an intimate and integral component of the production's artistic process, conceptualizing choreography, staging three numbers, and giving notes, in addition to the duties of a managerial assistant. I created a choreographic vision for my work by fusing the styles of the Parisian Folies Bergère with American burlesque, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Golden Age movie musicals, and, of course, Bob Fosse's sensual silkiness. I did this while attempting to blend with and compliment Professor Weaver's choreographic style that resided within his world of the production.

### *Welcome to Broadway*

*Welcome to Broadway* is an original jukebox musical I authored, produced, directed, and choreographed. My directorial style was greatly influenced by Professor Weaver, after observing his methodologies on *Nine*. My choreographic style strongly had been inspired by Bob Fosse and Michael Bennett. The production opened and ran for a nearly sold out engagement. My intention for the show was to encapsulate all the magic of the MGM Golden Age movie musicals into 105 minutes, featuring a cast of 25 entertainers, ranging in skill from first production to Equity veteran. My script was highly inspired by the cliché romanticism of Hollywood hits, such as *Casablanca*, *Royal Wedding*, *Holiday Inn*, *The Public Enemy*, and *White Christmas*. The story picks up where *Welcome to Vegas* left off. Michael, the formerly struggling young artist, has now made a name for himself, has inherited a production company, and is about to open his first show on Broadway when things begin to go awry. A jealous, washed-up producer has concocted an outrageous scheme to get rid of Michael on opening night. Chaos ensues behind the scenes, while the show must go on in front of the curtain. My scenic vision was to capture the auspicious spectacle of *Footlight Parade*, *Mary Poppins*, and *Singing in the Rain*. In post-show reflection, I realized my

production displayed some similarities to Susan Stroman's succinct comedic timing and physical humor and Hal Prince's fast, moment-to-moment pace, leading me to believe that, perhaps, I had been subconsciously influenced by their works.

### *Broadway Theatre Project*

Broadway Theatre Project celebrating its 26<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a summer intensive that Playbill.com refers to as "...the world's most prestigious musical theatre arts education program for high school and college students" (Broadway Theatre Project web). Entering my third year with the project, I serve as the Assistant to the Program Director and Director of Public Relations. My contribution is both administrative and creative, as I work directly under Program Director/Music Director David Sabella-Mills, Co-Artistic Director Darren Gibson, and President/Co-Artistic Director Debra McWaters.

Gibson has established himself as a performer and dance captain working with Broadway veteran Ann Reinking on the national and European tours of *Fosse*. In addition, he has staged ballets for the Richmond Ballet, the Boston Ballet, and the American Ballet Theatre. He is currently Education Director for TexARTS. Gibson is an excellent mentor because he has a wealth of knowledge he is willing to share with me. For instance, he has taught me that in order to be an outstanding choreographer, one must look deeper than merely studying other musicals; one must study how/by whom the choreographers of those musicals were initially inspired. By heeding his counsel, I will be able to go from modifying and/or re-teaching others' choreography to establishing my own choreography.

McWaters has had an enviable career directing and choreographing on stages around the world, including Broadway. For 15 years, she served as Assistant then Associate Choreographer for Reinking on *Chicago*, *Fosse*, and *The Visit*. She is an excellent mentor for me because not only is she a disciple of Fosse's, but she has afforded me the opportunity to serve as her Assistant to the Choreographer for three numbers, including staging the original choreography to "Yellow Shoes." This will allow me to analyze and understand the inner workings of a true artistic genius who is seasoned in the craft I wish to pursue.

#### Industry Professionals

Additionally, I will research the styles, methodologies, and philosophies of numerous established industry professionals, including:

##### *Ernest O. Flatt*

Ernest O. Flatt was "a dancer, choreographer and director who won four Emmy Awards for his work in television" (Obituary: Ernest O. Flatt). He made his silver-screen debut as a dancer in *Dancing in the Dark* and his television debut as choreographer in *Your Hit Parade*. He danced with Gene Kelly in *Singin' in the Rain*, choreographed the movie *Anything Goes*, and his dancers were fixtures on *The Judy Garland Show*, *The Entertainers*, and *The Steve Lawrence Show*. Flatt's most lasting television work was for *The Carol Burnett Show*, on which he served as the choreographer for eleven years (Grody and Lister 24). Despite the fact that Flatt is primarily recognized as a television choreographer, I am compelled to study his work because I admire his style. Although it is reminiscent of years gone by, particularly with partnering, his work is still entertaining and holds value for contemporary theatre as classic musicals are being revived.

Studying his work in-depth will serve to enhance my style by showing me how to vary my choreography so the dance numbers do not all look similar. In addition, Flatt believed that allowing the ensemble or solo performer to contribute too much was stifling to his creativity (Grody and Lister 32). On previous productions, I have fallen into this pitfall. Further study of his work will enable me to subscribe to his focus and not be so influenced by what dancers are comfortable doing, as opposed to what they can do in order to expand their personal growth and my growth as a choreographer.

### *Harold Clurman*

One of the three founders of New York City's Group Theatre, Harold Clurman directed more than 40 productions and was nominated for several Tony Awards. In addition, he was a widely-feared theatre critic for over 30 years; he helped to shape American theatre by writing about it. I will specifically study *On Directing*, one of Clurman's seven published works on the art of directing. Elia Kazan, who is commonly referred to as one of the most honored and influential directors in Broadway and Hollywood history, has called this particular book "the most influential book on direction ever written" (Clurman Preface). I would be compelled to study Clurman based on Kazan's recommendation alone; however, I am even more motivated to do so because I am discovering that I closely practice his stated philosophy on directing, "Direction is a job, a craft, a profession, and at best, an art. The director must be an organizer, a teacher, a politician, a psychic detective, a lay analyst, a technician, a creative being...All of which means he must be a "great lover" of the art" (Clurman 14).

By examining the work of a man who is credited with helping to shape American theatre and whose philosophy so closely matches mine, I desire to formally establish my methodology as a director.

### *Jon Jory*

Jon Jory learned to act first-hand from his parents, who were successful Hollywood actors of the 1940's and 50's, earning his Actors' Equity card as a young child. He grew to prominence as a director in the early 60's and, since then, he has mounted over 1,300 professional productions. I will specifically study Jory's *Tips: Ideas for Directors*. Jory says that he worked "making the same mistakes for years that a tip or two by a peer or veteran could have shortcutted" (xiii). His goal with this book is to help directors improve their craft more quickly by passing along the tips he has learned over the years. I am compelled to study Jory because of his willingness to share his tips on what has made him a successful director for approximately one-half of a century spanning nine countries. In addition, he headed the Actor's Theatre of Louisville, Kentucky, for more than 31 years, which he helped to build into one of America's most respected regional theatre companies, earning him a special Tony Award for Achievement in Regional Theatre (Jory xv). Since one of my professional goals is to become an Artistic Director at a regional theatre, Jory is a perfect selection for my research.

### *Bob Fosse*

Deeply inspired by Fred Astaire and coping with his own psychological and physical abnormalities, Bob Fosse created the most unique and stylized iconic movements and vocabularies in musical theatre history. His most lasting works included *Chicago*, *Damn Yankees*, *Cabaret*, *Sweet Charity*, and *Pippin*. Fosse is an eight-time Tony Award-winning consummate artist. Ben

Vereen says, “To have worked with Bob Fosse is to have had your hand directly on the pulse of life. To have applied this world-recognizable style into your repertory is to truly know how to dance forever” (McWaters Foreward). I have had the good fortune of learning his distinct techniques from some of his disciples while studying at Broadway Theatre Project. I am compelled to study Fosse because he was a renowned producer, director, choreographer, playwright, screenwriter, dancer, and actor—all of which are aspirations of mine. According to Vereen, Fosse was often called “demanding,” “strenuous,” and a “task master,” yet he was highly respected by his dancers (McWaters Foreward). Fosse’s ability to earn respect while demanding perfection is a quality I hope to learn and emulate with further study of his work.

### *Tommy Tune*

Tommy Tune, nicknamed Broadway’s tallest tapper, is considered one of Broadway’s most accomplished director-choreographers. He is a 10-time Tony Award winner. “Tommy is the first person in theatrical history to have won a Tony Award in four different categories: Best Featured Actor, Choreography, Best Actor, and Direction” (Grody and Lister 142). At the June, 2015 Tony Awards ceremony, he received a Lifetime Achievement Honor. I am compelled to study Tune’s methodology because he is considered a living legend; he has been a big time showman for over 50 years. In addition, I am compelled to study Tune’s philosophy because he speaks to me with respect to security as an artist. Tune says, “There is no such thing as security. You must always be willing to expect the unexpected because the journey is never what you expect it to be. So be prepared to be surprised” (Grody and Lister 149).

I must learn to trust this philosophy as I face not only the uncertainty of life beyond graduation from the University of Central Florida, but also as I face each door that opens in my future.

### *Michael Bennett*

Michael Bennett's fascination with *West Side Story* was the impetus for Bennett to become a director-choreographer of the standing of Jerome Robbins (Grody and Lister 114). As a director, choreographer, writer, and actor, Michael Bennett is a seven-time Tony Award winner. His choreographic works were highly athletic and engrossed in technique. He is best known for his work on *Promises, Promises; Follies; Company; and A Chorus Line*, and he was fortunate to have had the opportunity to be inspired by such greats as Bob Fosse, Michael Kidd, Ron Field, Lee Theodore, and Danny Daniels (Grody and Lister 114). I am compelled to study Bennett because our early backgrounds are similar: neither of us had dance lessons until we were in our teens, and neither of us could read music, although we both listened to a great deal of it. I am inspired to learn/practice Bennett's methodologies for overcoming these challenges, such as his recommendations to see every musical possible in order to see how good directors-choreographers work and to prepare for a show as far as possible ahead of time (Grody and Lister 101). In addition, I am compelled to study Bennett's technique of compensation when he could not choreograph a number as conceptualized due to the limited skill of the dancer(s) with whom he was working at the time (Grody and Lister 103). Studying and applying these methods and techniques when faced with challenges will enable me to be a better director-choreographer.

### Deduction

It is essential for me to delve into extensive research of directorial and choreographic concepts and pedagogy because I strongly desire to learn the means by which one establishes proficiency as a Director-Choreographer artist. It will help me to answer such questions as: How does one begin to direct/choreograph a piece? How knowledgeable does one need to be

with respect to music? How knowledgeable does one need to be with respect to different forms of dance? What affects one most with respect to choreographing a number? Is there value in working with assistants? Since my study will include not only my own personal experiences and observations, but also those of renowned professionals, it will enable me to formally establish my own unique style of directing and choreographing.

## **DEDICATION**

This research and analysis is dedicated to my mother, father, sister, grandmother, grandfather, aunt, uncle, cousin, almost-grandparents, and dearest confidant, each of whom offer immeasurable support throughout my never-ending pursuit of directorial and choreographic proficiency.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I wish to express gratitude towards my most influential mentors, Dr. Francesca Pratten, Daren Gibson, and above all, Professor Earl Weaver, for the immense directorial and choreographic mentorship they have offered me, motivating me to become a better artist, scholar, leader, professional, and member of society. Their guidance is unrepayable and my legacy will forever be in their debt. I would additionally like to thank Kelly Astro, Denise Crisafi, Professor Kristina Tollefson, and my thesis committee, Professors James Brown, Kelly Miller, and Earl Weaver, for allowing me to transform my occupation into academic enlightenment.

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## INSTINCTS

In order to unlock the potential of the embryonic infrastructure of directing, a director must begin as one of two things, if not both: a theatregoer and a performer. An emerging director must see as many productions as possible, broadening cognition of various production motifs as well as the canon of theatrical literature. As an avid theatregoer, a director may establish the style of theatre they prefer and assess each production by diagnosing what was effective and what was ineffective. Therefore, it is helpful to witness both good and bad theatre, as a lesson in folly holds substantial value in our art form. It is also advantageous for a director to previously have been a performer. As a performer, a director acquires an awareness of actor's spacing upon the stage, character's thought process, tactics of storytelling, the value of projection, theatrical terminology, and the actor's process. Additionally, performing affords a tangible, first-hand illustration of a director's process. By working with as many directors as possible, an actor innately cognizes various directors' strengths and weaknesses working with actors, qualities directors seek when casting, and the manner in which a director attempts to unify the production's design, respect the playwright, engage the audience, and organize the rehearsal process.

The embryonic infrastructure of directing, as referred to previously, is one's instinctual ability to direct. This ability consists of an unevolved, virtually primordial, approach to the craft, where one utilizes principals and tactics which are evoked naturally. The synthesis of organic instincts, familiarity with various motifs and theatrical literature, equilibrium of effective theatre, knowledge of the actor's process, and general sense of spacing and direction, can yield an effective product of theatre, even in its nascent form.

Intrinsic choreographic ability does not stem from such modest roots, however. A choreographer must minimally have: a concrete understanding of bodies and movement; a lust for and remedial knowledge of music; and a freedom within their body. Understanding various qualities and methodologies of movement and the ability of a dancer's body is essential to a budding choreographer's ability. This domain can be greatly enhanced by dance experience, particularly in ballet technique, as ballet is the epicenter of nearly all arranged dance. A choreographer does not need to be a musical theorist or compositional aficionado. In fact, reading music isn't required at all. However, a choreographer must understand rhythm, beats, counts, and the emotional qualities music can simultaneously represent and evoke. A choreographer who does not love music is handicapped by his or her own ineffectuality. A choreographer must listen to as many varieties of music as often as possible. Lastly, a choreographer must possess the ability to cultivate the freedom within one's body in order to unlock their potential for innovation in movement.

Throughout the Spring and Summer of 2014, I amalgamated my understanding of the embryonic infrastructure of directing with my primitive choreographic ability. I authored, produced, directed, choreographed, and headlined in *Welcome to Vegas*. This served as my first step to developing my own directorial and choreographic proficiency.

The concept of *Welcome to Vegas* began as a result of my love for music from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century. The birth of this jukebox musical occurred while listening to *With You*, Jazz singer Paulette Dozier's first album. As the baseline vamp of John Davenport's "Fever" began, I spawned the notion of authoring and directing a show about a smoky lounge singer and her opening act, who is a budding entertainer-by-night, waiter-by-day. In the following weeks, I developed a

playlist including Paulette Dozier's *With You*, as well as hits from *The Jersey Boys*, *Sister Act*, Bobby Darin, Wayne Newton, and Frank Sinatra. I relentlessly listened to this playlist, even while sleeping.

During the following five months, while studying at the University of Central Florida in Orlando, I spent late nights fusing a playlist of 256 songs into a 53-song outline. By the time the semester's final exams rolled around, I hardly had a word on paper. Upon returning home for the summer, it took me a mere eight days to turn a 53-song outline into a two-hour revue of sparkling spectacle and scintillating songs. The story chronicled the triumphs and misadventures of a struggling young man in New York. When this waiter-by-day, singer-by-night becomes the opening act of a famous Vegas lounge singer, he embarks on an outrageous and witty journey from New York to Nevada in his Pontiac GTO.

I contacted Merilee Lawrence, a member of the Board of Directors at the Barn Theatre, the oldest community theatre on Florida's Treasure Coast. I selected Lawrence because I had previously come to her rescue; she was directing a show at the Barn Theatre and had lost one of her male leads in the eleventh hour. She called on me to fill that role, which included a great deal of memorization and staging, with two rehearsals to go prior to the start of technical rehearsal. The show received excellent reviews, so I was confident she would return the favor by giving me some insight as to how to approach the theatre about producing my original work there. She suggested I submit a proposal to their Board of Directors and, after extensive negotiations with the theatre's President, I was contracted to produce the original jukebox musical at the magnificently time-worn venue. Next, I aligned my production and design team and cast the show.

A director-choreographer is only as good as those they associate themselves with; therefore, I knew my design and production team members must be an inventive squadron of collaborators who would be willing to dedicate an exorbitant amount of time into generating the magic of theatre. The hindrance was that this squadron had to be willing to work for free, as I was producing this show with very limited personal finances. Due to the incredible demand of work hours and credible lack of compensation, I had no choice but to become my own publisher, marketing director, master carpenter, and set, prop, sound, and lighting designer. For my associate producer and costume designer, I hired Dr. Francesca Pratten. Dr. Pratten is an accomplished retired artist and director from New York. I utilized my parents and other family members as my backstage crew.

I had not yet been taught to develop a formal production concept prior to the initiation of the design process; however, I had the clear intention of creating a cathartic experience for the audience, allowing them to escape from the confines of everyday life by entering a humorous, loquacious, and musical world of the play. To compliment that objective, my scenic design concept was that the entire play took place in a world which reflected the pop culture comic book art of the early 1960's. This concept utilized whimsical, two-dimensional, and larger-than-life scenic elements with sets which opened and closed like pages of a book. Dr. Pratten's costume design commented favorably on the motif with a sense of satirical 1960's glamour, giving a nod to Elvis Presley in Metro Goldwyn Mayer's *Viva Las Vegas*. Dr. Pratten adorned the showgirls with ten-pound feathered headpieces and shimmering sequined twinsets. The sound design implemented a great amount of underscoring via recorded music, and Hanna-Barbera-style sound effects offered a cartoonlike sensibility. The lighting was bold, bright, and colorful. Light appeared to generate

from both unnatural and natural places, such as lit staircases, marquees, and slot machines. The intentionally-exposed theatre lamps presented a theatricalized and heightened reality.

Though it is unusual and characteristically unnecessary for a director to be able to wear so many hats, it is certainly beneficial for one's toolbox of theatrical capacities. Having experiences in numerous design and production domains allows a director to better understand and communicate with designers and members of the production team. It is imperative for a director to have adequate vocabulary when discussing ground plans with a scenic designer, visual techniques with a lighting designer, or color palettes with a costume designer. Additionally, if a director has worked previously in various production elements, they have a better assessment of the realm of possibility in the art form.

It was by working for a regional casting director that I learned how to properly and professionally run auditions. I cast all featured characters in the production through personal invitation, and only held advertised auditions for the ensemble roles. The final cast included 21 entertainers, ranging in age from 6 to 67, and with performance resumes ranging from first-time-onstage to a former Vegas headliner.

Rehearsals were held six days per week with five-hour weeknight and eight-hour weekend rehearsals. The process was, in a word, daunting. I have taken on many challenges in my life but, to this point, never anything of such exertion. There is a reason professional production and design teams are comprised of over a dozen members. Managing the company seemed improvident at times. Directing a piece with 53 musical numbers, 39 characters, and 28 scenes is no easy task,

particularly while one is operating instinctively with merely an embryonic infrastructure of directing technique.

I staged scenes organically, not pre-planning any blocking, and stimulated collaboration with my actors as much as possible. Many times, I questioned the quality and effectiveness of my staging, but regularly reminded myself to trust my intuition. The spontaneity in my staging bled into my choreography as I created many numbers on my feet, only giving aforesight to the large production numbers. Using my intrinsic choreographic ability, I was deeply inspired by the style of Bob Fosse, as I'd seen in the musical *Fosse*. This style utilized knocked-knees, sickled feet, white gloves, fishnet tights, bowler hats, and a significant use of props, such as canes and bentwood chairs.

Working with my cast was quite difficult at times. Their varying range of experience presented the challenge of balancing their talents to achieve cohesion in scenes. Having only two triple threats in the cast, I had to hand-hold quite often, taking extensive time with nearly every cast member to yield a desired result. Though I am an eloquent speaker and am adept at presenting to an audience of thousands, I suffered with taking suitable control of the room, principally in full company rehearsals. This was partly due to the ranging age of my performers. There was a good portion of the cast who honored me with great respect; however, many of the younger cast members viewed me as a friend and many of the older cast members viewed me as an apprentice. This resulted in a difficult work environment.

The metaphysical environment wasn't the only strange atmosphere, so was the literal environment. Working in a magnificently time-worn venue proved to be quite an experiment in

flexibility. The stage dimensions were drastically different than the dimensions of the rehearsal hall. The wing space was incredibly limited, so set pieces had to be stored in the green room and costume shop then walked upstairs into the wings prior to the scene change where they would make their stage debut. Due to the large size of the cast, there were more costumes than space in the dressing rooms. Therefore, additional dressing rooms were constructed utilizing room dividers and Mylar curtains.

Though the rehearsal process and invited dress rehearsal were rougher than I had hoped, our opening night was a director's dream come true. Nearly everything went exactly how I had intended. There were virtually no dropped lines, every joke landed, the choreography was executed in a crisp manner, and the entire cast performed with such life, inventiveness, and vitality as I had never before seen in them. This resulted in the audience giving an immediate standing ovation. I had never felt prouder or more honored to be aligned with a group of such passionate individuals. That evening I toasted my fellow cast members with the highest praise I could offer. Sadly, the quality of the performances dwindled increasingly from performance to performance. By closing, the show had become a distant image of the production I had directed. Many scenes were ruined by added improvisation, choreography was executed more loosely, and the run time was increased by nine minutes.

Despite the dwindling quality, the show was immensely well-received by the audience. Many season ticket holders glowed, stating this was one of the best, most fun productions they had seen at the theatre in years. After opening night, the run of the show sold out before the second performance. Due to positive audience feedback and a far more than projected successful weekend

in the box office, the theatre warmly expressed an interest in my returning with another original work to debut the following year.

In retrospective reflection of the process and knowing what I know now, there are many things I would have done differently with regard to this production. In pre-production, I would have more accurately and specifically assessed the space in an effort to plan spacing, scene shifts, and quick changes more effectively. With regard to the overall production design, particularly to the set, I should have focused more on specificity. My lack of specificity was also seen in my work with the actor's on character development.

Part of being a good director is having good radar on one's personal strengths and weaknesses, as well as the personal strengths and weaknesses of the cast. Instead of focusing on the strengths of my actors, I focused on my strengths and attempted to project those strengths onto my cast. Organic, non-premeditated direction and choreography is a weakness of mine. I am a left-brain/right-brain thinker with a cerebral constitution; I do not produce my best work through improvisation. I missed an opportunity for grander staging and choreography by not putting time into pre-planning under the guise of the schedule of my other duties on the production. My inexperience as a director was faulted, as my direction was mainly comprised of giving actor's line readings.

In retrospect, the dwindling quality of performances resulted because I had praised the actors so greatly for their performance on opening night that it seemed to them as though they no longer had any more work to do. In doing so, I had unknowingly and unwillingly given them permission to get comfortable to a fault. At first, I found their improvisations humorous and, by

my reaction, I had enacted a downward spiral. I could have been much harder on my cast members and, if I raised the bar higher, they likely would have met it.

I am, however, indubitably proud of my work on *Welcome to Vegas*. Considering my cast of mixed ages and talents, the novel jukebox script, community theatre mentality, and venue limitations, I managed the company admirably, expressly considering I had never been taught direction, mentored to direct, or read a book on directing. Though I would do things differently in reconsideration, I do not lose sight of the production's success in the eyes of the cast, patrons, and theatre. This fusion of the embryonic infrastructure and nascent choreographic ability amiably served as my first step toward directorial and choreographic proficiency.

## MENTORSHIP

One of the most influential components of a director's and choreographer's development is mentorship. As an artist, there is no instruction manual. There is not a singular path which yields triumph of a desired result. Many have amiably attempted to make proclamatory guides on how to direct and choreograph. Though many of these works offer effectively tangible intuition on varying devices, experiences, and methodologies, they serve as more of an insightful frame of reference, rather than an instruction manual on the proper approach to a director's or choreographer's craft. One can read many books on how to hammer a nail; yet, until one picks up a hammer, he is vastly unprepared. Though research and reading is indubitably essential, it is only after a director has a more tangible understanding of his craft that it may become most effectual. Mentorship is the most effective means for a director and choreographer to improve beyond the embryonic infrastructure and intrinsic ability. This tactic offers a firsthand, assertive, and investigational approach to learning, not dissimilar to the manner of the art form.

In February, 2013, I was introduced to Earl Weaver, Associate Professor, Musical Theatre Coordinator, and Artistic Director of UCF's Theatre Department. Upon our first meeting, I was captivated and inspired by Professor Weaver's apparent ruthless ambition. At the time, I had no inclination that he would become the single most influential individual in my collegiate career. The following year, as a junior, I studied under Professor Weaver as a student in his Introduction to Musical Theatre Dance class, striving to become his mentee. By April, 2014, I accepted a position as Professor Weaver's Assistant Director of Arthur Kopit's and Maury Yeston's *Nine*, which would open the following year. An esteemed mentorship was materializing; a mentorship which would propel me far beyond embryonic directorship and choreography.

*Nine* is a concomitantly lively yet dark musical cataloguing “...the last days of a director’s once brilliant career” (Kopit 66). Design meetings began in Fall, 2015. I witnessed Professor Weaver’s process of meticulously and collaboratively crafting a comprehensive concept to drive our production. It was through this process that I learned a director’s primary duty is to possess a vision, then masterfully empower it through development and fruition in all elements of the production. Professor Weaver’s concept was concurrently inspired by the artistic style of Salvador Dali’s surrealism and cinematography of Federico Fellini’s neorealism. This was edifying to me, as I never before would have thought to draw theatrical inspiration from visual art and cinematography. Professor Weaver developed a motif which capitalized on Guido’s, the show’s protagonist, orchestral manipulation of the 21 women in the world of his variegated fantasies and realities, all while remaining true to the playwright’s vision and paying homage to 8-1/2, Fellini’s semi-autobiographical picture of 1963.

Dan Jones, Costume Designer and Costume Shop Manager, exploited the versatility of the little-black-dress. This palette outfitted each woman in all black with a touch of red. Guido was the only exception, as he sported a grey, shark skinned suit, further capitalizing on his central influence throughout the play. Our set, designed by Associate Professor Bert Scott, masterfully and simultaneously encapsulated the sensations of The Coliseum, an art gallery, and a movie theatre set. Large, holographic-looking columns lingered over the canvas-like screens, adorning artwork of notable Italian localities. These rear-lit LED screens served as tonal dynamite for Student Lighting Designer Andrew Mulkey. Mulkey’s design was dynamically cinematic, which was useful to elucidate which moments took place in Guido’s fantasies and which took place in a blurred reality. Professor Weaver spawned the idea of using 22 chairs to symbolize the characters

in a Dalian fashion, while shifting them from scene to scene in a Fellinian manner, as an indication of the play's varying characteristic undercurrents and wavering locations.

After casting, prior to the first rehearsal, my position grew from being solely Professor Weaver's Assistant Director to becoming his Co-Choreographer as well. He entrusted me with two scenes and three musical numbers, including "Folies Bergères," the musical's grandest production number. I had just over two weeks to witness Professor Weaver's directorial craft prior to satisfying the director's seat. Professor Weaver effortlessly commanded the room with an unadulterated, supportive, and firm disposition, evoking veneration and craftsmanship while earning the necessary volume of fearful respect from the cast. Internalizing this, I realized I had been too easy on cast members in past shows I had directed, particularly on *Welcome to Vegas*.

Professor Weaver blocked scenes faster than any director I had previously worked with. He shared his rehearsal philosophy with me; if you give actors a month to learn a show, they will take a month to learn the show. If you give them only a week, they will take only a week. In order to block at such an accelerated rate, Professor Weaver prepared the staging on paper, taught it to the cast, and then made the necessary adjustments to retrofit what worked on paper to be effective on live actors.

As my first night of directing approached, I performed extensive research on the choreographic style of the French *Folies Bergères*, the American *Ziegfeld Follies*, the idiosyncrasies of Tommy Tune, the sexuality of Rob Marshall, and the fluidity of Bob Fosse, all famous Broadway director/choreographers. I experienced great pressure while conceiving this number, as I felt I must concomitantly complement the canon of Professor Weaver's work while

living up to the high expectation placed upon me. Following in Professor Weaver's footsteps, I first choreographed "Folies Bergères," the eight-minute multilayered number, on paper. After testing the choreography on Rachel Butler, my confidant and Dance Captain, I made the necessary adjustments to my written choreography. This preparation was a blatant juxtaposition to my previous choreographic approach.

Professor Weaver bestowed his full trust upon me as he allowed me to work unsupervised while he choreographed "Be Italian," another production number, in another studio as I choreographed my dancers in "Folies Bergères." The process began in a favorable manner; however, within the first hour, I detected a speculative difficulty with three of my dancers. Whether it was distaste for my budding ability or mere lack of dance experience, it was clear three of my dancers required accommodations in order to achieve a desired result. Coping with this difficulty, I did my best to forge on, focusing on the more difficult sections of the number and simply laying the groundwork for the easier segments, which could be plugged in the following night. After rehearsal, I expressed my concerns to Professor Weaver, who both shared my apprehension and supported my judgment. For symmetry and safety purposes, we cut the four most inexperienced dancers from the number. In the following rehearsal, the number was completed and meticulously polished during every opportunity that presented itself.

The second number I choreographed, "Call from the Vatican," was sadly not as satisfying of an experience. Through collaboration with Butler, I had roughly choreographed the erotic chair dance with deliberate gaps in the choreography. I did so with the intent of organically setting segments of the piece to best feature the unique body of the performer. After an hour, Professor Weaver had completed his work in the primary studio, which I was moved into for the last fifteen

minutes of my rehearsal. With him watching me work organically, which has never been a strong suit of mine, a stage manager with an eye on the ticking clock, and a tired performer and understudy, I felt as though I had merely thrown the end of the piece together with the intent of fixing it in a later rehearsal. With the exception of the last 32 counts of the number, I was thoroughly satisfied with the quality of my work and collaborated elements.

On the contrary to how I felt the rehearsal went, my two cast members blatantly disagreed, meeting with Professor Weaver the following day to discuss their dissatisfaction with the rehearsal. Though Professor Weaver fortified me by stating the liability was their own, the instance caused me to begin second-guessing the integrity of my work. Over time, I became harder on my “Folies Bergeres” dancers as a form of overcompensation for my newfound, unjust diffidence in my craft. Due to the apparent effectiveness of my pieces, veneration of my dance captain, and approval of my director, my diffidence dwindled over time.

The disposition of the two dancers who criticized my process served as a small representation of the negative attitude which numerous cast members possessed during this production. Though the entire cast didn't take part in adolescent spitefulness, a few temperamental performers can damage the balance and amicability of an entire cast. Many of these individuals took great pleasure in destructively scrutinizing Professor Weaver's process, expectations, and temperament. These cast members disliked how fast scenes and numbers were staged and choreographed. This criticism showed how vastly unprepared these performers are for working in the professional world. I have been directed by Broadway veterans who have staged entire acts of musicals in merely one rehearsal. Professor Weaver's process moves at an accelerated rate, including the following: (1) Blocking the scene on paper utilizing the libretto and floor plan; (2)

Rapidly setting blocking on the cast, as experimental groundwork; (3) Examining the work by measuring its effectiveness on the performers; (4) Re-adapting the work to better fit the cast and production. This process is an entirely valid, effective, and professional process. It is a process I have since integrated into my work, and it has yielded highly desirable results.

Another common complaint was Professor Weaver's expectations of the cast. In opposition of this viewpoint, Professor Weaver taught me that directors should continually strive to raise the bar higher and higher, for actors will almost always rise to the occasion. His expectations were in no way unethical. He strove to motivate the cast to become more effectual, expressive, efficacious, and expedient professionals. Yes, expectations were high, but hard-working cast members who were attentive and pragmatic blossomed in the process.

The greatest protest was of Professor Weaver's temperament. His eye for perfection and no-nonsense tolerance justly caused him to become frustrated with the cast's work ethic on numerous occasions. Utilizing an exorbitantly stylized scenic design with 22 chairs, Professor Weaver pioneered a cinematic art form which many cast members did not understand. Many saw their primary duty as simply moving chairs around the stage, completely lacking comprehension of the art they were creating. As the cast was onstage for nearly the entirety of the musical, a common frustration was performers becoming unfocused on their craft, one even falling asleep in rehearsal. In addition to cell phone usage and tardiness, Professor Weaver would rightly admonish the cast for their actions. His irritation with unprofessionalism was well-founded. If other strategies of motivation have not worked, it may become necessary for a director to rebuke the cast in order to discontinue bad habits. At times, Professor Weaver would fervidly speak to the cast as a tactic

to help them become better company members. In most instances, this tactic was highly successful, showing me I could be much harder, if necessary, on cast members in future shows I direct.

The only negative result with this approach was with the cast members who were doing their jobs well, yet lacked the self-confidence in their craft to know that Professor Weaver's discourse was not directed towards them. Internalizing every negative note, these cast members began to feel like automatons, afraid to experiment and innovate. As a performer, one ideally possesses the confidence in their craft to know when they are doing well and acting as a professional, understanding which company notes apply to them and which do not. Sadly, a director is rarely fortunate enough to have an entire cast of proficient performers who are confident and secure in their work. In such cases, it may be more effective to single out the cast members at fault, even if it is the majority of the cast, refraining from admonishing the entire room.

Despite the deleterious elements of the process, the production holds fond memories for me, as well as many others. It was immensely and rather astoundingly successful among audience members, earning Professor Weaver and myself Kennedy Center/American College Theatre Festival nominations for Faculty Direction and Student Direction. *Nine* is not an easy production to do. It's cinematic style, non-linear plot structure, dialectic carousel, and neo-realistic dynamics make the production daunting on all levels, from educational to professional. The success of this production was due to Professor Weaver's distinct directorial vision, high expectations, attention to detail, and choreographic mentality. He views the relationship of acting, singing, dancing, scenic shifts, lighting, and sound as a dance, moving elements rhythmically as though all components are a sequence of steps set to a music. Working with him, I learned this methodology, as well as the importance of directorial vision, meticulousness, determination, the importance of continually

raising the bar, and insisting on nothing shy of precision. In addition to preparing me for the next step on my path to directorial and choreographic proficiency, this collaboration is the single most influential stimulus of my directorial and choreographic career to date.

## RESEARCH

Once an emerging director and choreographer has tangible experience and training through practical application, research may be applied. Upon my completion of Theatre UCF's production of *Nine* in March 2015, my mentor, Professor Weaver, urged me to further my craft by writing an undergraduate thesis on directing through the University of Central Florida's Burnett Honors College. Despite my apprehensions, as I never before valued the substance of research within an unorthodox and creative profession, Professor Weaver inspired me to appreciate directing and choreographing as not only an occupation and passion but also as an academic discipline and science.

Stimulated by his counsel, I spent the subsequent months studying educational works which objectify directing and choreographing as a technical and procedural craft, offering insight on varying practices, methodologies, and experiences in theatrical artistic leadership. These works include David Ball's *Backwards & Forewords: A Technical Manual for Reading Plays*, Svetlana Grody's and Dorothy Lister's *Conversations with Choreographers*, Dr. Louis Catron's *The Director's Vision: Play Direction from Analysis to Production*, Harold Clurman's *On Directing*, and Jon Jory's *Tips: Ideas for Directors*.

### Directing

By dictionary definition, a director is, "...a person who supervises the production of a show for stage or screen with responsibility for action and rehearsals" (Webster 414). My study of a director's process may be broken down into seven components: (1) Understanding the job of a director; (2) The required elements to craft directorial vision; (3) Analyzing the text of a play; (4)

The pre-production process; (5) Casting performers; (6) Blocking scenes; (7) Working with performers.

### *Duties*

Jon Jory, a prolific Tony Award-winning director who has mounted over 1,300 professional productions, feels a director hold the most influential artist role in any production.

When asked what directing is, Jory replied:

The director delivers the story of the play clearly, evocatively, and emotionally to the audience using theatrical means. The director assists the actor in framing character and relationship so that the narrative's points are made. The director reveals meanings in the text based on the author's intent and his or her own response to the play. The director melds the visual world of the play and the intended meaning to give the audience a complete experience. The director assures a creative atmosphere for the work and manages time to create the best result. The directors, designers, and actors are a creative team with clear collaborative goals. Everything else is rehearsal. Now doesn't that sound simple? (Jory xvi)

According to Harold Clurman, a distinguished director of over forty notable Equity productions, and commonly referred to as one of the most honored and influential directors in Broadway and Hollywood history:

Direction is a job, a craft, a profession, and at best, an art. The director must be an organizer, a teacher, a politician, a psychic detective, a lay analyst, a technician, a creative being. Ideally, he should know literature (drama), acting, the

psychology of the actor, the visual arts, music, history, and above all, he must understand people. He must inspire confidence. All of which means he must be a “great lover” of the art. (Clurman 14)

Dr. Louis E. Catron, a theatrical theorist and former professor of directing at the College of William and Mary, stipulated that a director’s job is comprised of five main functions. A director’s first function is to achieve artistic unification. This may be done by analyzing and interpreting the play while unifying the designer’s interpretations and guiding performer’s artistic intentions. Second is to respect and represent the playwright. This may be done by a director respecting the author’s work by handling it with care and veneration. If possible, a director should work with the playwright. The third responsibility is to represent the audience. This may be done by clarifying communications of story and intentions while eliminating distractions. Fourth is organization. In order to create art, a director must organize a functional working process. This can be accomplished by making definitive decisions, overseeing all elements of the production in a thorough yet concise manner, keeping an eye on the budget, developing and following a structured schedule, and casting professional performers who can positively contribute to the process. The fifth and final function of a director is perhaps the most difficult, working with performers (Catron 17-24).

### *Vision*

Conflict is essential in all entertainment and literature as nearly our entire life is comprised of conflict, from presidential debates on television to the friction of our shoe pressing against the pavement as we walk. In theatre, it is an incompatibility between two or more entities, with differing principals, beliefs, interests, or viewpoints. Without conflict there is no tension, therefore

there is no drama and theatre is solely drama, even if it is comedic. Emotion is the main proponent of theatre as it may be leveraged as the audience's empathetic association to the characters. This paves the way for heightened emotional and intellectual involvement. Entertainment is what audience members seek. Though theatre may be didactic and poses a propagandistic quality, a story can only enlighten if it can engage, and it can only engage an audience if it can entertain them. Dramatic action occurs when the people of the play actively interface with each other in a progressive manner which accesses the plot. According to Dr. Catron, once a director understands a play's conflict, emotion, entertainment value, and dramatic action, they may efficaciously craft a vision of a production (Catron 5-10).

### *Script*

When analyzing a play, it is helpful to keep in mind the six key principles of Aristotle's *Poetics*. These principles include plot, character, thought, diction, melody, and spectacle. Plot is the play's structure of events which rise and fall within the confines of the play. These events may be thought of as the series of proceedings and circumstances which provoke elevation of the play's story. Characters, in fundamental terms, are the people of the play who are affected by the story's conflict. Thought is both the character's process of forming an opinion as well as a script's overall conviction and methodology. Diction is a style of enunciation and quality of speech which reflects character. Melody is the music of the play. This includes all auditory aspects, including spoken voices, singing, instrumentation, and sound effects. Spectacle refers to the visual aspects of a production, including the set, props, lighting, costumes, blocking, and choreography (Aristotle). Understanding these elements affords one an infrastructure upon which a script may be dissected and analyzed.

David Ball, a former professor of playwriting at Carnegie-Mellon University and Artistic Director of the Pittsburgh Metropolitan Stage Company, acknowledges examining plays as a three-part process. The first part is understanding a script's shape. In order to do this, one must dissect what happens that makes something else happen, then what happens next, as dramatic action occurs when something happens that permits something else to happen. Additionally, one must understand the principles of stasis versus intrusion while appreciating and identifying the play's obstacles, conflicts, ignorance, and theatricality. The second concept of script analysis is ascertaining the play's varied methods. To do so, one must comprehend the play's principles of exposition, forwards, characters, image, and theme. Ball defines the third part of his process as is tricks of the trade. These elements include scrupulously unearthing the play's background information, trusting the playwright, identifying both metaphorical and literal families, avoiding the generality of mood rather by perusing atmosphere, elucidating individuality, notating eras, defining the climax, and rereading avidly (Ball).

Thorough script analysis is crucial to a director's process. Jory feels that one must understand what sort of play they are directing so they may incorporate the appropriate tools in their staging and vision. Only through script analysis may a director find the best way to tell the playwright's story (Jory 30-42).

### *Pre-production*

Entering the pre-production process, the director must first compose and release his vision statement to the production team and designers. Then he or she may begin to collaborate, crafting the design and unifying the vision of the show. During this process, the director will continually communicate with the producer and artistic director while joining forces with the stage

management team, choreographer, fight director, dramaturge, marketing department, prop master, as well as the set, costume, lighting, and sound designers. This will usually happen through a series of pre-production, design meetings (Jory 44-59).

During the pre-production process, the director should craft a prompt book. This working platform for the director to craft includes the script with notated line interpretations, tempo guides, blocking, and technical production data. It may be helpful to highlight in various colors to indicate significant elements and differentiate lighting, sound, and curtain cues as well as entrances and exits. Directors who leave this work to the stage managers are vastly *ad libitum* and unprofessional, as all directors should have their own fully-functioning play script to serve as their bible during a rehearsal process. A thorough prompt book includes dramaturgical information, the identification of and relationships between characters, audition data, the ground plan, lists of characters by scenes, a working rehearsal schedule, business matters, a daily journal, and goals for the next rehearsal (Catron 142-147).

### *Casting*

As Clurman once advised his students, “Cast good actors—and you’ll all be good directors” (Clurman 64). This statement is more than a witty remark as it bares ironic truth. In a personal interview with Duncan Stuart, a New York City casting director responsible for casting the current Broadway revivals of *On The Town*, *Pippin*, *Chicago*, and *The Radio City Christmas Spectacular*, it was said that casting is similar to painting a picture. The play serves as the canvas while the auditionees serve as the various tubes of color. A producer, director, and casting director work together to masterfully select the colors, or actors, which they will utilize to create their artwork. To do this one must keep an open mind and experiment, blending together many types,

shapes, sizes, colors, and vocal qualities. Eventually, after extensive experimentation to find the colors of each character, a cast will emerge (Stuart).

Jory states that a director should “Cast for interior process and exterior technique” (Jory 2). William Redfield, a stage and screen veteran of *Our Town* and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, as well as a founding member of New York’s Actor’s Studio, concurs with Jory and stresses the importance of a professional audition process, down to the specificities of registration, greeting actors, and only leaving the houselights half lit. While running auditions, it is important to create a professional and open environment so actors, singers, and dancers may professionally demonstrate their craft:

Most actors have learned to “perform” at auditions in order to reassure producers, directors, and authors who are normally more terrified than the actor himself, if the actor could only so realize. But such “performances” are parodies, and the director who does not invite them will be given a great deal more. (Redfield 6)

Dr. Catron suggests that auditions should be properly advertised, and scripts and informational packets should be available four to five weeks prior to the audition so performers may prepare. There should be at least two or three assistants in the lobby to greet performers, facilitate paperwork, answer questions, and escort them into the audition hall. A director should take meticulous notes during each audition, as specific comments are necessary to ascertain and remember strengths and weaknesses. Headshots and resumes are most helpful as they will allow a

director to remember the face and audition of person whose name the name they wrote on paper (Catron 156-157).

Jory offers prudent insight on when to refer to an auditionee's resume. In Jory's opinion, the resume is worthless if you are uninterested in the performer; however, if you're considering hiring the person, it may be a good time to consult their resume. If you're considering the person for a major role, it is helpful to know if they have carried major roles before. If you're considering them for a comedy, it is best to cast someone with comic credits as many good actors lack comedic timing. Consulting the resume is additionally helpful if you're unsure whether or not to call an individual back. If they have worked with someone you know and respect, you may consider giving them a chance. When selecting material for the actor to read, a director must see actors handle what is most pertinent to the role they are auditioning for as well as their capability of handling difficult material, such as rage, emotional outbursts, and large monologues. Jory feels a scene should be a page and a half or less, which should be distributed to the actor at least three days prior to their callback for optimal results. When the actor is reading the material and endearingly asks if he may direct the material to the casting table, the director should always respond with a charming and respectful "no." When it comes to choosing a final cast, he suggests placing the actor's pictures into three piles: yes, maybe, and no. It is important to trust one's gut and not second guess casting choices as extended consideration can talk a director out of their best choice (Jory 2-14).

### *Blocking*

Dr. Catron infers a director translating their vision into blocking is similar to an animated movie consisting of stopped-action frames. In each frame, the animator, or in our case director,

utilizes each frame to compose an aesthetically pleasing arrangement of space and placement which depicts character and story while incorporating physical actions. This composition is referred to as blocking. While blocking, a director must respect the significance of movement as the most tangible way to tell the story of a play while visually illustrating attitudes, relationships, and dramatic conflict (Catron 246-248). When blocking, it is important to recall the four principles which should govern stage movement:

(1) Movement attracts the audience's attention; (2) Movement is not permitted unless it is, and appears to be, motivated by the character's drives; (3) Movement communicates a sense of the style of the play, of the director, and of the character; (4) Movement must be organic, plausible, possible, probable, and true to the logic of life, the play, and the character. (Catron 250)

In order to focus attention, a director should block scenes using dominant areas of the proscenium arch stage, including downstage and upstage center. From greatest to weakest in prominence, the six areas of the proscenium stage include downstage center, upstage center, downstage right, downstage left, upstage right, and upstage left. Body positions include full front, full closed, three-quarters open right, three-quarters open left, profile right, profile left, three-quarters closed right, and three-quarters closed left. These positions may be used to illustrate characters using, sharing, giving, and taking the stage. Crossing is a standard function for breathing life into the staging while counter crossing helps balance the composition of character's special arrangement. While blocking, a director should be sure to keep actors away from furniture during significant moments so they do not become ineffectual. Levels are an effective tactic to control focus and indicate power. Triangles and asymmetry are innately visually appealing to the audience.

As much as it is favorable to block a scene on paper prior to rehearsal, a director must expect his or her blocking to change and develop throughout the rehearsal process (Catron 263-286).

### *Performers*

The director must initiate working with performers by beginning the first rehearsal with offering opening remarks of vision and expectations, introducing the designers and their designs, allowing the dramaturgy to orient the cast on the world of the play, allow stage management to take care of housekeeping, and, most importantly, establish leadership from the first moment. This initial impression of leadership may be established by knowing the names of all involved, knowing the script better than anyone else, offering useful insight, following a schedule, and having or finding an answer to all questions (Jory 62-66). A good process may subsequently begin with table work. This allows the director to guide their cast through proper assessment of character, plot, and innovation before the noise, froth, movement, and psychological miscellany of rehearsal make discovery more difficult. Effective table work is unpretentious and organized. It cannot be faked or approached in a vein of directorial egomania. This opportunity to ask questions, view the work as a whole, focus on relationships, and unearth subtext, is the director's most viable method of relating moments to the cast (Jory 68-76).

Actors must be allowed to engage their imagination and innovate for themselves while still achieving a director's vision. It may be thought of as creation under a microscope and must be handled properly and delicately so the actor may maintain a level of artistic freedom while the director may evoke the desired result (Catron 216-223). During the rehearsal process, it is imperative to steer the actors to incorporate an appropriate and effective tempo, rhythm, and pace (Catron 287).

Jory feels while working with performers through a rehearsal process, a director must assess what the actor wants, point out acting traps, respect the actor's time, ask questions, keep a constant radar on a scene's pulse, talk with the performers and not at them, not give line readings unless absolutely necessary, constantly refer back to the given circumstances, implore the actors to think with their brain while engaging their bodies, turn obstacles into assets, heighten the energy of the cast, handle problems, and never give up (Jory 118-153).

A director creates an emotional bond with the play and performers over the duration of a rehearsal process. Austin Pendleton, an internationally acclaimed director, actor, and Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright, famous for his work in *Fiddler on the Roof*, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, and *Mother Courage and her Children*, summarized this relationship well. In a personal interview, he stated, "It's fickle. You live with the script, you labor with the personae every day, the process overruns your life, then suddenly, miraculously, you're forced to let it go and let be. It's like parenting a baby bird and throwing it out of the nest" (Pendleton).

### Choreography

By definition, a choreographer is "...a person who designs or arranges the movement of a dance" (Webster 259). My study of this process may be broken down into seven components: (1) Commentary on choreographers versus director-choreographers; (2) The process which one implements while initially producing choreography; (3) Inception of choreographic vision; (4) A choreographer's relationship to music; (5) Which elements most greatly influence choreography; (6) Varying associations with assistants; (7) Versatility in styles of dance.

*Commentary*

As professed by Patricia “Pat” Birch, a Drama Desk, Emmy, and Tony Award-winning director and choreographer, the practice and craft of manufacturing and manipulating choreographic art may be simultaneously the most mentally daunting and physically rewarding process which an artist can experience (Birch). Donald Saddler, a Tony Award-winning choreographer responsible for works such as *No, No Nannette*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *Wonderful Town*, felt choreography is the art of capturing a moment and riveting an audience. He thought of dancing as method of communication. If one is attempting to communicate how it is to be a drunken sailor, he must be sure that every movement says something about that character. Saddler learned early on never to gesture without reason. He acknowledged individuals who both direct and choreograph as superlative, giving a musical a holistic concept as a patina of style. He felt their contribution is a good 40% to 50% of a show’s success (Grody 14-20).

Joe Layton, a choreographer of renowned works including *The Sound of Music*, *George M*, and *Barnum*, did not start out as a choreographer. Ever since he was a child, he possessed an urge to direct, idolizing the craft on staging and character development. Layton felt when one merely choreographs a show, they must answer to the director and compliment the director’s style. Conversely, when one is directing and choreographing, they only answer to themselves, offering a unique opportunity to have sole influence on the production’s style. He did not feel that he approached choreography differently as a director-choreographer. He appreciated the importance of being surrounded by strength, such as a strong music director and stage manager, and was certain that a choreographer should never be surrounded by weakness. Layton considered himself to be a stager; choreography is more concerned with steps, whereas staging is more concerned

with the overall picture. He viewed choreography as a vehicle of inspiration, listening meticulously to his cast's opinions. Many times cast members have good ideas, which he interpreted and used. He found the cast often inspire him to go one step further and, if he did, the cast would go one step further (Grody 52-63).

Michael Bennett, a seven-time Tony Award-winning choreographer responsible for works such as *Promises, Promises, Follies, Company*, and *A Chorus Line*, felt director-choreographers have a great deal of power with respect to creativity. He stated a director-choreographer has the most power when he or she is a producer as well, since the one with the money decides everything from the opening to the closing of the show. Bennett believed the key to working with performers was being able to handle people. He felt that trait was more important than the ability to choreograph. One must require the ability to inspire people, to work with them, and to create an atmosphere that is not a snake pit. The best work comes from a room full of trust and love (Grody 111-113).

#### *Creation*

Tommy Tune, a ten-time Tony Award-winning actor, singer, dancer, producer, director, and choreographer, prepared his choreography ahead of time and stuck with it when he was a budding artist. He did not break from this frame until he had developed his choreographic imagination. This made him feel in control and allowed him to conduct rehearsals feeling like a much older professional. Tune is best known for his artistic work on *Nine, Grand Hotel*, and *The Will Rodgers Follies*. As he gained experience, he did his research and then composed a more general idea, leaving himself open to the changeability of it all. Instead of making his own

statement, he was pulling the statements from each individual with whom he worked (Grody 142-154).

Bob Avian, a Broadway producer, director, and choreographer, feels, depending on the individual show, number, or star, it is impossible not to prepare choreography ahead of time. He cognizes that the first thing a choreographer must do is develop a concept and understand what he wants to accomplish with a piece. Once this has been done, the steps may be predominantly improvised, especially with the more experience an artist has. In his early days, Bennett said that he would be in pre-production six weeks prior to working with dancers in rehearsals (Grody 100-101).

When Ron Field, well-known for his work on the revivals of *Anything Goes*, *On The Town*, and *Peter Pan*, choreographed the original Broadway production of *Cabaret*, for which he won his first Tony, he utilized a revolutionary process. First, he imagined he was a choreographer in 1931 for the Kit Kat Club, a seedy underground club in wartime Berlin. Then he imagined a back story for each one of the girls, allowing their individualistic personalities to alter their movements so they seldom moved in unison. Legendary Emmy, Oscar, and Tony Award-winning director-choreographer Bob Fosse did the exact opposite when he choreographed the film of *Cabaret*. Fosse rehearsed the performers playing his Kit Kat girls up to 16-hours-per-day, so every pinkie was exactly in place—each one became a Fosse incarnation on the soundstage—which gave the show a definitive and immensely operative style. Though these extreme methodologies of creation were exceedingly dissimilar, both ways worked effectively and earned accolades (Grody 81-82).

Hermes Pan, choreographer of *Follow the Fleet*, *Blue Skies*, and *Finian's Rainbow*, began his choreographic process by studying his production's script and score extensively. Pan created organically, rarely pre-planning his choreography and design concepts. He was often noted for going into production meetings in a panic, as he rarely knew what he is going to do (Grody 2-3).

Lee Theodore, a choreographer known for her work on *Flora the Red Menace*, *Baker Street*, and *Apple Tree*, began forming her work by studying the script and absorbing herself in the musical's characters. While doing so, she made her primary objective to expand dramatic story through choreography. Unlike Pan, she believed the more prepared a choreographer is, the more she may improvise subconsciously. She felt it was vitally important to research everything available on a musical's style, including books, music, and photographs. Once, while working on *The King and I* with legendary choreographer Jerome Robbins, Robbins supplied books on Siamese dancing, as well as particular Siamese dancers (Grody 66-77).

Saddler proclaimed respectable choreography begins with research. If he was working on a period piece, he performed all the research he could about that period, including what people wore, what people ate, what popular entertainment was of the time, how individuals conducted themselves, what societal morals were, if the culture was religious or secular, and what kind of music was played then. He felt extensive research unlocks an authentic a style which should be incorporated into as many elements of the dancer's physicality as possible. Attending college for journalism, Saddler recalled the most important thing he was taught about writing a story was the importance of knowing an in-depth explanation of who, what, when, where, and why. He used this procedure as a guide to his choreography. As with most people, Saddler's first reaction to something was emotional, and he did trust his instincts (Grody 14-20).

Similarly to Saddler's methodology, Layton believed in research prior to choreography. When choreographing *Barnum*, he didn't read about P. T. Barnum but rather completed holistic research on circus arts. He thought he could not choreograph anything unless he had a firm grasp of the era, society, and script. Knowing the libretto allowed him to discover characters' idiosyncratic intentions. By the time he instituted this process, the number was almost entirely choreographed in his head (Grody 61-62).

Field hardly practiced any research and personally owned few books. He gained much of his knowledge being raised by his unconventional family, a tribe of circus performers, in the bowels of various theatres since the age of eight. He lazily approached pre-production preparation, wishing to have changed his ways but never being able to do so. His lack of preparation caused him to improvise a great deal, which subsequently became his procedural strong-suit. Field began to choreograph by first considering the performer for which he was choreographing. If it were a headliner, such as Chita Rivera or Liza Minnelli, he tried to get her talent into his system, attempting to bring his choreography to a point where, if Rivera or Minnelli were choreographing themselves, his work is what they would produce (Grody 82-91).

Ernest O. Flatt, choreographer of the *Carol Burnett Show*, felt the necessary level of developing choreography prior to rehearsals solely depended on the cast with whom the choreographer is working. If a choreographer is working for an accomplished dancer such as Gwen Verdon or Chita Rivera, pre-planning was less important as it was imperative to create the choreography which emphasized the strengths of the notable performers, best showcasing their skills. On the other hand, if the performer is not a notable dancer, pre-planning choreography will yield superior results (Grody 25).

### *Visualization*

According to Tony Award-winner, Donna McKechnie, star of Broadway's *Promises, Promises, Company*, and *A Chorus Line*, choreographers first conceive the imagery of their work in varying manners. Some see patterns and steps in their mind, whereas some need bodies in the space. Some choreographers, such as McKechnie's greatest mentor, Bennett, see an abstract movement of a number in their mind's eye then use bodies to solidify their vision (McKechnie). Bennett would get to a point where he could not visualize a number in his head anymore, and it became necessary to utilize dancer's bodies in order to perfect his work. For example, while working on *Coco*, where everyone was staged individually and then, at times, became dancers in similar patterns, Bennett would use a ladder where he had a better overall view so he could build the patterns with the dancers (Grody 101).

Pan, like Bennett, saw patterns without bodies and later adapted these patterns to bodies. As for the steps, he tried to move as the dancer (Grody 4). Saddler said if it was a big production, he studied the set to see how inventively he could use that space. He loosely set the patterns in his mind, not locking them in until he was working with the dancers. He did this because one dancer may have a particular quality which may inspire an entirely new pattern or inspiration of a given number (Grody 17-18). Unlike the others, Theodore believed everything is visualized in choreography (Grody 69).

### *Music*

Though Pan couldn't read music, he understood it in a naturalistic form, having a nearly perfect sense of meter and pitch. He felt if he didn't, he wouldn't have been able to dance, much less choreograph. He stated the most important thing for a dancer to have is a respectable understanding of music and rhythms (Grody 6). Field could not read music or play an instrument

either (Grody 87). Likewise, Theodore fell short of being able to read a score. Her musical understanding was a result of her adolescent exposure to varying style of music. She believed choreographers should have a sophisticated appreciation of music and visual arts, stating, “If he doesn’t feed himself, he really just runs dry after he’s done his dances for his first show” (Grody 71).

Tune does not consider himself knowledgeable when it comes to music. He cannot read scores, nor can he play any instrument, other than his tap shoes. He has a good ear, though, and learns fairly quickly by ear (Grody 146). Bennett did not read music, either. He considered himself lucky to have inherited an intuitive ear in terms of melody and rhythms. Bennett felt that one must have a good listening ear and listen to a lot of music all the time (Grody 103).

On the other end of the spectrum, music theory was ingrained in Layton’s dexterity. He was a music major at an arts school. This attribute helped him communicate with musicians and afforded him the ability to consult the score (Grody 58). Though Saddler could not read sheet music as proficiently as Layton, he could masterfully play piano by ear. His musical wherewithal afforded him the ability to figure out a score, however. He understood it is beneficial for a fledgling choreographer to have music theory, though it is more important that a choreographer is musical (Grody 17).

Music is the epicenter of a choreographer’s art form and may be leveraged for explicit choreographic inspiration. Field listened to music incessantly, tuning his ear to the styles and rhythms of new music. He did so to remain innovative, not wanting to become choreographically monotonous, using the same steps repetitively (Grody 87-88).

### *Influence*

Pan felt the mentors and people one works with have the greatest influence on the choreography one can produce. He found it difficult to work with people who do not understand one's style or cannot perform to one's expectations (Grody 6-7). Bennett concurred, being notably influenced by the standards of Broadway legend Jerome Robbins. Robbins had the incredible ability to craft each show as if he was somebody else. He took great care to ensure that the style of each of his works did not resemble that of any other of his works. This can be seen in the differences in style between *Fiddler on the Roof*, *West Side Story*, *Gypsy*, and *High Button Shoes*. They are all wonderful shows, yet completely unique in style. Likewise, this individuality was seen in Bennett's work. A lot of his dances were influenced by the staging in old movies. He recommended that budding choreographers see every musical they can in an attempt to see how exceptional choreographers work (Grody 111-117).

In Saddler's opinion, the greatest influence on choreography is the amalgamation of music, story line, space you have to work with, and characters. He strongly felt the character is the most influential element, as seen in Bennett's *A Chorus Line*. Each dancer has his or her own character, so even when they fall into concerted movements, the audience may feel as if there is another heart beating there. As a reflection of this, Saddler looked for dancers who really loved to dance and were innately musical, striving to communicate through their dancing (Grody 19).

Layton was most influenced by the characters, though he felt space came in as a close second (Grody 59). Flatt believed choreography is most influenced by space, as the set dictates whether a cast has a lot of space, a little space, or no space at all (Grody 32). Tune was a scenic designer in college long before he was a choreographer, so he traditionally considered space first.

In fact, he still takes great care to fill the entire space. For example, in *The Club*, he used a narrow runway into the audience called a joy plank. The reviewers thought it was fabulous how well he used the terrible space. As Tune matured, however, he has come to realize that storyline and characters, which overlap, are the most influential elements to a choreographer's work (Grody 148).

Bennett believed the most influential element to a choreographer is music. He saw music as being as important as knowing the abilities of a production's dancers, as a choreographer may not be able to choreograph a number as it was originally conceptualized. In such situations, Bennett suggested compensating by having some dancers dance off stage or freeze during a song. He further proposed staging complimentary movement for some to do while more capable dancers perform the original choreography as conceptualized (Grody 104).

According to Theodore, sometimes choreographers are charged with the task of creating and expanding numbers for the rising star, such as her work choreographing for Liza Minnelli in *Flora the Red Menace*. She states that if a choreographer is lucky, they will have a star who dances and gain inspiration creating a vehicle for them. Theodore felt the working theatre choreographer must be influenced by music, storyline, space, and characters. She further commented a choreographer's cast is their fate. If a dancer doesn't have a good sense of timing or rhythm, it is impossible to work with them, and no inspiration will be founded in collaboration with them. She said one unconsciously uses everything around them as inspiration. She recalled that Robbins, her sister-in-law's Godfather, once confessed to her he watched a lot of cartoons as a child and his choreography evolved from them. Cartoons make the bodies do some impossible things. Sometimes the dancers could do it, and sometimes not (Grody 66-77).

### *Assistantships*

Tune prefers to work with co-choreographers, specifically with someone who possesses strengths he does not possess. He likes to align himself with someone who balances him. He feels creation is four-fifths collaboration (Grody 149). Similarly, Bennett claimed to have never worked a day in his life alone. Bob Avian was Bennett's long-time assistant choreographer. Bennett's strengths included ballet and contemporary while Avian's strengths included tap and jazz. Together, they made one great choreographer (Grody 111). Saddler, too, relied on an assistant choreographer as a sounding board; sometimes choosing specialists in a particular style, such as tap, which was a personal weakness of his (Grody 20).

Theodore preferred to work with an assistant to try things. She carefully chose an assistant based on the project she was working on. For one show, she hired an assistant who had a black belt in martial arts, feeding his knowledge into her work (Grody 75). Pan found it important to have a good assistant who was pliable (Grody 8). Likewise, Flatt worked best with an assistant he could design movements on. That assistant could help him instruct the other dancers (Grody 33).

Layton always used an assistant who danced the style of the particular show, and then he would choreograph on him or her. Unlike Bennett with Avian, Layton did not stick to the same assistant on each of his productions. He alternated assistants so his productions would not look similar. He hated to give his assistants a title, as he merely longed for a masterful dancer to create on, such as the canvas to a painter (Grody 52-60).

On the contrary to the mass consensus, not all choreographers utilize assistants. Field worked singlehandedly until the last three years of his career. He seldom allowed the assistant to do anything but clean-up numbers on rare occasions (Grody 90).

### *Versatility*

Flatt recognized in order to survive as a commercial choreographer, one needs the knowledge of many dance forms in order to stay relevant, continue to innovate, and keep working in this ever-changing industry. He found the greatest foundation to be in ballet. Flatt stated that his form of jazz drew a lot from Latin dance styles, mostly in terms of partnering, as the male is so important in Spanish dance. He speculated Fosse's and Bennett's jazz was largely influenced by disco and rock music (Grody 36).

Pan felt that versatility in style was the key component to a choreographer's craft. He believed a dancer and choreographer needs to know a little bit about all forms of dance, particularly classic ballet, modern ballet, tap, rhythm, eccentric, and comedic. He said that an artist never knows what he or she will have to use in their varied bodies of work. Interestingly, Pan never took a dance lesson in his life. He started as a singer in the chorus and learned to dance from watching the dancers in the show and practicing the moves on his own (Grody 9). Saddler, on the other hand, had formal training in classical ballet. He studied numerous dance forms independently as he knew he ultimately wanted to choreograph and should be able to do a little bit of everything (Grody 22-23).

Layton firmly believed a successful dancer and choreographer must begin with ballet. After ballet is mastered, choreographers should learn whatever they can. The more one learns, the more one knows. The more one knows, the more one may use (Grody 62). Theodore concurred that a choreographer's skill must begin with ballet. Her rationale was due to ballet's 500-year legacy. She felt this form of dance was meant to develop the maximum ability of dance and movement (Grody 77). Tune sees ballet as a must, as it is the foundation of all choreographed movement and

is what makes all other forms look visually appealing. To him, tap is next most important style, as it is what makes dance sound good and become a form of instrumentation. He views jazz as more of a style than a technique, whereas all show dancing is ballet, a technique, no matter what one calls it (Grody 147).

Field believed it was important to have a great deal of versatility in dance. Although, he said that when he "...stopped to think about it, Fosse never took ballet, was kind of turned in, and was kind of this hooking type jazz dancer. But it's real clear, and I can trace Fosse's career and see the changes in his style" (Grody 93). Bennett recommended receiving as much dance training from an early age as one could receive, although Avian didn't take a single dance until he was in college (Grody 117).

## APPLICATION

In the summer of 2015, I produced, directed, and choreographed my original production of *Welcome to Broadway*. While doing so, I synthesized my developing knowledge of the embryonic infrastructure of directing, as established during my work on *Welcome to Vegas*, with the practical methodologies I learned through my mentorship with Professor Weaver on *Nine*, and my scholastic research on manifestos, philosophies of theatrical theorists, and viewpoints of industry professionals. Integrating these principals, I discovered experimentation, my next step on the road to directorial and choreographic proficiency. This step utilizes practical application of applied experience, learnings, and research to begin to form one's own directorial and choreographic style.

The pre-production sector of *Welcome to Broadway* occurred in a wildly unorthodox manner. After the enormous success of *Welcome to Vegas* the previous year, I informally agreed to mount another original work at The Barn Theatre in Stuart, Florida. Before developing a remedial concept of a plot, I submitted a production proposal to the theatre. I could sense how strongly they wanted me to return for monetary and public relations benefits. I understood that I had the upper hand with more room to negotiate than I had the previous year. Working underneath Professor Weaver, I learned that one is only as powerful as he acts, and if you talk the talk and walk the walk, you will instantly command the room. I integrated this methodology into my proposal and meeting with the Barn Theatre's Board of Directors, thoughtfully demanding 50% of the profits (rather than the previous 33%), permission to advertise the show in all their publications and prior to each of their season performances, as well as use of materials from their furniture and prop storage. I did not budge on my terms, though the theatre attempted to negotiate in pursuit of a compromise. After playing hardball for nearly two months, I received all the terms and conditions

I set forth. However, I found myself in a predicament similar to Guido Contini's situation in Arthur Kopit's *Nine*. I had a contract, a theatre, and a title, yet no script or plot.

On August 24, 2014, while riding The Great Movie Ride, a partially live and partly animatronic attraction at Disney's Hollywood Studios in Lake Buena Vista, Florida, I realized my desire to create a cinematic work which would be a delightful challenge to portray to the stage. The following day, upon listening to Mel Brook's "There's Nothing Like a Show on Broadway" from *The Producers*, I was struck with the notion of glorifying American theatre by respectfully and thoughtfully poking fun while warmly embracing the cliché nature of Metro Goldwyn Mayer movie musicals. I decided to audition performers prior to writing the script in an attempt to develop characters who would best suit the talents of my various cast members.

Open auditions were held for three days in December 2014. I publicized these auditions on the Barn Theatre's website, in an email blast to all the theatre's subscribers and previous cast members, as well as on the local paper's digital events calendar. On the website, I posted two song segments, "Another Op'nin' Another Show" for men and "I Got Rhythm" for women. It was an open cattle call audition, so performers could arrive on any day from 5 to 9 p.m. Auditionees were escorted into the theater in groups of five, where they each sang their assigned 32-bar cut. Unless the performer appeared to be virtually tone-deaf, I sent them back into the lobby in pairs with scenes to cold-read. I used scenes from various musicals which inspired the show, such as *Sweet Charity* and *Annie*, since I had not yet authored *Welcome to Broadway*. The 68 performers I was interested in were asked to join me for callbacks three months later, in March.

Though I had intended to have fragments of the script ready to be read at callbacks, I had still yet to write a word. I did, however, have an idea of the various stock characters in the play. For callbacks, I mounted the number "Thoroughly Modern Millie" from the musical *Thoroughly Modern Millie*. I hired Rachel Butler, my dance captain from *Nine*, to play Millie for the purposes of the callback. This allowed me to see how well my potential cast members could pick up choreography, learn lyrics, and work together as an ensemble. I did this so the callbacks would not feel like an audition, but like an actual rehearsal for the production, because as a performer myself, I deplore the tension of auditioning. It was intended that this strategy would yield great results, yet it did not. Performers were so concerned with trying to learn the choreography and vocals of the opening number that they neglected to perform and show me their talents as an actor. Though this methodology of callbacks has merit, it was too complex and abnormal for a group of community theatre artists. I cast 24 performers, making personal phone calls to each inviting them to join my cast. I used very vague language when doing so, as I did not let them know I hadn't the slightest idea of what parts they would be playing.

After casting and evaluating the performers for whom I was writing, I passionately authored the libretto in less than three weeks. I did so by utilizing a new authoring process. Rather than defining a plot, then writing blindly from beginning, to middle, to the end, I created characters, three subplots, and the complications each character faces. Once this substructure was established, I wrote scenes by imagining myself in the character's shoes, reflecting how a heightened alter-ego of myself may react to their situations. By using this process, the procedure of creating the script was easier to me than ever before.

This inventive jukebox musical celebrates the thrill of great musical extravaganzas, such as *Anything Goes*, *The Pajama Game*, and *Victor Victoria*. Inspired by Golden Age Hollywood films, such as *Casablanca*, *Royal Wedding*, *Holiday Inn*, *The Public Enemy*, and *White Christmas*, *Welcome to Broadway* was conceived as nostalgic work to evoke memories from the Golden Era of theatre and cinema. This dynamic musical comedy, simple in plot and rich in spectacle, tells the fictional misfortunes and triumphs of Broadway's youngest Director-Producer, Michael McWaters, portrayed by me. As McWaters strives to mount his first Broadway show, the play's headliner is arrested on her wedding day and a green-eyed producer offers a life-threatening contract, anything that can go wrong does go wrong. It is up to Michael McWaters to set things straight and see his production to fruition.

While Professor Weaver taught me the practicality and efficacy of visually dynamic minimalism during my work on *Nine*, I knew minimalism would not be an effective tactic while designing *Welcome to Broadway*. With the production being influenced by Golden Age MGM exhibition, such as the auspicious spectacle of *Footlight Parade*, *Mary Poppins*, and *Singing in the Rain*, I understood that impeccable visual design would be imperative to this production. Particularly the scenic and costume design would have to be over-the-top to capture the essence of dazzling sets and extraordinary garments in movie musicals. In light of the enormous success which *Welcome to Vegas* accrued, I felt it best to design the production's set myself and call, once again, upon my trusted confidant, Dr. Francesca Pratten, to design the productions' abundant costumes.

*Welcome to Broadway's* cinematic nature posed a prevalent design challenge to the production's scenic arrangement. With 41 scenes and 15 locations, it was imperative the set served

as a neutral platform which could quickly be shifted into many localities, while still producing enormous spectacle. I designed the midstage and upstage quadrants of the stage to be filled by seven lanky skyscraper frameworks, each with its own unique dimensions, ranging from six to eleven feet in height. These skeletal structures served as picture frames for various drops and flats which indicated location while offering many entrances and exits on various planes which scenes could take place. Combining this technique with double-sided furniture, such as a newsstand which revolved into a bookshelf, it made it possible to eliminate black-outs and scene changes entirely. This offered directorial opportunity to utilize elegant segues operated by cast members acting brief ensemble vignettes. This is a Brechtain convention of a *Verfremdungseffekt*, made popular in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century by German playwright, theorist, and director, Bertolt Brecht (Thomas).

Dr. Pratten was charged with the daunting occupation of costuming 24 performers in a musical which called for some characters to have up to nine costumes each. My concept was inspired by the prodigious work of Bob Mackie, award-winning costume designer of works such as *Gypsy* and *The Carol Burnett Show*. In this fashion, the revue's prominent characters were never seen on stage in the same outfit twice; every time they made an appearance, their wardrobe was more elaborate than before. This worked aesthetically to pay homage to the spectacle of the Golden Age, and it worked functionally to illustrate the seven months of time which pass throughout the script. The play's seasonal change from December to June allowed Dr. Pratten to incorporate inspiration from the wintery styles of *Holiday Inn* and *White Christmas* to the summer panaches of *Anything Goes* and *Kiss Me Kate*, offering a costume palette diverse in style, shape, and texture. Unlike any other production which Dr. Pratten and I had collaborated on, this work required large quantities of showgirls to wear numerous identical dresses, suits, headpieces, leotards, blouses,

and footwear. This challenge was heightened as the showgirls' body types ranged from small to large, slim to portly, and short to tall. Much like how the Radio City Rockettes' costumes are altered to make them appear more similar in size, Dr. Pratten designed showgirl costumes to give the optical illusion of unity. She did so by designing the dresses to end at the same height off of the floor, putting the higher heels on the shorter ladies and shorter heels on the taller ladies, and padding the bosoms of the slimmer ladies while creating constricting body suits underneath the costumes of the larger ladies. The greatest challenge was due to how fast the performers had to get in and out of costumes. Performers in the play would seldom have more than one minute to change from one costume to the next. Some characters' costumes changed seamlessly, breaking away before the audience's very eyes via the use of snaps, Velcro, and magnets.

The production's lighting design was crafted by J. Pat Montgomery, the Barn Theatre's Vice President and Technical Director. As my set design created a neutral yet dynamic space, the lighting design added color and texture via gels and gobos. The lighting plot was quite complex as the production contained so many scenes and locations, such as Central Park, St. Patrick's Cathedral, Fagioli's Italian Restaurant, The Ritz Carlton Ballroom, and many other localities. Montgomery and I met extensively to properly integrate lighting into this production in a manner which would elucidate fantasy versus reality, location, and subliminal mood while complimenting the pliable, ever-changing set and immersive, colorful costumes. Montgomery utilized 163 stationary overhead and side lights, 36 footlights, over 200 feet of twinkling Christmas lights, and over 300 feet of rope lights to create an immersive and theatricalized lighting effect. His job became harder when I bore the idea of making the overture a light show set to a medley Irving Berlin's songs. To do so, Montgomery created 32 light cues within the first minute and a half of

the production, utilizing moving helicopter lights, follow spots, laser balls, over-head Christmas lights, chase lights on the proscenium, fog, and a lit disco ball. I made the choice to start the show in this manner, as I wanted the audience to remove themselves from their day-to-day life and to get lost in the spectacle of the heightened reality which they were about to see and partake in.

I designed the production's underscores and sound effects, in addition to editing their pre-recorded music tracks. The wiring design and soundboard programming was done by Donald Cantrell, the Barn Theatre's Facilities Manager. The soundboard was operated by my stage manager, Lori L. Wood. This system was not dissimilar from the operation which we previously implemented in *Welcome to Vegas*. The greatest sound innovation which *Welcome to Broadway* posed was using lavalier microphones to amplify the voices of featured characters whose voices were not strong enough to carry through the Barn Theatre's small venue of 161 seats. Though this new element began as a massive concern for me, the microphones were much more efficient than I had expected.

This production posed difficult design challenges, from the plethora of shifting locations, to the sheer number of costumes, to trying to produce \$10,000 worth of spectacle on a \$2,000 budget. One of the challenges was the opening number of the second act, "Singin' in the Rain." After extensive research on methodologies of onstage rain, it was determined that it would be a tactical nightmare and a budgetary strikeout to create or rent a rain machine. After great deliberation, I was struck with the idea of utilizing hanging bubble machines and falling blue lasers to give the heightened affectation of rain. This concept was immensely successful in theory and was visually stunning; in practice, it posed significant safety risks. The bubbles, which accumulated up on the stage, created a slick and slippery surface which was nearly impossible to

remain stable on while tap dancing with metal taps. This resulted in me taking a well-recovered spill on opening night and badly bruising both knees. Additionally, the solution on the floor became tacky after it dried, which resulted in the stage needing to be mopped after the number. In order to circumvent this issue, low powered fans were utilized to direct the path of the bubbles into two defined areas of the stage which were covered with “puddles” of absorbent material which was colored to match the patterning of the stage floor. In the scene change after the number, this material would be removed and then washed prior to the next performance.

The rain was not the only great challenge posed by this production. Though the jukebox musical plot was told in a linear structure, it was a play about a play. The various design elements had to differentiate reality from fantasy. Lighting did so by utilizing specialty lights and moody, cooler colors to represent the play-within-the-play, and warmer, more natural lighting to indicate reality. Additionally, follow spotlights were used only in fantasy sequences. The non-realistic set featured demi-realistic flats and drops, while using lush tinsel curtains and rear-illuminated cycloramas to represent the play-within-the-play. Fantasy scenes featured no ambient noise except for musical underscoring, whereas the reality scenes featured various soundscapes, such as birds and traffic noise in the Central Park scene, restaurant noise in the dinner scene, and car horns, construction tools, and background noises in the outdoor city scene.

Following Professor Weaver's footsteps, I commanded the rehearsal process with respect and high expectation. I created a compulsively organized rehearsal environment which operated with professional standards of breaks, rehearsal hours, contracts, and waivers, similar to what performers experience working under an Actors' Equity Association union contract. From the first day, I set the precedent that I wanted my cast to exude professionalism, and I expected nothing

less. I made it clear unexcused absences were not permitted and tardiness would not be condoned. I made it clear that the actors were to have all lines memorized and music learned prior to the scheduled rehearsal in which the song would be staged. On the first day, each actor was supplied a detailed rehearsal calendar which meticulously outlined the agenda of each rehearsal. Start times and end times were adhered to, and cast members were expected to arrive at least fifteen minutes prior to the rehearsal, as a 7:00 p.m. rehearsal meant beginning work at seven, not putting on shoes, warming up, and presetting props. After the removal of two cast members which would not adhere to my conditions, the rest of my cast honored my methodologies with great respect, regardless of my young age. Rehearsals took place six days per week for four weeks prior to tech. I utilized masterful time management and did not waste rehearsals, as I could not afford to while trying to mount 21 musical numbers and 36 short scenes in four weeks. This was a blatant contrast to my previous directorial process on *Welcome to Vegas*.

Inspired by Professor Weaver's process of hastily, yet effectively, blocking scenes in *Nine*, I formed my own process of blocking scenes, amalgamating my inspiration from Weaver with my previous collaborative style. I blocked scenes on paper in my script, utilizing a miniature of the set with small mannequins to derive visually stimulating and useful blocking. In rehearsal, I would begin each scene with a few minutes of table work, then I would put it on its feet, asking the actors to do what comes naturally. After seeing their physical interpretation of the scene, I would integrate my preconceived staging with their organic impulses to create a hybrid between my artistic vision as a director and their artistic right as a performer. When the blocking was set and the scene had been run through once, I would move on adjusting as needed later on in run-throughs.

I completely choreographed numbers prior to the beginning of rehearsals, writing down step-by-step what I planned to teach. This style of pre-planning has been used by many industry professionals, including Professor Weaver, Donald Saddler, Lee Theodore, and Ron Field (Grody). Since each production number came from a mega movie musical, I repetitively watched the most iconic version of each number prior to choreographing. I did so in an attempt to embody the spirit and iconic moments of each musical spectacular while innovating in the stylistic vein of the original choreographer. I knew the appeal of this production was that of its music; therefore, I delegated the majority of rehearsal time to clean-up rehearsals of the musical numbers and run-throughs of the show. This was highly effective, as it allowed me to stage the numbers in a thorough manner and then meticulously run eight counts at a time until every performer was in perfect unison. Once each cast member knew every element of choreography, each production number was run repetitively for an hour per number. This afforded my cast the opportunity to practice so many times they virtually could not get their choreography wrong. It was a very effective process I will utilize and further develop in the future.

As I had previously worked in the space and was aware of its limitations, I designed and staged my production in a manner which could be housed effectively in the small, timeworn venue. I created set pieces which could be reversed or collapsed to take up as limited space as possible. I charged some actors with changing the set on stage while others shifted what was in the wings for the most effective use of the space. Areas were designated for quick change stations, and costumes were hung in the rafters then lowered when needed by the actors.

This production was beyond a full-time job as I multi-tasked in all areas. Outside the directorial, choreographic, and performance quadrants, the most consuming facet of my work was

doing my own set construction. I single-handedly learned to use screw guns, pneumatic nailers, a table saw, a miter box, a band saw, a drill press, and various hand tools. I utilized a half lab technique for structural support when constructing the skyscrapers and developed an altered track and pin system to secure the rotating flats in the skyscrapers. My attention to detail was conscientious, painting Damask patterning, aging bricks, and creating an elaborate stained glass window. This detail-oriented work took weeks of labor to create the 57 set pieces. I would work in the non-air-conditioned scene shop from as early as 8:00 a.m. to as late as 11:00 p.m. before and after rehearsals. Nearing the end of the process, the fastidious work became so laborious that I recruited my family, neighbors, and the cast members in order to finish the set on time. The result was tremendous, effective, and well-received. Montgomery stated that it was one of the best sets he had seen in the past two decades.

Multi-tasking in so many facets of the production was quite daunting and, at times, seemed impossible. For the first month of the process, I managed to achieve all I had set out to do, staying on track with staging in choreography, constructing the set, meeting with designers, marketing the show, and handling finances. Moving into the last leg of the production, it became impossible to keep all the plates spinning. I had to define which risks were absolute and which were speculative, then thoughtfully and holistically decide which plates to drop. I had to ask myself questions such as whether or not it was more important to have gold-leaf trim on the bookshelf or have myself on the radio advertising the show. When prioritizing during this period, I gave first priority to the production, such as direction, choreography, and rehearsal, because without a good product, all efforts would be futile. I gave second priority to marketing due to the importance of meeting my box office goals so I could repay my backers in full and earn a profit that could be utilized for

future college expenses. I then deferred to all other aspects of the production, including the set, props, lighting, sound, and costumes. Though this pace was quite challenging, I handled it well. Perhaps the greatest key to my success was always providing myself one-half hour to change gears before rehearsing with the cast. This afforded me the opportunity to stop thinking of the show as a producer and designer and approach it as a director, choreographer, and performer.

As exhausting as the technical rehearsal and run-through processes were, they were in doubtably the most rewarding elements of the rehearsal experience. Working in the rehearsal hall never compares to rehearsing in the space, especially with regards to a show with 57 set pieces that are all shifted by the cast. We systematically adjusted to the space, incorporated the set and costumes, and completed technical work for the show in a matter of five days. This allowed us four days to run the show, one of which contained a 12-hour rehearsal where the show was run three times. Prior to the start of each run-through, I would give many specific notes to incorporate from the previous run-through. I am an avid note-giver, as I feel nitpicking is where the magic happens. By giving notes, a director may fine-tune their product in a manner which is easy for actors to incorporate into their craft. Once we were into runs, I felt I could not unbiasedly analyze my portion of the show, as I was also playing the lead. To circumvent this issue, I invited respected friends who are established directors to attend each run and give me personal notes on my performance. This operation was highly effective and allowed me to have a keen eye for specificity with my cast.

The production opened on June 25, 2015, to incredible reviews and an approximately 90-second standing ovation prior to the actors taking their bows. Before the opening-night patrons had left the theater, our second performance sold out. This reaction was ideal and bolstered me

and my cast members with affirmation of a job well done and encouragement that our product was as strong as we had believed it was.

Learning from my experience of offering too much praise after an immensely successful opening-night one year previously, during *Welcome to Vegas*, I was not overly generous with the praise so that the cast did not become lazy and stop working so earnestly. Dr. Pratten and I had previously devised a solution to this concern. After the performance on opening night, I did not partake in festivities with my cast; this way they did not know what my reaction was to our opening. The following day, I called them in fifteen minutes earlier than their usual call time to give them notes. I calmly yet fervently thanked them for their incredible work and told them I was proud to share the stage with them each night; however, the cast still had a ways to go. I told them that the opening performance was at approximately 92 percent of the company's true potential. I incorporated a methodology which my elementary karate teacher taught me. My sensei believed the proper approach to didactic motivation was to praise, correct, and then praise again. I did so and then engaged the cast in an energy circle. When each cast member returned to their dressing room, they received a Be-Better Note from me. These Be-Better notes included one achievable improvement which each cast member could make in their performance that evening. I even gave nightly notes to myself. This way we never felt as though our job was done. We always had something we were working towards and trying to improve. In each daily company meeting I would say we were two percent closer to reaching our full potential. By the closing performance, I celebrated with my cast, telling them we had reached 110 percent. This tactic of motivation and improvement was incredibly successful, and I intend to utilize it for all limited-engagement productions that I will direct in the future.

The run was immensely successful at the box office, with most performances sold out. I was able to cover expenses, return the investments of my financial backers, and earn nearly double the profit I had projected. This entity was mutually successful for the Barn Theatre, affording them the means to power wash the venue, paint the west side of the building, and landscape the west parking lot. Due to the financial success of this one-weekend-only production, the Barn Theatre invited me back to create future original works whenever I have the time availability.

This production experience allowed me to synthesize the concepts I had previously learned about directing and choreographing and identify and develop my own directorial and choreographic style and process. I found great success by amalgamating the ethics and process of Professor Weaver with the shared practices of industry professionals. This process bolstered my confidence as an artist and honed my skills as a creative leader, offering me a quantum leap of growth on my conquest to directorial and choreographic proficiency.

## INNOVATION

In July, 2015, I had the privileged honor and illustrious opportunity to work for Broadway Theatre Project, a summer intensive Playbill.com refers to as "...the world's most prestigious musical theatre arts education program for high school and college students" (Broadway Theatre Project web). For 25 years, Broadway Theatre Project has held auditions nationwide. This year, the project welcomed 81 of the world's most promising rising stars to learn from upwards of 20 icons of the stage and screen as well as other industry professionals, including Broadway's most respected casting director, Jay Binder. Binder is responsible for casting works such as *A Chorus Line*, *The Lion King*, *Mamma Mia*, and *The Music Man*. Entering my third year with the project, I served as the Assistant to the Program Director and Director of Public Relations. This was a vast promotion, as I was an apprentice in my first year with them and an intern in my second year. While working alongside individuals who have achievements of which I have merely dreamed, I learned lessons and bettered myself as an administrator, director, choreographer, and performer, as this was a unique year for Broadway Theatre Project, having entered a partnership with Norwegian Cruise Line.

For the first two weeks of the project, apprentices trained at the International Production Headquarters of Norwegian Cruise Line Creative Studios in Riverview, Florida. During week three, the project took to the sea on the Norwegian Getaway, the newest, largest ship of its fleet, for a seven-day/six-night working Caribbean cruise to the Virgin Islands and Bahamas. While doing so, we studied the operations of two professional Broadway shows and performed in repertoire with *Legally Blonde* and *Burn the Floor*.

During these three weeks, I was privileged to work with Debra McWaters, Broadway Theatre Project's president and artistic director. Under such inconceivable and unsurpassable guidance, my leadership and choreographic skills greatly improved. McWaters serves as the exemplar of a creative genius: artistic, analytical, and incongruous. Her mind is scattered with unconventional fragments of theatrical brilliance. Watching her creative process is similar to peering into a colloquium between a Rorschach inkblot test and a fly caught in a spider's web and struggling to free itself. The metaphoric inkblot represents interpretability of the art form. The fly is symbolic of McWaters' choreographic vision and the web is representative of the constraints of her systematic mind. I began working administratively for McWaters, then came to work with her in an artistic manner as her assistant and as a performer in several numbers, including 2CELLOS' "Smooth Criminal" and *Big Deal's* "Beat Me Daddy." In order to comprehend and respect McWaters and my edifying relationship with her, one must understand her unique and complex history.

Before the depths of the Fosse style pervaded McWaters' thoughts, her mind was filled with statistical enigmas of astronomy and astrophysics. Following in her father's footsteps, who was an Apollo launch team member, she worked for NASA, where she put her Master's Degree in Mathematics to practice. When she befriended Ann Reinking, a Tony Award-winning Fosse protégé, her career path drastically evolved as she fervently pursued her newest passion, Broadway.

McWaters' merited association with Reinking afforded her mindboggling prospects as an assistant-then-associate choreographer. This privileged partnership included collaboration on the works of *Applause*, *No Strings!*, *The Look of Love*, *Legends*, and one of the greatest dark musical

comedies of our time, *Chicago*. This reboot of the original 1975 musical, based on the 1925 book, *Roxie Hart*, was set to perform for a limited run as a staged reading. When it caught the eye and ear of contemporary critics and entertainment producers, it transferred to Broadway, where it has become the longest-running American musical. Within her first decade in the metropolis of New York, while working on *Chicago*, McWaters worked with legends such as Bebe Neuwirth, Liza Minnelli, and Joel Grey. In a mutually beneficial collaboration, she taught them Fosse's choreography while they taught her how to cope with the stresses of Broadway.

McWaters' contribution continued to the production through one international and two national tours. While working in Las Vegas, Nevada, she assisted in putting Ben Vereen and Chita Rivera into the production. This was McWaters' first collaboration with Rivera. Her second occurred at the Goodman Theatre on a workshop of Kander's and Ebb's final collaboration, *The Visit*. Years later, McWaters' and Vereen's paths crossed several more times as she became the choreographer for his various solo shows.

The crown jewel of McWaters' legacy is that of *Fosse*, a revue encapsulating the illustrious career and style of Bob Fosse, the great choreographer, director, playwright, and star. She began as Reinking's assistant on the Broadway production as well as for a production in the West End of London, as well as the national/international tours. Later, she became the director and choreographer of the second national tour and then led European tours.

Administratively, McWaters reinforced for me the concept that things will not always go according to plan, so one must be prepared, flexible, and responsible. She taught me that one may only pre-plan, operate, and react the best they can, and it is wasteful to toil futilely over situations

which are out of one's control. Artistically, as an aspiring director and choreographer, I learned that art is an intangible, free-flowing spirit with contemplations and impulses of its own. One cannot force the creation of art, as that almost definitively leads to deficient direction and choreography which will have to be restaged. Instead, one must dexterously and skillfully channel the nature of art into a physical being by utilizing the performers, designers, and assistants while simultaneously inspiring them and seeking inspiration from them. In order to do this, a director or choreographer must free himself and prohibit his artistic barriers so collaboration may find its way into his craft. As an actor, singer, and dancer, McWaters allowed me to cultivate my skill working concurrently as an assistant and performer. This process required me to learn how to shift gears at the drop of a dime, from thinking of the piece holistically and structurally to thinking solely of my track and my personal performance.

Though I learned from McWaters immensely, my greatest mentor at Broadway Theatre Project was Darren Gibson. This mentorship, along with the mentorships of Professor Weaver and Dr. Pratten, will not soon, if ever, leave my craft. A Broadway performer, dance captain, and assistant choreographer, Gibson learned from theatre and dance legends Eliot Feld, Ann Reinking, and Gwen Verdon. His artistic handprint can be seen on works such as *Fosse*, *Movin' Out*, *The Look of Love*, and the 1998 revival of *On the Town*. In addition to working with him administratively, as he was the co-artistic director of the program, I was cast as a dancer in one of his pieces, "Crunchy Granola" from *Fosse*. As elated as I was to learn a piece of Fosse's original choreography from a disciple of the Fosse craft, I was well aware that this experience had the potential to become the most physically, mentally, and emotionally demanding process I had ever

experienced. The choreography for "Crunchy Granola" is specific, athletic, stylized, and requires unassailable, perpetual stamina.

My prediction of the experience's difficulties was well-founded, as Gibson meticulously and hastily taught, tweaked, and polished the majority of the seven-minute number in less than eight hours of rehearsal. As a choreographer, watching Gibson work was like partaking in a master class on technique of choreographic process. He believes that if the choreographer teaches something right the first time, it will not have to be taught a second time. To fulfill this philosophy, he meticulously and methodically taught us the choreography with every specification, nuance, and innuendo. This was a change from many choreographers I had previously worked with who teach the general functions of their choreography first and fill in details later. Gibson shared the purpose behind each movement, helping us better evoke the nuances and look at the choreography as a method of storytelling.

Various directors and choreographers have varying tactics which they utilize to motivate performers and achieve their production goals. Gibson's tactic was to push. He continually pushed us, his dancers, to work harder, be more precise, dance fuller, activate our entire bodies, and engage more emotionally to our movement and storytelling. He pushed us harshly yet masterfully in a manner which allowed us to feel supported and safe. There was never a time where I felt I was being prodded for purposes other than my own personal betterment. It was, however, exhausting, as every time I felt I had done all I could, I was told to go further, dance harder, and dig deeper into cleanliness of movement.

I earned the brunt of Gibson's pushing tactic and aggressive motivation. Towards the midpoint of the fourth hour of rehearsal, we, the male dancers, learned a floor slide where we slid approximately 15-feet downstage, swung our legs around to stand up, caught a girl in each of our arms, then stood, legs apart, carrying the first girl in a straddle as a second girl did a floor slide through our legs. When teaching this, Gibson demonstrated this action twice and expected us to have learned it. Though every other man did, I grappled with the procedure of how to get onto the floor and into the slide. This was a problem as the safety of the girls jumping and the well-being of the girls floor-sliding were solely in the hands of the men. My dance partners, Charlotte Damson and Jordyn Lurie, were dependent on me to slide properly as every one of their movements, from their preparation to their landing, depended on me to be stable and in place one count after my floor slide. Gibson would not instruct me how to do the floor slide, as he saw the educational value in me determining the proper method on my own. Instead, he urged me to repetitively attempt the choreography on my own. I did so with the entire cast watching for approximately ten minutes, which felt like eternity. The more Gibson pushed me, the more I could not ascertain the proper way to slide. This was because I was dancing in my head, rather than with my body. While all the other dancers watched the demonstration and parroted it instinctually with their bodies, I attempted to cognize it step-by-step. As a producer, director, choreographer, playwright, and theatrical administrator, I have a tendency to perform in a cerebral fashion. By doing so, I try so hard to mentally process the choreography and neglect to utilize muscle memory or bodily instincts. Gibson taught me, though my ability to analyze movement is wonderful from an executive viewpoint, it hinders my process as a performer. This was an eye-opening discovery, as I never before realized this differing quality between a choreographer and dancer.

Upon learning my desire to become a professional director and choreographer, Gibson took me under his wing and taught me many lessons pertinent to a choreographer's craft. We extensively spoke on the difference between choreographers and stealers. Though it is not illegal or immoral to steal choreography, or to be inspired by one's work and re-teach it or incorporate elements of it in one's work, it does not make one a proficient choreographer. Gibson acknowledged many, including himself, can prosper in a successful career almost entirely teaching other choreographer's work; however, a true choreographer invents and creates new ways to tell stories and express these new stories through movement. This made me realize that all my choreography to that point, including *Welcome to Vegas*, *Nine*, and *Welcome to Broadway*, had merely been my twist on elements of other choreographer's work. I found a newfound passion to begin to search for my own choreographic voice. Gibson taught me that I can make myself a choreographer by stealing, but I can make myself a legend through innovation.

Of course, all innovation stems from inspiration. For example, Fosse was inspired by Fred Astaire, who was inspired by Pan. Since musicals have been choreographed for so long by so many people, there are hardly any new steps which haven't been used before. Gibson shared the importance of seeking inspiration from the source, rather than from the previously-inspired secondary source. For example, Fosse's craft was greatly influenced by pop-culture dancing of the 1960's fused with burlesque panaches and stimuli. The notion of researching the origins of a dance style and seeking inspiration directly from a stylistic foundation was earthshattering and offered me newfound hope in discovering my own style of movement.

One night, after rehearsal, Gibson sat on the office floor, played a song on his iPhone, and told me to dance. Taken aback, I asked him what he wanted me to do. He stated that a good

choreographer can understand, see, and feel, dancing and creating choreography in a style influenced by the sensory experience of a given song. After some prodding, I closed my eyes and began to dance. This was difficult for me as I have never been a confident freestyle dancer, always working best with choreographed movements. After a moment or two, I began to get out of my head and allow myself to move more freely. Gibson asked what I saw. I responded that I saw the color blue, lasers, a martini, and a club in Miami. He told me I was wrong, stopping my dancing in its tracks. He instructed me to listen, really listen, to the music. He asked what the music was inspired by, to which I had no answer. He pointed out the gospel quality to the vocal line of the backup singers. This newfound discovery greatly altered the style of my freeform movement. When Gibson played another song, I identified the electronic quality in the music and danced in a robotic manner as though I was being influenced by electric charges in the song's instrumentation. It was then I realized the true importance of music to choreography. I had always understood music was most influential to creating dance; however, I had never appreciated the magnitude to which one must understand each innuendo and undertone of a song. It is necessary to seek proper stimulation in order to create choreography that compliments the work as a whole.

The discoveries I made during my time at Broadway Theatre Project allowed me to improve all aspects of my work as an artist, identify the precision with which an administration must run, observe and reflect effective directorship qualities, better my multitasking ability, and cognize the difference between intellectual methodologies of a director-choreographer and an actor-dancer. After cognizing this intellectual difference, I was able to craft a new approach to my art by attempting to become less cerebral as a performer. This fueled my ability to switch gears between being a creative leader and an entertainer. Additionally, I learned the importance of

choreographic innovation and methods by which one may pursue inventiveness in movement, both by effusively understanding musical qualities and seeking inspiration from an original source. With these skills integrated into my craft, I felt as though I had reached directorial and choreographic proficiency at last.

## CONCLUSION

The path to achieving a definition of directorial and choreographic proficiency is a challenging and difficult road to depart upon. If I were to name this process, it would be defined as a direction of reflection, as I need to experience and direct the subsequent steps and my learnings from each experience onto my directorial and choreographic craft. Though it presents its challenges, directing and choreographing is perhaps the most rewarding, freeing, and liberating undertaking I have been fortunate enough to face.

The first step on this path was accessing the embryonic infrastructure of directing and nascent choreographic ability. This is one's instinctual capability to create and lead art, a skill which may be established by previously being an audience and cast member, taking dance class, loving music, and practical experimentation. I took this first step by synthesizing my instinctual ability while directing and choreographing *Welcome to Vegas*. While doing so, I learned many important concepts, including ineffective ways to command a room, organize a working process, and seek for meticulousness in details. These misfortunes on naivety allowed me to learn from my mistakes and better myself in the future.

Once one has control over their embryonic infrastructure of directing and nascent choreographic ability, they may incorporate mentorship, the second step on their path to directorial and choreographic proficiency. Mentorship is a significantly influential component of an artist's and leader's personal betterment. As there is no singular method to artistic leadership which continuously yields achievement of a preferred product, it is helpful to be taken under the wing of successful directors, as this allows one to witness varying approaches of vision and process which

varying directors implement into their craft. As stated in chapter two, one can read many books on how to hammer a nail; yet, until one picks up a hammer, he is vastly unprepared. I was mentored by Professor Weaver on Theatre UCF's production of *Nine*, where I learned how to properly craft a vision, steer the design process, organize a working process, earn respect of a cast, pre-plan staging and choreography, and the level at which a director can raise the bar of a production, as well as how to motivate performers to rise to the occasion. Above all, I learned to view the relationship of acting, singing, dancing, scenic shifts, lighting, and sound as a dance, with elements moving rhythmically as sequence of processes set to music.

With a natural ability to create and guidance through mentorship, a budding director-choreographer may turn their passion and profession into a study and science. Research allows one to unearth and incorporate tactics of visualization and procedure into their own artistic process. Additionally, discovering the viewpoints, successes, and failures of various industry professionals may be incorporated into one's craft, serving as a theoretic mentorship. In a hyperbolic notion, once one has learned to physically hammer a nail, they may read books on various practices of nail hammering. I researched via scrutinizing the subject matter of David Ball's *Backwards & Forewords: A Technical Manual for Reading Plays*, Svetlana Grody's and Dorothy Lister's *Conversations with Choreographers*, Dr. Louis Catron's *The Director's Vision: Play Direction from Analysis to Production*, Harold Clurman's *On Directing*, and Jon Jory's *Tips: Ideas for Directors*. These works offered effectively tangible intuition on varying devices, experiences, and methodologies, serving as an insightful frame of reference on effective approaches to a director's and choreographer's craft.

Once one has further developed their impulsive directorial and choreographic ability, councillorship of a professional, and research on various methodologies, one may incorporate these skills and learnings into their work, leading to the fourth step on the path to proficiency. Step four is experimentation while developing one's own vision, process, and craft as a director-choreographer. I first experienced this fourth step while producing, directing, choreographing, and starring in *Welcome to Broadway*. This involvement allowed me to synthesize the concepts I had previously learned about directing and choreographing while identifying and developing my own directorial and choreographic style and process. Amalgamating my style with the ethics of Professor Weaver and the shared process of industry professionals established a successful working process which represented myself, the creative team, the script, and the audience well. In doing so, my confidence as an artist was bolstered and my skills as a creative leader were honed, affording me a substantial increase of development on my path to directorial and choreographic proficiency.

At Broadway Theatre Project, as the Assistant to the Program Director, Director of Public Relations, a dance captain, and a performer, I had to incorporate all elements of artistic creation on my path to proficiency, including impulses, mentorship, research, and practical application. The discoveries I made throughout this fifth step, consummate art, allowed me to better all facets of myself as a creator and leader, ascertain the meticulousness which an administration must function upon, discern effective and ineffectual directorship practices, identify the need to get out of my head and dance with my body as a performer yet cognize and analyze as a choreographer, as well as establish a foundation of stimuli on which new choreography may be my invented. After succession of this step, I reached my definition of directorial and choreographic proficiency.

Proficiency is a thought-provoking and ironic word as it is thought of synonymously as a form of perfection in expertise. As with true perfection, proficiency is illusive and essentially unattainable. This is the case with directorial and choreographic proficiency as an artist still continually evolves, and their personal definition of proficiency will be ever-changing and ever-evolving. Directors and choreographers continually learn and better their craft as the process of direction of reflection recurrently reflects differently as one experiences new practices to reflect into their work. After fourteen months pursuing these five steps, I realized that once the fifth step was reached, the first step re-emerged as my consummate art became my new directorial and choreographic instinct. Then, as new mentorships are formed and old mentorships are further developed, the second step of mentorship is redefined and improved upon. Continually as I read, research, and share, I learn more about our craft and practitioners of our craft, unendingly evolving the third step of research. The more I direct and the more I choreograph, the more I rediscover my directorial and choreographic style, underscoring the fluidity of the fourth step. The summation of these steps will chronically alter and improve my being as a consummate artist, the fifth step. Therefore, it is not enough for a director-choreographer to pursue directorial and choreographic proficiency. Instead, one must perpetually strive to redefine and further their personal definition of directorial and choreographic proficiency in an attempt to persistently improve, invent, and inspire innovative artists, audiences, and apprentices.

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