

Name: Kimberley Price

Student number: 1902505

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Lecturer: Zosia Jo Downmunt

Choreography and Creative Practice

With choreography being my least favourite module and the area where the skills I acquire are least concentrated, naturally there was an air of apprehension while approaching this section. However the development of knowledge received while working through the module reassured the ability of achieving the brief.

While debating the stimuli for this piece, personal and current attributes came to mind. With everybody being designated to their own homes due to the pandemic, an urge to look one's best (often with makeup and clothes) has arisen on social media and throughout girls I know. I wanted to create a piece where women can feel empowered again as I know of a lot of women who have developed a sense of negativity towards themselves due to not having anywhere to go, resulting in a lack of necessity to look their best and feel good about themselves. The thought arose: when do people feel their best? Through the use of personal experience the answer that revealed itself was when partying with friends; the time in history that most will associate with partying is the roaring 20s.

Two musicals which resonate with me personally and often inspire me in the realms of dancing are Bugsy Malone and Cabaret. With both being set in the 1920s (Cabaret being the late 20s into the 30s) I took inspiration from both for my piece. With the aim of my dance being to empower women I thought that the 1920s was a perfect setting for this as for women of the time there was a sudden new found wave of individuality, freedom and empowerment. "A young woman with a short "bob" hairstyle, cigarette dangling from her painted lips, dancing to a live jazz band. Flappers romped through the Roaring Twenties, enjoying the new freedoms ushered in by the end of the First World War (History.com,2018)." These unique women who were not afraid to question the status quo have always been iconic to me, being a time and experience I wish I could have been a part of.

Bugsy Malone is predominantly set within a speakeasy which led me into researching more about the topic as it is such a unique and interesting experience. This resulted in the ultimate theme of my dance being the personal interpretation of the atmosphere within a speakeasy during 1920s America. With the natural assumption that speakeasies were upbeat, energetic and loud places I choreographed the phrases to be lively and happy. To create these phrases i often favoured the stimuli and technique of improvising to music

A lot of the techniques I used while choreographing this piece are also stated by Jonathan Burrows in A Choreographer's Handbook. Burrow's states that he prefers to "Start at the beginning and go forwards. I like starting at the beginning because I like

how one thing leads to another, (Burrows,2010).” I like to start at the beginning as it gives me a clear route for choreographing and it means that when thinking of the next movements I know exactly what it is following and where it's going which makes the structure easier. I understand that other people prefer to create a range of movements and place them into an order however I find it easier to do it in chronological order.

Further into the Choreographer's Handbook Burrows also states that “we often use the word ‘material’ to describe short sequences found by a process of improvisation, which are then placed each in relation to the other to create a choreography. It can be a very good way to work, (Burrows, 2010).” As I prefer to use improvisation for my chosen choreography technique I resonate with this statement from Burrows, I like to improvise to a certain music track and embody the feelings that the sound brings, following this I like to pick out movements that feel most relevant and combine them into a sequence, during this piece I filmed these phrases while developing them to see how they looked and to have them for reference. I used a range of songs that were in the style of 1920s jazz to emphasise the theme to the audience and to set the atmosphere for my dancers. Movements and sequences often come to me at random hours of the day whether in the shower or while in bed, this relates to the technique used by Burrows as he states, “Accept what comes easily, (Burrows, 2010).” I think that when someone puts too much pressure on themselves for ideas it can often result in a blank of ideas, yet once you learn to relax and let movements come to you that is when you usually find fresh and new ideas more easily.

Once I had created a range of phrases I used the technique of motif development by giving each of my four dancers a different dynamic to perform the phrase in (Chloe- sharp, Amelia- smooth and continuous, Annabel- big and slow and Kim- small and fast.) While planning I made a lot of lists and mind maps of ideas for my piece, however, when it came to doing it there had to be a few adaptations due to the current circumstances. While on zoom there was often the problem of lagging which made it difficult to stay in time and made unison lose its effect, this was rather frustrating as I knew the piece would be perfect in person. To combat this problem we decided to film the different sections individually and edit them together as it made the movements clearer and improved the timing of the piece. Another choreographic technique I decided to use was structured/led improvisation. I achieved this by talking my dancers through what to think about during their improvisations as well as giving them examples of movements and inspiration of pictures and descriptions of the theme. Their overall task was to create a minute piece each which represented their personal ideas of what it would feel like and the assumed atmosphere of dancing in a speakeasy. This resulted in the four consecutive solos within my piece, I decided to use the same part of the song for each to emphasise the differing personal variations.

A key style of dance that comes to mind when thinking of 1920s America is tap. I decided to utilize the individual skills of my dancers to benefit the piece, as Annabel is extremely skilled in tap dancing I chose her for a solo for this section. "According to the producer Leonard Reed, throughout the 1920s "there wasn't a show that didn't feature tap dancing. If you couldn't dance, you couldn't get a job!" (Britannica, 2021)." The tap

shoes that we now associate with tap dancing became popular during the 1920s therefore I felt it was a very important section that I needed to include. It seemed like tap dancing was crucial if you wanted to be in the performing arts sector which means that to perform in a speakeasy it would be essential; which makes it essential to my dance piece.

Throughout the piece I tried to use a variation of formations of dancers, with there being solos, duets and groups, this was to keep the dance entertaining and enticing, which further justifies the use of unison and cannon. I also decided to include a close up gestual section to represent the new styles of dances that formed during the 1920s, such as the charleston, which were a key development for women of the time as it moved away from the often dull victorian period into a new era of enjoyability and freedom.

I decided to end my dance with a Cabaret inspired dance using a chair, Chloe has a beautiful quality to her movements mixing fluidity with sharpness which I felt suited this section perfectly. As women now had more freedom and the right to vote it meant that women could now be more individual and independent, being able to meet up with men on dates without parents being present and wearing shorter skirts than ever. Although we associate the 1920s with being an upbeat positive time it was actually a time that included a lot of darkness, although speakeasies seemed like a fun place to be it is also important to remember that these places were illegal. Issues of the time included, “shocking murders, a backwards step in education, the rise of organized crime, and

finally, the Wall Street Crash that brought the United States to its knees, (Historycollection, 2018).” Therefore, I had Chloe dance to a slower song to represent that all the happiness of flapper girls and dancers could often be a front to the crumbling society that was happening all around them.

Flapper girls paved the way for women of today, they fought through difficult situations and stood up for change. During this time where a lot of people I know are not feeling their best I think we should look up to these empowering women and do as they did by trying to make a positive out of a negative.

To conclude, considering that choreography is one of my weaker points I am proud that I was capable of choreographing a group piece, especially through the difficulties presented by the current pandemic and technology as I know that it would have been a lot easier and cleaner if it had been able to be performed in person, hopefully once this is all over I will be able to re-perform this piece in the studio.

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