

Reflective essay for icons

Module code: ADPA6003

Student number: 2218431

Name: Honey Boughey

Throughout the process of developing icon designs, I engaged with a range of artistic styles and character concepts. This reflective essay will explore the creative journey involved in producing a show, including the challenges encountered and how they were addressed.

In the first week of rehearsals, we explored Holly's (choreographer/director) vision for Icons. She expressed that each performer should select a celebrity who has made a significant social impact or undergone a meaningful personal journey. I chose to focus on a figure who had influenced society, as I believed this would allow me to engage more deeply with the narrative and connect on a more meaningful level. During my dissertation research, I became particularly intrigued by Madonna and chose to explore her cultural impact further, with a special focus on her influence within the ballroom community. Her narrative of rebellion resonates deeply with me, especially her advocacy for feminism and equality. The sources I used are:

Woman, M.A. (2021). *New Histories - Madonna: A Woman who Defied Sexism and Became a Musical Icon*. [online] Sheffield.ac.uk.

Brown, H. (2022). *Vogue — Madonna's 1990 hit helped catapult a subculture into the mainstream*. [online]

Madonna: How her message changed the social and cultural history of the 1980s. (n.d.).

By the second week of rehearsals, we had finalized our choices for the icons, and I had settled on portraying Madonna. Alongside developing our individual characters, we were introduced to the ensemble's opening piece, titled 'Icons.' Holly, our choreographer and director, envisioned the use of a large white sheet at the back of the stage to serve as a dynamic backdrop throughout various sections of the performance. This visual element was intended to enhance the thematic impact and cohesion of the piece.

However, due to the limited availability of basic and professional resources at UWTSD, we were unable to fully see this concept within the studio environment. Despite these constraints, Nick creatively constructed a smaller-scale version of the sheet and lighting setup. This allowed us to experiment with the visual effects on a manageable scale and see if it is usable for the final production. This experience highlighted the importance of resourcefulness and flexibility in the creative process, especially when working within practical limitations

After finalizing the use of the sheet and lighting setup, we began experimenting with different ways to incorporate it into our performance. For instance, Fin selected Eminem as his icon, focusing on the personal story involving his mother and struggles with drug abuse. To emphasize the conflict between his mother and a friend, we chose to enact the sex/fight scene behind the sheet, creating a shadow play effect. In this scene, I portrayed the male friend while Maisie took on the role of the mother.

During rehearsals, we sought Phoebe's guidance to refine the staging and ensure the shadow imagery would be clear and visually effective. Through this process, we discovered the importance of proximity and precise positioning relative to the sheet. If we were too far away or not well aligned, the shadows would merge, making it difficult to see the intended shapes. This exercise underscored the critical role of spatial awareness and collaboration in achieving the desired visual impact.

Building on this creative exploration, I particularly appreciated the way Holly and Beth collaborated with us throughout the rehearsal process. For my section on Madonna, Holly selected the song *Vogue* to highlight the influence of ballroom culture in her story. She choreographed a group piece featuring Maisie, Kirsten, Phoebe, and myself, which effectively captured the energy and style associated with that era. I found the choreography both engaging and dynamic; the incorporation of props such as newspapers and fans added a refreshing, upbeat quality while also introducing a level of complexity that made the performance both enjoyable and challenging

Following this, Beth and I began choreographing my solo section to the song *Frozen*. The original concept involved an opening trio with Maisie and Phoebe, where we performed the initial section

in jazz heels. As they exited mid-performance, I would move to the back of the stage, sit on a chair, and change into my dance heels to complete the remainder of the solo. This transition allowed for a shift in tone and intensity. I particularly enjoyed the sensual quality of the choreography and the sense of empowerment it conveyed, both physically and emotionally. The piece challenged me to embody confidence and control through movement, which contributed significantly to my personal and artistic growth.

During tech week, we were allocated only a single day at the Dance House, which created significant time constraints. As a result, we were unable to fully run the show or complete the technical side for the final section, managing only to rehearse the opening numbers. This felt particularly disorganized on the part of the university, especially given that this was our graduation performance and the first showcase for the cohort of graduate dancers. A more thorough meeting should have taken place between staff and students regarding the venue's requirements and restrictions, particularly in relation to performance styles and footwear. On the day of the tech rehearsal, I was informed that I would not be permitted to wear my dance heels due to the floor surface, which was not communicated prior to show term. If I had been aware of this earlier, I would have adapted the choreography and styling of my piece accordingly.

This lack of clear communication and forward planning left me feeling disappointed, and unfortunately, it reflects a broader pattern I experienced throughout my time at WAVDA. While I remained committed to producing work I was proud of, the challenges posed by institutional shortcomings had a direct impact on both my creative process and final performance.

To overcome this dilemma, I used my jazz boots and improvised the section where I changed my shoes. The end result was good, but the lack of communication really affected my performance.

During the live performances, we encountered several challenges, particularly with quick costume changes, which made timely entrances difficult to execute. A recurring issue throughout the process was limited access to the venue and appropriate rehearsal spaces, which significantly impacted on our ability to fully prepare. While the second show was the stronger of the two, some technical issues (such as the use of props) persisted due to insufficient rehearsal time in the actual performance environment. Despite these setbacks, I believe we delivered the best possible outcome given the constraints we faced. The experience highlighted the importance of thorough preparation, clear communication, and adaptability when working under pressure.

Bibliography:

Brown, H. (2022). *Vogue — Madonna's 1990 hit helped catapult a subculture into the mainstream*. [online] www.ft.com. Available at: <https://ig.ft.com/life-of-a-song/vogue.html>. [Accessed: 22/05/25]

Woman, M.A. (2021). *New Histories - Madonna: A Woman who Defied Sexism and Became a Musical Icon*. [online] Sheffield.ac.uk. Available at: <https://newhistories.sites.sheffield.ac.uk/volumes/2021-22/volume-22/madonna-a-woman-who-defied-sexism-and-became-a-musical-icon>. [Accessed: 22/05/25]

Madonna: How her message changed the social and cultural history of the 1980s. (n.d.). Available at: <https://edspace.american.edu/cc5572a/wp-content/uploads/sites/1257/2018/10/Extended-Essay-FInal-Carni.pdf>. [accessed: 22/05/25]