

MOURNING SUN

By

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A Senior Honors Project Presented to the

Honors College

East Carolina University

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by

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Abstract

The original idea for this work came from a period of self-reflection, specifically during this past summer where life as we knew it shifted dramatically. I have had a passion for the arts, in all forms, for as long as I can remember, all as a direct impact that my grandfather had on me. Charlie had always loved art, specifically dance and theater, and was a constant supporter of the arts. At a young age, he began taking me to the New York City Ballet to see The Nutcracker, and seeing how I fell in love with dance, he made it his mission to provide me with as much inspiration and access to the arts, as possible. He took me to see shows whenever he had the chance, up until the day that he died. This constant support and access is what drove me to pursue a career in the arts and has shaped me into the person that I am today. After his death, I truly realized how much of an impact that he made on me and how I feel as though I took his life for granted. I've realized that this is one of my major flaws, and I want to spend more time reflecting and suspending in the substance of each moment. I want to start appreciating what I have when I have it, instead of turning a blind eye to the treasures that fill each day. I keep a card on my desk that reads "Gratitude in advance is the most powerful creative force in the universe" and this principle is what I wanted the focus of this piece to be about. I felt as though it would be selfish to not create a piece that also reflects the dramatic change in life that has happened this year. Life can change so quickly and so we need to be grateful for what we have while we have it and truly appreciate this beautiful life.

Artist Statement

I have always been drawn to works that stray from the norm and translate unanswered questions into physical responses. Turning an inner monologue filled with curiosity, desires, values and beliefs into a work of art, whether that falls into dance or another medium, is a humanly effort that can impact the lives of infinite people. I believe that all forms of art have the ability to create change and cultivate rich environments where people can grow and find the value in freedom of expression. Not only dance, but all forms of art are engaging, stimulating experiences that, I believe, can shed new perspectives on the ways of the world. Art is personal, each person interprets it differently, but because of this, art has the ability to lead minds in new directions. Cultivating and creating artists and artistic minds by different means is something that I heavily value and work towards.

As an artist myself, I work to focus on being grounded to the earth beneath me, appreciating the stability that it provides, in both a physical and emotional capacity. Feeling grounded to the earth allows me to invest in the richness and elasticity of muscular function. Providing a strong base creates room for further exploration in the development of innovative movement and thought. In a physical sense, my movement and choreography reflects my desire to plant roots in the ground, often moving in and out of deep pliés and creating large bases. In a metaphysical sense, my work tends to reflect how I feel about the current environment and my focus on appreciating space. I work towards creating positive environments where all dancers and artists can learn and grow. Creating a space where people feel free to be their truest self is incredibly important to my choreographic and artistic process. I want the dancers in the room to feel connected to one another and appreciate the value in the physical connection with one another and the uniqueness that comes with each distinct process.

Choreographic Process and Application

The process for this project began four years ago when I first arrived in Greenville for my freshman year as a dance major. The Senior Choreography Concert, translating into my Senior Honors Thesis Project, is a culmination of hard work and dedication over the course of four years. Developing the skills needed to produce a work that highlights technical precision along with showcasing your unique artistic vision, is something that I, and all my peers, have been working towards in all of our creative endeavors throughout our training at ECU. Composition studies, occurring in the sophomore and junior years allow young artists to cultivate their personal creative voice and learn the logistical tasks that go into creating a full choreographic work. It was during Composition I and II that I learned how to most effectively present and develop my creative process. Once, I learned the importance of self-reflection to my process, I was able to start processing the concept and ideas for my Senior Choreography Project.

The concept for my work was derived from a deep self-reflection. I wanted to use this time and space to build an appreciation for life in every moment, and to instill in those around me the importance of showing gratitude for each other and the opportunity to exist in a community that values individual expression. I explained to each of my dancers that they would each have their own personal connection to the meaning of the work, and that I hoped they would forge a future path that reflects their personal experience from this work. My personal connection came originally from the impact that my Grandfather had on my life, and developed into finding gratitude in the mundane. In order to help my dancers fully grasp the gravity of what this work meant to me, and what I hope it would mean to them, I had them participate in a writing exercise in our first rehearsal. I had each of them write down, anonymously, an instance

where they felt that they had taken life for granted and realized so post-experience. I wanted each of them to find a personal connection to the work and apply that to their dancing.

I wanted the piece to have an old, vintage, nostalgic quality to it in the beginning. In three parts, the work would explore the feeling of nostalgia and longing for something past, then explore a chaotic series of events to signify life racing by without any realization of it doing so, and culminate in a dynamic shift to signify how quickly life can change and what you have always known could be gone in an instant. The first song was “I’ll be seeing you” by Billie Holiday. I wanted to use older music as an ode to my grandfather, but also as a way to signify a learned appreciation for the past. The second song kept the same vintage feeling, but increased in pace, allowing for the third song to serve as an abrupt shift to very modern music, showing the passage of time.

Dance is a physical art form and many theorists have studied this art of movement. One of the most highly studied questions is “why do we move?” There is not one specific answer to this question, but choreographic theorists have tried to explain it in a variety of different forms. Rudolph Laban was a leading theorist in this field and tried to explain movement by creating different theories to explain choreography. One of these theories is the Structural Model of Human Movement. This theory analyzes relationships, body surfaces, joints and parts, dynamics and actions. Throughout my choreographic process, I kept returning to this question of why, and used my curiosity of the subject, along with my knowledge on the Structural Model of Human Movement to add a layer of depth to my choreography. I use dance as a way to express my experiences and beliefs in a physical form. Movement is the direct result of my inner feelings and thoughts, as can be seen in my choreography. I posed this question to my dancers as well to

help them to understand how their gratitude for movement could be a factor as to why they move in the first place.

The experience of creating work in an emotionally rich environment, surrounded by those I love, while being supported by my peers and professors is something that I will hold dear to my heart for years to come. The culmination of a consistent drive and determination to create work at the highest standard resulting in this project is something that I take great pride in. Watching my dancers bring this work to life was an honor and I feel so grateful to have a presentation, such as this, to represent my four years in the dance program.

Below is the link to view my Senior Choreography Project, “Mourning Sun”, produced Fall 2020 in McGinnis Auditorium:

<https://youtu.be/SuI2HpCRJwg>