

Monique Martinez
Maida Withers
14 December 2019
TRDA4184

“Our Inferno”

Vision

My vision for this semester was to create a piece that portrayed the weight of blame that is continually passed onto the following generation. Millennials are constantly in the news being blamed for the failings of industries and the changes of American traditions. These include chain restaurants, the diamond industry, the movie industry, marriage, the 9 to 5 work day, and vacations, to name a few. The amount of attention that is spent on blaming younger generations could be better used to address issues that apply to all generations.

Additionally, despite the negativity that surrounds us younger generations, we continue to live – go to school, work, and of course, dance. I wanted to show through lighting, music, and choreography, the balance between feeling a constant weight above us and the need to continue living because not much else can be done. Therefore, my lighting was bright and colorful, the music was lively, and upbeat, the choreography was fast-paced and energetic, however, the text and lyrics revealed the heavier side of the piece.

Auditions and Casting

As a class, we decided to split into two groups of three choreographers. Each choreographer came up with about an eight count that was then attached to the other phrases created by the other two choreographers. Later, the movements I created would end up in my piece in some form or another. They were very effective in distinguishing the style I was after and therefore, I considered the dancers who I felt performed the choreography well and with

energy. After each group taught their combinations, we did a few improvisation exercises that further allowed us to see the individual styles of the dancers come through.

Going into auditions, I knew I wanted dancers who could move quickly and with energy. I wanted a large cast of about eight to ten dancers; originally, I thought of having three of my dancers lead the piece and the remaining dancers form an ensemble. However, once rehearsals began I found that separating my cast into smaller groups that were featured for an equal amount of time worked best because it emphasized them all as people with different attitudes toward the subject. After casting, I had ten dancers, two of whom dropped my piece, resulting in eight; these were Cate Alvaro, Katie Auerswald, Marney O'Connor, Victoria Endow, Arianne Gandy, Maddie Sell, Emma Wasserman, Paige Valego. The cast I ended up with had very diverse movement styles, personalities, and dance experience, which I think greatly benefitted my piece when it came to rehearsals and performance.

Rehearsals

My plan was to structure rehearsals primarily around dancer availability. I also knew my piece would consist of two distinct sections, the first would feature alternating small groups and the second would bring everyone on stage to dance together to my 21st century version of "We Didn't Start The Fire," because of this, I wanted to dedicate every other rehearsal to each section. Based on one dancer's availability, Saturday's became entire-cast rehearsals and Tuesday night's became small group rehearsals. My first rehearsal (Tuesday, September 10) consisted of dancer introductions and an overview of what my piece would be about. I began teaching choreography that would be in the second half of the piece first because I did not know yet how to separate my small groups. I first wanted to observe how the entire cast danced together before dividing them

into groups and ultimately pairs. The second rehearsal (Saturday, September 14), was also an entire-cast rehearsal – I continued teaching phrases that would be in the second half of the piece. By the end, the partners for that section were established and I could divide my eight dancers into four smaller groups, one being a solo.

Rehearsals for the first half of my piece went by a lot quicker than I had anticipated. Because I worked with a smaller cast on Tuesdays, these rehearsals were much more collaborative, productive, and individualized. We completed Cate and Paige's duet in one rehearsal and were able to add in Maddie and Arianne on the following Tuesday. Because my small group rehearsals were going by quickly, about half way through the semester, my Tuesdays became another full-cast rehearsal.

Choreography, Sound, and Lighting

For past pieces that I have created at GW, the choreography and idea came first, then sound, and then lighting. However, with this piece, it was the song that sparked an idea that led to choreography and the lighting design that influenced the ending of the piece. Instead of having one element carry my creative process and the others support it, I felt that they all depended on each other and were instrumental in the final product.

While I was driving back to school, I kept hearing "We Didn't Start the Fire" by Billy Joel and felt that I would have so much fun choreographing a piece to that song. I kept listening to the lyrics and found it funny that a couple of the things mentioned in the song were still relevant and that the "fire" was still burning, but now on a new generation. Although I began rehearsals using the original song, I realized pretty quickly that in order for the idea to be communicated properly, I had to rewrite the lyrics to represent today. The lyric-writing process

was extremely fun and something I had never done before, but once it was done, I had to recruit a voice to record it for me. I tried spreading the word to a capella groups but was not getting any responses. I connected with Phoebe Workman who offered to sample a recording for me and eventually, her voice was the one in the final sound scape. Once I began rehearsing with the updated lyrics, it began to affect the choreography – I could now create movements and images that referenced events in the song.

Although I had a substantial amount of choreography prepared, most of what ended up in the piece came from rehearsals with the dancers. In terms of the movement, my primary goal was to maintain high energy and boldness; with this in mind, I came to rehearsals with a few movements and then had my dancers manipulate it or add on. I would watch them work and when I saw something that stuck out to me, I would push them further in that direction until we had a complete phrase created through collaboration. I really enjoyed this way of working because it produced movements that the dancers felt comfortable and looked well doing.

Lighting

Beyond having a solid bright color, I had not thought extensively about lighting until my meeting with Brad. I also had not finished my piece and had about two minutes left to choreograph. We decided that the first half of the piece would be lit with blue light and during the shift in the choreography and music into the second half, the color would change to a light peach. We looked at the lyrics while designing the lights and realized that as the song progressed, they would become more negative and almost angry. Because of this and the “fire” mentioned in the song, we resolved that the lights would gradually get stronger and more saturated until the cyc was 100% red and the dancers were in silhouette.

After deciding my lighting with Brad, I knew how I wanted the remainder of my piece to go. Rather than having the dancers continue dancing happily, almost oblivious to the subjects in the lyrics, I wanted them to grow more angry, exhausted, and aware of the weight looming over them.



Tech and the Performance

During my final rehearsals, the dancers began developing their own characters. There were those who were aware of the turmoil mentioned in the lyrics, those who were confused and unsure of how to move forward, and finally, those who remained pretty oblivious. The tech rehearsals went smoothly although I felt that the energy was lacking. I had very little corrections and wished for the dancers to make adjustments as they saw fit. Opening night and the Friday night show went about the same as the tech rehearsals – all of the movements were executed well but I wanted to feel more energy from the stage. I figured that I may have been a biased viewer because I had seen the piece so much, but it felt low-energy and not as fast paced as it once had been. It was not until Saturday night, the final show, that I felt the dancers really performed at 100%. I was very happy with my project this semester, especially because it is something I never thought I could accomplish. A lot of coordination and collaboration was needed in order to result

in product that ended up on stage, and I am grateful for everyone's help and guidance along the way.