Choreographing Cabaret: A Guide to Storytelling through Dance and Movement

Katie Claire Bradley, Virginia Commonwealth University

Defense Date
2008

Document Type
Thesis

Degree Name
Master of Fine Arts

Department
Theatre

First Advisor
Patti D'Beck

Abstract
American Musical Theatre is one of the unique American methods of storytelling that exists in performance. In a musical, text, song, movement, and dance tell a story. In Music Theatre, when a character can no longer express what they desire in words, they sing. If singing cannot satisfy the need, the element of dance comes into play. Richard Kislan states, "What sets dance apart is the universality in movement and gesture which is not bound like language to nationality or culture. Dance transcends geography in a way that language cannot. Dance humanizes expression in a way that music cannot." (237) In American Musical Theatre History, dance was, at first, purely used for dance sake. The spectacle of dance was the interest of the public. Choreographers George Balanchine and Agnes De Mille helped to change dance in music theatre, by using dance numbers to further the plot of the story. They believed a musical number should enhance the tone, energy, and rhythm of the entire piece. Influenced by my mentors at VCU, I have discovered the important lesson of "telling a story." A musical number needs to take the audience on a truthful and emotional journey and aid in the flow of the play. Through the many projects that I have worked on with Patti D'Beck, I have learned a way to choreograph that is efficient and, to me, the best way to go about revealing a story to the audience. Using the musical Cabaret, I will highlight these important steps. The first part of this thesis is a case study on Cabaret.. All the steps that are outlined in the first part of this thesis are reiterated within the analysis of VCU's Main Stage production.

Rights
© The Author

Is Part Of
VCU University Archives

Is Part Of
VCU Theses and Dissertations

Date of Submission
June 2008
Wondering how to choreograph a dance — for the first time? Follow this guide to make your first piece of choreography. You can do it! Follow this handy 6-step guide or just take the tips you find helpful. Read on and start creating. How to choreograph a dance — in 6 steps. Step 1: Find a song… and listen to it like CRAZY. Finding the right song could be the easiest or hardest part of choreographing. Sometimes, you hear a song for the first time and you know. You just know. Iss da one. Other times, you have to browse through your entire iTunes library, SoundCloud dashboard, Spotify playlists, and still not feel anything. But once you have a song and pick out the section you want to choreograph to, listen to it… A LOT. And sometimes, you need dance choreography ideas and creative inspiration. Here are some tips that will help you tell a stronger story through choreography. Maybe you need to come up with dance choreography ideas that showcase your students’ newly learned skills, or are a dancer yourself struggling to put together a new composition. You might have the perfect music picked out and have filled the choreography with impressive technical skills, however you just feel that the whole piece needs just a little something more. What you’re probably lacking is a story, emotional and narrative threads weaved throughout the choreography that make the performance complete and connect the audience to the dance. Through the dance ID, Stephen Page, Bangarra’s artistic director and choreographer, investigates questions of identity and what it means to be an Aboriginal person in the 21st century. Page focuses on aspects of modern society in which a person’s skin colour may isolate them and be the reason why they are (or are not) accepted into a social group. Get ready. Choreographers may also use choreographic devices to organise movement in a way that helps to communicate their ideas. Here are some examples: unison (all the same), juxtaposition (different things at the same time), repetition (repeated movements), question and answer (movements act like a call followed by a response). Reflect. What do you see in the very first part of the clip until the dancers form two concentric circle shapes?