

IN SEARCH OF A CHOREOGRAPHIC IDENTITY: AN ANECDOTAL  
REFLECTION OF FINDING ONESELF  
AS A CHOREOGRAPHER

by

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## ABSTRACT

In this anecdotal reflection, I reflect upon and analyze my journey as a choreographer through four lenses: what led me to be a choreographer, my choreographic influences, an analysis of past trends in my work, and how I predict my choreographic identity will evolve moving forward. Though I did not grow up as a competition dancer, my high school and early college training provided an excellent base upon which my choreographic journey could grow. After a key opportunity presented itself in my third year of college, my career as a choreographer truly took off. Several choreographers, whose styles can be described by Laban Movement Analysis, have shaped me as the choreographer I am. Matt Steffanina and the Royal Family have both served as key influences in my hip-hop choreography due to their sharpness, isolations, and cohesiveness on stage. During my time at TCU, theatre professors Merrill West and Kelsey Milbourn have served as key influences on my tap in spite of their contrasting styles. Upon reflection of my past work, my use of stage stands out as a central defining factor; especially in large group numbers, I gravitate towards utilizing the majority of the stage to tell a story. I also heavily appreciate complexity within a piece. In tap, this manifests itself in terms of several sounds compressed into a short period of time whereas in hip-hop, this manifests itself in terms of several isolations compressed into a short period of time. Looking beyond graduation, I can continue to grow as an artist through continued education in Laban Movement Analysis and Alba Emoting. Additionally, by training as an assistant choreographer or dance captain under established Dallas-Fort Worth choreographers, I can both strengthen my working vocabulary of weaker dance styles and choreograph deeper, more meaningful stories. I am very pleased with the growth of my choreographic identity thus far and strongly look forward to strengthening it in the future.

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**INTRODUCTION**

The ultimate goal of musical theatre, as well as most dance, is to anatomize a story through human movement. In theatrical and dance productions, a choreographer is tasked with this crucial responsibility. They must take ideas from their mind and inspirations they draw upon and present them logically and swiftly on a stage for viewers. Through collaboration with dancers, taking inspiration and influence from pre-existing choreographic works, and a physical process of trial-and-error, each choreographer embarks on a journey to make audiences appreciate or question certain topics through dance. During my time as a theatre student at Texas Christian University (TCU), I began my journey as a choreographer. Though I have danced since high school, stepping into the realm of choreography has strengthened both my abilities as a dancer and my identity as an emerging artist. Through a variety of student choreography projects, I have begun to find a new identity as a choreographer and what influences have shaped this identity.

During the process of creation, one may find it difficult to objectively reflect upon their work. However, as with any art form, it is necessary for a growing artist to meditate on their past projects and analyze what was successful and how they can improve. Doing so allows them to practice a healthy growth mindset that strengthens their capabilities and identity as an artist. In this anecdotal reflection, I will analyze my choreographic identity in terms of what led me to be a choreographer, my choreographic influences, and trends present in my past works. I will then conclude with an analysis of how I believe my choreographic identity will evolve following graduation.

## SECTION 1: What Led Me to Be a Choreographer

I did not have a traditional dance upbringing like most dancers. I was not placed in dance classes or a dance studio from a young age, nor did I grow up competing in youth dance competitions. As such, I did not grow up in my elementary years having working lexicon of dance vocabulary. Considering how many New York choreographers and dancers start dancing from a very young age, this fact may initially appear as an inhibitor to my ability to finding my choreographic identity. Instead of a disadvantage, however, I appreciate the training I have received and my formative years of dance. I have embraced the adage of it never being too late in life for one to try something new and am grateful for doing so. While I might not have started dancing and choreographing when most professionals do in life, my commitment and dedication to choreography (in addition to continued dance training) demonstrates how one does not necessarily need to begin a dance journey early in life in order to achieve success.

My roots in musical theatre dance can be traced to my high school years at Houston Christian High School. During this time from 2016-2020, I participated in four musicals: *Curtains*, *Legally Blonde*, *Mary Poppins*, and *Crazy for You*. In each of these shows, I performed as an ensemble or featured dancer. In these shows, I internalized the importance of musical theatre dance within a show. I did not feel the need to be the “leading man” type in musical theatre; rather, I took joy in participating in large dance numbers and embraced the love I had for dance. In my first two years, I only participated in musical theatre dance. However, in my Junior Year, I began to tap dance. I found a natural inclination towards tap because of my ability to quickly pick up the rhythms and baseline tap steps that make up almost all other moves. Tap quickly grew into one of my favorite styles.

Additionally, during this time, I saw my fine arts teachers, Mrs. Kirsten Stewart and Dr. Bobby Linhart, tell stories as directors and choreographers while still coaching our cast to become better dancers; rather than solely focusing on the lead roles in the show, they spent extensive time during rehearsals dissecting the ensemble dances. During this time, they gave each of the dancers joy through opportunities for self-expression. While we were all doing the same moves within a piece, we were given opportunities to express ourselves through the characters we portrayed. This expression gave me and my fellow ensemble members joy; as a current choreographer, I look back on these moments as the basis for my desire to give other dancers joy through chances to express themselves through movement. Furthermore, within large ensemble numbers, they stressed synchronicity among dancers, appropriate energy given the style of the piece, and above all, sharpness of movement. Sharpness of movement is the stylistic element of Linhart and Stewart that has stuck with me the most throughout my choreographic journey. Being sharp - precise, direct, and strong - with movements added an extra level of cleanliness to our dances that I have strived to achieve during my time as a choreographer. The dedication my teachers gave me during my high school years provided me with a strong foundation to base my choreographic journey on.

Transitioning from high school to college, I maintained my identity as a dancer through classes and small student-led performances. However, an opportunity to choreograph presented itself during my Junior Year in the form of *The Choreographer's Stage*: a show in Theatre TCU's season designed to showcase original student-choreographed dance pieces. I immediately felt the need to take part in this show as a choreographer. Above all else, I felt the need to be on the other side of the table; I knew what it was like to be choreographed for as a dancer, but I knew I needed to choreograph myself in order to truly understand the art of dance more

thoroughly. Additionally, I felt a desire to create stories through movement and was excited by the anticipated artistic satisfaction I would gain as a result. As such, I applied and was fortunately accepted to be a choreographer. I took *The Choreographer's Stage* as an opportunity to explore choreography through hip-hop as I was the most comfortable and confident in that style at the time. I combined three ideas for different dances I had into one three-part dance piece: a men vs. women hip-hop battle entitled *The Dance Off*.

I based the three parts of the piece on different hip-hop styles. The first section was an all-women's dance to "Love Don't Cost a Thing" by Jennifer Lopez. For this section, I took inspiration from iconic hip-hop women of the 1990s including Jennifer Lopez, Missy Elliott, and Paula Abdul. This piece included moves with seductive energy, hip-emphasizing movements, and body rolls. The dance sought to embody pro-female sex-positive sentiments of contemporary decades like the 90s; in the context of the story, the ladies of the dance off sought to out-sensualize the men. In contrast, the men's piece to "I Wanna Be Your Slave" by Måneskin took inspiration from more modern hip-hop. This section was unique through its showcase of floorwork - combinations of moves in which the majority of one's body is on the floor or supported by three or four extremities in contact with the floor. In the context of the story I told, the men of the dance off attempted to out-dance their female competition through strong grounded movement involving the feet and lower legs dropping strongly into the ground. In the final section, the two groups came together to emphasize the power of unity through dance. In this final section to "Club Can't Handle Me" by Flo Rida ft. David Guetta, I sought to embody my own personal dance style - fun, upbeat, sharp, and energetic movements that give audiences a "wow" factor. All fourteen dancers came together in this section, suspended their battle, and used dance as an opportunity to bring their two groups together instead of driving them apart.

Though the piece began in division, I ended it in unity as that is one of the ultimate goals of dance.

As a result of this project, I felt a desire to continue choreographing. Seeing my own work on stage led me to truly appreciate and value creation. I was always taught that creation is an opportunity to inspire, excite, and promote change, but creating firsthand genuinely made me internalize it. This internalization came from the opportunity to anatomize my ideas and bring them from my mind to a concrete vision on stage. Ultimately, because of the dancers, my ideas became larger than me. The dancers did not just do the steps I gave them; they brought their individual experience to the steps which brought a sense of life to the dance I could not envision during the choreographing phase. They made me feel better about my movements than when I originally created them. Through this process, I learned that while one person choreographs a dance, the implementation of that choreography is a collaboration. My ideas as a choreographer could not come into fruition unless I worked hand-in-hand with the dancers to ensure my movies worked on their bodies as planned. While I come up with the ideas, I obviously need more than just my body to bring my ideas to life. I took pride and joy in collaborating with others which was one of the driving forces behind my continuing to choreograph.

Additionally, I valued telling stories through choreography and refining the choreography in preparation for storytelling. In a world where art is often undervalued in relation to STEM subjects, I firmly believe artistic storytelling is of the utmost importance. In light of this, I wanted to continue choreographing to tell stories that excite and challenge. In order to maximize the impact of storytelling during a dance, refinement and cleaning a dance is necessary. During my first project, I appreciated the ability to tighten and add more layers and depth to a combination after I taught it. This refining phase involved making sure dancers were



synchronized with each other, adding more dynamic shifts to a piece, and ensuring the dancers understood and embodied the overarching idea or concept for each piece. It allowed me to take dancers that already executed the choreography well and make them look even better on stage. With all this in mind, I knew my choreographic journey could not end with *The Choreographer's Stage*; rather, I needed to continue creating, collaborating, and choreographing.

## **SECTION 2: Choreographic Influences**

With my choreographic roots in mind, it is necessary to discuss the influences that have shaped me as a choreographer. Before discussing these individuals, it is important to understand a key method in describing a choreographer's style of movement. Laban movement, coined by Hungarian scientist and artist Rudolf Laban, seeks to objectively categorize movement into one of eight "effort actions." (Groff, 1995) Under Laban Movement Analysis (LMA), any body movement can be categorized based on whether a body movement is direct or indirect, sudden or sustained, free or bound, and light or strong. Through the utilization of LMA, one can combine facets of movement to reveal artistic or personal qualities through movement. (Agarwal, Dewan, & Singh, 2018) For choreographers, LMA is especially helpful in determining one's style. As one's style gets passed down to choreographers of future generations, the Laban effort actions naturally get passed down as well. Throughout the description of the following choreographers and subsequent analysis of my own style, I will rely on LMA as a key descriptor of each individual's movement.

From a young age, Matt Steffanina has consistently served as an inspiration for my evolution as a hip-hop dancer and choreographer. Steffanina is a Los Angeles-based hip-hop dancer and choreographer. He is the founder of the DNCR Academy, an online dance school,

and a frequent teacher at the Millennium Dance Complex, a premiere dance studio in Los Angeles. Steffanina's choreography has attracted me due to its isolations, juxtapositions of "pictures," and sharp movements. Isolations within a dance piece occur when either part of or the whole body freezes for a split second; these isolations in conjunction create a series of "pictures" of movements within a dance piece. When combined, these isolations and pictures create phrases of dance that translate into a full dance combination and story. Steffanina has a firm grasp on how to combine isolations cohesively and effectively within a piece. His isolations combined with sharp, hard-hitting moves strongly attract me to his style. In terms of Laban Movement Analysis, Steffanina contrasts "punches" – moves that are heavy, direct, quick, and bound – and "floats" – moves that are light, indirect, slow, and free. By combining two seemingly opposite effort actions, Steffanina creates contrast in his dance routines that make them notable stand out compared to others.

His style is especially evident in two of his routines: "Where Are Ü Now" by Skrillex & Diplo featuring Justin Bieber and "Worth It" by Fifth Harmony. In "Where Are Ü Now," he utilizes sharp flexions of the hand in the pre-chorus to compress several pictures within a short amount of time. He also has brief pauses at the end of some eight-count phrases (a section of eight beats within a song). In the chorus, he begins with sharp full-body movements to contrast the lower energy that immediately preceded it. He This energy brought about by the sharp movement pairs well with the orchestrations of the song's dance break. As the piece concludes, he switches into more fluid float-like moves that still contain sharp isolations as dancers hit the beats present in the song's orchestrations. The contrast of fluid and sharp isolations creates a sense of harmony within the piece and pairs movements logically with the music they are danced to.

In “Worth It,” Steffanina starts his routine with clear punch movements. The section in which the song starts contains seven percussive beats; he emphasizes each of these physically with various moves sharply, directly, and suddenly. He continues to punch throughout the remainder of the verse, mostly using his extremities. Steffanina does not float as much in this routine; rather, he adds contrast through various split-second pauses. These pauses allow viewers slight breaths to appreciate the phrase of movement that preceded it. As a choreographer, Steffanina’s combination of punches and pauses sticks out to me as aesthetically pleasing. While I fully acknowledge “aesthetics” are subjective, I believe this contrast adds levels to the routine. It also balances Steffanina’s play with rhythms with breaks to distinguish one phrase from the next. Overall, Steffanina’s sharp punches, contrasting floats, and ability to compress several pictures within a short amount of time have greatly influenced me as a choreographer.

Similar to Steffanina, the Royal Family has also had a profound impact on my identity as a hip-hopper. Founded by New Zealand choreographer Parris Goebel, the Royal Family is a world-renowned hip-hop dance crew. It is one of six hip-hop dance troupes that stemmed out of the Palace Dance Studio in New Zealand (also founded by Goebel). Comprised of hip-hop dancers from across the globe, the crew is well-known for its large, energetic group numbers. In terms of LMA and similar to Steffanina, the Royal Family is undeniably defined by its predominance of punches – movements that are heavy, direct, quick, and bound.

The Royal Family’s Internet-famous dance to “Bitch Better Have My Money” by Rihanna immediately caught my attention as a choreographer. The dance perfectly showcased Goebel’s ability to stage large group numbers with tens of dancers in an organized, logical way. The piece showcases excellent transitions between dance formations amid several tempo (of rate of music) changes throughout the song. Within each transition, the dancers punch throughout the

majority of the dance. These punches are highly synchronized among the troupe; more specifically, each dancer's moves are precisely timed to where the whole group moves as one. No dancer's punches look out of time with the rest of the troupe, they are all synchronized with each other. Additionally, the piece features Goebel's ability to make sense out of different parts of the dance and combine them into a cohesive routine. Amid the many changes in pacing and beats in the song, the crew seamlessly transitions from one section to the next. For example, at several points during the routine, the crew switches from dancing as a whole to splitting off into sections; some dancers clear off stage for others to come forward and be the center of attention. Each of these transitions is sharp, seamless, and synchronized. The culmination of these transitions throughout the entire routine has inspired me to do the same with my large group dances. It encourages me to find the harmony within a seemingly chaotic, multi-layered dance piece. Goebel and the Royal Family have been a driving force behind my appreciation and inclination towards large group dances.

Finally, I would be remiss without reflecting on the influence of two Texas Christian University (TCU) faculty members that have had a profound impact on my choreographic identity: Merrill West and Kelsey Milbourn. West is an alum of Broadway and performed in the 2001 revival of *42<sup>nd</sup> Street*. ("Merrill West," n.d.) She was also a member of the Radio City Rockettes, a New York City precision dance company, for eight seasons. After a twenty-year career in performance in New York City, West returned to Dallas/Fort Worth and currently serve as an adjunct faculty member for the Department of Theatre. She is also a frequent choreographer across the metroplex with several choreography credits at the regional theatre Casa Mañana. Milbourn is a TCU Department of Theatre graduate of the B.F.A Musical Theatre program; they now serve as an an adjunct faculty member for the Department of Theatre. While

they are not teaching, they frequently choreograph in Kansas City and Dallas-Fort Worth. They have several regional DFW choreography credits including works at Circle Theatre, Stage West Theatre, and the Dallas Theatre Center.

During the Spring 2023 semester, I served as a Teaching Assistant for West's Intermediate Tap class and a student Milbourn's Advanced Tap class. I learned that while both instructors maintained different tap styles, both influenced me as a choreographer and strengthened my choreographic identity. In line with her work in *42<sup>nd</sup> Street*, West's style involves more traditionally classical Broadway-inspired tap. Her routines consistently involved tap moves that were up and light. These moves brought about an illusion of weightlessness in dancers since the arms and upper body remain flowy and light while the legs and feet move to make percussive sounds. West also emphasized telling a story through dance in her class. As is the goal in all theatre, West believed each dancer should tell a story through each dance that reveals who either they or the character they are playing is experiencing. In terms of LMA, West's style best fits under dabs – moves that are light, direct, quick, and free. This style allowed me to understand the traditional style of tap most commonly seen in classical musicals and add her lexicon of tap vocabulary into my own working vocabulary as a choreographer.

In contrast to West, Milbourn's style offered a shift from traditional Broadway tap to "hoofing." Hoofing is a style of tap in which the whole foot from ball to heel sharply comes into contact with the ground and then lifts back off. Hoofing allows for heavy percussive sounds in a piece and is much more contemporary compared to traditional Broadway tap. Through the lens of hoofing, Milbourn emphasized sharp attack-like movements. Rather than looking weightless, their style embraces a dancer's full weight and places it into the move. This produces loud, strong, percussive, and muscular sounds that align with the punch effort action. Milbourn's style

attributed a sense of attack to my choreographic identity that I have since learned how to balance with West's lighter style. By combining the two, my choreographic identity has strengthened, and I have learned how to embrace multiple styles within the same type of dance.

### **SECTION 3: Analysis of Past Trends in my Work**

With my main choreographic influences in mind, it is necessary to reflect on my past works and analyze what trends I have adapted from my influences. In doing so, I fully acknowledge that I am a young choreographer without an extensive resume of choreographic works. To date, I have choreographed nine dance pieces. While I am in the beginning of my career as a choreographer, it is still essential to reflect on my past work objectively.

One of the most striking facets of my dances is the use of stage. In several of my pieces, I have noticed how I tend to use the majority of the stage to tell the story. I strongly gravitate towards this because I believe it creates a larger spectacle on stage. It also allows me to fully examine the interrelationship of multiple dancers in a piece. As dancers interact within a piece, the relationships they create contribute to the story being told. With more dancers occupying a greater area of the stage, I can utilize the entire stage to tell a story. Additionally, I appreciate the ability to paint larger pictures on a larger canvas. The Royal Family has shown me that having more dancers on stage creates larger pictures within each phrase of dance. Drawing from the influence of their style, using most of the stage during large group numbers allows me to tell larger stories on stage. I believe these large stories not only have a greater sense of "wow" factor, but they also impact audiences on a larger scale. As such, using the stage to the fullest extent is a key defining factor in several of my pieces.

One such piece is the third part of my Choreographer's Stage piece for Theatre TCU. In the final section of *The Dance Off*, all fourteen dancers came together on stage to emphasize the message of unity being told. While the first section included a short duet between two of the dancers, the dancers filled the entire stage in two rows of four dancers and one row of five. They all did synchronized movement through the majority of the first verse, further sending the message of uniting as one through dance. They stayed in this four-five-four formation through the end of the first chorus until joining in a single vertical line in the center of the stage. For a brief moment during the bridge, they remained in this line, but quickly turned the line horizontally and filled the stage once again. All fourteen dancers remained in this line through the bridge. As soon as the second chorus commenced, the dancers broke out into three trapezoid formations – two with four dancers, and one with six dancers. In the final pose, all fourteen dancers joined in the center.

Upon reflection, I believe this was an effective use of the stage that allowed me to successfully relay my message on stage. Filling the stage in the first verse and chorus allowed the audience to understand the size and scope of the story being told. Contrasting this with the vertical line in the bridge provided a break from the fullness that preceded it. It also combined all the dancers without filling the entire stage. Branching into the horizontal line and the trapezoids at the end once again reinforced the piece's message and ended the piece on an upbeat positive note. The use of space in *The Dance Off* was undoubtedly the key reason behind the piece's success.

A second piece of note is my choreography to "Whip My Hair" for Alpha Psi Omega's *Night of Drag: Sin City*. This piece involved eleven dancers – one lip-syncer in drag and ten dancers. The lip-syncer acted as a teacher while the ten dancers acted as her students. This

piece's story involved the students getting the teacher to unleash her inner sensuality. As such, the dancers began the stage in a horizontal line to establish who they were in relation to the teacher. They continued to fill the stage throughout the rest of the song in various formations such as standing in front of all three sides of the audience and splitting into two horizontal lines across the stage. At the piece's close, the lip-syncer joined the other ten dancers on stage; all eleven performers flooded in the stage in three lines that gave the piece a large closer and served as a celebration of the teacher's successful unleashing of her inner sensuality. Overall, I believe this piece's use of stage positively aided in telling the story. The variety of formations on the stage allowed for various dynamic changes throughout the piece while still showing the depth of the story the dancers were telling. I believe my use of stage in this piece was appropriate and effective.

Another signature trend in my pieces is the complexity of steps used. The difficulty level of movements and the rhythm of moves in a dance is essential in creating dances of high caliber and aids in creating a sense of "wow factor" for viewers. I always aim for a high level of complexity in my routines to showcase my abilities as a choreographer and my dancers' abilities as movement-based storytellers. As my choreographic identity has developed, I have learned that complexity of steps manifests itself differently depending on the style of dance being performed.

In tap routines, I believe complexity of steps comes from the amount of sounds shoehorned into a short amount of time. Tap is a predominantly percussive style of dance in that it involves the striking of two stainless steel plates at the bottom of a dancer's tap shoe with the floor to produce sounds. The most complex and impressive tap routines I have seen and choreographed contain several sounds compressed into a very short period of time. This is similar to Milbourn's aforementioned style of compressing several sounds into a short amount of



time through hoofing. By combining the strength of hoofing with a multitude of sounds, I have been able to implement complex steps into my tap routines.

The most notable example of this is my dance routine to “Broadway Rhythm” for Theatre TCU’s 2024 Senior Showcase. The beginning of this routine featured two pauses of eight beats in which I tapped completely a capella (with no music playing as I danced). During the second of these two breaks, I implemented three moves into the routine consisting of three or more fast tap moves: a firecracker (in which the ball of one foot brushes forward and back on the ground while the other is mid air, followed by the mid air foot landing and ending with the tips of the toes of the shuffling foot hitting the ground), a crossing double pullback (in which the balls of both feet spank the ground while moving inwards and then landing crossed at one’s center), and a crossing wing (in which the balls of the feet brush out, spank the floor in mid-air, then land center opposite the way they started). Later in the routine, I implemented a double shuffle time step followed by four alternating shuffles in a single eight-beat phrase. These two moves showcased a combined twenty sounds in this short time. At the end of the routines, I completed two maxie fords with a spank which consist of a combined twelve sounds in just over three beats. By adding these moves into my routine, I created fast percussive rhythms that added to the piece’s complexity. Since I both choreographed and performed this routine, this choreographic choice made audiences and the theatre industry in attendance at the showcase aware of what I was capable of. As the goal of this piece was to showcase my abilities instead of telling a story, the complexity of sounds in a short amount of time helped me to achieve my goal and demonstrate my capabilities as a tapper.

While tap’s complexity is derived from several sounds in a short amount of time, I believe hip-hop’s complexity comes from several isolations in a short amount of time. Since hip-

hop is not percussive like tap is, it is essential for complex hip-hop routines to contain several compressed isolations. Doing so provides elements of strong sharpness and energy to a piece. Due to its sharp, direct nature, isolations often come in the form of punches in hip-hop. Since punches are quick and bound instead of slow and free, this makes punches especially useful in creating sharp isolations and pictures in a short time. It also provides enough time for dancers to quickly shift from one isolation to another. As my choreographic identity has developed, I have discovered a liking and appreciation for quick isolations in hip-hop. It serves as an impressive form to show of a dancer's abilities and contributes an incomparable "wow factor" to a hip-hop routine.

I especially noticed this ability during my choreography to "Green Light" for Theatre TCU Black Excellence's production of *TCU Sings: Alicia Keys & John Legend*. In the rap verses of this routine, I anatomized the quick pace of words with sharp, quick isolations. Each phrase of movement contained several punches separated by various brief pauses to allow the audience to realize the isolations. In doing so, I not only paired the pace of movements with the words they were danced to, but also created a sense of complexity on stage. I also successfully elevated the routine's difficulty which created a more intriguing spectacle for viewers. Overall, while isolations vary across different styles of dance, I have learned to embrace them and use them to my advantage as a choreographer.

#### **SECTION 4: How Do I Predict my Choreographic Identity Will Change Moving Forward?**

Following the analysis of my choreographic identity in terms of the past and present, it is crucial to make predictions as to how I believe my choreographic identity will change moving forward. One of the key ways in which I believe my identity will grow is through more training

in various styles of movement and expressive emotions through dance. While I have a working understanding of Laban's effort actions, Laban breaks movement into three other categories with which I would like to acquaint myself. The first of these, "body" analyzes connections and patterns between body parts when the body is in motion. (Brooks, 1993) The second, "shape" describes the changes and manipulations of the body during motion. The third, "space" involves the body's connection with its surrounding environment. As I plan to live in Dallas-Fort Worth post grad, taking masterclasses on LMA would be the most logical way to strengthen this aspect of my identity. Several local arts organizations, including Forward Actors, offer classes in LMA. This training would both reinforce my working knowledge of effort actions while simultaneously training me in the remaining three facets of LMA with which I am unfamiliar. This would serve as a great benefit to me as a choreographer.

A second movement style in which I can grow in to strengthen my identity is Alba Emoting. This psychological technique suggests that regardless of culture, the basic emotions of anger, sadness, fear, tenderness, and eroticism are all linked to specific facial, postural, and respiratory movements. (Kalawski, 2020) Alba Emoting is crucial for actors as it psychologically connects inner emotions to outer movement. They train actors in how to physically portray one's inner emotions on an external level. Similar to growth in LMA, Alba Emoting classes are necessary for my growth as a choreographer. While less common in DFW, online training classes offered by the Alba Technique studio in New York City would serve as a great benefit to me. By embracing the link between emotion and physicality, I will become a much better storyteller through movement. The training would also aid me in anatomizing emotions and layering them to tell a cohesive story. Training in Alba Emoting would be an effective and scientifically proven way to improve my identity as a choreographer.

In addition to training in these styles of movement, I can strengthen my choreographic identity by choreographing more frequently in the DFW area post-graduation. An increase in choreographing would also increase the amount of influences I have. As such, it is necessary to train under choreographers in the area as an assistant choreographer or dance captain. Within a theatrical production, assistant choreographers usually aid the choreographer in composing the movement of a show without being in the cast. Dance captains, however, is a member of the cast who maintains and strengthens the choreography; they do not work on the choreography itself like an assistant choreographer would, but rather ensure the choreography remains consistent after the choreographer finishes their work. Training in one of these two positions would undeniably help me become a professional choreographer in the DFW area and beyond.

Several choreographers in DFW including Amber Marie Flores, the aforementioned Merrill West and Kelsey Milbourn, Evor Wright, Hanna DeLong, and Joel Ferrell, would be extremely beneficial to my personal and professional growth. By researching their shows and applying to assistant choreograph under them would allow me to see how they work in a rehearsal space. It would also give me key insights as to how they approach movement through story. One facet of this relationship that would be particularly helpful is their past training in technique-based styles such as contemporary and lyrical. While I am currently training in dance technique, I do not have an extensive working knowledge of these technique-based styles. By training with these choreographers, I can witness how they connect typical moves seen in ballet and contemporary dance and use them to tell stories. Training under these individuals who have achieved great success in their work will not only strengthen my identity as an upcoming professional choreographer, but also help me to achieve the same success they have.

Finally, one of the most important ways I can strengthen my identity is choreographing for meaning instead of show. I believe that not all dance pieces have to contain a deeper meaning and that some dances, especially more commercial styles, can be created simply for the purpose of entertainment. However, I simultaneously believe that in order to be a skilled and competent choreographer, one must have the ability to choreograph based on a desired meaning of a piece. While “meaning” is subjective from person to person, skilled choreographers must determine a vision for their dance, derive the message they want to share through the dance, and effectively create a sequence of movements that reflects this message.

The best way to aid myself in achieving this is to align myself with more musical theatre-based projects rather than commercial dance-based projects. In past experiences choreographing concerts including the aforementioned *TCU Sings: Alicia Keys & John Legend*, my dance pieces tend to be more performative in nature; since the purpose of these concerts was to uplift the music of a certain artist rather than tell a story, I retroactively realized I did not choreograph based on a story needing to be told. Musical theatre dances, however, are specifically created with a storytelling element behind them. By shifting my focus to learning from professional choreographers on musical theatre projects, I can better serve my choreographic identity and make myself a more well-rounded choreographer.

## CONCLUSION

Upon reflection of my roots in choreography, choreographic influences, trends in past work, and predicted evolution of my journey as a choreographer, I am proud of how my choreographic identity has grown during my time at TCU. Though I did not start my choreography journey until later in my adolescent years, I have proven that starting late does not limit one’s ability to become a choreographer. Through training in various styles of dance and

movement, my identity has grown. However, to truly maximize my choreographic identity's potential, I must continue to learn and grow throughout my entire career as an artist. Doing so will allow me to grow into a well-rounded, competent choreographer. I also happily anticipate the welcoming of new choreographic influences into my life. As I train, I will gain more influences that will contribute to and help shape my own style as a choreographer. In the future, I will happily accept new styles and influences as positive agents for change in my choreographic identity.

Following graduation, I look forward to continuing my training beyond a pedagogical setting at institution of higher learning. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time in college and greatly appreciate the training I have received, but entering post-college life will allow me to build a more extensive repertoire of influences and continued training. I anticipate this training will involve topics of dance that I either did not learn in college or need more growth in. Through this training, I can also meet new industry professionals outside of my professors while still implementing my professors' teachings into my work. The combination of my past and future influences and training will help me maximize my identity and capabilities as a choreographer. I am proud and content with the evolution of my choreographic identity during college and excitedly look forward to its continued development as I enter the professional theatre industry.

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