A 21st Century Nutcracker

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract

Originally created in late 19th Century Russia, The Nutcracker has become one of the most widely recognized ballets in the world, and in spite of its Russian origins, no other country seems to value The Nutcracker more than America. In America, The Nutcracker is a cherished holiday tradition, with millions of people filling the seats of participating theaters every winter. Unfortunately, The Nutcracker is historically stereotypical and exclusive. The Act II variations, notably Chinese Tea and Arabian Coffee, often present ill-informed stereotypes of the cultures they are tied to. Additionally, the ballet typically revolves around a young girl from an Anglo-European family, thereby excluding alternate ethnicities from the central narrative. Thankfully, choreographers like Mark Morris (The Hard Nut, 1991), Donald Byrd (The Harlem Nutcracker, 1995), and Christopher Wheeldon (The Nutcracker, 2016) have demonstrated that it is possible to alter The Nutcracker in ways that both challenge and maintain tradition. Inspired by these artists, I decided to produce my own version of The Nutcracker, titled A 21st Century Nutcracker, this past fall (2017). In pursuing this project, I had three primary goals: to expand my knowledge and broaden my skillset, to validate my research and demonstrate The Nutcracker’s openness to change, and to encourage other dance artists, particularly dance students, to challenge tradition and take risks in their own artistic endeavors. In this work, I explain my creative process, beginning with the preliminary research, followed by the conception of the project, the creation and development of the work, the production aspects, and, finally, the outcome of the project.

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Process Analysis Statement

Introduction

A college student sits on her couch with her computer in her lap, typing furiously. She is working on a research paper for her dance history class that examines the history and significance of the world-renowned ballet The Nutcracker. It is spring in 2017, and the end of the school year is fast approaching. The student is soon to enter her final year of undergraduate study, and she is somewhat preoccupied by impending responsibilities. Her mind wanders to future concerns; she is an honors college student, and she must soon determine what she would like to do for her thesis, a culmination of all she has learned. In this moment, she is struck by an idea, an extraordinary epiphany. She thinks to herself--what if I produced my own version of The Nutcracker? That college student was me, several months ago.

Composed by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky and originally choreographed by Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov in 19th Century Russia, The Nutcracker is an imperial ballet that revolves around a young girl named Clara, whose Christmas gift, a nutcracker, comes to life and leads her through a magical kingdom known as the Land of Sweets. Now a significant part of American culture, The Nutcracker has become a beloved holiday tradition, with millions of Americans filling the seats of participating theaters each winter. Consequently, The Nutcracker serves as a primary source of income for amateur and professional dance companies nationwide. In some cases, The Nutcracker can help fund a company’s productions for a full calendar year, making it essential to reproduce annually. Even Ball State Dance Company, previously known as Ball State Dance Theatre, produces its own version of The Nutcracker every four years.

In spite of its popularity, traditional productions of The Nutcracker are often stereotypical and exclusive. The second act of The Nutcracker takes place in “The Land of Sweets” and consists of a series of divertissements, notably Chinese Tea and Arabian Coffee, which often present ill-informed stereotypes of the cultures they are tied to. Additionally, The Nutcracker typically revolves around a young girl from an Anglo-European family, and thus, dancers of different ethnicities are often typecast in foreign roles. However, choreographers like Mark Morris (The Hard Nut, 1991), Donald Byrd (The Harlem Nutcracker, 1995), and Christopher Wheeldon (The Nutcracker, 2016) have demonstrated that it is possible to make alterations to The Nutcracker without rendering it completely unrecognizable. In other words, The Nutcracker is open to change.

I discovered all of this during the spring semester of 2017 while researching The Nutcracker for my dance history class. Inspired by these findings, I endeavored to produce my own Nutcracker for my honors thesis. In pursuing this project, I had three primary goals. First, I wanted to expand my knowledge and broaden my skillset. At this point, I had performed in and/or worked on several productions but had not yet produced my own. Developing an original Nutcracker could potentially provide me with valuable experience as a producer, director, and choreographer. Secondly, I wanted to validate my research and demonstrate The Nutcracker’s openness to change. Creating my own version of The Nutcracker could give me the opportunity to substantiate my findings as well as verify The Nutcracker’s supposed malleability. Finally, I wanted my project to serve as inspiration for other dance artists, particularly dance students, to challenge tradition and take risks. I hoped that pursuing this project might encourage others to push conventional boundaries in their own artistic endeavors. In the following sections, I explain my process, beginning with the preliminary research, followed by the conception of the project,
the creation and development of the work, the production aspects, and, finally, the outcome of the project. Producing my own Nutcracker was an incredible learning experience, and I am proud of what I made.

Preliminary Research

The Nutcracker’s history begins in late 19th Century Russia, shortly after the groundbreaking premiere of the imperial ballet The Sleeping Beauty in 1890. Adapted from E.T.A. Hoffman’s story “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King”, The Nutcracker was originally choreographed by Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov and composed by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. Petipa and Tchaikovsky expected to achieve great success with this new ballet, as their most recent work on The Sleeping Beauty received great praise from critics and ballet goers alike, but when The Nutcracker premiered in St. Petersburg at the Maryinsky Theatre on December 6th, 1892, audiences were less than impressed (Nutcracker Nation 14). One of the most disliked aspects of the ballet was the presence of children on stage. One critic wrote: “In the first scene, the entire stage is filled with children, who run about...are naughty, and interfere with the oldsters dancing. In large amounts, this is unbearable.” (Nutcracker Nation 15). Additionally, many took issue with the libretto, feeling as though it did not adequately represent Hoffman’s story and “lacked dramatic coherence” (Nutcracker Nation 16). In spite of these issues, the ballet reappeared in condensed forms on several occasions, and in the early part of the 20th Century, started to travel in bits and pieces (Nutcracker Nation 20).

Eventually, The Nutcracker came to America, and one of the first companies to introduce it was the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. The Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo migrated from Europe to America during World War II, and during the 1940s and 50s, “crisscrossed the country with a condensed Nutcracker”, which received praise from a number of audiences as well as the established critic Edwin Denby (Nutcracker Nation 20-22). In the early 1940s, a man named William Christensen staged excerpts of the ballet in the San Francisco bay area, eventually staging the first full-length American Nutcracker for the San Francisco Ballet in 1944 (Nutcracker Nation 22). Ten years later, George Balanchine choreographed his own version of The Nutcracker for the New York City Ballet, sometimes referred to as The Nutcracker (Siegel 255). When Balanchine came to America, he was already recognized as an artistic authority; people wanted to see his Nutcracker simply because they had heard of his talent (Nutcracker Nation 37). This led CBS to air his Nutcracker on television in 1957 and 1958, making his version of the ballet accessible to a wider audience (Nutcracker Nation 28). Consequently, Balanchine’s Nutcracker took America by storm and became the model for future American Nutcracker productions.

Unlike its Russian predecessors, American audiences fell in love with The Nutcracker almost immediately, and there are a couple notable reasons for this difference. First, Christmas is one of the most celebrated holidays in American culture, and The Nutcracker is closely tied to Christmas; the ballet takes place on Christmas Eve and is usually performed during the holiday season. In Russia, Christmas is a solemn holiday, primarily about paying homage to the birth of Christ. In America, Christmas is a jolly holiday, involving tree decorating, caroling, and gift giving (Nutcracker Nation 43). This cultural difference is part of the reason why The Nutcracker achieved greater success in America; the celebratory nature of the ballet was more appealing to American audiences. Americans also love The Nutcracker because it incorporates children in its story. As stated previously, Russian audiences were bothered by the presence of children in The
Nutcracker; they felt that childish behavior like running, playing with toys, and general naughtiness on stage was inappropriate. Conversely, American audiences thought the children were charming. Balanchine provided some insight into this difference of opinion in an interview about The Nutcracker several years ago. He said that in Russia, “no one asked children how they lived [or] what they thought. Children simply tried to become as much like adults as quickly as possible, and that was all.” For Americans, childhood was important because they were “citizens of a young country”; “if an adult [was] a good person,” that meant he was a child at heart (Nutcracker Nation 32).

Over time, The Nutcracker has become a significant part of American culture; today, it is a holiday tradition, with millions of Americans filling the seats of participating theaters every winter. As a result, The Nutcracker is a huge source of funding for amateur and professional companies nationwide. Some reports have suggested that The Nutcracker provides approximately forty percent of the annual revenue for professional companies (Tucker). For the Washington Ballet, The Nutcracker accounts for about fifty-six percent of the company’s annual ticket sales and twenty-two percent of the company’s annual revenue (Heath). Because of The Nutcracker’s economic value, many companies depend on it for funding each year, making it necessary to reproduce annually. Simply put, The Nutcracker is extremely powerful in the American dance world, which makes it important to consider its place in American dance culture and American culture as a whole.

Despite its popularity and prevalence, The Nutcracker has its flaws. Traditional Nutcracker productions are often Eurocentric and exclusive. As Donald Byrd says, “You’re being told a story—even when it’s set in America—from the perspective of a traditional 19th Century European household.” (“Is Nutcracker Racist?”) The second act of The Nutcracker takes place in “The Land of Sweets” and presents a series of divertissements, including Spanish Chocolate, Chinese Tea, and Arabian Coffee, which often display ill-informed stereotypes of the cultures they are tied to. Chinese Tea usually consists of plastered smiles, bobbing heads, and pointed index fingers (“Is Nutcracker Racist?”). Arabian Coffee presents similar problems, with ballerinas dressed in jeweled bras and gaudy harem pants performing classical ballet technique (“Arabian Coffee” 153). The variation typically features an “Egyptian Marilyn Monroe” on pointe dancing with other “Arabian” men and women and has been known to portray harmful, Middle Eastern stereotypes, such as licentious women and greedy, indolent men (“Arabian Coffee” 148). When these variations were originally choreographed, Europeans were fascinated with the east or the “Other”; many imperial ballets include variations loosely inspired by Eastern dance. At the time The Nutcracker was choreographed, authenticity was not a priority. While audiences were fascinated by Eastern culture, they knew little to nothing about it, which meant that choreographers could display their imagined perceptions of Eastern cultures without question; as long as the piece matched the audience’s idea of Eastern dance, there were no objections (Jowitt 49, 50). Additionally, The Nutcracker typically revolves around a young girl from an Anglo-European family. Dancers of alternate ethnicities are usually typecast in foreign roles; “many African-American and Asian dancers can tell tales of always being cast in the ‘exotic’ Nutcracker variations,” thereby excluding them from the central narrative (“Arabian Coffee” 149).

Thankfully, there is evidence that The Nutcracker is open to change. Choreographers like Mark Morris, Donald Byrd, and Christopher Wheeldon have demonstrated that it is possible to make alterations to The Nutcracker without rendering it completely unrecognizable. Mark Morris’s The Hard Nut, choreographed in 1991, presents a retro-modern reimagining of the 19th
Century classic, with an altered storyline and gender-bent roles (Cohen). Donald Byrd’s *The Harlem Nutcracker*, choreographed in 1995, uses Duke Ellington’s version of Tchaikovsky’s score and tells the *Nutcracker*’s story from the perspective of an African-American family (Siegel 265). Christopher Wheeldon’s *Nutcracker*, choreographed in 2016, shifts the focus of the narrative from a privileged, upper middle class family to a poor, immigrant family, a choice that is particularly relevant to American society today (Sulcas).

It was these adaptations that served as my main source of inspiration for this project. I wanted to see if I could alter *The Nutcracker*’s narrative while maintaining some of its original characteristics. For many dance companies, *The Nutcracker* seems to have become an obligation, a necessary chore, but I see it as an opportunity for artistic exploration. There are endless possibilities for growth and expansion, and I wanted to try my hand at shifting the narrative and pushing *The Nutcracker*’s conventional boundaries.

**Conception**

In the summer of 2017, I entered the devising stage of my process. I knew that I wanted my *Nutcracker* to challenge tradition, but I also knew that if I wanted my *Nutcracker* to be successful, I would need to preserve some of the traditional aspects. Most successful *Nutcracker* productions are united by three conventional traits: a clear connection to Christmas, a narrative that at least partially resembles the original, and use of Tchaikovsky’s score. I let these factors guide the development of my project.

As stated previously, the original *Nutcracker* takes place on Christmas Eve, and the ballet is usually performed during the holiday season. In fact, whenever dance companies attempt to produce *The Nutcracker* any other time of year, audiences are confused; as Jennifer Fisher states in her book *Nutcracker Nation*, “A stray Nutcracker will still show up in July from time to time, [but] its scheduling inevitably produces furrowed brows.” (42) Due to *The Nutcracker*’s inextricable ties to Christmas, I resolved that my narrative would take place during the holiday season, and I would present my *Nutcracker* toward the end of the fall semester.

While alternate versions of *The Nutcracker* stray from the traditional production in various ways, they usually follow the traditional plotline to some extent. The original *Nutcracker* takes place on Christmas Eve and begins with a grand holiday party in the home of an upper middle class, Anglo-European family known as the Stahlbaums. At the start of the ballet, the Stahlbaums prepare for the arrival of their family and friends and greet them as they arrive. Once all of the guests have arrived, everyone decorates the family Christmas tree, and presents are handed to the children. Soon after, Drosselmeyer, a local councilman and magician, arrives. One of the children, Clara Stahlbaum, is particularly excited about his arrival, as Drosselmeyer is her godfather. Drosselmeyer presents more gifts to the children, including exciting lifelike dolls that dance. He also presents a small nutcracker, which proves disinteresting to all of the children but Clara. Thus, when her brother Fritz breaks it, Clara is heartbroken. That night, after everyone goes to bed, Clara sneaks back into the parlor to check on the nutcracker. The clock strikes midnight, and Clara is surprised to see Drosselmeyer atop the clock. Suddenly, the Christmas tree grows, and mice begin to fill the parlor. A battle ensues between the mice, led by the mouse king, and an army of gingerbread soldiers, led by the nutcracker. Eventually, it looks as if the mice are going to win the battle, but just as the mouse king prepares to defeat the nutcracker, Clara throws her slipper at him, distracting the mouse king long enough for the nutcracker to stab him. The remaining mice scatter, and the nutcracker transforms into a handsome prince. To show
his gratitude and honor Clara’s heroism, the prince leads Clara through a snowy pine forest to The Land of Sweets, a magical kingdom. Once there, the prince and the Sugar Plum Fairy, who rules The Land of Sweets while the prince is away, present a variety of sweets from around the world, including Spanish chocolate, Arabian coffee, Chinese tea, and Russian candy canes. Afterward, the Sugar Plum Fairy ushers Clara and the prince into a sleigh, and the sweets wave goodbye as they ride off into the distance. The end of the ballet varies but often concludes with some sort of return to reality; the audience might see Clara sleeping in the parlor or Drosselmeyer carrying her off to bed. Regardless, this is a general synopsis of the traditional tale.

Alternate versions of The Nutcracker like The Hard Nut and The Harlem Nutcracker offer a fresh take on the classic story. Mark Morris’s The Hard Nut presents a retro-modern reimagining of The Nutcracker that takes place in 1970s American suburbia. It follows a similar plotline, but the biggest difference between The Hard Nut and the traditional Nutcracker narrative is that it tells the story of the hard nut, which comes from the original E.T.A. Hoffman tale. At the start of the second act, while Clara is still recovering from the battle, Drosselmeyer decides to tell her the story of the hard nut. As he begins to tell the story, the audience sees the maid from the party scene in the first act wheel in a bright pink baby carriage, containing the baby Princess Pirlipat. A king and queen, who look a lot like Clara’s parents, enter and gaze upon their daughter affectionately. The maid is left to watch over the baby but dozes off. While the maid is asleep, the rat queen prances in with two of her friends, climbs into the baby carriage, and bites Princess Pirlipat. The parents re-enter with Drosselmeyer, utterly horrified to discover that the rat queen has put a curse on Princess Pirlipat, making her hideously ugly. The rat queen tells them that the only way to break the curse is to find the hard nut, which a young man must break with his teeth. The king gives Drosselmeyer the task of finding this nut, which launches him into a worldwide quest. After traveling to several different places across the globe without any luck, he eventually gives up and returns home, where he inadvertently discovers the nut. Princess Pirlipat has grown into a young woman, and several young men have tried to break the hard nut with no success. However, the last of the men, Drosselmeyer’s nephew, is able to crack the nut open with ease. Unfortunately, he steps on the rat queen in the process and thus places a curse on himself. As Pirlipat transforms into a beautiful young woman, Drosselmeyer’s nephew transforms into a nutcracker. In spite of her previous condition, Pirlipat denies him. At this point, Clara stops the story and says that, unlike Pirlipat, she will accept him, marking her transition into womanhood (“Mark Morris... (part 1)”). While the story of the hard nut does not appear in the original Nutcracker libretto, Drosselmeyer’s worldwide quest to find the hard nut closely resembles the presentation of sweets from around the world in the second act of the original Nutcracker. While The Hard Nut strays from tradition in many ways, it follows a similar storyline.

The Harlem Nutcracker, choreographed by Donald Byrd, also veers from the original libretto, as it revolves around a contemporary African-American family, with Clara depicted as an elderly grandmother instead of a young girl. The story begins with Clara preparing for her family’s arrival on Christmas Eve, when her deceased husband suddenly appears. He hands her a toy nutcracker he gave her long ago, and she dances with him. When her family arrives, he disappears, and they engage in celebration. At the end of the night, after everyone has gone to bed, Clara has a heart attack. Death comes to collect her with his demons, but her husband, disguised by a mask, fights them off. The two of them then journey to “Club Sweets”, where they witness a variety of performances by magicians, swing dancers, and even body builders. Eventually, Death re-enters to collect Clara, and shows her significant scenes from her past.
Suddenly, they are back in the living room, where Death covers her and drops her in a heap. Her family discovers her, and she gets up to say her goodbyes. Death returns and removes his cloak, revealing himself as her husband. Realizing that it is time to go, Clara surrenders to his will, and they ascend to heaven together ("The Harlem Nutcracker"). While this version is unique in many ways, it bears some resemblance to the original plot. Noticing these parallels, I reasoned that my Nutcracker should follow a similar storyline.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, most Nutcracker productions use some version of Tchaikovsky’s score, as the music is arguably more iconic than the ballet itself. Innovative works like The Hard Nut and The Harlem Nutcracker are no exception. The Hard Nut uses Tchaikovsky’s traditional score, and The Harlem Nutcracker uses the 1962 Duke Ellington-Billy Strayhorn Nutcracker Suite, a jazzy interpretation of Tchaikovsky’s composition. Conversely, Nutcracker productions that stray from the score typically struggle to achieve success. When dancer-choreographer Vigi Prakash attempted to stage a Bharatanatyam Nutcracker in Southern California in the 1990s, it did not resonate because she eliminated Tchaikovsky’s score (Nutcracker Nation 93, 94). Thus, I decided to use Tchaikovsky’s score in developing my own Nutcracker.

Over the summer, I listened to the traditional score repeatedly, writing down any ideas that came to mind while listening. For quite some time, I was feeling uninspired; none of my ideas were particularly compelling. Then, one day, it hit me; I could make a college-themed Nutcracker. The contemporary, satirical Nutcracker I imagined would revolve around a “typical” college experience: partying. In it, I would present exaggerated stereotypes of college partygoers, including the stoner, the wild one, the innocent one, the responsible one, egotistical fraternity brothers, ditzy sorority sisters, the “lightweight”, and the exhausted one. Similar to traditional Nutcracker productions, my version would center on a girl named Clara, an innocent freshman attending her first college party. To maintain The Nutcracker’s ties to Christmas, the party would be holiday-themed, complete with ugly Christmas sweaters and a Christmas tree adorned with empty beer cans. The nutcracker doll would be replaced by a bong, which Drossy, the stoner, would use to corrupt Clara’s innocence during the party. This would lead Clara to “The Land of Munchies”, where she would consume various post-party snacks and eventually fall victim to the magic of the Sleep Fairy.

Thus, A 21st Century Nutcracker was born. For the remainder of the summer, I continued to develop and refine my vision, using Tchaikovsky’s score as a guide for narrative development. The plot naturally began to take shape as the various pieces of music brought specific scenes to mind. A vivacious tempo and explosive notes in the “Candy Canes” music inspired me to feature popcorn in the Land of Munchies. Contesting horns and strings in the “March” conjured up the image of a beer pong match. The hypnotic, dreamlike twinkling of the celesta in the “Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy” reminded me of a lullaby and thus served as inspiration for the Sleep Fairy. Knowing that I would need to sacrifice some of the original score for the sake of time, I tried to choose my music carefully. In the end, my “score” ended up being about a half an hour long.
Below is a comparison of my final sequence of scenes with the original:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Nutcracker</th>
<th>A 21st Century Nutcracker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Overture”</td>
<td>The Pre-Game (“Overture”): The party characters are introduced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Decoration of the Christmas Tree”: The party begins, and friends and family decorate and light the Christmas tree.</td>
<td>“Decorating” the Tree (“The Decoration of the Christmas Tree”): The party begins, and the partygoers “decorate” the tree with beer cans, topping it with a liquor bottle. Drossy, the stoner, arrives soon after, holding a shiny bong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“March”: The party continues, and the children receive presents.</td>
<td>The Beer Pong Match (“March”): Clara’s friends challenge the fraternity brothers to a beer pong match and lose. Drossy and Clara befriend one another and head to another room in the house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Arrival of Drosselmeyer”: Drosselmeyer arrives bearing gifts.</td>
<td>Clara Takes a Hit (“Arrival of Drosselmeyer”): Drossy explains to Clara what it is like to be high, and Clara takes a hit from his bong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Departure of the Guests”: The exhausted party guests turn in for the night.</td>
<td>Busted (“Departure of the Guests”): The cops show up and everyone has to leave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Battle and Transformation”: The mice and gingerbread soldiers battle, and the nutcracker transforms into a prince.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Journey Through the Snow” and “Waltz of the Snowflakes”: The prince leads Clara through a snowy pine forest.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Magic Castle”: The Land of Sweets is introduced.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Arrival of Clara and the Nutcracker”: The nutcracker prince and Clara arrive.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Land of Sweets (“Chocolate”, “Coffee”, “Tea”, “Candy Canes”, “Marzipan”, “Mother Ginger and the Clowns”, “Waltz of the Flowers”): The kingdom honors Clara with sweets from around the world.</td>
<td>The Land of Munchies (“Tea”, “Candy Canes”, and “Waltz of the Flowers”): Clara returns home where she discovers she is quite hungry. She orders a pizza offstage and opens up a bag of sour patch kids (“Tea”). Still hungry, she munches on some popcorn (“Candy Canes”). Then, the pizza arrives, and her hunger is finally satisfied (“Waltz of the Flowers”).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
"Pas de Deux" and "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy": The Sugar Plum Fairy dances with the nutcracker prince and performs a solo for Clara.

Dance of the Sleep Fairy ("Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy"): Suddenly exhausted, Clara has a difficult time keeping her eyes open, and eventually succumbs to sleep.

"Final Waltz and Apotheosis": The sweets say goodbye to Clara, as she rides off in a sleigh.

The Dream Duet ("Pas de Deux"): Drossy appears in Clara’s dreams, and they perform a final duet together.

Creation

Once I had a definite vision for my project, I was ready to begin the creative process. There were three main facets to my creative process: developing characters, following a narrative, and making movement. At the start of the fall semester, I gathered ten dancers for my project and immediately started rehearsing.

The first stage of my rehearsal process was character development. To begin this part of the process, I revisited a resource I had used in previous acting classes called "Approaching the Role" (Appendix A). "Approaching the Role" emphasizes the idea that actors need to know the given circumstances of a scene as well as their characters’ names, backstories, hopes and dreams, friendships and relationships with others, objectives, obstacles, and points of view, among many other aspects of their identity. At one of my first rehearsals, I assigned my dancers specific characters, and gave them the following set of circumstances:

- It is the weekend before finals week, and you are going to a huge holiday party at the Theta Pi Gamma fraternity house at Stahlbaum University. Everyone in attendance knows at least one person in the fraternity except Clara, who has never been to a college party before.
- Attendees include two Theta Pi Gamma fraternity brothers, two Sigma Phi Alpha sorority sisters, an exhausted girl, a "lightweight", a stoner, an innocent freshman named Clara and her two friends, the wild one and the responsible one.
- Clara, the wild one, and the responsible one are all freshmen who know each other from high school.
- The wild one and the responsible one both know one of the fraternity brothers because they were in English together last semester.
- Drossy is friends with one of the fraternity brothers because they occasionally smoke pot together.
- The Sigma Phi Alpha sorority sisters are extremely close and know most of the Theta Pi Gamma boys.
- The Theta Pi Gamma fraternity brothers are best friends.
- The exhausted girl and the "lightweight" are frequent visitors of the Theta Pi Gamma fraternity and rarely miss a party.
- The exhausted girl is romantically interested in one of the fraternity brothers.

Then, I gave my dancers some time to "fill in the blanks". First, I asked them to think of a name, age, place of origin, year in school, major, and hobbies for each of their characters if not already given. Then, I instructed them to combine that information into a short backstory, asking them to be as detailed as possible in their accounts. After ten minutes or so, I had everyone share
their more fully developed characters with the group. “The wild one” evolved into a freshman telecommunications major and fashion minor named Lexi, the youngest of five children in a Catholic family. The Sigma Phi Alpha sorority sisters became Sabrina Anne James and Amanda Marie Anderson, a pair of spoiled, health-conscious sophomores, both single and super flirtatious. The Theta Pi Gamma fraternity brothers became Chaz Smith and Brad Johnson, an aspiring entrepreneur and lawyer who met during rush week, got hazed together, became best friends, and collectively go by “Braz”. Each character took on a full, unique identity.

Next, I wanted to see if my dancers could translate their character descriptions into movement sequences. I grouped the wild one, the responsible one, and Clara together, paired off the fraternity brothers, sorority sisters, the “lightweight” and the exhausted one, and left Drossy to work independently. Then, I asked each group to create a short phrase for their characters. I had them work on this for about ten minutes and, once again, asked them to share what they created with the group (see 2:46-4:05 of the rehearsal footage). For me, these phrases served as movement foundations for each character. While I did not intend on having these initial character assignments be their final character assignments, they ended up being their official characters, as each character I assigned seemed to be a natural fit for the corresponding dancer.

The next big step in my rehearsal process was building the party sequence. In traditional Nutcracker productions, the party is approximately twenty minutes long, and while I eliminated some of the party sequence from my rendition, most of it was included. Because I wanted the party sequence to emulate the look of a contemporary college party, I knew I would need to incorporate contemporary dance movement. To build the movement framework for the party sequence, I created what I called the “social dance alphabet”, which consisted of a series of modern-day social dance moves, most of which can be seen in many popular music videos from the past five years, including the dab (D), the shmoney dance (E), hit the folks (F), the dougie (I), the milly rock (M), the whip (W), and the nae nae (N). Some of the movements directly corresponded with letters; others did not (Appendix B).

From this “social dance alphabet”, I created social dance sequences and gave them names (see 13:00-14:30 of the rehearsal footage). For instance, the sequence BVYEXMD, referred to as the “roll and pop” phrase, consisted of a body roll, followed by a chest pop, followed by a sweep of the arm, followed by the shmoney dance, followed by the cat daddy, followed by the milly rock, and concluded with the dab. This particular phrase actually made its way into the official choreography, during the scene where they decorate the tree with beer cans (see 3:40-4:03 of the performance footage).

My dancers, while incredibly skilled technicians, struggled to perform these social dance moves, as the movement did not come easily to them. To help them navigate this challenge, I sent them a series of links to music videos that incorporated moves from my “social dance alphabet” so they could see how they looked when properly executed. While this helped to clarify the movement, they were still somewhat timid in their approach. To address this problem, I enlisted the help of a friend proficient in social dance and invited him to one of my rehearsals. At this rehearsal, he broke down some of the more complicated movements. After this, my dancers were able to execute the sequences much more fully and confidently.

Additionally, while my dancers created detailed character descriptions, they struggled to fully embody their characters. To assist them with this, I choreographed phrases that reflected their characters’ identities. After the beer pong scene, when they all break out to dance, the dancers form a long line and perform a sequence of movements in unison, but the fraternity boys perform a slightly different sequence from the rest of the characters to highlight the fact that they...
are males. For instance, when the female characters pop their hips, the male characters pop their chests; when the female characters twerk, the male characters perform pelvic thrusts and "make it rain", acting as if they are swiping dollar bills from their hands. While I choreographed the majority of the movement in the party sequence, there were several moments of improvisation within the movement framework. In terms of embodying their characters, the dancers struggled most with these moments of improvisation. To confront this challenge, we developed a series of "movement signatures" for each character that the dancers could reference whenever they were unsure what to do. The sorority girls' signature moves were a hair toss and a hair twirl. Clara's signature moves were rubbing her arm and uneasily looking around. The exhausted girl's signature moves were nodding off and rubbing her eye. Throughout this part of the rehearsal process, I encouraged the dancers to make their own artistic choices and offered feedback to help them relate my choreography to their characters. Following the line movement sequence mentioned above, the dancers split off into two lines and perform their own unique dance. In developing these individual dances, each dancer tried several different movements until they arrived at the one that I felt best represented their character. In the performance footage, the "lightweight" stumbles around in a circular pattern, the responsible one performs contained movements, and the fraternity brothers crouch down and watch the ladies dance (see 9:03-9:46 of the performance footage).

Once I had a significant portion of the party scene complete, I started working on what would make up the second half of *A 21st Century Nutcracker*, "The Land of Munchies". First, I tackled the "Popcorn" dance. When I listened to the original score, I was particularly struck by the explosive notes and running tempo of the "Candy Canes" music, sometimes referred to as the Russian variation. I envisioned a tap piece in which the dancers would embody the energy and sound of popcorn popping. When choreographing this variation, I considered ways in which I could use time, space, and energy to create the illusion of popping popcorn. I gave the dancers fast-paced tap steps and had them traveling different directions throughout the space. The foot movements were in unison, but their pathways were varied; the tap sounds were crisp and clear, but the dancers moved in every direction, just like pieces of popcorn (see 15:40-16:54 of the performance footage). Next, I worked on "Sour Patch Kids". In building this variation, I drew inspiration from Sour Patch Kids commercials. I wanted the dancers to embody the idea of "first they're sour, then they're sweet". In watching the performance footage, one can see that the dancers start off as mischievous troublemakers, yanking Clara's braids, pulling her arms, and spinning her in circles, but at the end of the dance, when Clara falls over from dizziness, the dancers catch her, pull her up, and hug her, displaying their sweet side. She rolls her eyes, pats them on the back, and smiles at them (see 14:27-15:35 of the performance footage).

In "The Land of Munchies", I revisit themes from the party sequence to establish the idea that, as Clara imagines food dancing in her state of delirium, she also recalls people and images from the party. For instance, the sorority sisters from the party sequence portray the sour patch kids in The Land of Munchies, and I allude to their former personas in the variation. At the beginning of the show, when the characters are first introduced, the sorority sisters freeze in a picturesque pose; they stand side by side, holding hands, with one of their hands above their heads and the other below their waists, creating a diamond-shaped frame around their faces. They repeat this pose during "Sour Patch Kids" (see 14:25-15:35 in the performance footage). Similarly, "Waltz of the Pizza" features a male delivery man, portrayed by one of the fraternity brothers from the party sequence. The dancer exhibits a similar, macho persona, performing pelvic thrusts and flirting with Clara. "Dance of the Sleep Fairy" features the same dancer who...
portrays the exhausted character during the party sequence; she yawns throughout the variation to recall her party personality. Clara and Drossy’s “Dream Duet” displays the same two characters the audience sees during the party sequence as ClaraImagine them in her dreams. They perform some of the same movement to revisit how they met. For instance, after Drossy introduces himself to Clara and takes her into a different part of the house during the party scene, he shows her his bong and convinces her to try it. They shrug their shoulders in laughter and sway from side to side in contentment (see 10:00-11:30 of the performance footage). This is seen again during the “Dream Duet” (see 25:50-26:22 of the performance footage).

During this part of the process, my biggest challenge was working with all of the dancers at once. Consequently, the two most challenging sections were the party sequence and “Waltz of the Pizza”. Setting movement on ten bodies was something I had never done before. Over time, I learned that the larger the group, the simpler the choreography can be; movement is important, but in large groups, small movements become amplified. If one dancer turns their head to the right in the midst of several other dancers, the audience might not notice, but if ten dancers turn their heads to the right at the same time, the audience cannot help but notice. Additionally, the way that bodies are arranged in space can communicate a message as much or even more so than the movement itself; ten dancers marching forward in a straight line across the stage will have a different affect than ten dancers marching in different directions.

These ideas particularly applied to “Waltz of the Pizza”. When I first started working on this piece, I placed too much emphasis on movement and not enough emphasis on spatial arrangement. I started by creating a series of movement phrases with slicing arms and sweeping turns to reference the circularity of pizza and the slicing action of a pizza cutter (see 1:03:25-1:06:20 of the rehearsal footage), but when I tried to put the phrases together, it did not have the effect that I hoped for. Seeking inspiration, I revisited Mark Morris’s “Waltz of the Flowers” in The Hard Nut as well as the New York City Ballet’s traditional “Waltz of the Flowers” (“Mark Morris…(part 2); “The Nutcracker…1993”). In both, I noticed distinct formations, thoughtful poses, and simple canons, all of which evoked the image of flowers swaying in a field. Additionally, both versions had a featured dancer; the New York City Ballet’s Nutcracker featured a soloist named Dew Drop, and The Hard Nut featured Clara’s mother. In both cases, the ensemble’s movement was subtle to draw attention to the featured dancer. Drawing inspiration from these versions, I paid closer attention to the arrangement of bodies in space, incorporated triangular poses in addition to my slicing and sweeping movement patterns, and let the delivery man occasionally take the spotlight. At the beginning of the dance, the dancers lay in a circle to form a large “pizza”, and the delivery man, standing in the center, divides them each into slices. The dancers hold their arms above their head in a “V” shape and sit up as the delivery man conducts them. When they stand up, they perform a waltz step with a partner, but they hold their hands in a triangle shape, with one hand linked above their hands and the other reaching straight across. Simultaneously, the delivery man waltzes Clara across the front of the stage. At the end of the dance, the dancers form a giant pyramid to recall the pizza slice shape for the last time (see 17:05-20:37 of the performance footage). Making these adjustments made the piece clearer and thus, more effective.

The final month of my rehearsal process was somewhat challenging, as I still had a lot to do and not a lot of time to do it. To ensure that I would feel confident moving into the week of the performance, I planned out the month by rehearsal, mapping out when I would accomplish what. Some things were not finished until the final day of rehearsal, but by the end of the month, I was able to accomplish all that I set out to and felt ready to share what I had made.
Production

In addition to devising and choreographing *A 21st Century Nutcracker*, I had to consider several production elements, including budget, set design, lighting design, costuming, marketing, outreach, and archiving. While the narrative and the choreography were significant aspects of the project, the production elements were what ultimately brought my show together.

Two of my initial production-related tasks were finding a stage manager and lighting designer. After communicating with Colleen Tovar, the Production Stage Manager of the Department of Theatre and Dance, word got out among the stage managers that I was doing my own show, and one of the seniors in the directing and stage management program, Lexi Facemyre, reached out to me via email. Lexi and I arranged a meeting soon after to discuss the details of my show and her role in it. She informed me that I probably would not see her too much before the week leading up to my performance but that she would reach out to me if she had any questions and notified me that I could do the same. She offered to find a few crew members for me and also gave me advice about how to find a lighting designer. From the beginning, I had confidence in my stage manager’s abilities and trusted that she would do the job right.

Soon after, I began my search for a lighting designer. Taking advice from Lexi, I contacted assistant professor of theatre Mickie Marie, who works primarily in Design Technology. He forwarded my information to a number of students he thought might be interested. Unfortunately, after a week’s time, I had not heard from anyone and decided to try a different approach. I reached out to some of my friends in Design Technology on Facebook and was eventually connected to Abigail Tomlin, a senior directing and stage management major with lighting design experience. She and I met about halfway through the process with Lexi to discuss my show and how she planned to contribute. During this meeting, we organized a time for them to watch a run-through of the show so they could see what it actually looked like and get a sense for the sequencing. At this rehearsal, they recorded the run for their own records. When the week of the performance came around, Abigail had already preset light cues. All I had to do was tell her whether or not I liked the cues and make minor changes. During these rehearsals, Lexi took detailed notes on when each light cue happened and paid close attention to my comments. Their expertise and thorough preparation made the technical rehearsal, dress rehearsal, and two performances as simple and easy as possible.

Working with a budget was another production-related concern. In my budget proposal, I explained that I planned to put eighty percent of my budget towards design elements, such as the set and costumes, and twenty percent of my budget towards supplies for an opening night reception, and I was given a modest budget of one hundred dollars to work with. Considering that *A 21st Century Nutcracker* takes place in a college environment, I knew that could make use of personal inventories. However, I had a few specific visions that would require making a few purchases. I spent the majority of my budget on a five-foot tall, pre-lit Christmas tree, but I also used it to buy some costume pieces and reception supplies. Having a budget was helpful, but it only accounted for a fraction of the materials I used; for the most part, I had to be resourceful, which brings me to the design elements of my production.
Design

Knowing that I could not afford an elaborate set, I considered only what was absolutely necessary to establish the setting. I settled on a Christmas tree, a beer pong table, a couch of sorts, and a trash can. I was able to borrow a collapsible table for my beer pong table and a piano bench for my couch. I brought in my own trash can and bought the Christmas tree using a portion of my budget. While these might not have been the perfect materials, they effectively set the scene. In terms of conventional stage directions, I positioned the beer pong table up center, the Christmas tree up left, the blanket-covered piano bench down left, and the trash can right of the piano bench. During the performance, the beer pong table and trash can are removed at the end of the party scene, leaving the Christmas tree and the blanket-covered piano bench, which then serves as Clara’s bed.

Below is a stark depiction of the set:

My dancers and I were able to gather most of the costume pieces from our own wardrobes. In selecting costumes for the party sequence, we considered the personality of each character and tried to select complementary articles of clothing. In the performance footage, most of the partygoers wear knit Christmas sweaters to set the holiday mood, but some of the characters wear more unique items; Clara wears a white dress to display her innocence, Drossy wears a baja, sometimes referred to as a “drugrug”, to emphasize his recreational interests, and the fraternity brothers and sorority sisters wear matching letter shirts to highlight their association with Greek life. All of the characters wear bright red pants, with the female characters in tight leggings and the male characters in baggy shorts. They are unique from the waist up but uniform from the waist down. Conversely, each dance in “The Land of Munchies” warranted its own set of costumes. During this part of the performance, Clara dons a matching set of pajamas, the “Sour Patch Kids” dancers wear overalls with white socks, and “Popcorn” dancers wear yellow shirts displaying a popcorn bucket image with red bottoms. Pizza slices in “Waltz of the Pizza” wear white tops and red bottoms, while the delivery man wears a blue polo, red bottoms, and a ball cap. Dancers in “Dance of the Sleep Fairy” wear all black, with the sleep fairy donning a sheer skirt and her assistants carrying a large, blue blanket.
Marketing and Outreach

Two other items I had to consider were ticketing and advertising. I had to decide whether I wanted to charge admission, and if so, where I wanted the profits to go. In making this decision, I considered several ideas, but I ultimately decided to have a two-dollar admission that would go toward the Choreographing It Forward fund, a fund started a few years ago by a group of seniors designed to help students wanting to pursue independent projects. This idea made the most sense to me, as one of the primary goals of this project was to motivate future dance students to challenge tradition and take risks.

In advertising this production, I tried to reach as many people as possible by getting the word out in several, different ways. I created a Facebook event and invited all of my friends, asked the dance faculty to promote the show in their lecture classes, sent out an email through the communications center to the entire student body, delivered hand-written invitations to specific theatre and dance faculty members, contacted a number of previous professors via email, and asked friends to post flyers around campus. My efforts were largely successful, as I had a packed house both nights and diverse audiences.

Archiving

Dance is an ethereal art; it leaves little to no traces behind. Without some form of documentation, dances can be easily forgotten. Today, filming is the most common method of archiving dance. As with any dance performance, it is hard to fully experience *A 21st Century Nutcracker* through a screen, but I filmed it for two reasons: first, I wanted to be able to share it with those who could not physically attend the performance, and secondly, I wanted to have record of it in the event that I might decide to expand on it later on. In the final weeks, I searched for a videographer. I contacted the first person I thought of, who connected me to another friend willing to film. Daley Wilhelm filmed the opening night performance, and while the start of the performance is missing from the footage, I was largely pleased with her work.

Reflection

Over two hundred and fifty people attended *A 21st Century Nutcracker*. I was shocked, not only by how many people came to my show, but also by the amount of positive feedback I received; at the end of each performance, people approached me saying how much they enjoyed the show and how glad they were that they came to see it. I was overwhelmed and overjoyed by this outcome. However, what mattered to me most at the end of this project was that I had largely succeeded in achieving my goals.

First, I can now say that I devised, directed, and choreographed my own production. This project taught me a great deal about what it means to make a show; I learned how to develop characters and follow a narrative, how to set choreography on large groups of dancers, how to work with a budget, how to design a set and select costumes, how to communicate with a stage manager and lighting designer, among many other skills. Producing *A 21st Century Nutcracker* greatly expanded my knowledge and broadened my skillset.

Secondly, this project affirmed much of my research. It validated the Nutcracker's popularity as a holiday tradition, as I had a full house at both performances and the majority of my audience consisted of people I had never met before. It demonstrated *The Nutcracker*’s
capacity for change; while I did not tell the traditional tale, I maintained *The Nutcracker*’s essential characteristics, namely its ties to Christmas, its familiar narrative, and its iconic score. Thus, people recognized the parallels between my version and the traditional *Nutcracker* and enjoyed watching it. After the show, a number of people, including many of my dancers’ parents, informed me that it was refreshing to see a new take on an old classic.

While I cannot confirm whether or not I achieved my third goal of encouraging dance artists to take risks in their own artistic endeavors, I am hoping that my *Nutcracker* can serve as a source of inspiration for future dance students. If an amateur like me can produce an original version of *The Nutcracker*, anyone can.

Even with an admission price of two dollars, I managed to raise over five hundred dollars from my production. My original intention was to put the money toward the Choreographing It Forward fund, but after some discussion with my advisor, I am considering developing a grant that dance students can apply for to pursue projects rooted in previous research and/or exploration. I want dance students to know that class projects do not have to exist solely within the context of their courses; they can expand their projects and take them outside of the classroom. I am hoping that this grant can further encourage the development of informed, innovative projects.

While *21st Century Nutcracker* was one of the most challenging projects I have ever endeavored to do, it was well worth it. I learned so much, and I am incredibly proud of what I made. However, my work is not finished. A number of dance faculty approached me after watching this production, telling me that I should think about expanding it into a full-length *Nutcracker*. I certainly plan to continue working on this project in the future, but how I plan to do so is yet to be determined. I could expand upon this production, or I could create a totally different *Nutcracker*. The possibilities are endless, which makes the prospective development of this project all the more exciting.
December 1st, 2017 Performance
https://youtu.be/dmeAjRmQa40
(DVD Included)

Rehearsal Footage
https://youtu.be/VVHwqBdpyIw
(DVD Included)
Archive Photos

Fig. 1 - The Sigma Phi Alpha sorority sisters
Fig. 2 - Drossy and his bong
Fig. 3 - The arrival of Drossy

Fig. 4 - The exhausted one and the “lightweight”
Fig. 5 - The end of the beer pong match

Fig. 6 - "Clara Takes a Hit"
Fig. 7 - “Popcorn”

Fig. 8 - “Waltz of the Pizza”
Fig. 9 - “Waltz of the Pizza”
Fig. 10 - “Dance of the Sleep Fairy”
All Archive Photos Courtesy of Abigail Tomlin
With support from the Honors College and the Department of Theatre and Dance, Josie Meiss presents...

A 21ST CENTURY NUTCRACKER

An Honors Thesis Project

A contemporary satire of an age-old classic.

December 1st and 2nd, 2017 at 7:30pm
Korsgaard Dance Studio (BG213)
Admission: $2
With support from the Honors College and the Department of Theatre and Dance, Josie Meiss presents...

A 21st Century Nutcracker

An Honors Thesis Project

December 1st and 2nd, 2017 at 7:30pm
Korsgaard Dance Studio (BG213)

Fig. 12 – Front of Program
A 21st Century Nutcracker

Director/Choreographer ........................................ Josie Meiss
Faculty Advisor ................................................... Christie Zimmerman
Lighting Designer .................................................. Abigail Tomlin
Stage Manager ....................................................... Lexi Facemyre

Cast

Claire Cassidy  Cassidy Crull
Bridget Donovan  Greta Linder
Carly Lucas  Tyler Parnella
Jada Purdie  Hanna Seifert
Amber Smith  Katie Sullivan

Crew

Briana Rooke  Phoebe Kane
Justin Rozinski  Nicole Cooper

Special Thanks

Colleen Tovar  Sarah Mangelsdorf
Daley Wilhelm  Jaddyn Olivas
Lisa Schreck  Madison Baker

Photographing and/or videotaping this production is strictly prohibited.
Synopsis

It is the end of Fall semester at Stahlbaum University, and the Theta Pi Gamma fraternity house is hosting a huge holiday party to celebrate. An interesting assortment of people plan to attend this party, including a pair of excitable sorority sisters, a "lightweight", and a girl who can't seem to stay awake. Regardless, everyone is ready to let loose and have fun. Well...almost everyone.

Clara, a first-semester freshman at Stahlbaum, is hesitant to go to the Theta Pi Gamma party, as she has never attended a party before. However, her two friends Lexi and Stacie persuade her to give it a chance...by dragging her out the door.

At the fraternity house, party antics ensue, and Clara's innocence is corrupted by one of the partygoers. This leads her to "The Land of Munchies", where she consumes a variety of post-party snacks and ultimately falls victim to the magic of the sleep fairy.

Please note: The characters do “drink” and “smoke” during this show, but the materials they are using are only props. They contain no real substances.

Josie Meiss is a senior BFA dance major from Mishawaka, IN. During her time at Ball State, she has appeared in a number of performances, including the junior and senior choreography projects and Swing!. She has also participated in dance-related immersive learning projects, namely Dancing Towards Change and Impact 2 Innovation, in which she had the opportunity to devise full-length productions in collaboration with fellow students and working professionals, notably Sidra Bell of Sidra Bell Dance New York. This is Josie’s first time working as an independent director and choreographer. For her, the process of creating this work has been both incredibly challenging and rewarding, and she is eager to share it with the Ball State community. She would like to thank her dancers for their dedication and perseverance, Christie Zimmerman for her continuous encouragement and guidance, and her family and friends for their unwavering love and support. She hopes you enjoy the show!
Upcoming Attractions

IT CAN HAPPEN HERE

December 7-9, 2017 @ 7:30
December 10, 2017 @ 2:30
University Theatre
Works Cited


Works Consulted

“BEST ONE: Showin How To Do The "Shmoney Dance" (Bobby Shmurda)
@PricelessDaROC.” YouTube, uploaded by PricelessDaROC, 16 Aug. 2014,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eca-F44mPzM.

“Chris Brown’s Dance Crew | “Milly Rock”.” YouTube, uploaded by Chris Breezy Channel,

“iLoveMemphis - Hit the Quan (Official Video).” YouTube, uploaded by iLoveMemphisVEVO,

“iLoveMemphis - Lean And Dabb (Official Video).” YouTube, uploaded by
RuVjLiCqlNQ.

“NiuBlock Dougie (SAUGHI ).” YouTube, uploaded by Medy Hamsa, 16 Dec. 2012,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4zlHg4zT6yQ.

“Rej3ctz - Cat Daddy (starring Chris Brown).” YouTube, uploaded by Radial by The Orchard,

“Silento | Watch Me (Whip/Nae Nae) | @ProdigyDanceLV #WatchMeDanceOn.” YouTube,
uploaded by Darrell Rivera, 8 Apr. 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_
2Q317q21Jo.

“’Watch Me’ (Whip / Nae Nae) Silento #WatchMeDanceOn choreography by Jasmine Meakin
(Mega Jam).” YouTube, uploaded by Mega Jam, 21 Apr. 2015,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ImOBg2LVmBY.


APPENDING THE ROLE

Given Circumstances What is the situation? What is it that makes the words and actions here absolutely necessary? (This is not just plot; elaborate using your imagination.)

Identity Who are you? Really. Identify your dreams. Can you express yourself physically, emotionally, spiritually?
- What must it be like to be him/her (your character)? What are the connections between him/her and I? How are we the same? Different? What experiences have I had that make me able to empathize with him/her? (Use bits of yourself to create him/her. Reveal yourself—more moving.)
- What is your full name? What do people call you? What is your age?
- What is your posture like? How is your health? What is your occupation? Where do you live? What is your economic class?
- Who are your parents? Their place of birth? Are they alive? Their ages? Their occupations? Their politics? Do they love you? Do you love them? Do you have any brothers or sisters?
- Are you married, divorced, living with someone, single? Who is or was your partner? Or, who do you hope your partner will be? Do you have any children, or do you plan to?
- What are your fantasies? What is happiness for you?
- Your education? Your Intellectual abilities? What is your primary attribute? Sensory? Emotional? How have you been affected by these attributes? How do you view your world? What do you think is right or wrong? Valuable and worthless? Interesting and boring?
- Your religion? Your politics?
- How do you dress? What are you pleasures? What is your ambition? What is your temperament? What do other people say your temperament is? Do you have any complexes, fears, superstitions?
- What has your life been like? (Derive from the text and elaborate using your imagination.) What has been the major frustration in your life up to now? Describe the details of an ordinary day in your life.

Relationship At the moment this situation begins what is your relationship to the other characters? What are you really here for? What do you really need? Who are you talking to? Do you love? Do you hate? Try to find "love" in some shape, fashion or form, no matter how perverse, in the relationship. What choices will actively engage you with another character? Seek conflict.

Objective What do you want? What are you fighting for in this situation? Be specific. What do you really want to have happen here? What are you trying to get the other character to do? Make him do? Can you state your objective as a specific verb, with a specific receiver of the verb and a specific desired response? Objectives are both immediate and overall.

Obstacle What is in the way of getting what you want? What are the situational, environmental obstacles? What are the relationship obstacles? Your personal obstacles, your own doubts, fears, insecurities? Be specific. Don't play obstacles, play AGAINST them as you pursue objective. If you play the problems we have no conflict, no dramatic action, only attitude.

Action What tactics can you use to get what you want? Can you confront, threaten? Can you coax, appeal, induce? There are thousands of tactics, both threatening and inductive that we use all the time. Try every different tactic you can to win what you're fighting for in a situation. The wider the range of tactics you use the more interesting your acting. Are your choices active or passive? Are they physical? Don't settle for boring choices, explore. What gives you power in this situation, this relationship? How can you change your status for the better?

Moment Before What happened to make the first moment of your scene or monologue absolutely necessary? What is it a response to? Don't start at ZERO. Monologues start in the middle of something important. Can you include that moment in your preparation?

Humor What is funny here? What is there to enjoy? Is it ridiculous, absurd? If it doesn't appear to be written, find it in your relationship or the situation. There is always humor.
Opposites What extreme opposite feelings can you find in this situation? Where do you love one moment then hate? Is there joy/pain, gentleness/violence, need/resentment of need? Life is duality. Find the extremes, let them feed your objective and obstacle conflict. They may not be readily apparent, dig for them.

Discoveries What do you find "new" in the course of this scene? What happens for the first time that changes your relationship, your situation? See how many discoveries you can make in the scene as it happens from moment to moment.

Communication Are you getting what you want, need, from the other characters in the scene? Do they really hear and understand what you're saying? How can you get them to feel what you feel, agree with you, validate your action? Actors are senders and receivers. (Communication is not complete until you know whether what you send out is accepted or rejected, information that can lead you to your next moment. Listen and respond. Complete the cycle of communication for each moment. Seek a response. If you ignore the signals other characters are sending you will play the same moment over and over because you have no new information.

Point of view As a character you must allow yourself the subjective point of view that: "I am right and you are wrong." You should change from the way you are to the way I want you to be." Play against your obstacles, but pursue your objectives because you are right and entitled to them. Maybe not objectively in the eyes of the audience, or others, but from your own point of view. How can you change your situation and the people around you to be better? For you? Go ahead and be selfish. Compete.

Importance How is this situation, this moment, this action personally and emotionally important to you RIGHT NOW? What's at stake? How high can you make the stakes?

Events What happens in the course of this situation? What changes occur in you, in your relationships? What is the most significant change? Any moment that produces change in a relationship is an event. Every event is either a victory or a defeat in terms of reaching your objective. How many victories and defeats can you register in this situation? Life is change. If you don't find change in your scene you are playing narrative. Dig for the changes, register them. They are the dynamic of your work.

Place What and where is this place you're in? How does it make you feel? Is it like some place in your own experience? How is it special? How can you use this place to get what you're fighting for in this situation? What kind of power can this place give you?

Games and Roles What kind of games can you play as your character to get what you want? What "masks," roles do you assume? We play games in real life to get what we want all the time, so do characters in plays. They are just another way of obtaining precious objectives, desires.

Mystery What don't you know about the other characters in the scene? What are you curious about in this situation, this relationship? Do you have feelings that you don't understand, can't explain? There is a sense of wonder in each of us. What in this situation, this relationship engages your sense of wonder?

THESE QUESTIONS SHOULD BE EXPLORED DURING THE REHEARSAL PROCESS MENTALLY, PHYSICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY. THEY CANNOT BE ANSWERED DURING PERFORMANCE. PERFORMANCE REQUIRES A TOTAL COMMITMENT OF THOUGHT, ENERGY AND EMOTION IN A RECKLESS PURSUIT OF YOUR OBJECTIVE. THE DISCOVERIES AND OBSTACLES PLANTED IN REHEARSAL WILL GIVE SHAPE, CONFLICT AND EXCITEMENT TO YOUR PURSUIT. YOU WILL NOT ALWAYS REACH YOUR OBJECTIVES, BUT YOU MUST PURSUE THEM WITH ABANDON.

PLAY TO WIN.
Appendix B

Social Dance Alphabet

A = Hip Pop
B = Body Roll
C = Get Low
D = Dab
E = Shmoney Dance
F = Hit the Folks
G = Grind
H = Head Roll/Hair Flip
I = Dougie
J = Juju
K = Snake
L = Stanky Leg
M = Milly Rock
N = Nae Nae
O = Slide and Drop
P = Pelvic Thrust
Q = Hit the Quan
R = Make it Rain
S = Smack That
T = Twerk
U = Fist Pump/Jump
V = Chest Pop
W = Whip
X = Cat Daddy
Y = Sweep
Z = Tip Toe