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Fourth Year Award Outcome Report
Professor Michael Rasbury
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A Summer at the American Dance Festival

Last summer, I attended the 87th season of the American Dance Festival (ADF) in order to improve my dancing, meet fellow artists, and find inspiration to create my own work at UVA. The festival is one of the most important in the world when it comes to furthering modern dance as an artform. The Summer Dance Intensive was a five-week long session of classes, workshops, and performances by artists from all over the world. My experience at ADF changed who I am as a dancer and performer, influenced my perception of dance as an art form, and informed my choices as a choreographer. Below, I have attached a promotional video created by ADF for this coming summer intensive where I can briefly be seen in my hip-hop class (0:07). The video shows clips from a variety of classes and demonstrates the scope of the program:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=tMrgo--PnEY&feature=emb_logo

My daily classes were instrumental in educating me not only as a mover, but also as a dance scholar. My first class was Afro-Fusion, taught by Momar Ndiaye. On the very first day, he told us that his class was not a generic “African” dance class because each dance originating in Africa is highly specific to a group of people. We learned dances like Wongo, originating from Senegal, and Dundunba which comes from Guinea and the Malinke tribe. The rhythmic and high-energy dances made me physically stronger. Meanwhile, I learned the history of the movement. This contextualization is important in preventing cultural appropriation and misunderstanding when learning across cultures.

I also took Hip Hop: Groove Foundations with Quilan “Cue” Arnold. The class focused on the basics of hip hop while providing information on the origin of the movement. We learned chronologically about the way other manifestations of hip hop culture, like beatboxing and fashion, tie into the creation of these social dances. It expanded my perception of the form and it gave me far more context and history than is typical in dance technique classes. The importance of rhythm and improvisation expanded my movement vocabulary, and the skills I learned helped me later in creating choreography after I left the festival.

The last class of my day was called Mixed Makers. It was an experimental class which changed every week as a different choreographer taught class. It was a good way to learn a variety of processes, both choreographic and technical. Although it was a pleasure to work with all of the choreographers, my favorite was Axis Dance, a company that focuses on collaboration with dancers both with and without disabilities. They taught techniques for creating choreography which I later used in my own process at UVA. In addition to these daily classes, there were drop-in classes on the weekends where I could choose what to take. I took a variety of

these, including Countertechnique, Afro-Contemporary, Limon technique, Yoga, and Ballet. These classes were well out of my comfort zone, and they allowed me to expand my movement vocabulary to include new techniques.

I was lucky enough to be part of two student pieces which we performed at the end of the festival. One was choreographed by Anna Freeden called *Sleep Deprivation*, an abstract piece that explored moving with and without the music. The other was choreographed by Emily Haussler, called *...and there are never endings*. This second piece focused on care-giving and involved more partnering work. I appreciated these performances not just on their own terms, but also because the rehearsal process helped me build relationships with other dancers which could help me in my career once I graduate. Emily, for example, created Resilience Dance Company after leaving ADF, and I'd be interested in collaborating with her one day.

There were a number of performances by professional dance companies from all over the world. I went to a total of ten performances throughout my summer which ranged from the highly rhythmic work of Dorrance Dance to Eiko Otake, whose work was more akin to performance art. Pilobolus was particularly engaging. The group is famous for unbelievable athleticism, but I most enjoyed the way the work was framed. There was no narrative, but each piece was contextualized in a way that would elicit a particular emotional response. The same was true of some of the work that I saw at the International Choreographers Residency performance. The dancers that I saw daily in class turned out to be incredible artists who made work that challenged my ideas of what about a dance made it engaging. This sparked in me an obsession with style and context in regards to choreography.

After leaving the festival, I continued dancing into the fall semester. I auditioned for the Fall Dance Concert and was cast in a piece called *Indelible*, choreographed by Kim Brooks Mata. The piece was challenging, but I was prepared by my long classes at ADF. I found myself able to memorize and retain choreography better than I had in previous years, which I would attribute to having taken classes that were unfamiliar and challenging. During that fall semester, I also took Dance for the Camera, a project-based class which is all about combining choreography with filmmaking. One of my projects, *Red Hot*, was influenced by my newfound interest in audience response based on context. I shot the film at the IX Art Park and used bright color, upbeat sound, and a bold, direct gaze. I was happy with the results, finding the product cohesive, and I attribute the choices I made to inspiration found at ADF. My final project in Dance for the Camera was featured in the Drama Department performance *globalwarming.ppt* and focused on the damage done by single-use plastic bags.

Prior to the recent events caused by coronavirus, I was choreographing a piece for the Spring Dance Concert. I wanted to create choreography that fit a genre that I hadn't frequently seen in dance performances: horror. I recontextualized movement and discovered ways of moving that were uncomfortable to witness while still being safe for the dancers. In choreographing the piece, I used techniques that I learned from my classes with Axis Dance at

ADF. Although there may never be a performance from this particular work, I am still interested in the concept and hope to continue working on it in the future.

I believe that my experience at ADF was a success - I became a better dancer, choreographer, and learner as a result of attending the festival. The summer intensive is an excellent opportunity for any mover, regardless of level, to enhance their dance education. This generous grant I received was put directly toward tuition, housing, and essentials during my stay in Durham. My thanks go to the J. Sandy Miller family for their contribution to the Arts Scholars Program. Without them, this project would not have been possible, and I am deeply grateful.

Below are photos of playbills from 6 of the performances I attended:



